

THEMATIC SECTION: ADOLESCENCE IN  
THE CITY: QUESTIONS FOR THE FIELDS OF  
PSYCHOANALYSIS, EDUCATION AND POLITICS

**Educação**  
& **realidade**

## **Youth ‘Without Qualities’ and the Desire for Fascism: links between psychoanalysis, education and politics**

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**ABSTRACT – Youth ‘Without Qualities’ and the Desire for Fascism: links between psychoanalysis, education and politics.** This article presents a reading about the construction of adolescence that experiences totalitarian social atmospheres through the analysis of socio-political variables present in the coming-of-age novel *Young Törless*, by Robert Musil. In this dialogue between psychoanalysis, education and politics, we articulate the author’s concern about the moral ambivalence of his generation, with the educational and political proposals presented to the youth of our time. In the novel, the notion of formation was eroded in Modernity and replaced by socialization with homogenizing and massifying practices. In the face of adolescence *without qualities*, it is necessary to restore desire, forging a unique version of the fate of the subject’s political body and society.

**Keywords: Psychoanalysis and Education. Politics. Adolescence. Desire for Fascism. Törless.**

**RESUMO – O Jovem ‘Sem Qualidades’ e o Desejo de Fascismo: enlaces entre psicanálise, educação e política.** Este artigo realiza uma leitura sobre a construção da adolescência que vive atmosferas sociais totalitárias, através da análise das variáveis sócio-políticas presentes no romance de formação *O Jovem Törless*, de Robert Musil. Na interlocução entre psicanálise, educação e política, articulamos a inquietação do autor ante a ambivalência moral de sua geração, com as propostas educacionais e políticas apresentadas aos jovens deste tempo. No romance, a noção de formação foi corroída na Modernidade e substituída pela socialização com práticas homogeneizantes e massificadoras. Diante da adolescência *sem qualidades*, cabe um trabalho de restauração do desejo, forjando uma versão singular do destino do corpo político do sujeito e do social.

**Palavras-chave: Psicanálise e Educação. Política. Adolescência. Desejo de Fascismo. Törless.**

In this article, we conducted a reading exercise on the Political effects in the constitution of young people of our time by reading the social and political conditions present in the bildungsroman *Young Törless*<sup>1</sup>, by Robert Musil (2003). Through the dialogue between psycho-analysis, education and politics, we want to get to know a little better the social, cultural and political scenario responsible for the building of the Austrian society that was experiencing an intense void, a kind of anomie in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This state was translated by the expression *without qualities*, which gives title to the next book by Musil (1989), *The man without qualities*. The proposal of the approximation lies in the perception that many of the conditions experienced by the adolescents of the Austrian boarding school, where the story of the adolescent Törless takes place, are close to the conditions in which the adolescents of our time find themselves.

The world with qualities that produces Musil's man without qualities<sup>2</sup> shows many articulations with our present time. In the novel's narrative, full of autobiographical questions, the author details all his uneasiness with the moral ambivalence that struck the Austrian generation in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As noted by Michael Hanke (2004), Musil describes a state of society in which the normative standards of conduct and belief disappear, in which the individual, in inner conflict, finds it difficult to follow the contradictory requirements of the social norms.

We believe that, nowadays, the absence of qualities is built by the effects of hate speech, the negation of history and the non-elaboration of traumatic experiences – such as our authoritarian and militarized past –, which, since not symbolized, return in the form of a compulsion to repetition. In this way, situations of violence can present themselves as even more devastating because they are strayed from their conditions of social production, as if we were living an intrusion of the past into the present – a situation that places us in the face of a future resembling an eternal return of events already experienced.

The analysis operators present here are part of a larger research on what we have called the desire for fascism (Gambetti, 2019; Perrone; Gurski; Gambetti, 2019; Gurski; Perrone, 2020). The professor of political theory at the University of Bogaçizi, Zeynep Gambetti (2019), works with the hypothesis that we are facing a new type of fascism associated with neoliberalism. This new fascism would be a global phenomenon that does not have homogeneous characteristics. It is a mixture of nationalism, xenophobia, racism, charismatic leaderships, reactionary *identitarianism* and regressive anti-globalization policies, which can wear different robes and naturally loose the bonds of solidarity and sharing between subjects, producing harmful effects to community life. In this direction, the desire for fascism would come as a question of why the masses in Brazil not only endure the oppression of fascism, but also seem to have a kind of fascination with the premises of this political regime.

With regard to the new fascisms, we observe, in Brazil, the political strengthening of the extreme right through movements such as historical revisionism and negationism. Gambetti (2019) adds to this current scenario, of which Brazil is not the only signatory, the impact of the financialization of the world through wild neoliberal practices, an issue that is not only reduced to economic effects, also manifesting itself in extreme individualism that spreads in different spheres of social life.

We understand that psychoanalysis can contribute to this debate by exploring the notion of the desire for fascism from the reflection on the critical threshold of unconscious fantasies, considering how much they materially determine our imaginary and the conditions of our reality. We believe that the desire for fascism is related to jouissance that presents itself as an impulse towards totality, a jouissance that seeks to make *One of the Other*, creating a kind of social anti-bond. This striking element, of symbolic order, encourages the jouissance with the segregation and destruction of the other, which is presented both in the bonds that make up the day-to-day of Törless in the German and Austrian militarized boarding schools of the early twentieth century, and in our contemporary situations.

It is important to stress that we take Musil's bildungsroman not exactly for its place in the literary canon, but for symbolic systems that are evident in this work, especially the conflicting social fabric of the time. We consider it relevant to refer in a special way to discussions on the political effects of education and social formation of young people in the midst of the conflicts present in Musil's novel, because both Germany and Austria were central nations for the explosion of the *society without qualities* of the first decades of the twentieth century, in which the *awakening of spring*<sup>3</sup> of teenagers like Törless was constituted and where the conditions for the explosion of the practices present in the great wars and, especially, under the Nazi regime were woven.

The gradual shrinkage that our democratic institutions have been suffering, associated with the effects of the non-republican link between conservatism in customs, religion and education, poses harmful conditions for the construction of our youth. This context can be compared to what adolescents, like Törless, saw in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when they saw the Weimar Republic start an erosion process due to the growing totalitarianism, also in the educational sphere.

The passage of adolescence holds the interesting possibility of the subject to reinvent a place for themselves in the social bond, therefore, in their relationship with the Other<sup>4</sup>. We use to say that the psychic operation of adolescence produces ethical-political effects in the history of the subject and of culture because it is precisely a way of enhancing, through this operation, the possibility for young people to read the polysemically received inheritance, building their own questions from the inheritance they received.

In this sense, we ask: what is the possibility for the psychic operation of adolescence to forge a space of alterity and possibility of build-

ing the *new* in a social bond guided by the demand for reproduction and absence of thought, as the bonds in totalitarian regimes are usually presented? Could the erosion of polysemy in the educational relations of totalitarian regimes be one of the responsible facets for the *youth without quality* that result in the *man without quality*? In other words, the lives without qualities that sustained the Nazi and fascist nightmare of a Europe taken over by the totalitarianisms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sprout from which educational and formative conditions? Such questions will be tensioned with fragments of *Young Törless* and some nuances of our social and political present time.

### **The origins of totalitarianism in the educational conditions of Törless**

In *Histoire et psychanalyse entre science et fiction*, Michel de Certeau (2016) strongly argued that literature should be taken as fiction that lends logic to the events of history, adding that “[...] literature creates the *non-place* where the effective operations of a society have access to formalization” (p. 92, emphasis added).

The literary narrative about young Törless highlights the construction of the *non-place*, mentioned by Certeau (2016), which is formalized by the pages of History over time. In order to carry out reflections on directions for the current educational impasses, we need to better understand how the adolescent *without qualities*, forged within the European military athenaeums of the decades before Nazism, was born as the citizen *without qualities* willing to implode the Weimar Republic on behalf of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich in the decades that followed – all described in detail in Musil’s classic, *The Man Without Qualities* (originally published between 1930-1943), written in the sequence of *Törless* (from 1906), as previously mentioned.

In order to reflect on the political effects in the constitution of young people from Törless – the typical adolescent of Europe in the early twentieth century who is faced with a society *without qualities* – and think about the educational construction in which the adolescence of our time finds itself, we need to better understand pre-war Austria’s social and educational conditions.

The intense social transformations undergone, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, imposed a series of complications on life in the European cities, among them, industrialization with its frantic rhythms, anonymity as a way of life in large cities, and the difficulty of living with the huge social differences implanted in the midst of a growing *ethos* focused on linear progress (Benjamin, 1994a). This was the climate conducive to very rigid and conservative educational theses and conceptions in the direction of behaviors considered deviant. In this context, institutional training spaces grew more and more oppressive and authoritarian.

It should be remembered that Europe at that time – the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – and Austria, in particular, began to gradually mili-

tarize the education of children and young people. Some educators, already influenced by Freudian thinking, strongly resisted these plans, among which we highlight August Aichhorn (Aichhorn, 2006; Freud, 2012; Gurski; Gus; Moraes, 2016), who, from the educational practices intertwined by psychoanalysis, fought against the military spirit taking over the institutions.

It is important to remark the relationship between this educational rigidity and the Nazi practices that followed. It is worth remembering that Daniel Paul Schreber's father, Dr. Daniel Gottlieb Moritz Schreber, was celebrated as an educator whose educational theories were based on hygiene, physical vigor and orthopedics. His rigid theses spread throughout Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and were even incorporated later by National Socialism (Roudinesco; Plon, 1998). In the face of these theses, the reformatories, as the institutions that housed young people who committed transgressive acts were called, began to show some features shared with the conception of what would later be called the totalitarianisms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this line of thought, director Ingmar Bergman (1977), with the filming of *The Serpent's Egg*, was able to problematize the effects of the seriousness of the German economic and political situation after World War I (1914-1918), a situation that produced unemployment, misgovernment and, above all, fear in the population. The extreme right of the then newly unified Germany promptly took advantage of this chaos, producing narratives with *paranoid* inducing effects against minorities (Gurski; Pereira, 2019). It was in this way that Jews, as well as other social and ethnic groups considered foreigners, began to be accused of the dismantling of the country and, therefore, summarily persecuted and victimized by an extermination plan consummated during World War II (1939-1945).

In the movie, Bergman (1977) suggests that the progressive poisoning of bonds arises, precisely, from the incitement to hatred, racism and intolerance. We can think that, today, the poison evoked by the director is what intoxicates the bonds, leading to a tacit authorization of violence with different extermination practices in the direction of minorities. In addition to these practices, which can be identified as necropolitical, or, according to Safatle (2020), as typical of a suicidal state<sup>5</sup>, we have also understood the politics of "shooting is also culture" (*tiro também é cultura*<sup>6</sup>) as a way of attacking free thinking and political action in the sense that Arendt gives to this expression<sup>7</sup> (Arendt, 2011; 2016).

We note, therefore, the presence of authoritarian and conservative practices in the educational field and racial segregation, both in our current social scenario and in the context of socially convulsed Germany in the early 1920s, the environment of Törless's adolescence. It can be said that the economic and social crisis that is plaguing Brazil, in these last years of the 2010 decade, has been attributed, among other issues, to the investment that would have been made, by the governments before 2016, in social policies – actions which were fundamental to guar-

antee, for some years, the social and economic inclusion of subjects in situations of extreme poverty and social vulnerability. In this sense, it must also not be forgotten that the production of intolerance and prejudice against minorities has been the keynote of conservative policies in Brazil since the beginning of colonial Brazil.

In the colonial period, the darkness of the times was experienced by the exercise of a power that always placed itself outside the law, with places organized in a non-stately way, but as a kind of demarcation of zones of war and disorder. The colonial logic was that state violence worked in the name of civilization. The occupation and domination of spaces were justified, at the time, because the other was the so-called savage or uneducated one, the one who was outside civilized normativity, which justified their confinement in a subordinate and objectified place. We think that the non-transmission of historical memory refers to the repression of our history. In this aspect, might one think the loosening of the transmission of history in the educational bonds of our educational institutions, as a tacit path authorizing the new configurations of the old policies of death?

As Gambetti (2019) puts it, in her recent book *Acting in dark times*, we need to elaborate another critique of the current dark times. In the wake of Gambetti, we think that one of the necessary reflections to be made in the direction of the new desire for fascism, which arises in our society, refers to educational practices as a fundamental turning point to think about the political dimension of the constitution of the current youth. How can we create conditions for the production of the *youth with quality* in a scenario in which education ends up being instrumentalized by a discourse that strives, more and more, to flatten the political dimension of life? How can we produce different versions and readings when the tendency has been to produce univocity in the reading of phenomena and events?

### **Törless's "absence of world qualities": psychoanalysis, literature and modernity**

Illustrated in the reflection of Moretti (2020), the late bildungsroman about young Törless arrives practically together with psychoanalysis. Törless, Musil's debut book in literature, is released in 1906, shortly after Freud (2006) wrote his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in 1905. Musil's book proposes an interesting condensation between the young man's subjective and individual issues and the complex and turbulent social and historical context in which the plot unfolds.

In it, in addition to the issue of sexuality, the author explores his own (traumatic) experience lived inside a rigid and conservative Austrian boarding school, whose growing pace of militarization already denounced what was to come from the political point of view. It is in this environment that Törless, the protagonist, shows us the perverse nuances that the tumultuous passage of adolescence, between the family bond and the social bond of the time, offered to the youth.

Among several elements that can be examined in the novel, the sad discovery about the *lack of quality* in the world in which he lived seems to be the most important for Törless. The expectation of the arrival of the moment to become a man, with would come with his life at the boarding school, away from his family, quickly became a sinister nightmare, in which the melancholic longing for his parents concealed frustration with a life absolutely devoid of qualities that he came to know as a perspective of the future.

The narrative of this bildungsroman can be taken as a paradigm of a new relationship between society and the dimension of the passage of time and the transmission of experience inaugurated by the variables of Modernity. The new social and cultural conditions launched another atmosphere for the subjective conformation and for the stages of life. In traditional societies, with oral transmission, the meaning of life was lived in the community space in a transcendental way, with values given *a priori* through tradition (Benjamin, 1994 c). In the context of modern societies, however, the subject starts to inscribe themselves in a complex and abstract order, in which symbolic affiliations are lost, producing individualism, gradual isolation and the constant need to be represented by themselves.

With a new framework of social relations, which emerges in concomitance with the industrialization of life and its consequent acceleration, there is an increasing distance from the origins. It is as if the subject needed to produce the relationships between beginning, middle and end, through a narrower and more dense narrative thread susceptible to forge the bond, no longer organic, between past, present and future. For Benjamin (1994 b; 1994 c), the philosopher of experience and time, the changes that occurred throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century produced a certain erosion in experience and in its modes of transmission, thus causing the narrator's figure as a representative from oral tradition to disappear, with the novelist emerging in its place (Kehl, 2001; Gurski, 2012).

It is in this sense that Kehl (2001) suggests that the novelistic narrative played a predominant role in the construction of modern subjectivity. The psychoanalyst says that the novel had a great social acceptance at the time, a kind of voice of what had been silenced: the singular experience woven in the midst of an increasingly less collective bond.

The historian and theoretician of Italian literature Franco Moretti (2020), in his study on the late bildungsroman, argues that, at the time, there was a social background towards the free development of the subject, which would have provided a scenario, for the youth, of a marked increase of socialization and growth, or even socialization as individual growth. In this way, the historian also suggests that the novel, in general, was an excellent way to free the issue of *experience* from its meta-physical prison, opening space for us to recognize its features.

In this context, the bildungsroman<sup>8</sup> appeared in the literary field as the effect of a certain blackout, at the time, of the formative aspects of

education. Classical education, supported by humanistic values since Ancient Greece, gradually began to prioritize instrumental aspects of socialization rather than educational training. This is how the daily and educational life of boarding schools at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with its strict rules, seemed to announce what was to come with the two great wars, especially in the spaces of the already declining Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In the same way that socialization arises in the place of educational training, the illusion that existence is based on building a destination comes in the place of the uniqueness of the experience, like the *self-made man* (Kehl, 2001). This would occur in such a way that, articulating subjectivity and literature, Benjamin (1994 c) emphasizes that the novel ended up representing a way for the modern reader to warm up, since their life had become cold and meaningless due to the demoralization of the experience in the modern world.

The novel, therefore, appears as a narrative mode that is necessary as an imaginary representation of the modern subject who no longer recognizes themselves as belonging to a collective bond. It is in this way that, without integrating the pre-modern social formations that gave stable places to lives that were not individually thought on, the anguished Freudian subject of the early twentieth century synthesizes the result of decades of continuous straying from the collective dimension of the social bond.

According to Kehl (2001), those who sip novels are lonely people, suffering from the compulsion to say everything and vibrating with detailed and long stories that are justified through many discourses. Modernity, by dispensing transcendence, elided the idea of a God and a father, leaving the collection of language as an arbitrary identification reference. It is in this context that, for Kehl (2001), modern subjectivity is made up of many words, in an attempt to compensate for the loss of consistency through the erosion of metaphysics, generating the need for the subject to recreate, every day, such loss via talking.

The expansion and democratization of literature, from the nineteenth century, through the dissemination of fictional forms, produced a whole other way of how people coped with their fate. In this conjuncture, new meanings arose in a society that ceased to be governed by beliefs in a divine order that predicted the destiny of life. It was in this that the novel became the great literary style of modernity, bridging the loneliness of the subjects, who think of themselves as autonomous, and the collective determinations that they ignore, but that nevertheless affect their private life. Kehl (2001) suggests that the psychology of the characters, which is portrayed in the novels, amid the complex social plots of the daily life of the time, produced a subject of experience.

It is in this direction that the breaking of the uniqueness of the Other's discourse, through the break with the revealed word, brought the need for a proper foundation of subjective choices. This fact culminated in the call for a network of horizontal dialogues capable of mitigating the helplessness resulting from the new social conditions.

These social and subjective transformations, in addition to producing changes in the field of art and human expressions, also caused a change in the relationship of man with the truth. The empiricist philosophers, for example, believed that the subject would only have access to the truth from the experiences of their senses, which meant dealing with the desecration of the truth. Insofar as universal and/or transcendental certainties are lost, the individual becomes the center of their own references.

### **The Anticipation of the *Subject Without Qualities* in the Writing of the *Bildungsroman*: issues for adolescence**

It will thus be in the context of the social and cultural transformations of late modernity that we will see the birth of adolescence as a psychic operation necessary for the contemporary subjectivation. It is often said that traditional societies did not leave much room for the topic of choice. The determinations were anticipated, so that the subject had little risk and, therefore, little space for choice. Fate depended on birth and not on an epic journey in order to establish the proper enunciation conditions. However, based on social, economic and cultural variables, modern societies started to organize themselves around other referents, and the issue of freedom and autonomy came to acquire value and vigor.

In this framework, pubertal changes that every subject experiences when getting out of childhood no longer have a consistent symbolic nomination. Ruffino (1999) will say that the contemporary adolescent suffers especially from the impossibility of signifying the anxieties related to the bodily and psychic transformations of the passage through adolescence. The curves, the voice, the whole hormonal *boom* in the face of the absence of rites of passage became matters of the order of the *real*<sup>9</sup>, that is, situations for which the young person had difficulties finding a way of elaboration. It is as if the typical changes of this period of life stay in a traumatic state for the subject. In different cultural moments, the social aspect, through the rites of passage, lent other senses to the new that appeared in the body, a situation that, in some way, helped to appease the anguish. Nevertheless, in the absence of rites of passage, that is, in the absence of a symbolic community operator, the subject will have to perform such operation of elaboration through an intrapsychic operation called adolescence (Ruffino, 1999).

Adolescence as a crisis, with all the nuances of anguish, arises with the new conditions of Modernity. That is, in a social time in which each one must find a sense for themselves and for their transformations without the collective endorsement of a rite. It is in this perspective that we can see the contemporary symptoms of adolescence as a response, above all, to the difficulties that the youth from today face to manage to represent themselves in the social bond. This notion implies the fact that the contemporary adolescent is understood as the greatest representative of the Modernity crisis, when the individualistic and non-col-

lectivist societal structures lost the function of symbolization formerly present in a communitarian social bond.

These conditions also brought the need for legitimacy of the ways to be represented in the social bond. If, before, the marks of inheritance were sufficient to give consistency to the subject's place in culture, with the advent of Modernity, this operation is impaired. We may think that the emergence of psychoanalysis, as a legitimate device and authorization of experience, approaches itself to the psychic operation of adolescence because both work as forms for the subject to individually perform an operation that had once a collective character.

In *traditional* societies, youth corresponded, primarily, to a biological differentiation, since the life of a young person would be the exact reproduction of the life of his ancestors. With the rise of the bourgeoisie, social mobility and the idea that a time of formation is necessary for the interiorization of the world come into play, that is, it is the socialization for a society in constant transformation. Moretti (2020) also finds a symbolic change since the notion of youth was central and preceding the very culture of Modernity.

*Young Törless*, by Robert Musil (2003), identified as a late bildungsroman, precisely reveals the change in the passage from training, from *Bildung*, to modern socialization and its relationship with the processes of institutionalization. There is also, in Musil's writing, a critique of the centralization of socialization in the self and in the constitution of society that needs adaptable, standardized and precarious individuals.

Moretti (2020) notes that Freud analyzed several literary forms but did not analyze the bildungsroman. The author understands that psychoanalysis worked exactly to demonstrate the game of forces and oppositions, looking beyond the self, while the late bildungsroman aimed to build a self that internalized contradictions to transform them into a process of normalization in which the ambition of its hero would consist mainly of being like everyone else. It is the narrative of the young subject of the mass who lived totalitarianism, the evils and extreme solutions in which institutions are strong and individuals are fragile.

The late bildungsroman shows aspects of adolescent subjectivity discussed in the light of ethical, social and political issues. The book about young *Törless* begins with his parents taking him to the boarding school of a religious order where he should begin his training. From the beginning, the narrator reveals that Mrs. Törless accepted the separation of her son and his going to school to "protect the youth from the corrupting influences of a big city" (Musil, 2003, p. 8). Törless himself accepts the idea of going to boarding school "even with pleasure" (p. 9) to be able to leave the family and make his way towards what he believed to be adulthood. However, the initial joy at the separation became a kind of melancholy, in which he feels taken over by a "feeling of emptiness" (p. 9), seeing the outside world as a sad, monotonous and uninhabitable place.

## **Between Educating and Socializing: ethical-political issues in dark times**

The feeling of emptiness and the loneliness of adolescence itself comes as an effect of the encounter with the dimension of lack and non-completion (Rassial, 1999). In this sense, the beginning of the novel illustrates the great psychic work of adolescence; operating the castration of the Other from childhood, or, to put it another way, making the transition from the family bond to the social bond. As seen in his early desires to separate himself from his parents, Törless shows that the relationship with authority figures begins to lose consistency; that is what Rassial (1999) will call the breakdown of the Other, the moment in which the young person faces the lack in their symbolic dimension. For Törless, going to boarding school represented, in fact, the possibility of having his own space, away from the family, a time to build his place of speech and account for his origins in a way other than through family romance.

The encounter with the dimension of the lack of the Other is responsible for the proper psychic operation of adolescence, when the subject is able to change his position as a child, his belief in an imaginary completeness and forever lost, for the notion of structural lack.

This structural question of constitution abovementioned becomes interesting when we reflect on the social and political context of the time of Törless's conception. The early years of the twentieth century were responsible for the gradual melting of the Illuminist illusions in the field of culture and the progressive illusions in the field of politics, a time when traditional institutions, such as the Church and the army, were empowered and leaders took on increasingly totalitarian features, throwing the subjects into an agonizing sense of frailty.

Lacan, in *Seminar 15* (1967-1968/s.d.), underlined the importance of the analyst's act for making a difference with the simple act. The cut-off point of the analytical act lies exactly in the ethical position of breaking with the position of master (S1), refusing totality. The refusal of totality is what forges potency and vivacity to the polysemic view of the conditions that are placed for the subjects. From this perspective, we can say that resisting the tyranny of the ONE and enabling modes for the subject not to bend to any totality of the Other is one of the tasks of the education traversed by the dimension of the subject (Gurski, 2017).

We understand that, through the nuances of Törless's life, Musil (2003) problematized the formative paths of a society that is less and less affected by the presence of the subject and desire. Not in vain, Musil, in the novel, shows the tragic fates of the crossing paths of sexuality, violence and socialization in the lives of the adolescents at the boarding school.

Young people in narratives like the late bildungsroman reveal that the logic of desire and the primacy of the subject are undone in the name of social institutions of totalitarian inclination, a question that

will later appear materially in the formation of Hitler Youth. It is in this way that the socialization of that time, as a dimension of alienation to the demand of the social Other, operated by resisting the awakening of adolescence as a movement to differentiate the Other's demand. The *civil war* that inhabited the instinctive interior of young people, in the social time of Törless, was confronted with the construction of a totalitarian and static horizon.

In the new fascisms, the generation that did not know the totalitarianism of the last century professes extreme pragmatism – they understand such pragmatism as a virtue, since they are actions *without ideology*. Choices depend on social networks and opinion polls, discrediting any value other than hyperindividualism. It is also depoliticized pragmatism that sees no difference between the left and the right because only the option that *works best is* worth something. We could think that this resembles the principle of TINA (*There Is No Alternative*)<sup>10</sup>, through which the notion that there is no alternative to the totalitarianism of the laws of the market, of capitalism, neoliberalism and globalization is internalized.

In this sense, the discussion about the youth without qualities comes close to what we are experiencing. Ulrich, the protagonist of the novel *The Man Without Qualities*, could be thought of as the future adult of Törless. Both, each in their phase, live a massified life, whose simplified and pragmatic conditions regarding relationships give rise to a source of prejudices as a way of dealing with the other. Musil's youth and man without qualities, as well as our(s), are a sort of instruments of totalitarian practices that aim to erase any critical expression. One of the operations of the totalitarian machine is through the simplification of values and concepts that leads to a kind of naturalization of conflicts, as well as a reduction in thinking and in the mobilization of political autonomy. The sequence of Musil's unfinished novel was the production of subjects capable of managing the atrocities of World War II.

These issues appear in Törless's questions and dramas. The adolescent poses an ethical question to his colleagues, Reiting and Beineberg; at the beginning, he questions the actions of his colleagues, however, in the sequence, we see that the relationship between the three reveals the eroticization of power as being of greater interest than pleasure. We could say that this is the additional conclusion that Musil (2003) adds to the novel, in which we see the restoration of the positive image of parents and, also, of the bourgeois class. At one point, Törless writes an instructional letter to Basini<sup>11</sup> asking him to acknowledge the theft, remembering his parents' letter and assuming a position of superiority, through which he rejects the social and sexual experiences lived at the boarding school.

Moretti (2020) points out that the adult Törless embodies an imaginary solution, reconciling two realities in which modernity forces the subject to live simultaneously: the outside world, in which one must aim to find their place in the social order, and the inner world, apparently free, in which the subject can perform their individuality. Perhaps this

fragment symbolizes the *Bildungsroman* in its ironic register: there is no conflict between individuality and socialization, autonomy and normality, interiority and objectification. The formation of an individual coincides seamlessly with the social integration of someone as a simple part of the whole.

In one of the last sentences, the narrator encourages the reader to recognize the significance of Törless's training. He is described as a man who has a sufficiently sophisticated sensitivity to experience self-determination and aesthetic gratification anywhere in the world, an adult adapted to the reality of his time and society.

However, the narrator's irony, in this final moment, indicates the change in the meaning of the *Bildungsroman* and the impossible task of Modernity, especially for an adolescent: becoming an individual, a totality in an absolutely fragmented and violent world. The narrator of the novel insists on the success of Törless's education and declares that "A phase had ended, the soul had formed another ring, as in the bark of a young tree. This powerful feeling, for which there were no words, excused everything that had happened" (Musil, 2003, p. 147). This is how the adult Törless agrees wholeheartedly and assures the reader that he "did not regret what he had done" (p. 147). The need to guarantee the reader his exemplary socialization, justifying all the events of the novel, raises the question: why does Törless need to give so many guarantees to socialization?

The desire to explore the dark world of transgression and violence did not disappear, but Törless returned to the empty world of the beginning of the novel, since the progressive ideals of the old world were lost. Melancholically, we can infer that Törless will mature in Musil's work as Ulrich, the *man without qualities* of Musil's great unfinished writing (1989) – who, in some way, anticipates, in literature, the masterful concept of *banality of evil*, coined by Hannah Arendt (1999) amid the coverage of the Eichmann trial in Israel. It is Ulrich's saying "[...] the human being, in fact, can eat other men as well as write the *Critique of Pure Reason*; with the same convictions and the same qualities" (Musil, 1989, p. 57).

These transformations were a catalyst for disaster. The resources of civilization, synthesized by faith in rationality, moral law and progress, had been excavated from within; weightless, they soon lost the ability to resist the barbarism that advanced everywhere, including in the vicissitudes of adolescence.

Lacadée (2011), in *l'éveil et l'exil*, commenting on Musil's *Bildungsroman*, highlights how the elimination of another can even become a solution. He critically comments on the posture of Beineberg, one of Törless's colleagues, when he says that Basini means nothing to him and that humiliating him, annihilating him, would be a good thing, a kind of purification.

The social and political context of Törless's adolescence leads us to think about his difficulty in reinventing himself, in building *know-how*

*with his sinthome*<sup>12</sup>, assuming the necessary dose of singularity in order to answer for his place in a position of otherness in the relationship with the Other, the task of the psychic operation of adolescence. If such operation, which evokes the uniqueness and therefore the *new* of the registration of the subject in the social bond, had been made possible by the conditions of the time, then perhaps Musil had not led young Törless to the position of the man without qualities in his maturity novel. Therefore, it seems *no accident* that the Nazis and other extreme movements gained ground in this environment devoid of higher qualities.

### **Psychoanalysis, Education and Politics: links for a new future**

The narrative about the Törless's formation evokes the articulation of the discussion of psychoanalysis with adolescence and the relations of power, issues that are central to the constitution of young people and to the current historical moment. Freudian texts on culture and politics addressed exactly war, death and the social bond articulated with the issues of domination, power, submission and violence.

In the discussion of this writing, in which we evoked the notion of formation and its disappearance from the historical horizon in favor of an instrumental socialization, we emphasized that we are concerned with the neutralization of the most important issue of the operation of adolescence, the production of the *new* of the subject, the singular dimension of their creation that takes shape in the passage of adolescence and puts youths in a position to forge something new for the culture of their time. We are concerned because we see that the impersonal dimension of socialization, fostered by the current educational institutions, has made it almost impossible for adolescents to sustain another discursive place, liable to produce social change and not just the adaptation and/or reproduction of norms.

As we have already stated, one of the elements that destabilized the narrative of formation was the discovery of the unconscious, as Freudian thought established a link between the modern concept of alienation and the suffering imposed by the process of socialization. The alienation and socialization of desire were thought, by Freud (2010), as united among themselves, a way of producing identities and internalizing norms. Later, authors belonging to the Frankfurt School, as Adorno and Horkheimer (2000), articulated, through Critical Theory, the suffering modes with psychic economy and social order, reflecting on aspects of fascism and authoritarianism.

In Brazil, from the nineteen nineties, with the redemocratization of the country, we have had changes in the educational system, driven by changes in university research agendas, which shaped new public education policies. Educational institutions have started to discuss the idea of difference and not just diversity. Perhaps these years of national democracy reconstruction have helped to outline a more participatory position of the Brazilian youth in the social scene. We have had some

movements, such as the 2013 protests, which repositioned youth as more active social actors, claiming their role and mobilizing hope, but, also, reigniting the typical fears of a conservative society.

In this turning point scenario in education and in the position of the new generations, we also had the resurgence and rise of the extreme right in Brazil. Conservative and extremist leaders focused on education as the main element of disorder lacking a supranational purifying intervention due to the threat it represented to the evaluative references of Brazilian society: family, religion and even the ways of loving and sexual relationship.

Through educational guidelines, such as the school without party movement (*escola sem partido*), homeschooling and militarized schools, we can see the return of the conception of socialization instead of education. We think that, in the same way as in Törless, this increase of individualities is not directed at the collective construction, neither at the construction of peace and conviviality. The expectation is for a leader similar to the Father of the Horde to re-establish an order that never existed and to purify, with the incitement to hate, the deviants and different ones. Like Törless, the mentors of current educational directions are guided by what we have called the *desire for fascism* (Gambetti, 2019; Perrone; Gurski; Gambetti, 2019; Gurski; Perrone, 2020).

The problematization that we are discussing was synthesized in the new educational project of the government: The National Program for Civic-Military Schools (*Programa Nacional das Escolas Cívico-Militares*), whose proposal is that, under military management, the problem of youth violence will be solved. Through this conception, the rules and disciplines, at school, will be responsible for naturally increasing the students' performance.

The *new school* proposed by the logic of militarization is allied to another policy of the Brazilian past, the criminalization of poverty. Such logic questions the democratic structures and gains of education in the last decades, using the discourse of fear, exception and threats. It is also important to mention that the militarization of public schools means the deconstruction of the struggle for the right to public education and that its public ruin is also the undoing of the State, of rights and citizenship.

In the same direction of dilution of the democratic State, there is the project that intends to give rights to the so-called family education. In this project, children and youth are not thought of as citizens, as subjects of rights with the guarantee of a public education with quality provided by the state, public education is transformed in a militarized socialization, in which the main concern is the sovereignty of the homeland, of the rules, of discipline and of a certain order. In this way, the political bodies of children and young people are thought not from their singularities but, rather, from the search of massification and homogenization. It is the antithesis of an educational paradigm that considers the dimension of the singularity of the subject and of desire.

The neoliberal agenda has allied itself with moral conservatism, in the opposite direction of the democratizing process that was taking place in the country. In this perspective, the desire for fascism evokes the one from the multiple and seeks to eliminate any possibility of action. The human will disappears to transform anyone into the old pair of victim and executioner, as we witnessed in Musil's bildungsroman (2003). We believe that, in the face of adolescence *without qualities* that is being forged in a world of lesser qualified relations, a restoration work and historical composition of the desires of the subjects is needed, a proposal that could articulate present, past and future, enabling young people to forge an own and unique version of their passage through the world. A passage that is not simply an echolalic repetition of what they received.

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## Notes

- 1 The book was considered a late bildungsroman. It narrates episodes of three students, Reiting, Beineber and Törless, at an Austrian military boarding school in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The trio, after discovering a theft by their colleague Basini, decide to punish him, instead of reporting him to the school authorities. The punishment occurs through physical, psychological and sexual abuse of the adolescent. Throughout the novel, questions arise about the adolescents' sexuality, ethical dramas and compulsive behaviors. When the trio's torture crosses the moral limits endured by Törless, he secretly advises Basini to confess the theft to the director, as a way out of the situation. In the end, Törless returns to his parents' home and his education is completed.
- 2 We refer to the book *The man without qualities* by Robert Musil (Ed. Nova Fronteira, 1989). The book is considered one of the main works of literature of the 20th century, set in post-first war Vienna.
- 3 For other details on the meaning of spring awakening for psychoanalysis with adolescents, see Lacan (2003).
- 4 In his work, Lacan formulated different developments on the notion of Other, *Autre* in French. One such facet concerns the (large) Other as a place of radical otherness that is presented to the (small) other – our neighbor with whom we maintain a relationship of identification through imaginary specularity (Lacan, 2010). In this way, the Other can also be thought of in the scope of the discourses that exist beyond and below ourselves and that constitute us as beings of language.
- 5 French philosopher Paul Virilio (1999 apud Safatle, 2020) developed the concept of a suicidal state as the inevitable final outcome of all states that have technical development and economic progress as the main elements of their existence. It is suicidal insofar as it depletes its own natural and human resources, reproducing the logic of the endless search for increased production and consumption to meet a neoliberal economic market structure. In this way, the suicidal state is “a new stage of the state in the form of management immanent to neoliberalism. It is, therefore, its terminal phase” (Safatle, 2020). The concept of suicidal state was not created to characterize fascist states

specifically, but there are intrinsic correlations between the fascist states of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the suicidal state: we can associate the suicidal state with the characteristic of fascist regimes that refer to heroism and the cult of (their own) death. In fascism, this approach to its own end is related to the individual (ego) and, in the suicidal state, to the stately body itself.

6 Expression used by deputy Eduardo Bolsonaro in November 2020. For more information, see: <https://istoe.com.br/eduardo-bolsonaro-faz-aula-no-bope-com-mario-frias-e-diz-que-tiro-tambem-e-cultural/>.

7 For Arendt, political action is always collective, however much it begins with an individual; it is a relationship, it exists between equals and guarantees a plural world. When acting politically, the individual must focus on reality and act among others, maintaining the meanings recovered from the past to elaborate concepts and values that guarantee daily action.

8 The *bildungsroman* presents the *formation* of a young protagonist through their experiences, travels, achievements and disappointments; the narrative deals with individual development and integration into a society as two sides of a historical path. Gradually, from the bourgeois revolutions, pragmatism is imposed, and the dimension of formation loses its meaning in mass society, being replaced by the dimension of educative socialization.

9 Instance that constitutes one of the three registers that, together with the symbolic and the imaginary, found what Lacan called RSI. These are inseparable registers, linked by the Borromean knot, which account for the subject's relationship with the dimension of the lack. For Lacan, the real is that which cannot be fully symbolized by the word, that which "does not cease to not be written" (Lacan, 1985, p. 127).

10 Political slogan attributed to Margaret Thatcher.

11 Cf. Note 1.

12 *Know-how with the sinthome* would be equivalent to the moment when the adolescent subject accepts to take in his own hands the adventure of a reinvention of themselves from the original marks of what they received as inheritance and transmission. A moment when they operate a subjective choice, authorizing themselves to make their own version of what is inherited. For more information, see Gurski (2017).

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