

Thesis Title: **Towards an Understanding of Worldliness: Readings in Proust and Musil**

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Thesis Abstract

The experience of reading a novel makes possible an encounter with the world, and defines the world anew at the event of our engagement with the text. The thesis seeks to understand worldliness not as exclusively as a philosophical concept but a hermeneutic disclosure wherein the conventional parameters of the self and world become somewhat redundant. The first section dismantles this binary while tracing a trajectory of philosophical thought in Europe, beginning with Descartes, Hume and Kant, culminating finally in the advent of phenomenology and ontology in the writings of Husserl, Heidegger, Ricoeur. The following two sections are dedicated to readings of/in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* and Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities*, where the attitude as developed in the preceding theoretical section comes to bear a part in engaging with the concerns revolving on worldliness and style, the aesthetics and politics that emerge out of the construction and reception of these novels.

Through these readings, the thesis seeks to critically re-formulate notions of theory, style, world, literary reference and event of reading, and is perhaps driven towards a new poetics of literary engagement which favors ambiguity, ambivalence and nothingness over sharply delineated categories, univocal meanings and essence. The choice of the texts goes hand in hand with these concerns, given that their emergence aesthetically embodies these above-mentioned quandaries that would be relevant as long as one seriously contemplates the role and meaning of reading in our lives.