

the letters. This first volume gives some idea of the enormous amount of work that the team of Canadian, French, and American scholars have contributed and some hint of the huge expense of the total *Correspondance*, which is being financed in large part by the Canada Council, with some help from the CNRS.

The present volume, after a fine preface by Henri Mitterand, the driving force of the whole project in its first years and still very active in it, contains a biography of Zola in his early years, up to the time of *Thérèse Raquin*, most complete and perceptive; a useful—and unique—historical introduction to the period, a chronological concordance juxtaposes the events of Zola's life with the external events of the epoch. The letters, 210 of them, come next, complete with the most detailed and handy notes which are followed by a bibliography of books and articles pertaining to Zola's early life and career; after these come biographical notices, thumbnail sketches of Zola's correspondents at this time in his life, then there are a description of the chief periodicals of the time, an index of all the works by Zola cited in this volume, and an index of all those correspondents and others mentioned in the letters.

The letters themselves are perhaps a little less good than the edition, which is a real monument, one of the great publishing events of our century in the domain of nineteenth-century French studies. Zola was not a great correspondent, neither as noble nor as appealing as Flaubert, not as clever as Gide, not as intellectual as Sainte-Beuve or as universal as Voltaire. But he was a very good correspondent nonetheless: his letters are clear, pointed, well composed, solid and complete, though they are not usually very long. Already some of his typical attitudes and qualities are evident: his seriousness, his somewhat formal approach to others, his reserved but courteous tone, his angular hardness of mind, his love of discussion, debate and theory. In these letters he is not yet a great man, but they show that he is a great man in the making.

And this edition is a worthy tribute to him as well as a worthy complement to Henri Mitterand's edition of the *Oeuvres complètes*. All those who formed the policy and devised the plans for it have contributed much not only to our knowledge of a man but of a period and a literary

movement, and those who persuaded the Canada Council and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique to support it have done us all a signal service. It is a shame, some think, that no institution in France would fully back this enterprise, which does so much for one of France's most glorious sons. But it is greatly to the credit of the Canadian people that it was their country which made possible not only the organization of the active and spirited Zola Programme of the University of Toronto, whence this edition derives, but that it made possible a publication which will be a model for all future editions.

Robert J. Niess

### FREDERICK G. PETERS

*Robert Musil, Master of the Hovering Life: A Study of the Major Fiction*  
New York: Columbia University Press, 1978. Pp. 286. \$16.50.

Peters's study both pleases and irritates. The latter reaction is due in part to the fact that the book grew out of a doctoral thesis. The investigation shares one trait common to academic theses which emerge as born-again books. The compulsion to cover everything relevant in encyclopedic thoroughness at times wearies and distracts from the valid argument Peters develops.

The introductory chapter, after a balanced sketch of Robert Musil's life, posits the thesis that Musil attempted in his fiction to create a new morality for modern man lost in the vacuum of values. Fiction alone for Musil seemed able "to hover" over all aspects of modern fragmented life, according to Peters. A cogent justification for the investigation which studies Musil's fiction from philosophical and psychological perspectives is next developed. Musil's antipathy toward psychoanalytic study of his life and works is duly noted, but Peters carefully argues that Musil whether writing on the level of metaphor (read: "mysticism") or of reason was sensitive and true to psychological reality.

Chapters two through six study in chronological order Musil's major fiction starting with the novel *Young Törless* of 1906, to *Unions* (two stories published in 1911), *Three Women* (a trilogy of short stories in 1924) and finally two chapters on the three volumes of the great fragment, *The Man without Qualities* (1930-1943). Peters's seventh and final chapter avoids summarizing the preceding material. He writes instead an essay which compares Musil's major themes with the same problems grappled with by philosophers and psychologists, namely Freud, Jung, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. Appended to Peters's study are the usual scholarly amenities; notes, a selected bibliography, an index to Musil's works cited, and an index of individuals mentioned complete the book. Layout and print are conventional and pleasing to the eye. The book has been carefully edited, for only one misprint was noted (on page 68, the name "Marianna" occurs five times; once it was printed with final *e* instead of *a*). Even granted the delay between the completion of a manuscript and its publication, Peters should have brought his selected bibliography up to date. The German selections do not go beyond 1973 and omit at least two pertinent works: Uwe Baur and Dietmar Goltschnigg, eds., *Vom Törleß zum Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1973); and Robert L. Roseberry, *Robert Musil: Ein Forschungsbericht* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1974). The bibliography of secondary literature in English has no entries more recent than 1968.

Peters has done a service to Musil studies by developing a consistent argument of book length in English based upon the excellent translations by Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins. The last full length English introduction to Musil dates back to 1961. There has even been a perceptible decline in both German and English articles on Musil in the past few years. Thus this book is a provocation for continued discussion of Musil in the English world and in studies of comparative literature.

Those, however, who already know Musil's writings and who are familiar with the secondary literature would have been better served if Peters had reduced his book to two or three concise articles. His final chapter could be published on its own. Peters is at his best in the study of "Tonka" (*Three Women*). His probing of the story ranges from Kierkegaard to

Camus, Buber, Freud, back to Kierkegaard with asides on Kafka and Nietzsche. Here the reader finds the essential Peters's method of psychological, philosophical validation of Musil's prose work. To apply the technique to each published story and novel is tedious. The reader feels, to quote Musil's first chapter heading from *The Man without Qualities*, that he has had "a sort of introduction which, remarkably enough, does not get anyone anywhere."

There is far too much paraphrase as literary interpretation in this book. Since the English translations of Musil's works are of similar page format as Peters's study, a few comparisons of number of pages will illustrate this criticism. The story "Grigia" is twenty-four pages long; Peters devotes nineteen pages to it. Nine pages are his discussion and ten pages are retelling. "The Lady from Portugal" is a novella of twenty-six pages; Peters's nineteen pages on the lovely work separate out to seven pages of Peters and twelve pages of retold Musil. The fact is that interested students and critics will read the original story and are not served by such lengthy condensations.

This study is, despite its flaws, a worthwhile contribution to the continued interaction and caution between literature and psychology which began in Austrian studies with Freud and Schnitzler. While it is blatant overstatement to say Freud and many a later psychologist are less concerned with curing neuroses than they are interested in psychology as a tool for understanding literature, nevertheless, the interaction between literary studies and psychology continues to enrich all who are concerned with the human condition whether manifest in life or letters. In tracing Musil's failure to master the hovering life, Peters has contributed to that literature of insight.

George M. O'Brien