

The confusions of
young törless as a
response to
wilhelmine politics
and ideals



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The book *The Confusions of Young Törless* by Robert Musil illustrates the change in societal values during the Wilhelmine Period of 1890-1914. Under Wilhelm the second, the German Empire was reined on ideals that were found on economic liberalism and social conservatism. These ideals led to highly aggressive militaristic and imperialist actions. Musil can be seen as prophesizing the changes of attitudes, beliefs, and practices of those growing up in the Wilhelmine Era. Two particular adolescents, Beineberg and Reiting, represent the shift to fascist attitudes. This is shown through the way they value courage and strength. Their cruel treatment of Basini resembles fascist militaristic practices of obedience and discipline; indeed, Beineberg and Reiting represent the ideals during the rein of Wilhelm II, which can be directly correlated to World War I and postwar fascist dictatorships.

The Wilhelmine Era resulted in an evolving focus on aggression and strength, which resulted in World War I and later became the core principles of the fascist rule. Musil first demonstrates this through Reiting who seems to be putting emphasis on these same values. One specific example can be shown when the author describes Reiting's actions: "another kind of practice he indulged in was to punch something in an out-of-the-way place...to strengthen his arms and harden his hands with calluses".[1] In this example and throughout the novel, Reiting felt the need to become stronger and prove his power. Reiting represents the German Empire at the time, a country that focused on imperialistic foreign policy and building a Naval League to show its power. The contemporary interpretation regarding the origins of World War I, states that Germany shares the primary blame for the

war's occurrence, due to its aggressiveness under Wilhelm II; these aggressive actions led to the outbreak of World War I.

In the novel, Reiting and Beineberg assert their power in various types of aggressions, which include sexual, physical, and emotional abuse of another character, Basini. One specific example is when they attacked Basani: "Beineberg and Reiting leapt after him...and were whipping him with something [and Basini] begging them to spare him".[2] This quote illustrates the aggressions of the two adolescents on to someone else, similarly to Germany's imperialistic aggressions towards Africa at the time. It is also important to mention the reasons behind the actions of Beineberg and Reiting and how it can represent the rise in fascism during this time. These characters justified their cruel treatment of others by saying it was discipline as a response to disobedience. Obedience was an important aspect of the fascist party and unwillingness to comply with the party often led to punishment.

Beineberg and Reiting say they punish Basani for disrespecting them or doing something against their wishes. An example of this is when Beineberg and Reiting are talking to another student that Basani tried to get turn against them: "Basini's coming to the hideout tonight; we are going to punish him for stirring you up against us." [3] Throughout the entire novel Beineberg and Reiting's reason for punishing Basani was due to his disobedience to them, which they felt was an act against his superiors. Essentially, the fascist party felt the need to eliminate any person or faction of people who didn't cooperate with their regime. This specific ideal can be shown developing during the reign of Wilhelm II through the characters of <https://assignbuster.com/the-confusions-of-young-trless-as-a-response-to-wilhelmine-politics-and-ideals/>

Beineberg and Reiting. When a friend of these two in the novel refused to do something they asked, Beineberg and Reiting threatened him. They said: “My dear Törless, if you rebel against us and do not come, the same will happen to you as Basini.”[4] It is important to see the correlation between Beineberg and Reiting’s idea’s of corporation and obedience under their power and that of the fascist dictatorships in the following decades.

The Confusions of Young Törless should be taken as a purposeful and coherent reflection of the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of those growing up in the Wilhelmine Era. In the novel, the characters Beineberg and Reiting represent the shift in culture and attitude that led to World War I and ultimately the fascist dictatorships. Beineberg and Reiting show numerous similarities to fascist ideals and policies. This is demonstrated in the novel through their cruel treatment of Basani, which resembles fascist practices of obedience and discipline and their emphasis on strength.

[1] Robert Musil, *The Confusions of Young Törless*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2014) 41 [2] *Ibid.*, 76 [3] *Ibid.*, 148 [4] *Ibid.*, 149