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The Dis/location of Solitude: The Disaggregation of Empire in Joseph Roth's *The Radetzky March*

The condition of solitude, no matter whether it is coercive or intentional, collective or individual, disengages the rules of the community in which it comes into being. Inasmuch as it deactivates the political and social parameters of its location, it presents itself as an operation of dislocation. However, is it not the case that any *dislocation* is, by necessity, related to a *location*? Does solitude's dislocation not act, therefore, as the prerequisite of its location, and vice versa?

In order to clarify this paradox of solitude's dis/location, let us consider the status of former imperial provinces. They were certainly politically located within respective empires but, at the same time, linguistically, socially, and economically dislocated from these empires' core zones. In governing them an imperial administration followed different rules than those applied in its centers. The derogation inherent in these rules, however, enjoyed a much wider dissemination, characterizing the manner in which the representatives of central imperial constituencies perceived and treated the members of the provincial ones in everyday contacts. The isolation and immobilization of the provinces was the imperial center's broad and joint operation, but the provinces nevertheless played an active role in determining its end-effects. Since the division existed not only between the center and the provinces but also within both of them, it persistently ruined their homogeneity and stability. Although, after the collapse of the political entity that housed them both for centuries, the divided constituencies used to blame each other for this demise, the perpetual resurfacing of the empire's structural gap within them interrogates the plausibility of such unilateral interpretations. Instead, it hints at a deeper problem that encompasses and surpasses them both.

While such tarrying of the one constituency by the other is comprehensible in the enflamed atmosphere of the immediate post-imperial decades, it makes much less sense in the recent historiography as well as reception of literary works that are focused on the breakdown of empires. The case I want to investigate in this connection is Joseph Roth's novel *The Radetzky March*. In spite of the monarchist opinions occasionally put forth in Roth's journalistic work, my claim is that the novel's complex structure resists being read in any such ideological frame.¹ Under closer inspection, it

¹ For a recent summary of the novel's dominant reception in such a frame, see Adam Koźuchowski's *The Afterlife of Austria-Hungary: The Image of the Habsburg Monarchy in Interwar Europe* (112-21). The historian Koźuchowski himself subscribes to it.

portrays its main characters as firmly encapsulated by solitude. This is represented as a grave condition that governs their communication not only with other characters but also themselves. The elderly Emperor, who approaches his provincial “sons” absent-mindedly, indifferently, and negligently, serves as the epitome of such inaccessible loneliness. Of course, disinterestedness suits the supreme position in any political hierarchy and therefore should hardly be seen as astonishing.² Yet the Emperor appears to be absent-minded not only in relation to the provincials but also himself. An entity appointed to rule the whole empire – as omnipresent among its inhabitants as God in the world³ – is not exactly sovereign. On the contrary, the Emperor, who is responsible for the well-being of millions of people, leaves the impression of being an extremely distracted person. At the age at which he enters this novel he has ceased to even master his own self.

Portrayed on innumerable public walls and reproduced on coins and stamps as coffered up in the “crystalline armor” of his “icy and everlasting, silver and dreadful old age,” he casts a tough and freezing glance upon his subjects (75; 85-86).⁴ Remote and unapproachable, his face lacks personality and familiarity. Under such conditions, some subjects remove his portrait from their walls (109; 124) and others consider him to have been definitely abandoned by God (176; 196). Even to the Emperor himself God begins to appear as mysterious as he himself regularly appeared to his soldiers (240; 267). The Emperor for his part felt as if he was drifting away from them, as though they were all shrinking and “the things they said reached his ear from a vast distance and then bounced away meaninglessly” (243; 273). This increasing detachment from his subjects makes him incapable of carefully listening to his visitors and interlocutors. During an inspection of his troops in Ukraine, he thus promotes a barber from Olmütz from corporal to sergeant completely against the man’s wishes. Although he thereby destroyed the barber’s life, the narrator presents the Emperor as extremely pleased for having accomplished a good deed and making the barber happy (242; 269).

The Emperor’s profile within the novel has wide-reaching impact. His officers of provincial origin, while unreservedly committed to him, display an analogously radical solitude, replicating the Emperor’s humiliating disregard for the “provincials” in an even stronger form. The way the novel represents its characters leads the reader to the conclusion that the desperate *dislocation* of some imposes an equally devastating *location* on others, and vice versa. Is the proliferation of solitudes an unavoidable corollary of the divided imperial coexistence? Their mutual instigating resurfaces in all relations between the main characters in *The Radetzky March*, as well as between its major and

² For a classic study of the ruler’s aloof loneliness, see Leo Strauss’s *On Tyranny*.

³ *The Radetzky March* (75); *Radetzky marsch* (86). In the following text, the first parenthesized number refers to the page in Michael Hofmann’s English translation of Roth’s *The Radetzky March*, and the second, italicized and separated by semicolon, to the German original.

⁴ Hofmann translates “in seiner eisernen und ewigen, silbernen und schrecklichen Greisenhaftigkeit eingeschlossen” as “coffered up in an icy and everlasting old age,” astonishingly dropping “silver and dreadful.”

minor characters. The novel obsessively returns to the complex relationship between imposed mobility and immobility, the solitudes of Austrians and provincials, those of the dominating supranational individuals and of the dominated national and workers' collectivities. As these solitudes foster one another, *The Radetzky March* renders a distribution of sympathies between them obsolete, which seriously questions its supposedly nostalgic character.⁵

Following three generations of the typical imperial Trotta family, Roth lets their solitudes deepen rather than ameliorate one another. Baron Joseph von Trotta, who saved the Emperor's life at the battle of Solferino (1859), is ennobled, whereupon he breaks his personal relationship with his Slovenian father, concealing him from his Bohemian wife due to a sense of provincial shame. After having renounced his familial father in favor of a political one, in a typical gesture of repetition compulsion, he, as a father himself, ceases his personal relationship with his own son, raising him toughly and coldly. This guides his son to likewise repeat the same gesture toward him, instead becoming attached to the Emperor. Raised by the Baron in such an impersonal way, District Commissioner Franz Trotta, as the father, reproduces the same attitude towards his son Carl, who, for his part, also chooses to instead admire his grandfather and the Emperor.

In the frame of the Habsburg Empire, it appears that a family could only ensure its external reputation by consenting to its internal discontinuation. The narrator reminds us, as if pointing out the price of the Great Father's love, that a "great chain of hills" separated the Commissioner from his son (170; 188) and the Baron from his father (8; 11).⁶ The Dual Monarchy's officers of provincial origin had to detach themselves from taking care of their family bonds, since attachment to one's original family was considered provincial behavior. If one wanted to overcome it, one was expected to abandon this "primitive" loyalty in favor of binding oneself to the Emperor. Families could improve their social status only via the latter, which required of its members mobility across various imperial provinces, often located great distances from their family's home. Once cut off from their geographic, social, cultural and linguistic roots, the Emperor's supranational officers were compelled to live a free-floating, dislocated life. Their career development affiliated them with locations to which they were all but emotionally attached and which, in turn, regarded these settlers as foreigners.

The novel carefully investigates how the protagonists' feeling of non-belonging and the distrustful reception that they are afforded by their new surroundings generates their unbearable solitude and concomitant attempts to come to grips with it. There seems to be no exception to this rule. After having fought for his Emperor and,

⁵ For a recent reading of the novel along more ambiguous lines, see Ana Foteva's *Do the Balkans Begin in Vienna?: The Geopolitical and Imaginary Borders between the Balkans and Europe* (173-95). Foteva, however, does not address the problem of the dis/located solitude that figures centrally in my reading.

⁶ In the latter case, Hofmann translates "schwerer Berg [lit. severe mountain] militärischer Grade" as "a great weight of military distinction."

in the process, become a military invalid, Baron von Trotta's father, born in Slovenian Sipolje, becomes a gardener in the Emperor's Laxenburg castle in Lower Austria, which becomes, incidentally or not, a surrogate milieu for his indigenous one. Baron von Trotta himself, disappointed with the Emperor's mendacious administration, withdraws from the military service in South Hungary, which has confronted him with daily mistrust and gossip (5; 8), and retreats into a silent Bohemian landscape. District Commissioner von Trotta, for his part, is sent to Silesia and then Moravia, whereupon, faced with complete isolation, he undertakes a trip to Ukraine to reestablish his personal relationship with his endangered son. Lieutenant von Trotta was stationed in Moravia and then Ukraine, where, after quitting his embarrassing military service, he tries to integrate into the domestic peasant population.

At the beginning of their appointment to various provinces, however, neither of the Trottas cares to identify his new location exactly. They want their provincial surroundings to remain indistinctive in order to project onto it the self-pleasing, therapeutic fantasies of their solitude without facing resistance from the domestic population. Only after such resistance arises and the provincials announce dissatisfaction with their imposed identity do the Trottas become frustrated with their dislocation. Yet, even then, they prove unwilling to approach the provincials, for whom they are responsible, in distinctive terms, instead continuing to heal their dislocation through stubborn detachment. In demonstrating such obstinate blindness to the perspective of the provincials that they are expected to take care of, they unwittingly replicate the Emperor's utter disinterest in his subjects as exemplified, among everything else, by the aforementioned treatment of the Ukrainian barber.

This compulsively reemerging ignorance deserves closer examination since it manifests itself diversely. To recover from his frustrating south Hungarian appointment, Baron von Trotta withdraws into his Bohemian refuge because he confuses it with his "native" Slovenia. The narrator states twice that he became "a little Slovenian peasant" (14; 18, 19) there, as if taking up the protagonist's indistinctive point of view.⁷ In a sudden outburst of anger induced by his unbearably divided identity, the Baron renounces his Imperial Father, reattaching himself to his Slovenian one. Yet, although it now seems that he has definitely quit his relation to the Emperor, his loyalty to him proves irrevocable. Despite the Baron's intention to reintegrate, his rapid aging and the isolation caused by the consecutive deaths of this father, wife, and father-in-law echo the Emperor's traumatic self-enclosure.⁸ He also reminds us, through his inability to remember the face of his recently deceased wife (19; 24), of the Emperor's notorious forgetfulness, as well as, by his growing habit of treating his own portrait as the only

⁷ I say "as if" because the narrator himself does not really distinguish between various imperial provinces, usually treating them "summarily." I will return to his unplanned repetition of the characters' behavior in my conclusion.

⁸ As is known, the Emperor's only son committed suicide, the Mexicans executed his brother, an Italian anarchist assassinated his beloved wife, and a member of a Serbian liberation movement assassinated the heir to his throne. For his traumatic self-enclosure, see Kozuchowski (163-64).

interlocutor that has remained to him (18; 23), of the Emperor's self-seclusion. Finally, the Emperor is most exemplarily resurrected in the Baron's disregard for the personality of fellow beings. They must unconditionally obey his traumatic self-enclosure, above all his son Franz, to whom both the military career of his father and the desired return to the peasant life of his grandfather are strictly forbidden (17, 19; 22, 24).

The Baron's unwilling reduplication of the Emperor makes his attempted return to his familial father fail. The very structure of the Dual Monarchy, circling around its absent center, prevented its subjects' return to their mutual personal relationships. The attachment to the impersonal Common Father, hammered into imperial subjects' consciousnesses through the daily rituals of identity-formation, sentenced any attempt at personal belonging to failure. The novel obstinately reminds us that the Emperor's portrait supervised his subjects from all public walls, coins, and stamps, and that the performance of the Radetzky March was notorious at all public occasions. It is heard at the Baron's funeral, as well as that of his Slovenian father (20; 25). All concerts on the main square of Commissioner von Trotta's small district town in Moravia began with it (23; 27); it was even played in brothels (81; 92) and public bars (109; 124). It is no wonder, then, that the young Carl Joseph imagines his future death for the Emperor as followed by the tones of the Radetzky March (26; 32) and that his patriotic fantasies at the Corpus Christi procession are stoked up by the same music (210; 235). The contact with the omnipresent Emperor's portrait sometimes takes a detour via the portrait of his representatives, such as that of Baron von Trotta's, which supervises his grandson from afar with equal persistence (70, 104; 79, 118). Since every officer is but an embodiment of the Emperor, when the grandson inherits the Baron's qualities, he ultimately inherits those of the Emperor. The Impersonal and Indifferent Father thus spectrally multiplies in all his subjects. Commissioner von Trotta even inadvertently imitates his famous "elastic stride" (168; 186-87). The narrator does not let us escape his irony.

Inheriting his personal father's disrespect of the other's personality, District Commissioner von Trotta also indirectly reaffirms the aloofness of the Supreme Father. The Commissioner's disrespect holds not only for his relation to the son but also for all his other social relations. For example, Bandleader Nechwal's wife and children are not deemed deserved of his exact memorizing (31; 37). As regards his other provincial subordinate, Sergeant Slama, he silently passes over the affair of his son with the Sergeant's wife and expects Slama to do the same, as if provincial wives are somehow "naturally" apt for the sexual initiation of the Emperor's youth. Due to his mother's early death and his predominantly motherless childhood (which is repeated in his son's life), District Commissioner von Trotta does not hold women in high esteem. As they are expected to satisfy men's appetites, in a conversation with his only friend in his late age, Doctor Skovronnek, he designates the unknown woman who caused his son's fatal passion as a "person of the opposite sex" (*Frauenperson*), reserving the concept of a "lady" (*Dame*) only for females that a man intends to marry (263; 291). The same despising is afforded to his house staff, i.e., his housekeeper madam Hirschwitz and, and at least initially, his butler Jacques. After the latter dies, Commissioner von

Trotta tries, in a similar “self-evident” vein, to impose the name Jacques (invented by his father, decades ago, as a “noble” nickname) upon his newly hired successors and wonders why they refuse to accept it (unlike the “original Jacques,” 251; 277). The same ignorance concerns the Commissioner’s relation to the imperial provinces’ exact location. He refuses his son’s wish to continue his military service at the Empire’s “Southern frontier” in Slovenia (because an Austrian officer must remain cut off from his place of origin, 138; 151), directing him instead to its “Northern sister” Ukraine (138; 152). At that time, incidentally, the Empire’s Southern frontier was Dalmatia, while Ukraine could only be its “Eastern” and not “Northern sister.”⁹

Yet a supranational Austrian servant, as a true copy of the Distracted Supervisor, was not expected or even allowed to distinguish between the various “Slav tribes.” One must not address them by their individual names but exclusively by their collective name—i.e., as “Slavs” instead of as “Russians or Serbs” (154; 170).¹⁰ This is why the District Commissioner resolutely refused the distinct national claims of particular “Slav tribes,” treating them as a typically revolutionary disobedience by ignorant “sons” to their Benevolent Father (155; 171). Using his immediate provincial ethnic surrounding as a metonymy for all irrational barbarians, he identifies all rebelling nations with the “unruly, stubborn and stupid” Czechs who proliferate everywhere (252; 278). In a conversation with Nechwal’s son, who pays him a visit, his guest’s face strikes him as typically “Czech”—i.e., reminding him of an “animal” (255-56; 282). Heavily disappointed with the invasion of “barbarians” that bring the world of the Radetzky March to collapse, he rapidly ages, drawing ever nearer to his Emperor until, perceived as “the ghost of the history of the fatherland” (302; 336), he looks almost like the Emperor’s younger brother (307, 309; 341, 343). Indeed, he increasingly sees the world in the same amorphous manner as the Emperor, who perceives Ukrainian Jews as “strange black grain in the wind,” a “black rout” that approaches Him who absent-mindedly rides his horse, and for who knows what reason (242-43; 270). Increasingly, the Emperor’s eyes begin to look into the distance, where the edges of eternity appear, so that everything in his close proximity is blurred. He even overlooks a crystalline drop on the end of his nose that everybody else is staring at (247; 276). The same negligence concerning his own appearance happens to Commissioner

⁹ Once again, it is unclear who in the last instance allocates Slovenia to the south of the Monarchy and Ukraine to its north – Commissioner von Trotta as a focalizer, or the narrator. As I have pointed out above, both are equally ignorant of the exact location of imperial provinces, confusing them unconcernedly with each other. I will return to the narrator’s unintended duplication of his protagonists’ detachment from their surroundings in my conclusion.

¹⁰ This can be understood as a continuation of Herder’s benevolent treatment of the Slavs as itinerant peoples “taking up a much larger space on earth than in history.” Because nature denied them “nobler gifts,” attributing them instead a terrible “slavish inertia,” Herder obliges the Germans, as the carriers of humankind’s history, to protect and cultivate them (Herder 696–98). Towards the end of the nineteenth century the Dual Monarchy, in order to prevent its own disintegration, switched to a new administration of its provinces along these lines.

von Trotta, whom the Emperor's cynical officials perceive as if having arrived into their present "from a historically distant province" (302; 336).

Both these distracted "living dead," the Emperor and Commissioner von Trotta, suddenly become distant provincials within the same Empire that offered them the most central accommodation only a few years earlier. The world they blindly trusted becomes completely strange, catapulting them out of their privileged location. While Commissioner von Trotta tries to reconnect with his son in order to regain his abruptly lost position in life, he faces a series of traumas, duplicating like a typical "imperial clone" the analogous experience of his father and, via him, the Emperor himself. He consecutively learns about his son's unheroic death (351; 391), the mental breakdown of his son's mentor, Count Chojnicki, who is now housed in an asylum (358; 398), and finally, the prosaic death of the Emperor (360-61; 400-01), from whom, during the requested audience, he had vainly expected a personal exchange (306-09; 339-43). Yet for His Majesty he remains the same weak echo of *déjà vu* others that fellow beings were for the Commissioner himself for many decades and that the Commissioner himself ultimately becomes for other people (including his own son, who perceives him as the Emperor's copy; 185; 206). In the world of the Great Mediator, who multiplies his doubles everywhere, even the people closest to one another fail in their attempts to establish mutual personal relationships. On two occasions Commissioner von Trotta wishes to tell his son that he loves him but, inhibited as he is, cannot enact this wish (170, 186; 189, 207). Even in the communication with his friend Doctor Skovronnek, he cannot find the right word to enter into an intimate conversation with him (259; 286).

The third Trotta, Lieutenant Carl Joseph, replicates for his part the grandfather, whom he perceives as his true father since he experiences his actual father as a foreigner (66, 185; 75, 206). This is, after all, the father's fault because Commissioner von Trotta directed his son to continue Baron von Trotta's military career in order to make his own castrated wish come true. By being the Baron's remote copy, the Lieutenant resumes the Baron's non-belonging within the milieu of his military appointment (77, 227; 87, 252), driving his relation to the Emperor into a similar ambiguity. On the one hand, he manifests unreserved loyalty, deeply admires his Emperor (26, 210-11; 32, 234), and rescues him from humiliation in Madam Resi's brothel (82; 93) and the Ukrainian garrison (328; 364-65). On the other hand, the Emperor strikes him as a complete foreigner (76, 185, 328; 86, 206, 364) who deserves only indifference and pity (246; 275). Divided like his grandfather, he yearns for a return to the native Sipolje of his forebears, a location that he imagines in equally blurred terms. As a true descendant of his grandfather, the Lieutenant does not really distinguish between the Czech and Slovenian peasants and languages (66; 74-75), but adds to his forebear's ignorance a touch further. By imagining mosques and praying Moslems as constitutive parts of Sipolje (124; 140), he confuses Slovenia with the newly occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina. He beats his grandfather's disinterest for the others in some other respects, too, by depriving all women that attract him of distinctive personalities, i.e., Madams Slama, Demant, and Taußig. The Lieutenant gets to know them via their

husbands, approaches them as substitutes for his early deceased mother, and, in his clumsy treatment of them, replicates his young father, who, according to his former classmate, the painter Moser, was extremely shy with the lasses (48; 56).

As for his subordinates from the lower social strata, he treats his Ukrainian servant Onufri in an even less personal manner than how his father handled his butler Jacques. Both Onufri and Jacques are certainly destined to fulfill the literal and symbolic wishes of their masters. Yet the Lieutenant cannot memorize Onufri's strange Slavic name (68; 77), cannot bear to direct his gaze at Onufri's provincial face, and therefore does not really know what Onufri looks like until he finally learns his name (69; 78). After all, the man's teeth remind him of a horse (68; 77) and his behavior of a bear (71; 80). This contempt for "lower" beings beats that of his father because, unlike the Ukrainian Onufri, Jacques is supranational "family property," and also because Lieutenant von Trotta, unlike his "true Austrian" father (28, 138; 34, 152), is dispossessed of his identity from the outset. In fact, the gaze of his furious grandfather directed at his neck consistently irritates him (70, 104, 328; 79, 118, 364). He also feels continually haunted by numerous deceased beings who seem to be blaming him (such as his mother, his surrogate mother Madam Slama, his friend Max Demant, Jacques, and the striking workers, as well as his own buried self; 42, 171, 183, 232, 275, 337; 48, 189, 204, 258, 305, 375). Besides, instead of representing himself, in relation to Madams Slama, Demant, and Taußig, he usurps the roles of their husbands; in relation to the Emperor, the role of his grandfather; in relation to Count Chojnicki, the role of son; in relation to his father, who suddenly strikes him as his son, the role of father (333; 371); and in his relation to Doctor Demant, he copies his father's relation to Doctor Skovronnek. Feverishly searching for the proper location of his identity, he also compulsively identifies with inferior grandsons (e.g., Doctor Demant who admires his grandfather, as the Lieutenant does his; 110; 125). In the outcome, he increasingly feels from the outset to have been an instrument of inimical and disastrous destiny (122, 281-82; 138, 313). In order to get rid of such an unbearable othering of his own personality, he compulsively dispossesses the others of their personalities by imposing on them his remedial fantasies.

In this novel, however, the absent center of the Dual Monarchy does not only push the Trottas and those who depend on them – such as their fathers, sons, grandsons, wives, mistresses, servants, friends, and provincial subordinates – into irrevocable solitude. Consider the case of the rich and independent Polish landowner Count Chojnicki, a figure from the group of so-called frontier men (*Grenzmenschen*) located at the Empire's Eastern margin, i.e., Ukraine's periphery with Russia: He is described as an extremely mobile person, a "migrant bird" familiar with many regions, metropolises, social and political milieus, a strange fellow with innumerable acquaintances but no single friend or enemy, a man of oscillating moods, belonging at the same time to the center and the province; in a word, an "alchemist" who merges all manner of various identities (146, 174; 162, 194). As Roth himself was born at the Eastern frontier of the Empire, many commentators pointed out his continuous sympathy towards

these kinds of people.¹¹ Besides, Chojnicki's antidemocratic and monarchic worldview (148, 184; 164-65, 205) apparently sides with Roth's opinion expressed in his journalistic work. Yet neither Count Chojnicki's nor Roth's worldview (as articulated in this novel) are that simple.

Chojnicki despises and spits on the "new nations" (the Austrians, Hungarians, Czechs, Ruthenians, Croats, Slovenes, Poles, and Jews) as well as on the dispossessed working class, which does not want to work anymore (149; 165). However, he also calls the Emperor a "senile idiot (*ein gedankenloser Greis*)," the government "a bunch of morons," and the parliament an "assembly of credulous and pathetic nitwits." The Empire, he states, is in such terrible condition that it must perish (148; 164). It has lost contact with historical development and misapprehended the key agenda of modernity: nation and technology (176-77; 195-97). In sum, Chojnicki, as the Lieutenant's second father (179; 199), shares with his true father merely the scorn for democracy and nations, but is much more critical toward the Monarchy. Being dis/located both at its center and its frontier (like Roth himself), he unmistakably senses its impending catastrophe. As a frontier man who, unlike the District Commissioner, who is firmly located at the Monarchy's center, rejects all values almost to the verge of nihilism, the Count would most probably commit suicide were he not an extremely curious reader of the announcements of catastrophe. Catapulted out of all comfortable identity locations, he remains in life out of sheer curiosity for what is going to happen (171; 190)! At the Monarchy's denigrated, ruined frontier (as opposed to its self-aggrandizing ceremonial center), one can clearly discern the omens of the forthcoming decline (141, 179; 156, 199). Ultimately, whereas the centrally located Viennese enjoy the Monarchy's cheerful end time without the slightest presentiment of its approaching breakdown (211-12; 235-36), Count Chojnicki's dislocated clairvoyance drives him into a mental asylum (356; 396). This is the sad life trajectory of probably the most attractive of all the frontier men in the novel, but this group is, as one might expect, extremely heterogeneous.

The other frontier men in this story embody the Ukrainian province's other dangerous advantages. The smuggler Kapturak flees from Russia, where the secret service is after him because of his having traded with deserters, the same activity that he comfortably and lucratively pursues in Habsburg Ukraine. The hotel owner Brodnitzer, who has arrived in Ukraine from Silesia for dubious reasons, opens a casino and offers girls (189-90; 208-10). Unlike the Count, who is a generous benefactor, these petty settlers draw huge profits from the Empire's approaching catastrophe.¹² While the in-

¹¹ Roth locates the concluding events in his novel in the small Ukrainian town of B., near the Russian border. This fit his birthplace of Brody.

¹² Roth's narrator does not share the enthusiasm of the simple people for their benefactors. In the same way that receiving an act of charity satisfies these people's desire for a magnanimous master, the benefactor, committing this act, nourishes his conscience and pride. See the narrator's explanation of Count Morstin in Roth's novella "Die Büste des Kaisers" in *Die Erzählungen*. Although *The Radetzky March* does not contain such direct explanations, the narrator's attitude towards Count Chojnicki is equally ambiguous.

dependent and well-positioned landowner Chojnicki is mobile, their problematic past and lucrative present bind them to this frontier zone, to which they do not belong and which, for its part, considering their murky business, does not welcome them. This forces them into a growing isolation and a stigma of foreignness that culminate with Kapturak's expulsion and the prohibition of Brodnitzer's casino (311; 345).

In fact, the foreigners can never really understand the "swamp" of the frontier, which is the epitome of dislocation without the clearly established rules of behavior genuine to locations (141; 155-56). In its small towns, the streets are without names and houses are without numbers (143; 158). This "forgotten world," covered by the "dust of centuries" and accompanied by the "incessant fat chirruping of frogs" (141, 222; 155, 247), even aggravates the amorphousness of the province from which the Trottas are at continuous pains to keep their distance. When Commissioner von Trotta undertakes a journey to his Monarchy's remotest province, he packs a revolver to protect himself from bears and wolves, among the numerous perils there that endanger a "civilized Austrian" (167; 185). Austrian officials arrive in this penal colony only on account of the most embarrassing misconduct (167; 185). It resolutely resists all democratic changes characteristic of the center (184; 205). This outmost dislocation that hosts the "last of all the stations in the Monarchy" (142; 157) swallows the lives of uninitiated settlers, soldiers, and officers (141; 155-56), while the natives circulate across it as "living ghosts" "jammed in" between "West and East," "day and night" (139; 154), struggling to come to grips with its indeterminacy. To outmaneuver the perilous tricks of this godforsaken transit zone crisscrossed by the most diverse of earthly interests, they develop techniques such as trading, smuggling, negotiating, usury, and spying or offer various hospitality services (such as hotels, taverns, salons, brothels, casinos, post offices, and banks).

Of the traders, bankers, and caterers, the Jewish population is most representative (141; 155). In Commissioner von Trotta's typically anxious imagination before his Ukraine trip, the Ukrainian Jews "waged an incessant campaign of rapine" against foreign property and belongings (167; 185). Yet, in the memory of Lieutenant von Trotta's friend Max Demant, who stems from this region, his Jewish grandfather, with the huge silver beard, sitting in his tavern and waiting for his customers, was beloved by all but anxious that his progeny would betray his legacy (84-85; 95-96). In fact, the upcoming change to the world takes care that only a few Jews of his sort survive into the twentieth century (340; 378), and, as they entrust their protector, the Emperor, on his inspection of troops in Ukraine, they have no doubts that the end of the world is approaching (243; 271). After Ukraine lost the Emperor's protection, the specific Jewish dislocation within its general provincial dislocation became disastrous indeed. Ukraine's terrible *provincial* solitude drove the Jews into an even more frightening *ethnic* solitude.¹³ If a Ukrainian identity was regularly *confused* with other provincial identities, the Jewish identity was, in the Ukrainian defensive reaction against this

¹³ The very name of Ukraine means something marginal, at the edge of visibility, from the Russian perspective, obviously, but it applies to the Habsburg point of view, as well.

accumulated denigration, sentenced to *erasure*. Consider also that Roth finished his novel in Berlin shortly before the Nazis seized power.

As if contributing to the delineated diversity of the frontier men, the narrator himself inhabits the *historical* in the place of their *geopolitical* frontier. He is divided between the yesterday world of before the First World War *about* which he writes and the present world of after the war *in* which he writes, and never tires of reminding the reader of this predicament. Such a position is analogous to that of Stefan Zweig, who finished *The World of Yesterday* (orig. 1942) ten years after Roth. Drawn into the traumatic solitude of emigration, Zweig also incessantly compares the past and present worlds but with the emphasis on the traumatic fate of the Jews, which, of course, also became his personal destiny. Yet, while he personally testifies in his memoirs, Roth's novelistic narrator is impersonal, an old-fashioned mediator of past events. He behaves like a typical epic narrator who never addresses his protagonists, since they do not belong to his world anymore, but exclusively his readers.¹⁴ Taking advantage of his historically later position, behind the backs of the protagonists whom he permanently ironizes because of their shortsightedness and naivety, he enters with the readers into a kind of initiated partnership. For instance, he objects to his characters on the following bases:

- a) None of the Austrian officers were able to hear the machinery of the great hidden mills that were already beginning to grind out the Great War (98; 111);
- b) the Ruthenian peasants did not know that the Empress had died many years before (133; 150);
- c) Commissioner von Trotta did not know that Fate was spinning more sorrow for him while he slept (269; 298);
- d) Lieutenant von Trotta overheard the grim wing-flap of the vultures that circled above the Habsburg double eagle (212; 235);
- e) the Emperor himself, ultimately, failed to notice that a crystalline drop had appeared on the end of his nose (247; 276).

¹⁴ For these characteristics of the premodern epic as opposed to the modern novelistic narrator, see Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (39). Cavarero polemicizes against Arendt's epic understanding of the narrative by opting for its novelistic understanding. By introducing the epic narrator into his novel, Roth bereaves his figures of the possibility of shaping their own life trajectory, which was genuine to the novel's protagonists, by making them mere toys of a predetermined fate. Hofmannsthal applies an analogously anachronous technique by introducing the typically baroque figure of the fortune-teller into his lyric comedy "Arabella" (finished in the same year as *The Radetzky March*). Such fatalism finds its explanation in the atmosphere of the 1930s, after the First World War destroyed the nineteenth century's optimistic conviction that the human is the carrier of his history. This idea, of course, first became problematic in the imperial provinces, in which Roth places the action of his novel and where he was born. Taking recourse to an "antiquated" epic technique – in the same way as Hofmannsthal in his lyric comedy or Brecht in his contemporaneous epic theatre reach for an "anachronous" baroque technique – Roth simultaneously prevents his readers from identifying with the novelistic characters.

Along with introducing his readers in this way to the benightedness of his protagonists, Roth's narrator directly compares the past time about which he writes (1859–1914) with the present, which he shares with his contemporary readers (1932). For example, he remarks that in the Dual Monarchy a deceased person habitually entered a long memory whereas in the accelerated nation-states he or she is quickly forgotten (120; 136). In addition, the prior concepts of class, family, and personal honor disappeared from the uncompromising present, as did the former elastic aristocratic principles (206, 292; 228, 324). Via his Doppelgänger Doctor Skovronnek – the only important character who survives the catastrophe (like Roth himself) and whose “fondness of people matched his low opinion of them” (comparable to Roth's ambiguous stance towards his characters, 258; 286) – he states that in the present compartmentalized world nobody can take responsibility for others anymore. The Emperor cannot be responsible for his subjects, nor parents for their children, nor husbands for their wives, nor men for women. Social cohesion is forever lost, and every individual and group must follow his, her, or its own way at his, her, or its own risk (258, 268; 285, 297).

This neatly corresponds with Count Chojnicki's statement that, in today's world, trust in God has given way to trust in the nation-state (176; 196). Given that Chojnicki and Skovronnek strike the attentive reader as the author's two Doppelgängers that contest and complement one another, this correspondence is hardly accidental. However, although Chojnicki spits on the forthcoming petty nations¹⁵ and Skovronnek is somewhat skeptical concerning emancipated wives and women,¹⁶ this does not mean that they yearn for the old world. On the contrary, in the same way as Chojnicki dismantles the illusion of the Empire's political cohesion, Skovronnek clearly sees that its social cohesion is fake and the emancipation of its constituents is necessary. Yet inasmuch as, in the opinion of these *Zeitdiagnostiker*, full emancipation of nations or women or children merely substitutes one solitude for another, they cannot welcome it enthusiastically, and neither can Roth. The self is an equally elusive shelter of one's identity, as is the other. Equipped with the bitter postwar experience – in which many liberation movements resulted in reactionary nation-states – Roth's narrator realizes that anchoring identity in one's self instead of the other merely reestablishes solitude, which proves to be non-locatable.

Therefore, rather than being an uncritical adherent of monarchist ideology, the narrator of *The Radetzky March* oscillates like the frontier men among the novel's protagonists. However, in his particular case, being located at the historical frontier means being dislocated from both the epoch before and the epoch after the First World War. Like Brecht's interpreter of the happenings on stage, Roth's narrator belongs neither to the darkness beyond the stage nor under the lights of the stage itself.

¹⁵ According to Chojnicki, Austrians are “waltz dancers,” Hungarians “stink,” Czechs are “born to clean boots,” Ruthenians are “treacherously disguised Russians,” Croats are “broom-makers,” Slovenians are “chestnut-roasters,” and Poles are “fornicators and barbers” (148; 164).

¹⁶ According to Skovronnek, “there was nothing in the world that did not trouble them” (258; 285).

As for the latter world of today, the narrator of *The Radetzky March* keeps a distance from the petty nation-states in which the outcome of the First World War has pushed him. As for the former world of yesterday, the supranational Empire from before the War is definitely over, which gives him the opportunity to reconstruct the trajectory of its catastrophe, as he trusts, *sine ira et studio*. As seen in this supposedly impartial perspective, the trigger for the Empire's breakdown was the dislocation of its center that, withdrawn into solitude, unavoidably generated further dislocations instead of the desired cohesion.

Unexpectedly though, one of the effects of this fateful concatenation of dislocations turns out to be the narrator's own dislocation from the world of his protagonists. If they are forever gone, then his dislocation is enforced, which means that the narrator is affected by the same developments as they are. He is an involved transmitter rather than a distant master of this concatenation. As if suppressing this undesired involvement and taking advantage of his distance instead, Roth's narrator locates his protagonists in their predetermined fate, which they supposedly cannot comprehend. At one place in the novel, for example, he states that Lieutenant von Trotta was unable to express the reason for his depression but that "we" (i.e., the narrator and his reader) can say it on his behalf (122; 138).

However, precisely by using his temporal dislocation to locate his protagonists in their own time, to rivet them to their fate, he unwittingly replicates their pattern of keeping the others at a distance. All the Trottas mercilessly apply it to their fellow beings and especially provincial subordinates, thus multiplying their own solitude. In doing so, they blindly follow their Emperor, whose unbeatable detachment forces all his subjects into repeating it. Yet, if this universal pattern ultimately catches up even with Roth's narrator, then he is its carrier rather than a critical observer, an exemplary representative of the literary world that he is at pains to antique from his quasi-outside life position. This is how the second and hidden narrator's frontier position, next to the highlighted temporal one, comes to the fore: that between the protagonists' *literary space* and the author's *life space*. Despite his consistent striving to exempt himself from his protagonists' destiny to reach his author's supposedly sovereign freedom, the narrator's dislocation turns out to be no less located and his solitude no less enforced than that of the protagonists.

As Roth's narrator compulsively repeats the politics of an empire that it claims to have placed in a museum, the question that must be raised reads as follows: Who locates whose solitude, the narrator that of the protagonists, as we have had the impression hitherto, or the other way around, as we are now about to realize? As no final disentanglement of their intertwined relationship is possible, the protagonists' and the narrator's solitudes turn out to be deprived of their clear location, which makes them interact with those of their readers, who are seemingly placed beyond the aesthetic area. The spaces of literature and life thus penetrate one another, inducing the mutual dislocation of their identities. Therefore, in *The Radetzky March*, against the intention of its author, not merely does the disaggregation of the Habsburg Empire take place but also the disaggregation of literature's empire. Inasmuch as this empire is estab-

lished by a frontier man as a typical go-between, it loses its traditional sovereignty and self-sufficiency. Although in reintroducing the epic narrative into his novel Roth did his best to procure for literature's solitude a protected location, this solitude breaks free from the envisaged shelter into an unforeseeable dissemination.

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