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Geist (and Gemüt) vs Life – Max Scheler and Robert Musil

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§1 Introduction¹

Robert Musil (1880-1942), the Austrian writer, essayist and author of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (MoE), and Max Scheler (1874-1928), the south German realist phenomenologist, shared a number of philosophical convictions and interests. These convictions and interests distinguish them from almost all their contemporaries. They are by no means common today although more common than they were. At the centre of their work stand detailed anatomies of the human heart. Ulrich, the hero of MoE, notes, and his creator agrees, that

everything that happens amongst men has its origin either in emotions or in the want of emotions (MoE D 52 1138),

and Scheler thinks that

[w]hoever has the *ordo amoris* of a man, has the man (GW 10 348)

Musil and Scheler were what might be called, using a term due to Scheler, "doctors of the age" (Scheler GW 10 217). Each was concerned to remedy what Scheler (GW 10 362) calls "the general slovenliness (Schlamperei) in emotional matters", a slovenliness that Musil's "exact man of feeling" with his "passion for exactness, correctness" tries to avoid, understand and explain. There is, Musil famously says, a

skewed relation, an abiding miscommunication (Aneinandervorbeileben) between the intellect (Verstand) and the soul. We do not have too much intellect and not enough soul, rather we do have enough intellect in questions of the soul...we do not think about and do not act in connexion with our self (E 1092, cf. tr 130).

They shared not only many convictions and interests but also a number of influential enemies, in particular Klages, Rathenau and Spengler, and devoted considerable energy to the task of criticising and combating the errors of their enemies.

¹ Versions of this paper were presented in Cologne in 1998 ("Musils Gefühle - zwischen Stumpf und Scheler"), in Paris in 2002 ("Du 'Geist', de l'éthique et de la moralité - Shaw, Scheler et Musil") and in Geneva in 2005.

Perhaps their most fundamental point of agreement is their understanding of "Geist" and "geistig", that is, of the relation between heads, hearts, livers (the will) and life. This shared understanding of Geist and its relation to life is at the heart of their battles against what Scheler called "Pan-Romanticism" and a German disease – that is, the thought and examples of Klages, Rathenau and Spengler.

The five most striking anatomies of irrationalism penned by Musil are his explorations of Arnheim, Meingast, Feuermaul, Prof. Lindner and Spengler. The model for Arnheim in MoE is the German capitalist, philosopher and politician, Walter Rathenau (and to a degree, Maeterlinck); for Meingast the German graphologist and philosopher, Ludwig Klages; for Feuermaul the kitsch counterpart of Rilke and Expressionist poet from Prague, Franz Werfel; for Prof. Lindner the German pedagogue and pacifist, Wilhelm Foerster. The ferocious treatments of the lives, effects and mental worlds of these four characters in MoE, at the hands of the narrator and of Ulrich, correspond to critical treatments of their models in Musil's other writings. And the speculative German philosopher of history, Oswald Spengler, is the subject of one of Musil's most powerful and successful essays.

Scheler, too, criticises in detail the philosophies of Klages, Rathenau, Spengler and Foerster. They are all, he thinks, guilty of value-illusions. Klages, Rathenau and Spengler take the values of life to be higher than those of Geist. Their Pan-Romanticism is not the only German disease Scheler attacks. Inwardness ("Innerlichkeit"), too, he thinks, requires treatment. And one of the best examples of inwardness is Expressionism.

Whereas Scheler is an out and out spiritualist, Platonist, essentialist and anti-naturalist philosopher, Musil's philosophical inclinations are towards naturalism and nominalism. There are thus many differences between their views and, indeed, about philosophy. A full account of the relations between their philosophies would examine their shared convictions that the heart is prior to the liver, that values are more fundamental than norms or rules, and that ethics is prior to morality. It would look at their accounts of many different affective phenomena – pleasure, self-love, amour propre, self-interest, egoism and egocentrism, erotic love, mystical and aesthetic experience, sympathy, contagion, identification², remorse, resentment, existential envy, shame, modesty, self-deception, false feelings, hollow emotions and sham sentiments – and at their accounts of the distinction between affective states and non-states and of motivation. And at their analyses of models, heroes and anti-heroes. It would consider some of the more striking differences between their views – Musil's thoroughgoing ethical particularism (one of the many consequences he draws from the contextualism he seems to have taken from Mach) and Scheler's partial ethical particularism; Musil's endorsement and Scheler's rejection of the identification of ethical and aesthetic values; their attachment to the distinction between essential possibilities and mere facts and Musil's far-reaching modification of this distinction in his account of the roles of probability³ in life and history; their very different attitudes towards philosophical anthropology and views about politics, culture, civilisation, education and history; the contrast between Scheler's essentialist claims about, for example, "Geist", love and murder, and Musil's view that "Geist", "love" and "murder" are family resemblance terms; the different roles they ascribe to cognitive values and disvalues, such as foolishness; Musil's atheistic mysticism and Scheler's Catholicism and subsequent pantheism. More generally, it would consider the extent to which Scheler

² Cf. Heydebrand 1966 143ff., Müller 1971 204ff..

³ Cf. Bouveresse 1993.

exemplifies the "familiar fetishes of epoch, nation, race, Catholicism and the intuitive man" denounced by Musil (E 1087, tr. 127).

In what follows I ignore all these similarities and differences between their views except one – what I called their most fundamental point of agreement, their understanding of “Geist” and “geistig”, that is, of the relation between heads, hearts, livers and life (§3). In §2 I briefly survey what is known about the relations between Musil and Scheler, and in §4 I describe the main anticipation of the present account of the relations between the philosophies of Musil and of Scheler.

§2 The Two Ulrichs - Natural Twins ?

Towards the end of his life Musil says of Scheler that the German philosopher "found the approach (Zugang)" to ethics. The young philosopher, Musil, by contrast, "knew of no approach that would have suited" him (T 918-9). Musil seems to have met Scheler in 1913 in the company of Franz Blei (T 267), who describes his friendship with both in his autobiography (Blei 1930). They were, Blei says, to collaborate on the review, "Der lose Vogel", edited by Blei (TT 163). In 1913 Scheler published "Zur Rehabilitierung der Tugend" (On the Rehabilitation of Virtue) under the pseudonym "Ulrich Hegendorff" (GW3 399). Shortly thereafter both thinkers succumbed completely - and Scheler massively - to the German "trahison des clercs". They collaborated on the review "Summa", which was edited by Blei and first appeared around the end of 1917. Its programme was: "Steigerung und Vertiefung des Wertgefühls" (Eisenhauer 1993 113). In 1937 Musil says he must come to terms in a hurry with the second edition of Scheler's book on the nature and forms of sympathy, a book first published in 1913, before he publishes the chapters on love in MoE (T 918).

In his only description of Scheler, Musil refers to both his emotions and thoughts:

A fiery (mettlesome) academic stallion, the most extraordinary emotions spray from his nostrils. Yet a great wealth of things thought through (with varying degrees of intensity) (T 904).

Musil may also have had in a hand in formulating the description of Scheler given by Blei in *Das grosse Bestiarium der modernen Literatur*, which was written with the help of Musil, writing under the partly Irish pseudonym "Dr Maturin Melas":

The Scheler is a type of lizard, very long and lean but supple. These traits enable it to go wherever it is not expected. It lays its many eggs amongst crumbling rocks so that their surfaces are often completely covered, especially since the Scheler spreads a shining mass (iridescent, schillernde Masse) over the spots the eggs do not cover. The Scheler has two eyes, one is very sharp-sighted and the other blind. This does not prevent the animal from closing its good eye in order to attempt to see with its blind eye, an exertion which often leads it to secrete the already mentioned juice. The Scheler's four feet are hidden under its skin and its gait is therefore gentle. During its long rutting periods the Scheler is extremely animated. It should be mentioned that it often lays the same egg more than once. As to its colour, the Scheler's back is deep black with a very thin red stripe. But its belly shimmers (schillert), ambiguous and evocative (Blei 1922 58-9)

§2 Geist (Heads, Hearts and Livers) vs Life

There is one word which Shaftesbury and Jane Austen do frequently use in the same apparently idiosyncratic way, and that a way which is alien to us and, I think, subject to correction, alien to most of the other eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers. This is the word '*Mind*', often used without the definite or indefinite article, to stand *not just for intellect or intelligence but for the whole complex unity of a conscious, thinking, feeling and acting person* (Ryle 1971 290; my emphases)

The conceptual opposition between "Geist", or spirit, and life looms large in the writings of the German contemporaries of Musil and Scheler. It is deployed there in the loose and easy way in which abstract philosophemes tend to be thrown around in philosophical German. The difficulty of understanding the opposition is compounded for some of us by the fact that many of the very many uses of "Geist" - the remarkable article on this word in the Dictionary of the Brothers Grimm, by Rudolf Hildebrand, runs to 223 pages - do not translate easily into English.

Two uses of "Geist" and "geistig" are important for present purposes. The terms may be used to delimit one type of what are often called in English "psychological" or "mental" acts, activities and states – the "spiritual" ones. They may also be used to describe one type of value. I first set out in a very schematic way some variants of the two ways of using these terms and associated theses and then illustrate these in the writings of Musil and Scheler.

One very common use of the two terms describes intellectual activities such as thinking, judging, deliberating and inferring but not any affective, conative or sensory phenomena as "geistig":

G1 Geist = head (vs heart, liver, sensibility)

Two distinct alternatives are to be found in the writings of Scheler, Musil and their contemporaries. They have one feature in common. In contrast to traditional views, "Geist" is opposed to life or soul. The two alternatives are:

G2 Geist = head, liver (vs life/soul - heart, sensibility)

G3 Geist = head, heart, liver (vs life/soul - heart, sensibility)

G2 is associated with Pan-Romanticism. Intellectual activities and the will are "geistig". Affective phenomena pertain to life, to the soul. G3 is endorsed by Scheler and by Musil although they do not understand it in the same way. Thought, the will and some affective phenomena are "geistig", some affective phenomena belong to life. Love and hate, Scheler

thinks, are spiritual acts, unlike affective states (“Gefühlszustände”) such as bodily pain. And Musil says of love, for example, that it is more than a mere emotion.

Just as it has often been claimed that intellectual activities and states are “superior” to or “higher” than affective and sensory activities so, too, G2 and G3 may be combined with either

- G4 Geist is superior to life
- G5 Life is superior to Geist

The Pan-Romantics typically endorse G5; Musil and Scheler endorse G4. But, as we have seen, the referent of “Geist” according to the Pan-Romantics is not what it is for Musil and Scheler. “Superior to” may be understood either evaluatively or descriptively. Musil and Scheler endorse G4 both as an axiological claim and as a descriptive claim.

The second use of “geistig” which will be important in what follows is its use to qualify a type of value – spiritual values, such as cognitive, aesthetic and cultural values, which contrast, for example, with vital values and disvalues such as health and sickness, flourishing and decline. Scheler and Musil endorse

- G6 “Geistige” values are higher than vital values,

the Pan-Romantics proclaim

- G7 Vital values are higher than “geistige” values

Spiritual Acts, Activities and States

“Geist” figures prominently in the writings of the two Ulrichs - indeed Musil's Ulrich, unlike Arnheim, is a prince of Geist (MoE K. 40, title). This is not, at first sight, surprising. Most philosophical writers in German would be lost without the word. But Scheler and Musil use the term in a way that differs from its most common use in such circles, in a way that is all their own.

In 1918, in the course of analysing and defending his friend Blei's “never satisfied demand for Geist”, Musil writes that Geist contains “an element that is understanding and participates in the development” or progress of scientific theory, “and another element that is incalculable, that does not develop, is contradictory, and depends on slowly changing basic emotions...”. Geist, he notes, might also be called, depending on the context, “soul, culture, affective situation, mood of the time, domain of evaluations”. It comprehends “everything that is in the widest sense religious and political, everything artistic, everything human that is not purely national and is not a matter of arbitrary beliefs or emotions”. It “is everything that the inner life requires” (E1023). “One often hears praise (in German) for what is *geistreich und gemütsvoll*”, he notes, without anyone noticing the tautology” (P 835)

In 1931, in a letter to Adolf Frisé about MoE (Briefe 494-5), he writes:

The sense in which I use the word *Geist* in the book consists of understanding (Verstand), emotion (Gefühl) and their reciprocal interpenetration. (So it was in the

stone age and so it will be in future)...the intellect is not the enemy of emotion...but its brother, even if it is usually an estranged brother. The concept *sentimental* in the good sense of the Romantics once combined both components in their unity (Musil 1981 494-5, cf. MoE 1882)

Musil is aware that his use of “Geist” is unusual. He is surprised to find a philologist and editor of Humboldt's letters who describes “Geist” as “intimate richness of thought rooted in the depths of emotion” (“Innige in den Tiefen der Gefühle wurzelnde Gedankenfülle”). “My concept of Geist”, he says, would appear to the anonymous philologist as a case of “bringing coals to Newcastle” (T I 904)

Much of the enormous analytic enterprise of Musil is devoted to exploring how emotions and other affective phenomena, understanding and thought, and their interpenetration should be understood in the twentieth century. Nearly all of his substantive claims and suggestions rest on his account of this triad. Indeed his novel provides contributions to the “geistige mastery (Bewältigung) of the world”. The hero of his novel, Ulrich, is, as we have seen, a prince of Geist. He is also a man without qualities or properties. Just what this means cannot be understood without taking into account Musil's understanding of “Geist”:

Ulrich assumed as a matter of course that a man who has Geist possesses every kind of it, which would indicate that Geist is pre-existent to qualities; he himself was a man of many contraries and took the view that all the qualities that had ever become manifest in humanity were latent, fairly close to each other, in every man's Geist if he had any Geist at all (MoE 29, p. 116-117, cf. MwQ Wilkins/Kaiser 134)

Scheler defends stronger versions of the same views: every spiritual act instantiates every kind of spiritual act (GW2 385); persons, their spiritual acts and states and their values, can never be directly given as objects; our most direct contact with them involves collective intentionality, co-performance (GW2 382).

Scheler, throughout his career (cf. GW2 388), uses “Geist” to refer to two different types of acts and states: theoretical acts such as inferring, supposing, remembering, perceiving, intuition and meaning (Meinen) as well as states such as belief but also emotional acts such as loving and hating and one type of preferring – which Scheler in fact considers to be a type of cognition, of values - and willing and choice as well as states such as love, felicity and despair (Scheler GW 2 386ff.). Like Musil, he is aware of the novelty of this view:

Up to the present day philosophy has inclined to a prejudice that has its historical origin in antiquity. This prejudice consists in upholding a division between “reason” and “sensitivity” which is completely inappropriate to the structure of Geist. This division demands that we assign everything that is not rational - that is not order, law, and the like - to sensitivity. Thus our *whole emotional life* - and, for most modern philosophers, our conative life too - must be assigned to “sensitivity”, love and hate as well (F GW 2 259, cf. tr. 253)

As he puts it in 1927, his new use of “Geist” comprehends both the “reason” of the Greeks - the thinking of ideas, certain forms of intuition - as well as volitive and emotional

acts and so differs from the main uses, past and present, of the term. "Rarely has a word been responsible for so much mischief", he says, (GW 9 32).

Perhaps the most important thesis about the relations between Geist and Seele which is common to Scheler and Musil is that Seele and all its manifestations are the objects of Geist. As Philip Payne (1996) puts it, in MoE, Geist records soul. Geist makes soul and life the objects of its intellectual and affective regard. According to Scheler, as we have seen, spiritual states or qualities and their bearers and contents can never be directly given as objects. Bob can at best co-perform the hates and intentions of Max (Mithassen, Mitwollen). There is of course also the possibility that Geist become the object of successful art, of figurative contents which do not permit of successful paraphrase.

Geistige vs other Values

Musil says

My ethics has, something I like to overlook, a "highest good", it is Geist. But how does this differ from the view of the philosophers for which I have so little sympathy that reason (Vernunft) is the highest good ? (P 843)

One may, however, wonder whether "spiritual goods" really are the highest values for Musil. Musil and Ulrich often qualify what they take to be of the greatest importance as holy or sacred, for example in the "Holy Conversations" (MoE II chs 11, 12). Musil says of his novel that it is "religious" given the assumptions of religious disbelief. It presents a "secular mysticism" (E 1364, tr. 160). Passion brings into being a „wild, religious being“ (MoE 1116). It may even be the case that man has something of a "provisional creation of God" (TB I 841).

Scheler's ethics and indeed much of his philosophy is based on a division between four types of value and applications of the claim that these stand in relations of axiological height to each other. He distinguishes

the values of (dis)agreeableness and the connected "consecutive" values of usefulness and uselessness;

the vital values of what is noble or common, or, less tendentiously, of what is good in the sense of the "tüchtig as opposed to bad in the sense of schlecht (not böse), together with the consecutive values of well-being and welfare;

the geistige values of beauty and ugliness, right and wrong, philosophical knowledge; the value of scientific knowledge is a consecutive value of the latter, and all cultural values and the values of different goods are consecutive values of geistige values;

the values of the holy and the unholy of which the only bearers are persons (GW 2 122-6).

The value of holiness, he announces, is higher than spiritual values, spiritual values are higher than vital values, and vital values are higher than the value of agreeableness. Just as spiritual acts and states are never given as objects and properties but must be co-performed, so, too, persons and their individual (un)holy values are never given as objects and properties but are loved and hated. Scheler's account of the relation between love, hate, despair and felicity, on

the one hand, and individual values, on the other hand, make up his extremely bullish account of the other state.

Speculations à (la) baisse/hausse

Scheler and Musil employ (almost) the same French idiom in order to mark differences of axiological height. Thus Scheler argues that "the demand for equality is always a speculation à baisse", a bearish speculation (GW 3 121), that "the modern world-view...speculates à baisse...and seeks to understand everything that is alive by analogy with what is dead (GW 3 144), that "naturalist philosophy is in principle a speculation 'à baisse'" (GW 7 181). The idiom may have been suggested to him by a passage in Bergson: "Bergson rightly says that...the basic attitude of the philosopher to the world is 'confiance', that of science 'défiance' (speculation à baisse)..." (GW 10 309)⁴.

Musil's descriptions of bearish speculations ("die baisse-Spekulation" TB 1 435), of men who speculate à la baisse about man ("Das hilflose Europa", E 1085-6), of speculations in Geist "à la baisse and à la hausse" (MoE 91) crop up again and again at important junctures in his writings. In MoE Tuzzi says to Ulrich:

Tuzzi: „You like to think the worst of everything...If I may say so, your ideas about your fellow-men have a downward tendency, a somewhat bearish tone“.

“That's an excellent way of putting it”, Ulrich answered, and seemed pleased, “even if I don't quite live up to it” (MoE I 91 MwQ Wilkins/Kaiser 133-4)

The James-Lange theory of emotions and related theories which identify emotions with types of sensations are rejected by Scheler and Musil (following the magisterial destruction of these theories by Musil's "Doktorvater", Carl Stumpf):

“This is the extent to which, even now, a more or less emphatic intention dominates in many circles to substitute scientific concepts meant to be as concrete as possible for the useless spiritual observations of the soul. And however much one would originally have liked emotions to be nothing more than sensations in the bowels or wrists (which led to such assertions as that fear consists of an accelerated heartbeat and shallow breathing...”

“So if the scientific goal may be said to be a broad and wherever possible ironclad anchoring in the realm of nature, there is still blended with it a peculiar exuberance, which can be roughly expressed in the proposition: What stands low stands firm. This was once...a 'bearish speculation in human values' (MoE II 52 p. 1144, MwQ Wilkins/Pike 1245-6)

More generally,

This reckoning with people's bad capacities is a bearish speculation. A bearish order is trained vulgarity. It is the order of the modern world (Essays 1388-9, tr. 182)

⁴ Cf. "Tandis que le savant...est obligé de ruser avec la nature, d'adopter vis-à-vis d'elle une attitude de défiance, et de lutte, le philosophe la traite en camarade" (Bergson 1959 1362).

Ulrich frequently speculates bearishly. When Diotima gushes about love and beauty, Ulrich leads the conversation round to statistics and the fatty tissue under the skin (MoE ch. 67). He deals in exactly the same way with Arnheim's logorrhoea about intuition and the soul. Why, then, is Tuzzi wrong to see Ulrich as bearish *tout court*? Ulrich and Musil think that

There is a human state that is fundamentally opposed to rationalizing, calculating, goal-oriented activity, estimating, pressure, craving, and base anxiety. It is difficult to describe.

And many attempts to describe it, for example, by the friends of life and the soul, are, they think, unsuccessful:

One aspect of the truth resides in all the characterizations (as love, goodness, irrationality, religiosity) that have been disputed here, and for the complete truth we have today no thought at our command.

I would like to call it simply the 'other condition' (Essays tr. 185)

The accounts given by Musil and Ulrich of the other state or condition ("Zustand") and its "holy" objects are very bullish speculations. They correspond to Scheler's even more bullish account of spiritual states – felicity, beatitude, despair, contemplation and collectedness – and acts – love and hate – and their holy correlates. But even here, we may suspect, Musil and Ulrich introduce a bearish note. According to Scheler, but not Ulrich and Musil, acts are more fundamental than states.

It is precisely the accounts by Scheler and Musil of what is and is not "geistig", and in particular their versions of G3, G4 and G6, which are at the centre of what they themselves saw as their battles against a variety of irrationalisms – their Anti-Rathenaus, Anti-Spenglers, Anti-Klages, Anti-Foerstes, and their demolitions of inwardness, Expressionism and Pan-Romanticism. If one does not understand these accounts, then one cannot understand these battles. For if Musil and Scheler are right, their enemies err by trying to adapt Geist to life.

§4 Conclusion

The intriguing conceptual relations between the philosophies of Scheler and Musil have not exactly been prominent in the secondary literature on Musil⁵ although Musil himself implies that a confrontation between his views and those of the south German realist phenomenologist would be of interest. For shortly after beginning to study the second edition of Scheler's book on the nature and forms of sympathy, Musil writes to a friend: "Scheler has not yet killed me, but were he a little better, he would be fatal" ("Scheler hat mich bisher noch nicht umgebracht, aber ein wenig besser, u. er wäre tödlich" – Musil 1981 797, letter of 26.viii.1937).

The view outlined above is not, however, entirely new. It was anticipated by a man whose opinion has some weight – Franz Blei. This Austrian literary critic and editor, a friend not only to Musil and Scheler but also to Rathenaus, is the man to whom Rathenaus complains that Musil has reviewed him harshly. Blei "discovered" Musil and, like his protégé, participated in the extensive Austrian discussions of the inseparability of form and content

⁵ Cf. Mulligan 1995 94 n2.

("secondary meaning and expression") and its consequences, aesthetic and non-aesthetic. In his strange 1930 autobiography, *Erzählung eines Lebens*, Blei quotes without any reference Scheler's claim, which we have already come across, to the effect that

Geist is a pure form, without power, without activity, without force: it is a "group of intentions"⁶

Of this claim he says

Musil demonstrated this in the novel *The Man without Qualities* much more intensively than Scheler in his expositions. By showing it (Indem Musil es aufzeigte.) (Blei 1930 466)

The last sentence, the context suggests, is an allusion to Wittgenstein's distinction in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* between showing and saying, between what can be said and what can only be shown. Chapters 61 and 62 of Blei's autobiography contain extensive references to Wittgenstein and Scheler⁷. Ten years later Blei (1940 225) quotes a fragment from the *Tractatus* (6.5) and attributes the idiom "sich aufzeigt" to Wittgenstein.

Blei had written to Wittgenstein in 1925 to compliment him on the *Tractatus* – he is thus one of the first to "discover" the *Tractatus*. In a letter to his Austrian friend, Ludwig Hänsel (himself a fan of value-theories à la Meinong and Scheler), Wittgenstein comments on his admirer:

Is he not an obscene writer? Who writes all sorts of indecent things for ladies? (Wittgenstein 1994 100).

This was the common view of Blei⁸ which Musil tried hard to dissipate⁹. But some indication of the difficulty Musil faced is the description Blei gives of his *Lehrbuch der Liebe und Ehe*, which he calls a *Tractatus Erotico-Politicus* (Blei 1928 5).

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⁶ He doubtless has in mind a formulation to be found in Scheler's 1927 "Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos":

...des...ohnmächtigen, nur in einer Gruppe von reinen "Intentionen" bestehenden Geistes..(GW 9 46)

⁷ Musil reports that "Max Scheler had much to thank [Blei] for in a critical period of his life" (E 1202).

⁸ It was, for example, the view of Karl Kraus who, in 1911, called Blei an "erotischen Geschäftshaber", an erotic busy-body (Kraus 1986 95). It has also been a common view of Musil.

⁹ E 1022-1025, 1199-1202, cf. Willemsen 1983.

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