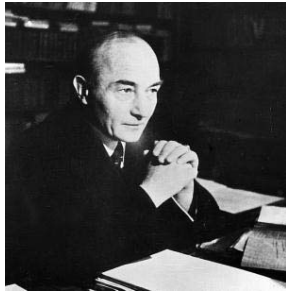


Excerpt from Robert Musil's
Man Without Qualities

Volume One

Translated by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser
Picador (1979)



28 A chapter that can be skipped by anyone who has no very high opinion of thinking as an occupation

MEANWHILE Ulrich was at home, sitting at his desk, working. He had got out the analysis that he had broken off short some weeks earlier when he had made his decision to return from abroad. He did not intend finishing it; it merely pleased him that he was still capable of doing this sort of thing. The weather was fine, but in the last few days he had only left the house on brief errands and did not even go into the garden. He had drawn the curtains and was working by shaded light, like an acrobat in the semi-darkness of a circus, performing dangerous new leaps in front of a gathering of experts before the public are let in. The precision, vigour and sureness of this kind of thinking, which has not its equal anywhere in life, filled him with something like melancholy.

He now pushed away the paper, covered with formulae and symbols, on which the last thing he has written was an equation of state of water, as a physical example, in order to apply a new mathematical operation that he was describing. But his thoughts must have strayed some time before that.

'Wasn't I talking to Clarisse about something to do with water?' he wondered, but could not clearly recollect. Still, it did not matter. His thoughts wandered on, idly

Unfortunately nothing is so difficult to represent by literary means as a man thinking.