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Literary Representations of Family and Nation
In the Writings of
Joseph Roth, Günter Grass, Milan Kundera, and Ingeborg Bachmann

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Doctor of Philosophy

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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This dissertation examines literary representations of family and nation and the intersection between these two concepts in the metaphor of the nation-as-family in the works of four twentieth-century East-Central European writers: Joseph Roth, Günter Grass, Milan Kundera, and Ingeborg Bachmann. It is a study of the ways in which social and political crises of the nation and empire, such as the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the rise of extreme nationalism, the Second World War, and totalitarianism, impact family life and familial relationships, and how this impact is represented within the domestic space.

Roth, Grass, Kundera, and Bachmann reflect on issues of nationalism and imperialism in the twentieth century in various representations of domestic crises. In their writings, individual families undergo various internal crises expressed as domestic conflicts between husband and wife, tense paternal or maternal relationships, resistance and challenge to paternal authority, or the loss of the family as a home and site of identity. In all the novels examined in this dissertation, but especially in those written by Roth and Grass, domestic crises intersect with historical crises in such a way that the family appears as the recipient of conflicts of war and nationalism. However, unlike Roth and Grass, Kundera and Bachmann show that the family is not only a theater for the representation of historical crises, but also the instrument through which the power and violence of war, nationalism, and totalitarianism are expressed and acted out. Thus, in Bachmann's view, the violence of nationalism and war that one nation unleashes against another nation arises primarily from a certain power dynamic that exists within the realm of the family, between a man and a woman.

In different ways, Roth, Grass, Kundera, and Bachmann underscore the complicity of the family in the perpetuation of violence in society. However, these writers also establish the family as the site where this violence can be opposed and new moral alternatives can be envisaged.

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Acknowledgments

This dissertation is the outcome of a long journey in the Department of Comparative Literature at Emory University. This journey has seldom been smooth, as I tried to find a balance between the requirements for a doctoral degree and the commitments that come with raising a family. However, I am now at the end of this odyssey, and, as I turn the page and savor the moment, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge some of the people who in one way or another have helped me arrive at this happy moment in my life. First of all, I would like to thank my dissertation committee: Dr. Maximilian Aue, Dr. Deepika Petraglia Bahri, and Dr. Angelika Bammer. All three have offered me invaluable guidance in my academic work throughout many years, have unfailingly extended me their trust, and have shown enormous patience with my work as it slowly progressed. I am deeply appreciative of their effort and commitment to provide me with excellent critical feedback on several earlier versions of this manuscript. I would like to add my special appreciation for Dr. Aue's editorial suggestions, which have furthered and strengthened my dissertation.

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Introduction: The family in the nation and the nation-as-family

Scholars have explored linkages between the family and the nation in the Third World since the mid-twentieth century primarily in the context of postcolonial assumptions and as a process of nation-building. This dissertation builds on insights from postcolonial theory on nation-building, but grounds them in East-Central European history and analyzes them in literary texts from this region. These texts show not only the way in which the structure of the family contributes to the creation of a nation, but also how the relationship between the fixed structure of the nation and the changing configuration of the family becomes one of a fundamental discrepancy. The nation-as-family, a narrow and often-rigid construct of identification, is like a Procrustean bed that forces the individual family into preconceived social and political strictures. Nonetheless, the family, which is inherently dynamic and varied, almost always challenges the limited imaginings of the nation. In the various writings this dissertation explores, the family is located at the intersection between conflicting social and political tendencies: nationalism and regionalism, and totalitarianism and individualism.

As early as 1882 Ernest Renan describes the nation as “a spiritual family” (18).¹ Like the family, the modern nation claims to possess a genealogy in the form of a heritage “received in an undivided form” from the dawn of history (Renan, 19), but unlike the family, whose line can break at a certain moment in time, the nation is imagined “as a continuous narrative of national progress” (Bhabha, 1).² Renan also calls the nation “a large-scale solidarity” (19), and in 1884 Friedrich Engels observes,

“modern society is a mass composed solely of individual families as its molecules” (744).³ In *Black Skin, White Masks*, originally published in 1952, Frantz Fanon also recognizes the close relationship between the family structure and the national structure. If “the family is a miniature of the nation,” a direct correspondence exists between the laws, principles, and values of the family and those of the nation (142).⁴

The fact that the nation can be conceived as a family reveals something about the dynamics between the private and the public spheres of our existence. Although today the family is associated with private existence in opposition to the public or collective experience of life, this was not always the case. In ancient Rome the concept of the family refers not to a married couple and their children, but to slaves. In “The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State,” Engels explains, “*famulus* means a household slave and *familia* signifies the totality of slaves belonging to one individual” (737). The “communistic household” that preceded the patriarchal family embraced numerous couples and their children (Engels, 744). In a study on representations of the family in the medieval and early modern periods, *Framing the Family* (2005), Diane Wolfthal notes that the family was initially property-based and included everyone who belonged to a household, whether biologically related or not (2).⁵ Similarly, in *Family Matters in the British and American Novel*, Andrea O’Reilly Herrera elucidates that the preindustrial household often consisted of more than two generations living together, servants, and sometimes boarders living in the same house or in adjacent dwellings. As such, the household was sometimes a unit of production, dependent on the goods produced in the home (1).⁶ Only in the second half of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century, with the industrial revolution and the rise of the

modern nation, did the household economy decrease, while production largely moved into the public sphere, the market. It is important to underscore the idea that as the modern nation is imagined as a family, aspects of the communistic household are combined with characteristics of the later individual family. Thus, the idea of privacy, a fundamental aspect of the modern nuclear family, cannot be accommodated by the nation, which is an essentially communal entity and the product of collective will. The older understanding of the family as the communistic household, described by Engels “as a public, a socially necessary industry” (744), is thus a more suited model for the modern nation. However, the later patriarchal family that succeeded the communistic household provides the nation with a fundamental understanding of authority, which is essentially male.

The temporal anomaly of the nation is noted by a number of critics, among them Tom Nairn, who defines the nation as “the modern Janus.”⁷ As a two-faced god, the nation has one face turned to the past and another toward the future. At its conception the nation has already had a long history, yet it also professes to be a new form of communal organization and therefore superior to anything that came before it. As an invention of modernity, the nation adopts from the family a form of organization and a genealogy/history that predates the modern period. Thus, “nations are symbolically figured as domestic genealogies” (McClintock, 91).⁸ Yet, as Anne McClintock notes, the metaphor of the nation-as-family paradoxically excludes the institution of the family from national power:

[S]ince the mid-nineteenth century, at least in the West, the family itself has been figured as the antithesis of history ... The family offered an indispensable metaphoric figure by which national difference could be shaped into a single historical genesis narrative. Yet a curious paradox emerged. The family as a

metaphor offered a single genesis narrative for national history while, at the same time, the family as an institution became void of history and excluded from national power. The family became, at one and the same time, both the *organizing figure* for national history and its *antithesis*. (McClintock, 91)

Defining the family as the “antithesis of history” takes away from the family the possibility of agency: whoever is not on the side of history is therefore not an agent of history. Nonetheless, in an antithetical position to history, the family also acquires the power to oppose the nation’s single, unified narrative. The distinction between the family as metaphor and the family as institution draws attention not only to the nation as a large-scale fraternity, but also to the concrete involvement of the family in the modern nation. Thus, the family can act to support nationalist discourses, but can also oppose them. In this latter instance, the family as the “antithesis of history” returns to haunt the family as metaphor and challenge the nation’s imagined family.

In the trope of the nation-as-family or the representation of the family in the nation, a certain set of dynamics between the private and the public spheres plays out. The private/public distinction can no longer firmly separate what pertains only to the individual from what is collective, “what is concealed (secret) and what is visible and accessible” (Sutton-Ramspeck, 4).⁹ The family, as this dissertation shows, is located at the intersection between the “competing and mutually contradictory realms” of the private and the public (Sutton-Ramspeck, 1), in that ambiguous space where “the two realms flow unceasingly and uncertainly into each other ‘like waves in the never-ending stream of the life-process itself’” (Bhabha, 2).¹⁰

Scholarship on the inter-relationships between family and nation, including the ways in which the family becomes the organizing figure of the modern nation, is mainly the outcome of postcolonial and feminist enquiry of the last three decades. This

dissertation draws on the work of various postcolonial historians and literary critics, among them Anne McClintock, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Ranajit Guha, as well as East-Central European literary and cultural critics like William Johnston, Katherine Verdery, Sara Lennox, and Marcel Cornis-Pope, or political thinkers like Hannah Arendt, Václav Havel, and Louis Althusser, all of whom have offered valuable insights on the family and the nation.

In particular, this dissertation examines literary representations of family and nation and the inter-relations between these two structures in the works of four twentieth-century East-Central European writers: Joseph Roth, Günter Grass, Milan Kundera, and Ingeborg Bachmann. It is a study of the ways in which social and political crises of the nation and empire impact family life and familial relationships and how this impact is perceived and conceptualized within the domestic space. The term nation is used in this dissertation as a generic concept as well as to designate concrete historical nations of twentieth-century Europe. However, the concept of empire refers specifically to the Austro-Hungarian empire. Empire and nation are treated as complementary concepts, and there is one common feature this dissertation explores: the use of the family metaphor within the frameworks of nation and empire.

This dissertation examines representations of three major socio-political crises of the twentieth century in works by Roth, Grass, Kundera, and Bachmann: the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire, expressed in the disintegration of the imperial edifice and its social and moral orders; extreme nationalism, war, and the destruction of North-East European multiculturalism; and the crisis of individualism as experienced in East-Central Europe in the communist period.

The main body of the dissertation is organized chronologically, starting with the analysis of Roth's writings on the demise of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, continuing with a novel by Grass representing the interwar period and the Second World War, communism in Kundera's work, and a reflection on all these major historical events in twentieth-century Europe in Bachmann's writings. Each writer's perspective on family and nation is influenced and determined by his or her historical location and experience.

Roth, Grass, Kundera, and Bachmann convey ideas and concerns about empire and nation through representations of particular families. These families undergo their own internal crises expressed as domestic conflicts between husbands and wives, tense paternal or maternal relationships, resistance and challenge to paternal authority, or the loss of the family as a home and site of identity. In all cases, domestic crises intersect with historical crises in such a way that the family appears as the site of conflicts of war and nationalism. This idea comes across compellingly in the narratives by Roth and Grass. However, unlike Roth and Grass, Kundera and Bachmann show that the family is not only a theater for the representation of historical crises, but also the instrument through which the power and violence of war, nationalism, or totalitarianism are expressed and acted out. More than Kundera, Bachmann shows how history is shaped by relationships within the family. Identifying the family as the realm where individuals learn to speak, use language, understand and act in the world in a particular way, Bachmann argues that from within that same realm arise ideas of power, subjection, and domination. Within the family, there is already an ongoing war. In addition to concrete historical crises of twentieth-century Europe (the fall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the Second World War), Bachmann identifies yet another crisis: the antagonism

between men and women. Informed by her experience of fascism, she defines patriarchy as a timeless conflict between men and women, which she calls the “perpetual war.”

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Franz Fanon writes that “[i]n Europe the family represents in effect a certain fashion in which the world presents itself to the child” (141). This dissertation starts from a similar premise, namely that the family represents the prism through which Roth, Grass, Kundera, and Bachmann represent and reveal the world to us. The family is the frame through which to view historical crises of empire and nation. However, each family examined in this dissertation frames historical events in a particular way. Thus, the family never exemplifies a static structure, but is always actively engaged in the construction and reading of history.¹¹ It is never an objective frame but always already a viewpoint.

In different ways, Roth, Grass, Kundera, and Bachmann underscore the complicity of the family in the perpetuation of the national or the imperial vantage point. However, these writers also attempt to establish the family as the site where imperial authority, nationalism, war, and totalitarianism are opposed. This dissertation investigates the dynamic between the private and the public spheres, as the metaphor of the family intersects and inter-relates with the institution of the family (McClintock).

The Trottas

The first chapter, “Family, Empire, and Nation in Two Novels by Joseph Roth,” examines imperial conservatism in Austria-Hungary as represented in the rigid environment of an Austrian aristocratic family and the demise of this family in the context of the fall of empire. Roth follows the destiny of the fictional Trotta family in two

of his novels: *Radetzkmarsch* (The Radetzky March) and *Die Kapuzinergruft* (The Emperor's Tomb). He presents a case of assimilation of a Slovene family to the Austrian heritage. Starting a new dynasty, the Trottas struggle to live up to their new role in history. The simple life of Slovene peasants is exchanged for the life of the Austrian aristocracy. The Trottas enter history in the period of decline of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and the crises experienced by the House of Austria echo in the relationships of the Trotta house.

In *Radetzkmarsch* Roth demonstrates how imperial conservatism impairs relationships within the Trotta aristocratic family. The paternal relationship is at the center of the crisis experienced within this family, but a similar crisis is manifested at the level of imperial authority. The father, district commissioner Baron von Trotta, is the perfect image of the Austro-Hungarian bureaucrat. He epitomizes the ideal of "Treue" (loyalty) toward the supreme monarch and carries out his mission in the Moravian district he oversees safeguarding the unshakable immobility of the Habsburg establishment. He invests the Emperor with a divine status on earth and regards the monarchy as a supra-national unit endowed with a unique European mission. He distrusts and fears history as a dynamic process and regards change as an anomaly. He refuses to acknowledge the pressing social issues within his district and remains blind to his son's needs. The similarities between the district commander and the Emperor are striking. Both are representatives of a world in decline. Like Baron von Trotta, who loves his son but does not know how to relate to him except through military etiquette, the Emperor—the most honored figure of the monarchy—never truly understands the needs of his people and the urgency of reform. Within the Trotta family, Carl Joseph, the district commander's son,

gradually emancipates himself from the authority of his father, in the same way that nationalist movements throughout the multinational realm question the moral authority of the Emperor and the legitimacy of the imperial model.

The imperial army appears as the perfect embodiment of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy as a multinational family, but it also demonstrates the failure of the monarchy to act out its mission. Irrespective of ethnic background, officers and soldiers from all corners of the monarchy are allowed to serve in the imperial army. Within the monarchy, no other profession is more esteemed than that of the military. That is why, when the time comes for Franz Joseph to choose a path in life, his father has already decided for him. Nevertheless, Franz Joseph's experience in the military does not in the least resemble his youthful dreams, in which he imagined that the greatest honor on earth was to die for the emperor. The imperial army is weak, corrupt, and falling apart. Officers are moved from one garrison to another, suffering most acutely from displacement, a lack of home, and a real purpose, and they seek consolation in drinking and gambling. No other institution can portray the crisis of the multinational family more evocatively than the disintegrating imperial army.

Die Kapuzinergruft is one of Roth's late novels, and although part of the narrative takes place before the collapse of the monarchy, the focus in this novel is the after-war period. Roth continues to depict the perpetuation of rigid relationships within the Trotta family—a different branch this time—but he seems more interested in representing the times of economic hardships in post-World War I Austria reflected in the instability of marital relationships and relationships of friendship. Roth's attitude toward the monarchy changes from *Radetzky* to *Die Kapuzinergruft*. In *Radetzky* Roth is more

critical of the conservative nature of the imperial establishment than he is in *Die Kapuzinergruft*, as well as more confident in the transition from monarchy to the nation-state. But *Die Kapuzinergruft* sounds a very pessimistic note, and, faced with the rising tide of fascism, Roth seems to express his own views in the narrator's nostalgic outlook on the past. This novel is very critical of the conceptual poverty of the nation, which is ridiculed and seen as a bad farce in comparison to its predecessor, the multinational monarchy.

The Matzerath-Bronski-Koljaiczek family

The second chapter, "Family, Nation, and Minority in Günter Grass's Novel *Die Blechtrommel*," focuses on the clash between competing and contesting German and Polish nationalisms and the crisis of multiculturalism in North-East Europe in the mid-twentieth century replicated in the demise of a multiethnic German-Polish-Kashubian family. Grass's perspective is unique, because it looks at the German-Polish rivalry from the viewpoint of the Kashubian minority.

Die Blechtrommel (The Tin Drum) is an incisive and perceptive illustration of the kind of rivalries, animosities, and struggles that go into the process of imagining a nation. All European nations are nations of mixed blood, says Ernest Renan. But in their desire to imagine themselves as a large spiritual family, individuals unite around those things they have in common and "forget" the many things that differentiate them from one another. The family in *Die Blechtrommel* is essentially mixed. It represents three ethnicities, German, Polish, and Kashubian; it practices Protestantism as well as Catholicism, and variants of these two faiths; and it is multicultural and polyglot.

However, the pressures of interwar nationalist fervor to unite around either of the two nations (Germany or Poland) that dispute each other's right over the city of Danzig and the surrounding area, destroy in the end this multiethnic family. In his lecture Renan emphasizes the violent processes that play a decisive part in the creation of a nation. Recognizing the complicity between power and justice throughout history, Renan remarks, "[t]he right of the Germanic order over such-and-such a province is stronger than the right of the inhabitants of that province over themselves" (13). As the mixed German-Polish-Kashubian family tries to uphold and protect its right over their own ways of life, which are not reducible to the "limited imaginings" of one nation (Anderson, 7),¹² the crisis that unfolds in the Danzig society as a result of the violent clashes between Polish and German nationalisms penetrates the porous walls of the extended Matzerath-Bronski-Koljaiczek family and becomes an inner crisis of this family.

Grass represents a variety of family situations that involve numerous relationships between the members of the family, but three relationships in particular stand out: the conjugal, the adulterous, and the maternal relationships. The adulterous relationship is as much a familial relationship as the conjugal rapport, because it occurs between cousins. The narrator of *Die Blechtrommel*, Oskar Matzerath, has never known which of the two men he calls his "presumptive fathers" is his biological father. Alfred Matzerath, citizen of the German Reich, is married to Oskar's mother, Agnes Koljaiczek, of Kashube origin. But Agnes has been in love with her cousin Jan Bronski, with whom she continues to have an intimate relationship after her marriage. Bronski, an ethnic Kashube like Agnes, shows his opposition to Agnes's choice of a German husband and embraces Polish nationality. Oskar's three parents construct a familial "triumvirate," which operates just

about the same time as the city of Danzig, established as a Free City under the protection of the League of Nations after the First World War, maintains its independence from foreign intervention. One of the unwritten agreements of the family triumvirate is Agnes's adultery. Grass places Agnes's relationship to the two men in the context of the German-Polish presence in North-East Europe. As a woman and a Kashube, Agnes is the preserver of family peace and the negotiating party between the male nationalistic members of the triumvirate. She also symbolizes Kashubia, the land divided between Germany and Poland. Her death triggers the collapse of the triangular edifice within the family and coincides with Danzig's loss of political autonomy. The relationship between Matzerath and Bronski, the two presumptive fathers, takes on characteristics of the militaristic confrontations between Germany and Poland.

The conjugal and the adulterous relationships define the internal politics of the family and shape its destiny, but the maternal relationship is equally important. Oskar loves and admires his mother, who gives him all the care and affection a mother is capable of. He admires her ability to negotiate the tensions between the opposing parties of the husband and the lover. But he is also powerfully drawn toward his maternal grandmother, who represents the matriarch of the Kashube side of the family. The family reunions in Oskar's fantasies of home take place under grandmother Koljaiczek's four skirts, which symbolize an all-inclusive structure for the mixed ethnicities and cultures of the extended family. His mother and grandmother are in the best position to negotiate "the tensions between nationalism and regionalism, metropolitan influences and local patriotism" (Cornis-Pope, 5).¹³

This chapter uses some of the insights of postcolonial criticism (Spivak, Said, and McClintock) and subaltern Indian history (Guha) to analyze the role of the Kashube minority in the conflict between Germany and Poland. After a serious accident that interrupts his growth, Oskar the Kashube disguises himself as a three-year old and uses all the means at his disposal to subvert nationalist power. With a toy drum hanging down his neck, Oskar hides under rostrums and breaks up Nazi rallies, beating rhythms of waltz and foxtrot on his drum. True to his mother, who had tried to create a different political climate, not based on the singularity of nationhood, Oskar the insurgent proves that agency is multiple and unpredictable: “Oskar saß den Roten und den Schwarzen, den Pfadfindern und Spinathemden von der PX, den Zeugen Jehovas und dem Kyffhäuserbund, den Vegetariern und den Jungpolen von der Ozonbewegung unter der Tribüne. Was sie auch zu singen, zu blasen, zu beten und zu verkünden hatten: meine Trommel wußte es besser” (*Die Blechtrommel*, 100).¹⁴

Like Roth, who expresses nostalgia for the multicultural world of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in the face of the rising tide of fascism in Europe, Grass allows his narrator to convey his disappointment in the age of nationalism and his nostalgia for the lost cultures of minority groups in North-East Europe. The case of the Kashube minority shows that non-nation building communities have very little chance to survive in a world that defines identity mainly based on nationhood and thus excludes other forms of identification.

Tomas, Tereza, and Sabina

The third chapter, “Family, Nation, and Central Europe in Milan Kundera’s Writing,” shows how the family is both a locality of totalitarian oppression as well as the site from where the possibility to resist and oppose totalitarianism arises. This chapter studies the invasion of the private space of the family by communist hegemony in the context of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet invasion of August 1968. Similar to *Die Blechtrommel*, Kundera’s novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* focuses on two kinds of familial relationships: the parental relationship and the conjugal relationship. The parents are in a position of strict authority vis-à-vis the child, and the family is the site of ideological interpellation. The parental relationship designates both the rapport between the biological father/mother and child as well as the dynamics between the symbolic father—the communist state, party, or leader—and the people. Kundera deconstructs socialist paternalism and the trope of the communist nation-as-family, while simultaneously representing the crisis of individualism as a struggle over the private realm within three individual families: Sabina’s family, Tereza’s family, and the married couple, Tomas and Tereza.

Sabina, a painter, and Tereza, a photographer, have struggled growing up in a highly authoritarian family environment. While Tereza’s mother creates a childhood environment for her daughter that resembles a concentration camp, Sabina’s father raises his daughter in the spirit of socialist values, prohibiting opposition. Departing from home, both women hope to be able to shape their destinies in accordance to their beliefs, but university life for Sabina and marriage for Tereza do not offer any change. In fact, the

pressures of authority increase and become the everyday experience of a totalitarian regime.

As an art student, Sabina is further educated into socialist realism, but the most horrible experience of college life for her is the mandatory participation in the socialist parades, including the May Day parade, which, as Katherine Verdery notes, is “the ultimate ‘etatization’ of time, seized by power for the celebration of itself” (49).¹⁵ However, in Tereza’s experience of marriage, in the relationship between Tomas and Tereza, Kundera makes the most revealing descriptions of totalitarian oppression. The conjugal relationship is a comment on two basic tenets of communist ideology: that communist society has solved all social inequalities and is therefore the most just society in the history of humankind; and that the communist party rightfully occupies the center of truth. As such, the communist party is the advocate and defender of a socialist system of values, which becomes the only acceptable ethics in communist society. Using a scenario in which Tomas leads an adulterous life, thus conveying the message to Tereza that all women are alike, Kundera illustrates the communist purpose to reduce all human diversity to uniformity and submission. In one of Tereza’s recurring dreams, a group of naked women are marching around a swimming pool and are forced into total submission by Tomas, who has adopted the role of the communist oppressor. Paradoxically, although the women are asked to perform certain acts identically, at risk of being shot dead at the slightest resistance, they are bound in the joyous solidarity of their obedience and compliance. The image is also a comment on the socialist claim that in socialist societies women are benefiting from the same opportunities as men. Speaking of the ways in which totalitarianism integrates human beings and their free will into the flow of history,

transforming individual agency into historical agency, Hannah Arendt observes that individuals are “totally caught up in the ‘freedom’ [of history], in its ‘free flow,’ [...] they can no longer obstruct it but instead become impulses for its acceleration” (Arendt, 121).¹⁶ The marching women around the pool are transformed into impulses of socialist history, and thus they ironically achieve their equality to men.

In this chapter, the trope of the family is also examined in the context of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, when, in an act of solidarity toward a small socialist brother nation, the Soviet hegemon tried to assist Czechoslovakia to regain the path of socialism. Socialism uses family imagery to support fraternity across national lines. In the metaphorical family of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European communist bloc, the leadership in Moscow occupies the place of the father, evincing supreme authority over the relative nations.

The concept that in Kundera’s work opposes both metaphors, the international family and the nation-as-family, is Central Europe. In Central Europe, Kundera finds a trope of resistance to both communism and nationalism. Although seemingly reconstructed from an Austro-Hungarian paradigm, Central Europe is not a nostalgic concept. It presents an alternative to a divided Europe, but not as a return to the past. More than anything, Central Europe is a way of thinking, a search for a more inclusive way of imagining our existence and our role in the world. For Sabina, the connection to the past is crucial, but she does not close herself off from the present. Through Sabina, Kundera argues that the past must be put to work for the present, or actively engaged in the making of the present. When Sabina uses her nineteenth-century Bohemian

grandfather's bowler hat in the love games with Tomas, she is able to hear various "semantic rivers" from the past and present merge together:

[Th]e bowler hat was a bed through which each time Sabina saw another river flow, another *semantic river*: each time the same object would give rise to a new meaning, though all former meanings would resonate (like an echo, like a parade of echoes) together with the new one. Each new experience would resound, each time enriching the harmony. (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 88)¹⁷

Like Václav Havel, Kundera believes that the family is not only a site of totalitarian violence, where the private domain of living is severely imperiled or destroyed, but also the place from which to start the resistance to communist domination. This idea comes across in the transformations within the conjugal relationship between Tomas and Tereza. In their relationship, Kundera views the possibility to once again uphold the boundary between the private and the public realms as well as to see the family engage in its own unique imaginings.

The Matreis, the Jordans, and the Ivan-I-Malina constellation

The last chapter, "Family, the Legacy of Empire, and Alien-Nation in Postwar Austria in Ingeborg Bachmann's Work," continues to explore the family as seat of identity and site of violence, but unlike Roth, Grass, and Kundera, who underscore the complicity of the family with the ruling establishment or the atrocities of nationalism, war, and totalitarianism, Bachmann situates the family at the epicenter of violence in history. Like Fanon, who locates the European family at the center of the Western narrative of racism and colonialism, Bachmann identifies in the family the underpinning of all forms of violence. In her work, conjugal and paternal relationships do not mirror

fascism, crime, and brutality, but are themselves a foundation for war, sadism, and violence against women, people of color, and Jews.

Like Grass and Kundera, Bachmann focuses on the paternal and conjugal relationships, including nonmatrimonial relationships of love, but unlike any of the previous authors, she also examines the relationship to a deceased metaphorical family that her protagonists reimagine: the House of Austria. This chapter focuses on relationships within three individual families: the Matreis from the short story “Drei Wege zum See” (Three Paths to the Lake); the Jordans from the unfinished novel *Der Fall Franza* (The Book of Franza); the unnamed narrator’s family and the Ivan-I-Malina constellation from Bachmann’s only completed novel *Malina*.

Bachmann’s perspective on the family is informed by Austria’s ambivalent heritage: the Habsburg legacy and fascism. All her protagonists celebrate the multinational House of Austria, which they identify as their true place of identity. The “I-figure” from *Malina* and Franza from *Der Fall Franza* define their multinational homeland in terms of language and culture, rather than in terms of nationhood. Remembering what she suggests was her previous existence in the House of Austria, the “I-figure” dreams in Bosnian, Bohemian, and Windish (a mixture of Austrian German and Slovenian) and calls to mind the streets of Prague and the port of Trieste. Similarly, Franza walks through the alleys of the graveyard in her native village in Carinthia, wrapping herself in the sounds of the German and Slovenian names that appear on the tombs and intersect in her family genealogy. Moreover, Elizabeth Matrei, the protagonist of the short story “Drei Wege zum See,” falls in love with one of the characters in Joseph Roth’s novel *Radetzky marsch*. All relationships between men and women are clearly

marked by women's nostalgia for the House of Austria. In *Malina*, nostalgia and disappointment in postwar Austria leads the unnamed female narrator to re-envision the House of Austria in her own Union of Two Houses: the territory between her house and her lover's house, Ivan's, on Ungargasse. She calls this small country "mein Ungargassenland" (my land on Hungary Street). It is critical to note that none of the love relationships between men and women in *Malina* and "Drei Wege zum See" finalize in marriage. The women desire a long-term relationship, but the men abandon them. The only relationship that ends in marriage is that between Franza and Leopold Jordan, but this conjugal relationship has nothing to do with the House of Austria. Here Bachmann evokes the other side of Austria's ambivalent heritage: fascism.

This is where the conjugal relationship overlaps with the paternal relationship in Leopold's diabolical experiments to annihilate Franza and other women and the various criminal incarnations in *Malina* of the metaphorical father and patriarch who repeatedly kills the daughter. Through these relationships Bachmann raises a crucial question: how was it possible for Austria, the heir of an extraordinary multicultural and multiethnic legacy, to become a fascist nation in less than two decades after the collapse of the monarchy?

This chapter examines the crisis of identity as a crisis that involves the individual family within Austrian postwar society. All of Bachmann's protagonists are not only deeply saddened by the fall of Austria from imperial greatness to fascist degradation, but they also cannot reconcile themselves to Austria's return to normality after 1945, the economic wonder, and their nation's rapid moral recovery. The "I-figure," Franza, and

Elizabeth feel alienated in postwar Austria, and they are unable to perceive a transition from a war situation to real peace.

Broadly speaking, there is a crucial difference in the treatment of the concept of crisis between Bachmann and the previous three writers whose work this dissertation examines. If for Roth, Grass, and Kundera, a macrosocial crisis impacts the family and triggers the internal individual crisis within the family, for Bachmann, the causes for nationalist conflicts and wars must be sought in the antagonism between men and women and the violence against women within the family. For Bachmann, this kind of violence inspires all other forms of aggression that exist in the world. Therefore, all historical forms of power and violence emerge from patriarchy. This is also where Bachmann's concept of perpetual war originates. Political regimes and declared wars can be defined historically. However, patriarchy is the kind of social order that has never been established as an institution, yet has always existed. This undeclared institution has structured all societies on the basis of family units, with the father carrying the primary responsibility for the welfare of the family, and therefore also being invested with the principal authority. Bachmann's work locates patriarchal relationships at the center of her understanding of violence and war. Moreover, Bachmann's critique of patriarchy must be seen in conjunction with her critique of Western forms of domination, colonialism and imperialism, as well as the West's continued domination in the world.

Bachmann's conception of violence has serious implications for the public/private distinction. The difficulty to identify where the private realm ends and where the public realm begins is even more striking in Bachmann's writing than in the work of Roth, Grass, and Kundera. The way our world is set up on relationships of power—in

patriarchy, or the “perpetual war,” aggressive nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism—demonstrates that the family has never been conceived to exist other than in the ambivalent public/private realm.

Although Bachmann perceives that there is something fundamentally wrong with the family and the relationship between a man and a woman, she does not give up hope that different, nonoppressive relationships could someday exist in the world. It is in the relationship between a man and a woman that Bachmann identifies the place where healing and regeneration must begin. But she proposes that men and women, and, by extension, nations, keep a certain distance from one another for a while. Thus, Bachmann envisions a time when relationships in the world will not be based on power, and men and women will be able to meet in a healthier moral and political environment, with a more tolerant and inclusive mindset.

Notes

¹ Ernest Renan, “What is a nation?” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1995), 18.

² Homi K. Bhabha, “Introduction: narrating the nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1995), 1.

³ Friedrich Engels, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 744.

⁴ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 142. It must be noted that when Fanon observes that “[t]here is no disproportion between the life of the family and the life of the nation,” he is only referring to the white family (142). The situation of the black family in the context of colonialism reflects no such correspondence between family and nation. As Anne McClintock notes, Fanon recognizes and immediately rejects the Western metaphor of the nation as a family (*Dangerous Liaisons*, 93).

⁵ Diane Wolfthal, "Introduction," in *Framing the Family: Narrative and Representation in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden and Diane Wolfthal (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 2.

⁶ Andrea O'Reilly Herrera, "Introduction," in *Family Matters in the British and American Novel*, ed. Andrea O'Reilly Herrera, Elizabeth Mahn Nollen, and Sheila Reitzel Foor (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 1.

⁷ Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London: Verso, 1981), 348.

⁸ Anne McClintock, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race and Nationalism," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 91.

⁹ Beth Sutton-Ramspeck, *Raising the Dust: The Literary Housekeeping of Mary Ward, Sarah Grand, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004), 4.

¹⁰ Bhahba is citing from Arendt's *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958). For the reference on Bhahba, see note 2.

¹¹ I have borrowed the idea of framing, as a process of representation, from Rosalynn Voaden and Diane Wolfthal, editors of *Framing the Family* (see note 5). In this book, aspects of the medieval family—"the conjugal pair, the household, the relationship of parent to child, or the couple to the extended family, and of the nuclear family to the community" are analyzed through various frames such as the marital bed, the frame of women's careers, the frame of death, the Jewish frame, and other frames (Wolfthal, 7). In *Framing the Family*, the family is what is being represented.

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 7.

¹³ Marcel Cornis-Pope, "Introduction: Mapping the Literary Interfaces of East-Central Europe," in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Marcel-Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, 1-8 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004), 2: 5.

¹⁴ "Oskar huddled under the rostrum for Reds and Blacks, for Boy Scouts and Spinach Shirts, for Jehovah's Witnesses, the Kyffhauser Bund, the Vegetarians, and the Young Polish Fresh Air Movement. Whatever they might have to sing, trumpet, or proclaim, my drum knew better" (*The Tin Drum*, 124). Günter Grass, *Die Blechtrommel* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1981), 100. Translated by Ralph Manheim as *The Tin Drum* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 124.

¹⁵ Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 49. Verdery borrows the term "etatization" from Romanian writer Norman Manea, who uses it to describe the fate of people's private time in Romania. "Etatization" literally means the process of statizing (40).

¹⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 121.

¹⁷ Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 88.

Chapter 1

Family, Empire, and Nation in Two Novels by Joseph Roth

Time's the king of men,
For he's their parent, and he is their grave,
And gives them what he will, not what they crave.
(*Pericles*, Act ii, sc. 3)

Deine Gegenwart schleppt immer eine ganz schwere Last von unverarbeitung
Vergangenheit mit sich ... Was ist nun die natürliche Folge – ? – Daß auch um die gesunden
und blühendsten Stunden deines Jetzt ein Duft dieses Moders fließt – und die Atmosphäre deiner
Gegenwart unrettbar vergiftet ist ... Und darum ist ja ewig dieser Wirrwarr von Einst und Jetzt und
Später in dir... (Arthur Schnitzler, *Anatol*)¹

Joseph Roth² was twenty-four when the Austro-Hungarian empire collapsed and he died briefly before the outbreak of the Second World War. In all his fictional works and many of his essays written between 1927 and 1939, he returned to the world of Austria-Hungary. Even when he wrote about the First Republic of Austria, it was often with the purpose to contrast the economic insecurity and existential anxiety of the aftermath years to the stability and security of the imperial past. Roth loved the world of his childhood and its disappearance made him cherish it even more. But, as Ian Reifowitz observes, there is a difference in Roth's attitude toward his lost homeland before and after 1933. Until 1932, Roth's writing about the Dual Monarchy is impartial, unfolding both the strengths and weaknesses of the imperial institution. After Hitler's seizure of power in Germany, Roth went into exile and became increasingly alienated from the world, which shows in his later writings, where nostalgia becomes a predominant aspect of his protagonists' lives. "Roth's nuanced portrait of Austria transformed into an idealized version of a multinational paradise that barely resembled the reality of the past" (Reifowitz, 120).³ This transition can be observed in Roth's treatment of the Dual

Monarchy if we compare *Radetzkmarsch* (The Radetzky March), first published in 1932 and acclaimed as his best novel, to his penultimate novel, *Die Kapuzinergruft* (The Emperor's Tomb). This latter novel is less successful literarily but represents an excellent example of Roth's disillusioned understanding of the world in 1938, when the text was originally published. In the first of these two novels, Roth's deep appreciation of the forces of unity and stability within the monarchy is tirelessly attended by a critique of the conservatism of the imperial establishment, but in *Die Kapuzinergruft*, the critique of the monarchy is a lot milder, replaced by hard opposition to nationalism and by disenchantment with the course of Europe in the interwar period. In the first novel, Roth is keenly aware of the will for independence among the majority of nations of Austria-Hungary, and he seems in favor of change. However, in the second novel, from beginning to end, he conveys the somber and bleak view that the post-Habsburg world does not offer any viable political and spiritual alternatives.

The shift in Roth's political vision from a more liberal standpoint, where he recognizes the failure of the monarchy to allow for reform and innovation, to a conservative promonarchist position is reflected in Roth's treatment of family, empire, and nation in the two novels this chapter examines, *Radetzkmarsch* and its sequel, *Die Kapuzinergruft*. What links family, empire, and nation in Roth's novels is the idea of crisis. Thus, the Trotta family, the Austro-Hungarian empire, and the First Republic of Austria undergo different crises: a crisis of identity (the family); a crisis of disintegration of a society along with the ensuing spiritual vacuum (the Dual Monarchy); and the crisis of identity of a shrunken nation after the fall of the monarchy (The First Republic of Austria), struggling with economic, political, and nationalistic problems, and culminating

with the German annexation of Austria in 1938. Roth does not treat these crises independently, but focuses on the ways in which the crises of empire and nation reverberate and enhance the crisis within the Trotta family.

The concept of the family is crucial for this analysis, as it refers not only to the Trotta family, but also to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy as a large family of nations. Likewise, the figure of the father pertains not only to the Trotta fathers, but also to Franz Joseph I (1830-1916) as the father of the multinational empire. Thus, some aspects of the paternal relationships between the Trotta fathers and their sons, such as a deep-set inflexibility in action and feeling on the part of the father and reluctance to consider the actual needs of the younger generations, apply to the relationship between the emperor and his people, and vice-versa, some of the conservatism of the larger family can be recognized within the Trotta family. This intimate mirroring between the small and the large families is a constant feature of the novels discussed here, resulting in a heightened awareness of crisis in Roth's writing.

While the presence of the father—whether the Trotta fathers or the emperor—is crucial for understanding the crises in *Radetzky*, equally decisive is the absence of the father in *Die Kapuzinergruft*. This difference also reveals two very distinct attitudes toward paternal authority: in the first novel, with some variation from one generation to the next, there is a propensity in the son to break ranks with the father, to distance himself from and challenge paternal control, whereas in the second novel, the absence of the father provokes nostalgia for the lost unity of the family and a profound longing for a past way of life. Therefore, in Roth's writing, paternal relationships represent the main theater in which the crises of the Trotta family and the monarchy are played out.

In spite of all its faults, the Dual Monarchy, a strange and unique mix of various nationalities, ethnic groups, and religions, offers most of Roth's protagonists a safe home, an identity, and a sense of purpose in life. In Roth's work, the pre-1914 Habsburg world is a world built on traditions and values, security and stability. However, the post-1918 world, a time of disintegrating values, moral confusion, global recession, and, above all, rising threat of fascism in Europe, has nothing to offer in Roth's view. In this context, the Habsburg myth emerges, a literary recreation of the Habsburg world as the fragile paradise of Central Europe.⁴

The Habsburg myth arises from the contrast between the world before the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian empire and Europe after the First World War. "Alles in unserer fast tausendjährigen österreichischen Monarchie schien auf Dauer gegründet und der Staat selbst der oberste Garant dieser Beständigkeit" (Zweig, 13).⁵ With the exception of two unsuccessful campaigns against Napoleon III in the mid-nineteenth century and the battle at Königgratz (Bohemia) in 1866, when the Prussians attacked and defeated the Austrians, the reign of Franz Joseph I had been stable and peaceful. Six decades of prosperity, industrial growth, and creative talent constituted the last chapter in the history of the Dual Monarchy. For Stefan Zweig this was "the golden age of security." Such descriptions of the world preceding the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire are in stark contrast with post-imperial Central Europe. As we read in Stefan Zweig's autobiography, "[j]eder von uns, auch der Kleinste und Geringste, ist in seiner innersten Existenz aufgewühlt worden von den fast pausenlosen vulkanischen Erschütterungen unserer europäischen Erde ... [N]ie ... hat eine Generation einen solchen moralischen Rückfall aus solcher geistigen Höhe erlitten wie die unsere" (7-8).⁶

Carl Burckhardt,⁷ who witnessed the last months of existence of the monarchy from the imperial court in Vienna, wrote a letter to Hugo von Hofmannsthal five years after the disintegration of the Dual Monarchy: “Alles in unserer Generation ist Abschied. Die nächsten werden es schon leichter haben, das beste wird vergessen sein” (Bronsen, 180).⁸ At Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s death in 1929, Thomas Mann evoked the image of the writer in his later years, for whom the collapse of the monarchy had meant the ruin of order, the world, and the universe.

In an impressive biography of Roth, David Bronsen explains that to many of the writers who experienced the end of the multinational empire the real meaning of the downfall seemed to reveal itself some years after the actual event. For Franz Werfel this happened during his emigration. And the Prague writer Willy Haas wrote about his experience in this way: “Das Schöne und Großartige an dem alten Österreich, dem letzten Universalstaat [...] war später, nach seinem Untergang, uns deutlicher sichtbar als zur Zeit des Krieges“ (Bronsen, 181).⁹ What all these writers, Zweig, Hofmannsthal, Burckhardt, Mann, Werfel, Haas, and Roth, have in common is a sense that an important chapter of Western civilization comes to an end with the fall of the Dual Monarchy.

In the dissolution of the multinational empire Roth perceived an event that struck at the core of personal and communal identity as well as an event of great consequence for Central Europe. The loss of multiculturalism in the old empire marked Roth profoundly, which explains why his protagonists experience a profound feeling of homelessness. Roth’s writings suggest a nostalgic view of the past coupled with the belief that the supranational monarchy was a better home than the nations founded through the Treaty of Saint-Germain in September 1919. However, Katherine Arens, a leading

scholar in Austrian intellectual history, has opined that to associate Roth with nostalgia is facile and undocumented. Roth always expressed “what was pragmatically superior to ethnic nationalism,” but he never hesitated to also underscore “what was politically contemptible in the [Austro-Hungarian] state” (Arens, 216). In his work, similar to Zweig, Hofmannsthal, Robert Musil, Hermann Bahr, Franz Theodor Csokor, and Alexander Lernet-Holenia, Roth recreates the Habsburg world with its illusions of security and permanence, while at the same time he examines this world from a critical standpoint, emphasizing premonitions and signs of decay and disaster. Thus, he not only expresses the Habsburg myth, but also examines critically the world that gave rise to it. He inherits the myth as well as articulates its “partialness” and “inadequacy” (M. W. Swales).¹⁰

Radetzkymarsch (1932) and *Die Kapuzinergruft* (1938) are two fictional chronicles in which Roth narrates the decline of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy via the Trotta family saga during a period of five generations. His first novel starts with the battle of Solferino in 1859, when Austria-Hungary lost Lombard in its military confrontation with the Sardinian and French armies, and his second novel ends with Austria’s loss of independence in 1938.¹¹ In his first novel, Roth focuses on the life of the ennobled side of the Slovene family, the von Trottas of Sipolje, during a period of four generations. *Radetzkymarsch* closes with the death of the protagonist at the beginning of the First World War. *Die Kapuzinergruft* narrates the fate of a collateral branch of the Trotta family through World War I and the post-war period. In private histories both novels recount the demise of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy as the disintegration of a system of values and moral codes, of established institutions and ways of living.

Radetzkmarsch (The Radetzky March)

“The typical post-1918 narrative from inside the one-time Habsburg Empire takes the long view of the monarchy’s final century” (Arens, 217). Such is the case with *Radetzkmarsch*, which presents the dynasty of the Trottas from their emergence into history to their demise over more than half a century later. The opening pages recall the Trottas’ ancestry. Originally from Sipolje, a small village in the southern part of Austria-Hungary, the Trottas have descended from Slovene peasants. When a plain infantry lieutenant by the name of Joseph Trotta saves the life of Emperor Franz Joseph in the battle of Solferino in 1859, the lieutenant is awarded “die höchste aller Auszeichnungen: den Maria-Theresienorden“ (the highest of all decorations: the Order of Maria Theresa) (*Radetzkmarsch*, 5).¹² Ennobled as Captain Joseph Trotta von Sipolje, he becomes the first member of a young dynasty. The favors of the Emperor are extended to the next two generations, and the Trottas become dedicated and loyal servants of the Monarchy.

i) Entry on the world-historical stage and loss of the father

The relationship the novel examines in greatest detail is the father-son dyad. There are three fathers and three sons in the course of four generations. The first father-son dyad is characterized by an ascending social mobility and the loss of essential roots. The Hero of Solferino, son of a Slovenian peasant, starts a new dynasty when he becomes the ennobled Captain Trotta. But the relationship that interests Roth mostly is that between the third and the fourth generation father and son—Franz von Trotta and Carl Joseph. Half a century of family history bears on this relationship, and for the youngest

son, the image of his father often combines with the memory of his grandfather and the Slovenian forebears.

Arens rightly observes that for the first Baron von Trotta the opportunity to emerge into history comes with a price. When the simple infantry lieutenant is elevated in rank and ennobled, the new Captain Trotta feels “[a]ls hätte man ihm sein eigenes Leben gegen ein fremdes, neues, in einer Werkstatt angefertigtes vertauscht [...] als wäre er von nun ab sein Leben lang verurteilt, in fremden Stiefeln auf einem glatten Boden zu wandeln” (*RM*, 5).¹³ Roth describes the captain’s new circumstances as a loss of equilibrium, which makes it impossible for him to relate to everyone as before. Captain Trotta looks at his reflection in the mirror every night and every morning, trying to get used to his new rank and status. In this new life, his own father appears like a stranger. The old man, once a constable sergeant, who had previously spoken to his son only in Slovenian, now congratulates him “im harten Deutsch der Armee-Slawen” (*RM*, 7).¹⁴ The father has suddenly moved far away, or so it seems, but the truth is that the son has been removed so far “durch die Gnade des Schicksals und des Kaisers” (*RM*, 7).¹⁵ Starting a new dynasty comes with a symbolic amputation from the family line: “losgelöst war der Hauptmann Trotta von dem langen Zug seiner bäuerlichen slawischen Vorfahren” (*RM*, 8),¹⁶ and none of the road signs indicates a way back. This rupture and the impossibility to reestablish the connection to the Slovenian past are crucial aspects in understanding the predicament of the Trottas.

Removed but also removing himself from his father and the land of his ancestors, Captain Trotta marries into an older dynasty of Habsburg civil servants. His wife is the daughter of a well-off district captain in western Bohemia. Although the captain

continues to send letters to his father on a weekly basis, he never invites him to visit his new family. The old man had lost an eye in a fight with Bosnian smugglers, and was now living as a war invalid and groundskeeper at the Castle of Laxenburg: ¹⁷ “[er] fütterte die Schwäne, beschnitt die Hecken, bewachte im Frühling den Goldregen, später den Holunder vor räuberischen, unberechtigten Händen und fegte in milden Nächten obdachlose Liebespaare von den wohlthätig finstern Bänken” (*RM*, 5).¹⁸

Two major factors determine the destiny of the Trotts: upward mobility and the question of ethnic identity. “The family is becoming something else, neither Slovene nor German. As the novel casts them, the Trotts become true subjects of *Haus Habsburg*. They have, indeed, lost their prehistory in the Sipolje for which they are titled, yet they have entered Western history in an unexpected and potentially significant way” (Arens, 218). The Trotts’ new prehistory is now that of the Haus Habsburg. They are relocated from the marginal ancestral Slovenian cradle to one of the most prestigious imperial Houses in Europe, thus experiencing what Homi Bhabha has called “the unhomely moment.”

In an essay entitled “The World and the Home,” Bhabha explains what happens in the case of historical migrations and cultural relocations.¹⁹ In Bhabha’s view, “to be unhomed is not to be homeless,” or forcibly evicted from a home, but represents the uncanny sudden knowledge that home as the private domain and outside-home as the public sphere can no longer stay separate. Thus, Bhabha remarks, “[i]n the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible ... The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world”

(445). Trotta's upward mobility within Habsburg society puts him on the world-historical stage. He is no longer a simple Slovenian lieutenant of peasant extraction, but a captain decorated with the highest military distinction and soon to become an Austrian baron. His new rank is foreign to him, but so is his father, who has suddenly started talking to him in German, the language of the military and the Habsburg rulers. The Hero of Solferino feels estranged from his family and his forebears, and equally confused in his new identity as a member of the lesser Austrian nobility. For Bhabha, the "unhomely" is a paradigmatic postcolonial experience, but Roth shows how it can become an issue within the Habsburg imperial realm, as the Trottas attempt to negotiate cultural difference in their new home. Within the "world-in-the home, home-in-the-world" paradigm, Trotta realizes that the small space of Slovene domesticity is suddenly permeated by what until then had exclusively been the domain of the outside, of Habsburg aristocracy.

The crisis of identity within the Trotta family can thus be examined as a crisis in which the space of domesticity is permeated by the public sphere. "Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed" (Bhabha, 451). Roth suggests such an intimacy in *RM* when he describes how the private life of a Slovene peasant becomes inextricably linked to the destiny of the monarchy. Years later Captain Trotta is finally able to feel at home in his rank, his station, and his repute.

However, one incident occurs that seems to reverse this course of assimilation to Habsburg society and provoke a renewed crisis of belonging. A highly fictionalized version of the story of the battle of Solferino has found its way into the captain's son's

reader. In this version of the battle, the Emperor is elevated to heights of superhuman valor and the lieutenant is described in equally favorable terms. Nothing is mentioned about how at a certain moment of the battle the lieutenant pulled the Emperor off his horse and shielded him with his own body in order to save the Emperor's life. Thus, the truth was more comical than heroic. When the Captain asks to see the Emperor on this matter, the Kaiser argues that what schoolchildren need is not historical truth but inspiring stories. No correction is made, though the story is removed from the school manuals. Shaken in his faith in the truth and justice of the monarchy, Captain Trotta requests his discharge from the army.

This episode in Trotta's life triggers the Captain's attempt to remove himself as far as possible from the imperial center and to return to his former simple life. He settles down on his father-in-law's estate in Bohemia, and, similar to his own father at the castle park in Laxenburg, he goes about tending the garden, trimming the hedges, mowing the lawn, guarding the forsythia and the elderberry bushes, repairing tools, looking after poultry, manure, and the harvest. Once again he was a little old Slovenian peasant, but imperial favors did not abandon the family. Soon after the audience with the Emperor, Captain Trotta is raised to the barony and his son is provided with five thousand guldens to pursue an education fit for the family's name and position. The captain unwillingly accepts these favors, which makes his attempt to distance himself from House Habsburg partially unsuccessful. While aspiring to reconnect to his ancestors, Trotta remains tied to the Habsburgs. "These events underscore the paradox of the Trottas' new status in world history" (Arens, 218). The attempts on the part of the Slovene peasant/Austrian baron to

separate the private sphere from the public domain and reverse the course of his family's destiny thus remain unsuccessful.

ii) Habsburg dynasty or Slovenian ancestry

There are crucial differences from one generation to the next in the degree of attachment to Haus Habsburg or to Slovenian ancestry. The first baron is resolved to attempt a return to prearistocratic times, downplaying his attachment to Austria. But his son, Baron Franz von Trotta und Sipolje, district captain and the Imperial and Royal High Commissioner, does not regret being a civil servant and manifests total indifference toward his peasant forebears. Of all the members of the Trotta family, the second Baron von Trotta establishes the strongest connection to the monarchy, which he serves with unparalleled devotion in his little town in Bohemia. As he grows older, the resemblance between the district captain and the Emperor becomes striking.

In contrast to his father, Carl Joseph feels only slightly connected to the Habsburgs. As a child he venerates the Imperial Royal House, imagining that to die for the Kaiser is the supreme honor on earth. But the Kaiser is both close and remote to him, in the most baffling way. As a young officer, Carl Joseph knows that serving in the imperial army is a strong reason to feel proud of himself—no profession within the monarchy was regarded more highly than the military—yet he wished he could renounce his career for the simple life of his forebears. He lacks his father's ability to feel at home within the Habsburg dynasty. His destiny unfolds between his sense of duty and his sense of identity.

Carl Joseph's inadequacy for the military shows both in his appearance and his mental constitution. He never sits well on a horse and is unconcerned about the cavalry

steeds. He dreads the conversations with his fellow officers, and cares little for the military exercises held twice a week through the streets of a small town in Moravia, where his garrison is stationed. He feels the blood of his forebears inside him and they have not been horsemen. They kept close to the land, pushing their plows between furrows of soil, behind pairs of oxen.

Carl Joseph often pictures Sipolje in his mind. He has never seen the village of his forebears, but feels he has made its acquaintance and could find it on the map with his eyes shut. His image is idyllic. Everything seems to live by an ancient cycle of work and love, where people, beasts, and earth are in perfect consonance, and create a fertile equilibrium. “Back home”—this is what Carl Joseph calls the ancient village of Sipolje—“[d]aheim wohnten sie in niedrigen Hütten, befruchteten nächstens die Frauen und tagsüber die Felder! Weiß und hoch lag winters der Schnee um ihre Hütten. Gelb und hoch wogte im Sommer das Korn um ihre Hüften. Bauern waren sie, Bauern! Nicht anders hatte das Geschlecht der Trottas gelebt! Nicht anders!...” (*RM*, 57).²⁰ In his mind, the young lieutenant sets up a dichotomy between the civilized and the primitive. Although he is born and raised into Habsburg society and culture, Austrian civilization is foreign to his heart. Unbelievably close, although in fact unknown to him, are his Slovenian roots. “Back home,” a place he has seen only with the eyes of his imagination, everything is primitive but beautiful. The people of Sipolje live in “squalid huts of clay and thatch” between “unknown mountains,” where the soil is “succulent” and the crops are rich (*TRM*, 60). They have made for themselves “[e]in schönes Dorf, ein gutes Dorf! Man hätte seine Offizierskarriere darum gegeben!” (*RM*, 56).²¹ Two generations after his

family was relocated from the periphery of the empire to the imperial center, Carl Joseph still feels the “unhomely moment” stirring in him very keenly (Bhabha, 445).

Shortly after Carl Joseph’s only friend—the Jewish doctor, Demant—dies in an absurd duel, young Trotta fantasizes about transferring from the Uhlans regiment in Moravia to a regiment in the southern part of the monarchy. He pictures himself marching across his native soil and drawing close to the small, quiet village. The image is that of a homecoming. Nevertheless, the southern border is not an option for the lieutenant. The novel shows how soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian military were not allowed to serve in places where they came from. This was a strategy meant to prevent the military from taking sides with the civilian population in the event of civil unrest. The regiment in Moravia, for instance, where Carl Joseph is first stationed is comprised of Romanians and Ukrainians, but no Czechs. As historian William Johnston explains, “[b]ecause the army might have to put down agitation by Bohemian Sokols or Ruthenians in Bukovina, officials stationed Slav recruits far from their homelands under German officers” (Johnston, 50).²² The only two options open to young Trotta are a transfer to the interior of the monarchy or to the eastern border of the empire. He decides to join an infantry battalion on the Russian border, the homeland of Ukrainian peasants and of Onufrij, Trotta’s loyal ordinance. Carl Joseph imagines the borderland as the northern sister of Slovenia.

In contrast to his son, the district commissioner feels no attachment to the native soil of Slovenia. The Emperor’s view that Carl Joseph could not serve in the south is fully shared by the baron, who has never had the desire to see his ancestral village.

Er war ein Östereicher, Dieneer und Beamter der Habsburger, und seine Heimat war die Kaiserliche Burg zu Wien. [...] Er war ein Bezirkshauptmann. In seinem

Bezirk vertrat er die Apostolische Majestät. Er trug den goldenen Kragen, den Krappenhut und den Degen. Er wünschte sich nicht, den Pflug über die gesegnete slowenische Erde zu führen. In dem entscheidenden Brief an seinen Sohn stand der Satz: “Das Schicksal hat aus unserm Geschlecht von Grenzbauern Östereicher gemacht. Wir wollen es bleiben.” (*RM*, 116-7)²³

In the district captain’s view, the change of fate that occurred at the time of the battle of Solferino is definitive. He is blind to the fact that historical circumstances may some day bring new alterations to their established dynasty. In that, he resembles the monarch, and their resemblance is also striking in their attitude toward his son (in the baron’s case) and toward his people (in the Emperor’s case). Neither of them listens to what the other has to say, and when they do perceive that something may have gone wrong with the one(s) they have watched over, it is too late. History acts upon their lives with a force greater than what they could control or even imagine.

iii) The paternal relationship

The relationship between Baron von Trotta and his son, through which Roth also reflects on the relationship between the monarch and his people, is deeply affected by their alienation from one another. This estrangement, a permanent state of things within the Trotta family, is caused by the conservatism and rigidity in the father’s attitude.

Roth describes the district captain as a person of extraordinary immobility:

“Nase und Mund waren, wenn der Bezirkshauptmann sprach, eher eine Art Blasinstrumenten, als Gesichtspartien. Außer den Lippen bewegte sich nichts in diesem Gesicht” (*RM*, 26).²⁴ When Roth evokes the image of Herr von Trotta in his uniform, he mentions the dark whiskers he wore “als ein Abzeichen, das seine Zugehörigkeit zu der Dienerschaft Franz Josephs des Ersten beweisen sollte, als einen Beweis seiner dynastischen Gesinnung” (*RM*, 26).²⁵ These whiskers, he notes, likewise remained

immobile when Herr von Trotta und Sipolje spoke. He never moved, spoke, or acted in unpredictable ways. He wore the same dark blue on Sundays and weekdays, and during the meals he stood up between the second and third course to “stretch [his] legs,” as he used to say. “Aber es war eher,” Roth explains, “als wollte er seinen Hausgenossen vorführen, wie man sich erhebt, steht und wandelt, ohne die Reglosigkeit aufzugeben” (*RM*, 26).²⁶ A similar immobility thoroughly characterizes his attitude within the family.

The manner in which the district captain relates and communicates with his son resembles a military relationship. Captain Franz von Trotta und Sipolje had not been allowed to pursue a military career, but nothing prevented him from acting out a subordination relationship in his own family, expecting his son to obey military discipline not only at the cavalry school but also at home. Whenever Carl Joseph returns for summer vacation from the military school in Hranice, Moravia, he must undergo a lengthy interview with his father. When the two meet, the young cadet has already given his coat a last tug, adjusted his waist belt, and taken off his cap, “wie es Vorschrift war”—as prescribed by regulations (*RM*, 21). He clicks his heels at the sight of his father and waits for a sign that would allow him to make himself comfortable. When his father requires a report of progress from school, checking on reading, geometry, horsemanship, and other matters, Carl Joseph’s answers are nothing longer than necessary. The interview seems like “ein kümmerliches Stückchen Winter” to him (*RM*, 20)—a wretched bit of winter—and only afterwards the summer vacation starts.

Nothing changes in their relationship, not even when Carl Joseph has grown up to be a lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian army. He feels the same kind of respect verging on awe toward his father as he felt as a boy. His answers are often the same “Yessir,

Papa.” The father dictates and the son obeys. Their established relationship of subordination is continued, which couples with the total control of emotions, even in the most personal situations. When Carl Joseph falls in love with Frau Slama, the wife of sergeant Slama, and has an affair with her, it is still the father who decides the formal details of the young lieutenant’s last encounter with sergeant Slama after his wife’s death in childbirth.

An essential characteristic of the father-son dyad in this novel is that it is completely devoid of emotions. No feelings are exchanged between the two men. Away from home, Carl Joseph has acquired the habit of writing letters to his father. All information is factual on his side, as expected. When after Demant’s death the son feels an urgency to acquaint his father with his deep-felt desire to transfer to the land of his forebears, the father’s reply is entirely dismissive. Only later, when the district captain can no longer ignore his son’s feelings and view of the military, he must allow him to make his own decisions regarding his pursuits in life. But then their relationship has broken down. The father does not know how to relate to a son who has ceased to show subordination in thinking and action and whose needs he has never known nor understood.

Carl Joseph’s sense that he belongs to a long line of Slovenian peasants more than to the Habsburg genealogy brings him closer to his grandfather than to his father. Indeed, the young man feels more like his grandfather’s grandson than his father’s son. The knowledge Carl Joseph has of his grandfather grows from his silent conversations with the figure in the portrait of the Hero of Solferino. A friend from the district captain’s youth, a painter, once visited the house of Baron Joseph von Trotta and was allowed to

paint a portrait of him. At the death of the Hero of Solferino, the portrait was hung in the district captain's study, where the grandson could often observe it. The portrait seemed to develop a life of its own, apart from the man it represented. "Die Neugier des Enkels kreiste beständig um die erloschene Gestalt und den verschollenen Ruhm des Großvaters. Manchmal, an stillen Nachmittagen [...] stieg Carl Joseph auf einen Stuhl und betrachtete das Bildnis des Großvaters aus der Nähe. [...] Nichts verriet der Tote. Nichts erfuhr der Junge" (*RM*, 31-2).²⁷

The portrait initiates a number of contradictory reactions in the grandson. Carl Joseph is simultaneously fascinated and awed by the figure in the portrait. The Hero of Solferino appears at once as a pillar of monarchy and the gateway toward the past.

An dieses Bildnis klammerte sich die Erinnerung Carl Josephs, als an das einzige und letzte Zeichen, das ihm die unbekannte Reihe seiner Vorfahren vermacht hatte. Ihr Nachkomme war er. Seitdem er zum Regiment eingerückt war, fühlte er sich als der Enkel seines Großvaters, nicht als der Sohn seines Vaters; ja, der Sohn seines merkwürdigen Großvaters war er. (*RM*, 57)²⁸

The memory of his grandfather reconnects Carl Joseph to the long line of his ancestors. Whenever he looks at his grandfather's portrait, the grandson thinks he knows Sipolje. Yet the grandfather had saved the life of the Emperor, and if you were a Trotta it meant that you kept on saving the life of the monarch. In the figure of the grandfather there exist simultaneously a call of the forebears and a call of duty. For the district captain, the call of duty and the established identity as an Austrian encompass his entire universe. The latter is intentionally oblivious to the link to his Slovenian ancestry, and therefore experiences no conflict of identity. But for the young lieutenant the call of ancestry and the call of duty are opposing and ultimately irreconcilable forces.

In the figure of the grandfather lies an essential key to understanding the complexity of the Dual Monarchy. In him we find both privilege and difference. He is a Slovene peasant and an Austrian aristocrat. He represents one of the minority nationalities of Austria-Hungary as well as the ruling class. There is at one point in his life a seeming equilibrium between these two strands of his identity, but they never really work together in lasting harmony. The misunderstanding between the Hero of Solferino and the Kaiser is never resolved from Trotta's point of view. The result is that, in appearances, the latter remains an Austrian aristocrat, but in his spiritual makeup, he never stops being a Slovene and a peasant.

The Trotta family describes two possible ways in which the problem of identity was reconciled and accommodated inside the Dual Monarchy. The Hero of Solferino shows one path and his son, the district captain, shows the other path. In the first case, Baron Joseph von Trotta und Sipolje holds on to his ancestral identity, but he also adopts a new kind. Irrespective of the disagreements he may have with the monarch, he seems reconciled to his situation within Austrian society. He tacitly favors Slovenian ancestry over Habsburg genealogy, but that brings no changes to the social status of his family. In a study entitled *Vienna's Golden Autumn*, Hilde Spiel explains how some of the aristocracy, though using German as their lingua franca, remained proud of their Slav or Magyar vernacular and ancestry (18).²⁹ Such is also the case of the first Trotta aristocrat. In contrast to his father, the district captain relinquishes all ties to the Slovenian past and fully assimilates to the Austrian strain. His loyalty and devotion to the Emperor and the monarchy can hardly be equaled. To choose to be a Slovene rather than an Austrian is tantamount to an anomaly. In fact, the district captain views national minorities and the

idea of the nation itself as historical anomalies: “Es mochte viele Völker geben, aber keineswegs Nationen” (*RM*, 214).³⁰

Herr von Trotta calls the Czechs, in the midst of whom he grew up as an Austrian, “widerspenstig, hartköpfig und dumm” (*RM*, 214)—unruly, hardheaded, and stupid—and views them as the inventors of the concept of the nation. To him, “national minorities” were nothing but large communities of “revolutionary individuals” (*RM*, 214). Such communities had been multiplying unnaturally, as if a contagious disease had struck the land, whereas the loyal elements of the monarchy had grown less fertile. The district captain perceives in the disintegration of the monarchy a great injustice; he himself appears as a victim of injustice. When a friend of the family, Dr. Skowronnek, suggests that the district captain’s son may desire to leave the army and start another profession, the district captain is shocked: the echo of “some other profession” is as alien to him as the words “revolutionary” and “national minorities” (*RM*, 239). When he relinquishes his paternal authority, he thinks he should also stop being an official (*RM*, 240). He dies shortly after Emperor Franz Joseph’s death, and Doctor Skowronnek remarks that neither of them could have outlived Austria (*RM*, 331).

To summarize, the grandfather points toward a negotiable equilibrium between ethnicity and a supranational identity, while the district captain represents a case of assimilation to the Habsburg dynasty. Both are valid options within Austria-Hungary, providing it the license to function as a supranational entity. The problem arises within the third generation of the new dynasty, with Carl Joseph’s unresolved crisis of belonging. The more upset he is by the conservatism of the imperial institution, the greater is his longing for his ethnic roots and the simplicity of village life.

But it is not so much that Carl Joseph's spiritual constitution weakens his sense of belonging to Austria, or that the two strands of his identity, which his grandfather had negotiated into a seeming agreement and which he himself could not reconcile, constitute a peril to him and the Trotta line. In this, the argument of this chapter differs from previous criticism, which emphasized a crisis based on loss of essential roots (Arens). The real crisis springs from lack of a genuine communication. Carl Joseph cannot face his father other than in military clothes, and the topics of their conversations and written correspondence are always foreseeable and typical. There is nothing spontaneous, unpredictable, or of a genuine interest in the father-son communication, and in this lies the profound immeasurable crisis Carl Joseph experiences, which eventually destroys him and his family.

iv) The dichotomy between center and periphery and the fragility of the multinational family

The lack of communication, which Roth renders at the level of the nuclear family, transfers to the level of the monarchy, the multinational family. From the contrast Roth creates between the center and the periphery of the empire, between the imperial court and the Crown-lands, a sense of rupture evolves. The borderland to which Carl Joseph is transferred is one of Roth's most powerful and revealing images of the fragility and vulnerability of the supranational monarchy. Here, at the farthest eastern post of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, we find a striking contrast: between the poverty, the uncouth and inhospitable surroundings, and the calculated opulence, the refined and cultured society in Vienna. The greater the contrasts are, the weaker is the interaction between the borderland and the center of the empire.

In spite of its distance from Vienna, the eastern borderland station resembled in appearance other stations from the interior of the monarchy. “Es war der letzte aller Bahnhöfe der Monarchie, aber immerhin: auch dieser Bahnhof zeigte zwei Paar glitzernder Schienenbänder, die sich ununterbrochen bis in das Innere des Reiches erstreckten” (*RM*, 120-1).³¹ The station featured a Morse apparatus and a stationmaster, who once a day called out and rang the bell for the departure of the train westward bound. But unlike other stations, no one departed from this remote part of the monarchy. Apart from those who had to come, nobody came. This forgotten place is said to be one of the strangest areas.

The town³² in which the regiment is located has no name; streets are likewise nameless and houses bear no numbers. The inhabitants are one third workers at some sort of craft, another third farmers wretchedly struggling with poverty, and one third tradesmen. About this last group, Roth comments that they had a “miraculous instinct” for making money in any mysterious manner possible. Surrounding the town are widely scattered forests, but exceedingly invasive and insidious swamps constitute the persistent and unrelenting natural occurrence of the eastern borderland. “Sumpfgeborene waren die Menschen dieser Gegend. Den die Sümpfe lagen unheimlich ausgebreitet über der ganzen Fläche des Landes, zu beiden Seiten der Landstraße, mit Fröschen, Fieberbazillen und tückischem Grass, das den ahnungslosen, des Landes unkundigen Wanderern eine furchtbare Lockung in einen furchtbaren Tod bedeutete” (*RM*, 119).³³ Before the Great War, the swamps are the greatest enemy of the Austro-Hungarian army. The roads of the town are often supplied with gravel to ease the way of horses and soldiers. But in the spring the gravel never lasts more than a week, “sacrificed” as it is to the swampy roads.

“All Steine, Millionen von Steinen, verschluckte der unersättliche Grund der Straße”
(*RM*, 120).³⁴

Aside from the unpredictable, impulsive, perilous, and capricious nature of the eastern borderland, two more features cohere to generate its character: first of all, the border contaminates and corrupts the unadulterated elements coming from the center; second, it manifests an astonishing perception and intuition with regard to historical development. “Wer immer von Fremden in diese Gegend geriet, mußte allmählich verlorengahn. Keiner war so kräftig wie der Sumpf. Niemand konnte der Grenze standhalten. Um jene Zeit begannen die hohen Herren in Wien und Petersburg bereits, den großen Krieg vorzubereiten. Die Menschen an der Grenze fühlten ihn früher kommen als die andern” (*RM*, 119).³⁵

v) The breakdown of the imperial army and the collapse of the multinational family

No army in Europe was more popular than the Austro-Hungarian army. This was less on account of “prowess in battle,” owing more to the “omnipresence [of the army] as pacifier of the realm. Garrisons of imperial and royal (*k. und k.*) troops, carrying the yellow flag with its black eagle throughout rural Bohemia, Galicia, Hungary, and Croatia, dramatized imperial presence to even the most indifferent peoples” (Johnston, 50).³⁶ The Austro-Hungarian army enjoyed great popularity among the civilian population from one end of empire to the other. According to Johnston, Roth “celebrated the military as a living bond between emperor and people” (Johnston, 51). The imperial army was “a melting pot of nationalities, toward which officers and men felt a ‘schwarz-gelb’ loyalty

transcending national origin” (Johnston, 50). Thus, the military embodied the force of unity within the large multinational family.

In the early pages of *RM*, Roth suggests that people were drawn to the military exercises as if to a splendid spectacle they could never miss. “Die Kaufleute verließen ihre Läden, die müßigen Besucher der Kaffeehäuser ihre Tische, die städtischen Polizisten ihre gewohnten Posten und die Bauern, die mit frischem Gemüse aus den Dörfern auf den Marktplatz gekommen waren, ihre Pferde und Wagen” (*RM*, 55).³⁷ All of them wanted to get a view of the military performance, packed with action, color, and sound. The galloping of the regiment accompanied by the peal of trumpets, the red trousers of the men against the brown bodies of the horses, offered the curious onlookers an unequalled spectacle. As Johnston observes, the colorful uniforms of the Austro-Hungarian officers also “adorned every ballroom, spurring civilian men to dress with greater flair than elsewhere in Europe” (Johnston, 51).

But in spite of the “display [...] of a proud front” and the great respect it drew from the populace, the imperial army “remained in perpetual crisis” (Johnston, 51). Up to 1867, only archdukes could hold the position of commanders-in-chief, excluding abler professionals from the high office. There were several practices that were problematic and reduced the cohesion of the imperial army, such as the training soldiers received to dread their superiors, the practice according to which officers rode to the front in railroad coaches, while soldiers were put in cattle cars, and the language barrier, which reduced the communication between officers and subalterns to seventy German words (Johnston, 51-2). There was also the fact that officers and soldiers were transferred from one garrison to another, which made them feel “as homeless as itinerant actors” (Johnston,

53). All of these and many more were causes of discontent in the ranks of the military. But one of the harshest aspects of military service that was able to provoke serious crisis in an officer's life was the code of honor (*Ehrenkodex*). "It acted as a superego requiring [officers] to settle disputes by dueling" (Johnston, 53). In England, the duel had disappeared by 1850, but in Austria-Hungary it was not until 1911 that Franz Joseph issued a prohibition against dueling, allowing it only in the most serious cases.

This aspect of military life also features in *RM*, where Dr. Demant, Carl Joseph's only friend, is asked to settle a trivial matter by dueling. One night, Carl Joseph is seen escorting Demant's wife home from the theater, which leads an officer from his garrison to think and express the conviction that Carl Joseph is having an adulterous affair with Dr. Demant's wife. In order to save the honor of his wife and innocent friend, Demant challenges the slanderer to a duel. The night before the duel, Demant ponders on the obsolescence and meaninglessness of the Habsburg code of honor, which forbids a man to escort a woman home but demands the supreme sacrifice. Demant's predicament also results from the fact that he is a Jew, and Jews looked up at their emperor as if he were a father to them. He could not extricate himself from a duty of honor as he could not disappoint the supreme benefactor. The Jewish doctor dies, which deepens Carl Joseph's crisis in the military. Through this incident, Roth also shows the deep crisis of the Austro-Hungarian army, which forced some of its best men to give their lives in support of a dubious military ethos.

The spectacle of "blutiger Pracht" (*RM*, 55)—or gory splendor—which Roth mentions in his description of the military maneuvers is deeply ironic, suggesting how unaware the actors and spectators were of the fragility of the imperial edifice. Roth

indicates the crisis within the Austro-Hungarian army in his portrayal of the code of honor. But his anticipation of the demise of the monarchy is most compellingly expressed in the breakdown of the imperial army in the borderland region. Any officer who is stationed on the borderland for a longer time period falls prey to its conditions. The dominant feeling soldiers and officers experience in this strangest of all places is that of being severed from home. It is a profound emotion with repercussions upon their general view of life as well as their military behavior:

Die Kameraden, Bürgerliche zumeist und deutscher Abstammung, lebten seit vielen Jahren in dieser Garnison, waren heimisch in ihr geworden und ihr anheimgefallen. Losgelöst von ihren heimischen Sitten, ihrer deutschen Muttersprache, die hier eine Dienstsprache geworden war, ausgeliefert den unendlichen Trostlosigkeit der Sümpfe, verfielen sie dem Hasardspiel und dem scharfen Schnaps, den man in dieser Gegend herstellte, und der unter dem Namen 'Neunziggrädiger' gehandelt wurde. Aus der harmlosen Durchschnittlichkeit, zu der sie Kadettenschule und überlieferter Drill herangezogen hatten, glitten sie in die Verderbnis dieses Landes, über das bereits der große Atem des großen feindlichen Zarenreiches strich. (*RM*, 122)³⁸

Showing the corruption and deterioration of the Austro-Hungarian army on the eastern border, caused through isolation and severance from the "homeland," Roth broadens the idea of a critical deficiency of communication. The center is entirely oblivious to the needs of the margin, and its ignorance is founded in rigid conservatism. Introducing the borderland Cossacks, Roth creates a striking contrast between an alienated army and the apparently cohesive forces of a military power the monarchy soon had to confront.

Demonstrating extraordinary strength and skill in horsemanship, the Cossacks are like "uniformierte Winde in militärischer Ordnung" racing around "auf den kleinen, huschgeschwinden Pferdchen ihrer heimatlichen Steppen, die Lanzen schwenkend über den hohen Pelzmützen, wie Blitze an langen hölzernen Stielen" (*RM*, 123).³⁹

While the Cossacks move with the speed of lightning, at its border, the empire is speedily losing an army. The border regiment is gradually transforming into “ein Regiment von Spielern”—a regiment of gamblers (*RM*, 165). Officers stationed here become drunks and gamblers, swamped in booze and debt. Carl Joseph succumbs to the same fate, and when the district captain arrives on a short visit, he finds his son drunk. The young lieutenant has become unrecognizable in his attitude as a soldier and a son. His appearance is unsettling, and even his father is moved to fearful sadness at this shocking sight: “Leutnant Trotta wußte nur nicht, daß sein Gang unsicher wurde, seine Bluse Flecken hatte, seine Hose keine Bügelfalte, daß an seinen Hemden Knöpfe fehlten, seine Hauptfarbe gelb am Abend und aschgrau am Morgen war und sein Blick ohne Ziel” (*RM*, 156).⁴⁰

For the first time in his life, Herr von Trotta observes that his son may not be well and reckons that his ailment may have more profound reasons than occasioned by intoxication. But urgent matters call the district commissioner back to his district, where unusual unrest has been reported, and the thought that his son may need his help has to be postponed. These moments are unique in the narrative, because they embody the only opportunity the father has to engage in real communication with his son. But the circumstances and the call of duty defeat the sudden impulse to reach out to the only son.

vi) The metaphorical father of a disintegrating family

The image of a deep-set conservatism of the imperial establishment joined with descriptions of a decaying borderland army, as well as the social unrest spreading throughout the empire, are evident signs of the rift between the center and the periphery

of the Dual Monarchy. Roth chooses the rich Polish landowner Count Wojciech Chojnicki to express the moral and political bankruptcy of the monarchy:

Ungläubig, spöttisch, furchtlos und ohne Bedenken pflegte Chojnicki zu sagen, der Kaiser sei ein gedankenloser Greis, die Regierung eine Bande von Trotteln, der Reichsrat eine Versammlung gutgläubiger und pathetischer Idioten, die staatlichen Behörden bestechlich, feige und faul. Die deutschen Österreicher waren Walzertänzer und Heurigensänger, die Ungarn stanken, die Tschechen waren geborene Stiefelputzer, die Ruthenen verkappte und verräterische Russen, die Kroaten und Slowenen, die er 'Krowoten und Schlawiner' nannte, Bürstenbinder und Maronibrater, und die Polen, denen er ja selbst angehörte, Courmacher, Friseure und Modephotographen. (*RM*, 126)⁴¹

The Count is in his forties, a bachelor and a man of the world, a cavalry captain in the reserve, who loved horses, liquor, society, frivolity, and also seriousness (*RM*, 124):

Den Winter verbrachte er in großen Städten und in den Spielsälen der Riviera. Wie ein Zugvogel pflegte er, wenn der Goldregen an den Dämmen der Eisenbahn zu blühen began, in die Heimat seiner Ahnen zurückzukehren. Er brachte mit sich einen leicht parfümierten Hauch der großen Welt und galante und abenteuerliche Geschichten. Er gehörte zu den Leuten, die keine Feinde haben können, aber auch keine Freunde, lediglich Gefährten, Genossen und Gleichgültige. (*RM*, 124)⁴²

The Count is phlegmatic, sarcastic, irreverent, a heartless and selfish spectator of history. He cares for no one but himself. His political assessments are sardonic and scathing toward all nationalities of the empire. He scorns each of them, but he is no less forgiving of the imperial establishment and the monarch. As a deputy to the Imperial Council for many years, he has never cared to bring the needs of the people of the borderland to the attention of the forum. His only goal has been to fuel his scorn of the parliamentary body to which he belongs. In his sarcasm, the Count is chauvinistic; but he is also clairvoyant: "Dieses Reich muß untergehn. Sobald unser Kaiser die Augen schließt, zerfallen wir in hundert Stücke'." Furthermore, the Count entirely distrusts the nation-state: "Alle Völker werden ihre dreckigen kleinen Staaten errichten [...]" (*RM*, 126).⁴³

Count Chojnicki's tirades verge on the philosophical. The *Vaterland* (Fatherland), he remarks, has ceased to exist before its actual dismemberment, and the actual reason for that is the loss of faith. In the past, the Emperor appeared invested by divine authority to rule over a vast portion of Europe and peoples of various descent. But the monarch's investiture depended on his people's belief in God. When the people stopped believing, they also realized they had been solely responsible for situating the monarch at the head of the multinational empire. It is now in their power to depose him. The era of nation-states, Chojnicki observes, erodes the relationship of the people to God and replaces it with the religion of nationalism:

‘Die Monarchie, unsere Monarchie, ist gegründet auf der Frömmigkeit: auf dem Glauben, daß Gott die Habsburger erwählt hat, über so und so viel christliche Völker zu regieren. Unser Kaiser ist ein weltlicher Bruder des Papstes, est ist Seine K. u. K. Apostolosche Majestät, keine andere wie er: apostolisch, keine andere Majestät in Europa so abhängig, von der Gnade Gottes und vom Glauben der Völker an die Gnade Gottes. [...] Der Kaiser von Österreich-Ungarn darf nicht von Gott verlassen werden. Nun aber hat ihn Gott verlassen!’ (RM, 150)⁴⁴

The loss of faith in the monarch reflects on the same theme of alienation between the center and the periphery.

Roth describes one attempt on the part of the Kaiser, the metaphorical father of the multinational empire, to reach out to his people; the monarch visits the borderland. Nevertheless, the dominant notes of this visit are a pervasive sense of belatedness and disconnectedness. The portrait Roth draws of the Kaiser is at once grave and hilarious, and has little, if any, of the dimensions of an Apostolic Monarch. The Kaiser walks with a brisk step, but he is an old and forgetful man, and his mind dwells on trivial matters. In his weak moments, he feels upset that he is not a frontline officer, with whom he would have readily swapped destinies. He feels he would rather sleep in a hut assigned to an

officer than in the quarters of an old castle, and he prefers the blaring of trumpets to the operational plans, though he feigns interest in the latter. Moments of comedy and gravity pervade the monarch's visit to the borderline regiment. For instance, one night the Kaiser opens the window to his room, apprehensive that his guards might discover him standing in the cold autumn air. He feels tiny and old in his nightshirt in the face of the immense night, and thoughts of regret and envy cross his mind. "Der letzte seiner Soldaten, die vor den Zelten patrouillieren mochten, war mächtiger als er. Der letzte seiner Soldaten! Und er war der Allerhöchste Kriegsherr!" (*RM*, 204)⁴⁵ The image of the Kaiser in *RM* is in stark contrast to the myth surrounding one of the most powerful monarchs of Europe. He is no longer the equivalent of the divine Father on earth, but instead a human being weakened by old age. He needs his people's faith to keep him in his place, but no one needs him anymore. He is the abandoned father of a fallen dynasty.

The monarch's visit is not an encounter with the real conditions of the borderland—the workers' destitution and suffering, the peasant's hardships and privations, the real danger from across the frontier. The military maneuver he observes is completely irrelevant to the circumstances of either his officers' or his people's lives on the eastern border. Watching the movements of each individual platoon, the monarch has a revelation of the destiny of his army, "zerschlagen und verstreut, aufgeteilt unter den vielen Völkern seines weiten Reiches" (*RM*, 211).⁴⁶ But the monarch makes no attempt to change either the protocol of his visit or ask what is wrong.

The monarch's estrangement from his people is once again revealed when the old man comes face to face with young Lieutenant Trotta. The Kaiser can hardly remember the incident at the Battle of Solferino, and the Trotta dynasty is long-slumbering in his

memory. But the alienation is reciprocal. The Supreme commander in Chief, for whom in the past Carl Joseph would have given his life, was now alien to him. Nothing stirred in him when the Kaiser drew only a few paces away from him, and he regretted he could not feel the intoxication he had felt in the past. At this instant, “[d]er Leutnant Trotta glich einem Manne, der nicht nur seine Heimat verloren hatte, sondern auch das Heimweh nach dieser Heimat” (*RM*, 211).⁴⁷

RM is written in the third person. The narrator’s omniscient perspective suits well the events of the von Trotta family in the context of the rigid world order maintained by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The Trottas follow a predetermined path, from which they do not digress. For as long as their faith in the monarchy is strong, the desire to change anything in their lives is nonexistent. That is also the reason why relationships within the Trotta family remain the same.

When Carl Joseph loses his faith in the monarchy and his father realizes with awe that their world is falling apart, an opportunity comes up to rethink the paternal relationship. But the district captain is troubled and totally unaware of how to respond to the situation now arisen:

Wie einfach hat die Welt immer ausgesehn! dachte der Bezirkshauptmann. Für jede Lage gab es eine bestimmte Haltung. Wenn der Sohn zu den Ferien kam, prüfte man ihn. Als er Leutnant wurde, beglückwünschte man ihn. Wenn er seine gehorsamen Briefe schrieb, in denen so wenig stand, erwiderte man mit ein paar gemessenen Zeilen. Wie aber sollte man sich benehmen, wenn der Sohn betrunken war? Wenn er: ‘Vater’ rief? Wenn es aus ihm ‘Vater!’ rief? (*RM*, 157)⁴⁸

The father misses the opportunity to answer his son’s call, and also fails to see a connection between his son’s condition and the changed atmosphere in his own district in Moravia. His view that the Trottas’ mission in the world could only be imagined as long

as they remained loyal servants of the monarchy blinds him to the real and urgent needs of his own child.

In *RM*, Roth is able to examine the failures of the monarchy with an impartial eye. His critique of the imperial establishment is more prevalent than his nostalgia for the Habsburg world. By showing the rigid conservatism of the Austro-Hungarian army and the strong opposition to reform and innovation inside the imperial bureaucracy, Roth shows reservations with regard to a continued meaningful mission of the Dual Monarchy in Central Europe. In Carl Joseph's gradual estrangement from his father and his emperor Roth presents the drama of a lost mission. However, six years later, he offers the world a different view of the monarchy.

Die Kapuzinergruft (The Emperor's Tomb)

*Die Kapuzinergruft*⁴⁹ represents Roth's swan song. This novel was written in 1938, a sad year for Austria and Europe: Germany occupied and incorporated Austria into the German Greater Reich, while Britain and France, the other great powers of Europe, protested only verbally to the German government, but did nothing else.⁵⁰ The novel conveys Roth's profound disillusionment with the path of European history in the twentieth century. Significant is the fact that, unlike *RM*, this later novel has no father figure. The protagonist's father dies over a year before the outbreak of the First World War, and when Franz Ferdinand Trotta becomes a father himself, he soon declines his parental role. The emperor is mentioned only in passing, and as in *RM*, he is old and overtaken by history. A major part of *KG* unfolds in the interwar period, which gives Roth more material to examine issues of nationalism and to contrast the First Republic of

Austria to the multinational monarchy, as well as to oppose the moral degradation of Europe in the 1930s to the spiritual heights of Europe before the First World War. Roth's vehemence against nationalism is also fertile ground for nostalgia, which becomes a predominant aspect of the narrative.

As in *RM*, in *KG* Roth portrays two families: the Trottas and the multinational family, represented through the friendship triangle of an Austrian, a Slovene, and a Jew. There are three branches of the extended Trotta family in Roth's two novels: the aristocratic, the bourgeois, and the peasant strand. While *RM* focuses on the aristocratic side, *KG* chronicles the destinies of a wealthy young Trotta established in Vienna and his cousin Joseph Branco, the Slovene peasant from Sipolje. The timeframe is the period between the two World Wars, but flashbacks in time carry us to before and during the Great War. Franz Ferdinand Trotta, Joseph Branco, the chestnut roaster, and their Jewish friend, the coachman Manes Reisiger, are stationed at the beginning of the war, like Carl Joseph, on the eastern border of the monarchy, in a town called Zlotogrod. The three men become inseparable friends, but by the end of the war their friendship has been broken beyond reconciliation.

From the start, the narrator, Franz Ferdinand Trotta, establishes the connection to his ancestral village of Sipolje and the Hero of Solferino—who was his grandfather's brother. Only after that does he introduce his own side of the family. In contrast to the Trotta aristocrats, the narrator's father was "a rebel and a patriot"—an interesting paradox of the Dual Monarchy. "Er wollte das Reich reformieren und Habsburg retten [...] Er träumte von einer Monarchie der Österreicher, Ungarn und Slaven" (*KG*, 316).⁵¹ The father leaves the village of Sipolje for America, and after a few years he returns a

rich man and settles down in Vienna, where he founds a Slovenian party. He dies eighteen months before the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, without achieving his dream—a Slav monarchy under the rule of the Habsburgs. He leaves one son behind, whom he makes “[den] Erben seiner Ideen”—the executor of his ideas (*KG*, 316).

When this son, Franz Ferdinand Trotta, returns from the war, many things are different in society and in his personal life. With titles of nobility abolished, many people had lost their name, rank, and position, their money, and their homes. No longer wealthy, Trotta has no means of subsistence, his only inheritance being his mother’s house. His wife works in a workshop of arts and crafts and has a strange relationship to a Hungarian woman, Professor Jolanth Szatmary. For a while Szatmary seems to dictate Elizabeth’s relationship to her husband. Eventually, husband and wife are able to reconnect and live together, and a son is born to them. Over a year later, Szatmary regains control over Elizabeth, who leaves both her husband and son. The Trotta family’s house is turned into a pension. Nine friends from before the war move in—including the Polish Count Chojniki. Franz Ferdinand’s mother dies, and Trotta sends his young son to Paris to be raised as a French citizen. The novel ends with the narrator’s attempted visit to the royal Habsburg family tombs.

i) A look at the multinational family from the center and the periphery

KG starts shortly after the narrator’s father’s death, in 1913, with a visit of the narrator’s cousin Joseph Branco from Sipolje to Vienna. Unlike the grandson of the Hero of Solferino, whose strongest desire is never fulfilled, Franz Ferdinand has visited Sipolje and speaks the language of his forebears. He greets his cousin in Slovenian, which is no

surprise for Joseph Branco, especially since the latter speaks German poorly. But to Franz Ferdinand this is a calculated decision.

The ability to speak Slovenian and a family name are the only commonalities Franz Ferdinand and Joseph Branco share. The Slovenian peasant is dark-haired and his skin is a deep brown from the sun. He seems like “ein Stück einer fernen südlichen Sonne”—a part of some distant and southern sun (*KG*, 317). The same sun had shone on the narrator’s father, remembered as lean and dark, brown and bony, “ein echtes Kind der Sonne”—a true child of the sun (*KG*, 317). But Franz Ferdinand recognizes himself as different, and when he describes himself as fair, he seems to include in this image the young men in the company of whom he spends his nights in Vienna, “die Stiefkinder der Sonne”—the sun’s stepchildren (*KG*, 317).

Roth builds on the contrast between the cousins as the two enjoy their breakfast at Café Magerl. The dark and meridional, lively, healthy, and wide-awake young man refuses a cup of coffee and asks for soup instead (*KG*, 318), at which Franz Ferdinand remembers the custom of the peasants of Sipolje to eat potato soup in the morning. Branco drinks his soup, and never bothers about the spoon: “Ganz diesem dampfenden Teller hingegeben, den er mit starken, schmalen Fingern hochgehoben hielt, bot er den Anblick eines Menschen, dessen Appetit eigentlich eine noble Regung ist und der einen Löffel nur deshalb unberührt läßt, weil es ihm edler erscheint, unmittelbar aus dem Teller zu essen” (*KG*, 318-9).⁵² The two men have nothing more than a name in common. Their education and cultural environment have made them grow wide apart, and when they meet, one cousin feels more Slovenian than Austrian, and the other is more Austrian than Slovenian.

In the encounter between the Trotta cousins Roth constructs a dichotomy between the decadent self-indulging center and the hard-working self-asserting margin of the monarchy. Franz Ferdinand keeps the company of artists and aristocrats, taking pleasure in art and eccentricities. He spends his nights frivolously and during the day he sleeps. On the other side, Joseph Branco has family responsibilities. He has come to Vienna to claim the monetary inheritance his deceased uncle—the narrator’s father—has left him. He will give a small portion of the inheritance to his sister, who will be married soon, and the rest he will put into a small business.

Throughout the novel various protagonists express thoughts and ideas regarding the significance of the monarchy. The narrator has mixed emotions toward the monarch and the empire, perceiving the great complexity of both. Emperor Franz Joseph I is old, alone, and distant and yet at the same time he is “allen nahe und allgegenwärtig im großen bunten Reich” (*KG*, 321).⁵³ And the monarchy is “etwas Größeres, Weiteres, Erhabeneres als nur ein Vaterland” (*KG*, 321).⁵⁴ On a visit to the eastern borderland, the narrator reflects on the great diversity of landscapes and nations ruled by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Unlike Carl Joseph from *RM* who gradually loses the sense of being at home anywhere within the monarchy, Franz Ferdinand maintains the connection to home, whether he lives in Vienna or travels to the southern or eastern provinces. He feels just as much at home in Zlotogrod as he is in Sipolje or Vienna, and he perceives a harmonious working together of differing elements: “Landschaften, Äcker, Nationen, Rassen, Hütten und Kaffeehäuser verschiedenster Art und verschiedenster Abkunft [müssen] dem durchaus natürlichen Gesetz eines starken Geistes unterliegen, der imstande ist, das Entlegene nahe zu bringen, das Fremde verwandt werden zu lassen und

das scheinbar Auseinanderstrebende zu einigen” (*KG*, 339-40).⁵⁵ This is a crucial difference between the protagonists of the two novels: while Carl Joseph’s identification with Haus Habsburg limits his possibility to freely embrace Slovenian ancestry, Franz Ferdinand is able to unite the two major strands of his identity, thus becoming a true son of the multinational family.

The idyllic image of the old empire, which evidently is promoted by the center, is flawed by the reality of life throughout the Crown Lands. Both in *RM* and *KG*, signs of a dysfunctional monarchy can be identified in the workers’ miserable working conditions and the peasants’ grinding poverty. “Seit Jahren husteten die Arbeiter, spuckten Blut, wurden krank und starben in den Spitälern. Aber sie streikten nicht,” observes the narrator of *RM* (164).⁵⁶ Similar to *RM*, there is in *KG* a great contrast between the center and the periphery of the monarchy. Franz Ferdinand’s father, the patriot favoring a Slav Austro-Hungarian state, often pointed out how “das Parlament, der Justizpalast, die Universität, die Bodenkreditanstalt, das Burgtheater, die Hofoper und sogar noch die Polizeidirektion”—the entire imperial capital—“nährte sich ganz deutlich [...] von der tragischen Liebe der Kronländer zu Österreich: der tragischen, weil ewig unerwiderten” (*KG*, 357).⁵⁷ The capital city is like a “brilliant and seductive spider” ceaselessly drawing power, energy, and brilliance from the surrounding Crown Lands (*KG*, 357). Living among aristocrats, the narrator has an insider’s perspective on the great spider’s workings. But his ancestry makes him desire to also acquaint himself with the fate of the poor and disenfranchised across the monarchy, the ones he calls “the open-handed providers of Austria:”

Die Zigeuner der Puszta, die subkarpatischen Huzulen, die jüdischen Fiaker von Galizien, meine eigenen Verwandten, die slowenischen Maronibrater von Sipolje,

die schwäbischen Tabakpflanzer aus der Bacska, die Pferdezüchter der Steppe, die osmanischen Sibersna, jene von Bosnien und Herzegowina, die Pferdehändler aus der Hanakei in Mähren, die Weber aus dem Erzgebirge, die Müller und Korallenhändler aus Podolien: sie alle waren die großmütigen Nährer Österreichs; je ärmer, desto großmütiger. (*KG*, 357)⁵⁸

Franz Ferdinand's perspective is broader than both the spoiled, arrogant, and irresponsible viewpoint of his aristocratic friends or the angry and disillusioned perception of the disadvantaged. By combining the insight of the center with a compassionate understanding of the periphery, the narrator gains some impartiality in his views of the monarchy. But of course, Franz Ferdinand is not a neutral or detached spectator of history, and all his actions are based on a series of social factors or personal decisions that bring him closer or further away from the center.

ii) Appearance against reality

The contrast the narrator creates between center and periphery largely arises from the opposition between truth and lie, appearance and reality. This complex and dynamic dichotomy impacts all relationships in *KG*, whether we examine the relation between mother and son, husband and wife, or the bond between friends. At the center appearances rule supreme and truth is constantly postponed, ignored, unspoken, and suppressed. Conversely, at the periphery, emotions are not an oddity, expressed as they are more freely and sincerely, without the barriers of convention and prejudice.

Two examples eloquently illustrate the propensity of the center toward appearances: first, the conception of love and marriage in high society and, second, family relationships among the wealthy. Having acquainted us with his family's history as well as the society whose company he keeps, Franz Ferdinand Trotta admits his love for Elizabeth Kovacs. She is the sister of a Hungarian baron who often voices an opinion

about his fellow nationals' suffering under the Dual Monarchy. The narrator has no sympathy for Baron Kovacs or his ideas, but he nurtures a secret love for his sister. Yet he dares not express his affection in public, aware that such attitude would only attract his friends' scorn and fuel their sarcasm. In the circle in which Trotta spends his days—or rather his nights—“galt die Liebe als eine Verirrung, ein Verlöbniß war so etwas, wie eine Apoplexie und eine Ehe ein Siechtum” (*KG*, 324).⁵⁹ Looking back upon those days, just before the Great War, the narrator explains, “Es war damals [...] ein höhnischer Hochmut in Schwung, ein eitles Bekenntnis zur sogenannten ‘Dekadenz’, zu einer halb gespielten und outrierten Müdigkeit und einer Gelangweiltheit ohne Grund. [...] In dieser Atmosphäre, hatten Gefühle kaum einen Platz” (*KG*, 324).⁶⁰ For the frivolous and world-weary Viennese society, to establish a relation to a woman that is not based on “arrogant decadence,” short-lived, and entirely dedicated to the gratification of the senses is like betraying some sacred principles.

The conviction that love must always be concealed and feelings never shared is carried over into the maternal relationship. Franz Ferdinand's rapport to his mother has nothing true or spontaneous about it; it is a feeble attempt to ape the attitude of other young men to their own mothers (*KG*, 325). The idea of “a real mother” was inconceivable in their circle, and their own was “eine Art von Brutstätten, denen sie ihre Gereiftheit und ihr Leben zu verdanken hatten, oder, im besten Fall, so etwas, wie heimatliche Landschaften, in denen man zufallsmäßig zur Welt gekommen ist und denen man nichts anderes mehr widmet, als ein Gedanken und eine Rührung” (*KG*, 326).⁶¹ The thought that he could speak to his mother about Elizabeth crosses Franz Ferdinand's mind briefly, but he suppresses it. He had dreaded his mother ever since he was a boy,

and they had never had a conversation that did not entail a prescribed code of conduct. He couldn't possibly admit his true feelings to her.

Similar to the paternal rapport in *RM*, the relationship between Franz Ferdinand and his mother is fraught with rigid convention that thwarts affection and endorses artificiality and disingenuousness. This does not mean that Roth's parent protagonists are callous, unfeeling individuals. On the contrary, the need and capacity for love are present in them as much as in anyone else. Franz Ferdinand observes that his mother was certainly capable of overwhelming love for him, but the manifestation of maternal affection was much reduced. "Sie liebte den Sohn ihres Mannes, nicht ihr Kind. Sie war eine Frau. Ich war der Erbe ihres Geliebten; seinen Lenden schicksalhaft entsprossen; ihrem Schoß nur zufällig" (*KG*, 362).⁶²

Habsburg society in Roth's chronicles is highly patriarchal: men are the real agents of history, whereas women are mere objects of fate. As such, women's destiny is fulfilled only in association with men and through their benevolence. In *RM* women are mentioned fleetingly and die prematurely. They either give birth to an only son, relinquishing the role of educator to the father, or they die in childbirth. The fact that Franz Ferdinand's mother loved him as her husband's son exemplifies a deep-set practice that permitted women to cultivate only so much love for their children without upsetting the patriarchal order. Franz Ferdinand's mother never questions this order.

When, shortly before his departure to war, the mother offers her son the gift of his father's portrait, the young Trotta is struck by the strangeness of the framed face. Never in his life has Franz Ferdinand seen his father look so alien, but to his mother the man in the portrait is "beloved and familiar." An obvious difference in appearance between

father and son is suggested: the father has black, almost fanatical eyes; the son is fair and blue-eyed, and his gaze is skeptical, “sad and knowing.” He has never had “the eyes of a believer and fanatic” (*KG*, 362), but his mother opines without hesitation that Franz Ferdinand looks just like his father. On the same occasion, the narrator depicts the custom in his family of praising the food, even when the dish does not turn out well. The subject of food could occupy the entire meal. It is through such examples that the image of a society fixed firmly within the walls of unalterable laws, customs, and practices, virtues and disadvantages takes form. The world of the Trottas is highly symbolic. Intimacy, spontaneity, and familiarity in relationships are banished. Instead, measured, calculated, deliberate speech patterns and actions become symbolic of rank and position in society. When such rigidity descends to the level of the family, it becomes damaging insincerity.

Franz Ferdinand recognizes the debilitating effects of a world of appearances and no content. With the shadow of death looming large over the Habsburg world, he decides to join the Thirty-Fifth regiment in Eastern Galicia, where his cousin Joseph Branco, the chestnut roaster, and his friend Manes Reisiger, the Jewish coachman, serve in the imperial army. The news of war determines Trotta to act out of feeling and not convention. He bids farewell to his aristocratic friends, who are puzzled by his departure. But he prefers to die with those he cares for than with “Walzer-Tänzern”—a lot of waltzers in uniform (*KG*, 358). He deems his decision “romantic,” based on feeling, not calculation. Franz Ferdinand acts in truth, motivated by affection:

Nun, weit davon entfernt, mich etwa ihrer zu schämen, bestehe ich heute noch darauf, daß mir diese Zeit meines Lebens der romantischen Vorstellungen, die Wirklichkeit näher gebracht haben als die seltenen unromantischen, die ich mir gewaltsam aufzwingen mußte: Wie töricht sind doch diese überkommenen Bezeichnungen! Will man sie schon gelten lassen—nun wohl: ich glaube, immer beobachtet zu haben, daß der sogenannte realistische Mensch in der Welt

unzugänglich dasteht, wie eine Ringmauer aus Zement und Beton und der sogenannte romantische wie ein offener Garten, in dem die Wahrheit nach Belieben ein- und ausgeht... (*KG*, 359)⁶³

Like his cousin from *RM*, Franz Ferdinand associates the eastern borderland with the idea of home. For Carl Joseph, his orderly Onufrij's native land at the border with Russia is at first like a sister to the village of Sipolje on the southern periphery of the monarchy. But his real experience of the borderland spoils the idyllic image and arrests his homesickness. Carl Joseph becomes homeless at the same time that he loses his longing for home. Franz Ferdinand's experience of the periphery is different: he feels as much at home in Zlotogrod as anywhere else in the monarchy, whether Sipolje, Muglitz, Brunn, or Café Wimmerl in Vienna. The land is not a hostile treacherous ground for strangers (*RM*), but gives the impression of courage and freedom from care (*KG*, 340). What in *RM* was a town without a name now is called Zlotogrod.

The image of Manes Reisiger as if ascending from prehistoric times—" [m]it seinem gewaltigen schwarzen Vollbart, gerade gegenüber der eben aufgehenden Sonne, in seinem groben Leinen" (*KG*, 342)⁶⁴—is a powerful contrast to the weary half-assumed decadence of the center. He reminds Franz Ferdinand of "an Urwald, Urmensch [...] verwirrt und verspätet" (*KG*, 342).⁶⁵ Trotta remembers the Jewish coachman taking off his shirt and washing himself at the fountain: "Er pustete gewaltig dabei, spie, kreischte, jauchzte fast, es war wahrhaftig wie ein Einbruch der Vorwelt in die Nachwelt" (*KG*, 342).⁶⁶ The prehistoric animal is wild, unconstrained, and ingenuous; he does not bother himself with customs of rank, even if it is the military discipline he flouts. When the young lieutenant Trotta, just arrived at the Thirty-Fifth regiment, sends for his friends, he has no idea what reception awaits him. The unembarrassed Jewish coachman,

disregarding all military procedures, throws himself on Trotta's neck in an outburst of happy emotion. The warmth and tenderness of this "primitive" and robust man amaze Trotta and make him briefly forget the military etiquette.

Reisiger's Jewishness, which Roth describes as "primitive" and "anachronistic," and in great contrast to everything "modern," reveals a fundamental difference between a tribe and a nation, as Prague-born Erich Kahler (1885-1970) points out: "a *tribe* is an ethnic group that has evolved out of and with its proper religion and *before* the development of a world religion, or out of its reach. A *nation* is an ethnic group that came into being *after* the development and under the aegis of a world religion, as did France, England, Russia, and other countries" (Kahler, 10).⁶⁷ Historian William Johnston mentions "the archaic kind of unity" that Jews have maintained throughout time "owing to their tribal religion" (24), and which has helped them survive the process of assimilation to any culture, including the Austro-Hungarian society. This idea also comes across in Roth's characterization of Manes Reisiger, who seems to be bound to a tribal, pre-modern community of fate. Although Reisiger is now enrolled as an Austrian soldier in the Thirty-Fifth regiment of the Austro-Hungarian army, his appearance and personality strongly suggest that he has held on to his people's ancient traditions and rituals. Referring to the Jewish immigrant population in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century, Hilde Spiel mentions the poorer Jews who lived in the second district of the city, and who were most adamant to hold on to their culture; they were "utterly foreign, archaic-looking figures in their caftans, felt hats, beards and ringlets [...] often uncouth but just as often highly imaginative and scholarly immigrants" (51).

Similar to his treatment of Reisinger's Jewishness, Roth once again confronts the center with its Other in the image of Joseph Branco. Just as in *RM*, two peripheries are manifest, but their character is somewhat changed. In *KG*, Sipolje is not the idyllic space that grows from Trotta's imagination. Joseph Branco makes it real—there are hardships that make a father depart from the family for half a year. And yet, the beauty and strength of this village, which Carl Joseph has dreamed of so often, reappears in the descriptions of the Slovenian woman. When Franz Ferdinand, oddly wed, cannot produce the picture of his wife to introduce Elizabeth to his friends, Joseph Branco draws from his pocket the picture of his own wife. A beautiful, proud, and voluptuous woman dressed in Slovenian folk costume stares at them. Her arms are bare and strong and her hands rest on her hips. “Das ist die Mutter meines Kindes, es ist ein Sohn!” says Joseph Branco (*KG*, 373).⁶⁸ When he is asked whether he is married, Branco replies that he will marry the mother of his ten-year old upon his return from the war.

Another difference grows out of this situation, which continues to reflect on the center-margin, appearance-sincerity dichotomies. Previously, Franz Ferdinand could not share his feelings for the woman he loved with his Viennese friends, afraid of their mockery and sarcasm. Love was “an aberration” for them and marriage “an incurable disease” (*KG*, 324). Only the fear of death makes him go against prejudice and marry Elizabeth, but no one besides the immediate families attend the short ceremony. And what happens next? In the nineteen hours the newlyweds spend together, they hardly communicate: on the train Elizabeth reads a German comic novel, which Franz Ferdinand finds disgusting, and at the hotel in Baden, an unfortunate event—the death of Jacques, the devoted family butler who had joined their trip—inexplicably separates the two.

While Franz Ferdinand is at Jacques' deathbed, Elizabeth writes a farewell letter to her husband and departs. So ends the prewar chapter of their love story, which leaves the narrator in doubt about his wife's affections as well as his own. A certain malaise pervades this relationship before and after the war, when Franz Ferdinand finds his wife engaged in a relationship with a lesbian. On the contrary, Joseph Branco has not the slightest hesitation regarding his relationship to a woman he has lived with for over ten years. Their love and companionship do not need a social agreement to endorse them. And neither is war an incentive for Joseph Branco and his wife to give their relationship a different meaning. The woman he will marry after the war, Joseph Branco informs his companions, has been his wife all the years they have spent together. Marriage, in their case, is not a rushed decision in the face of death, but an achievement brought about by lasting love. For Branco marriage is not a performative act,⁶⁹ but a continuous interplay unfolding between a man and a woman.

iii) “No more chestnuts without a visa:” from supranationality to national states

The triangle of friendship of Trotta, Branco, and Reisiger feeds into the last remnants of imperial cohesion—the ideal of supranationality. The friendship breaks down without an evident reason during the three friends' deportation to Siberia. Bizarrely and without explanation, Branco and Manes are at each other's throats. Their conflict intensifies until the man in whose house they have taken refuge asks them to leave. Franz Ferdinand, embittered by their attitude, never tries to reconcile them. But their brawl does not prevent the Slovene and the Jew to unite on their journey back to East Galicia (Poland, after the war) and Slovenia. From a historical point of view, a new era begins. In

RM, Roth shows how internal contradictions tear apart the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

In *KG*, the centrifugal forces are not only generated internally, but are also influenced and prompted by relationships of power outside the empire. That is why in this second novel interethnic unity and friendship, or the idea of supranationality, collapse in the context of the Siberian wasteland:

Zum erstenmal, obwohl ich vor der Heftigkeit meiner damals geliebten Menschen erschrocken war, traf mich auch eine jähe Einsicht; ich kann wohl sagen, sie habe mich getroffen, von außen her gleichsam: die Einsicht nämlich, daß ich nicht mehr zu ihnen gehörte. Ein ohnmächtiger Schiedsrichter stand ich vor ihnen, nicht mehr ihr Freund, und, obwohl ich mir darüber im klaren war, daß der Wahn der Wüste sie ergriffen hatte, glaubte ich doch daran, daß ich gegen ihn bestimmt gefeit wäre. (*KG*, 378)⁷⁰

The story of the three friends, tailored onto the end of the monarchy and the rise of Central and Eastern European nation-states, is symbolic of the collapse of an existing alliance and the birth of new partnerships. At the beginning of the war, Joseph Branco, Manes Reisinger, and Franz Ferdinand are united in what Roth describes as a sincere friendship, though the Slovene peasant and the Jewish coachman show no eagerness to die for the imperial cause. What seems to count from their perspective is not their sacrifice for their fatherland but their togetherness. Roth is silent on further reasons and no signs of patriotism are visible in his pages. In *Vienna's Golden Autumn*, Spiel observes that at first even the Slavs went to war to fight for the monarchy, but the reason she invokes is “a sense of adventure after so many tranquil decades” (198). The bond that united the Crown Lands under the rule of one Supreme and Apostolic Monarch provided enough cause and purpose to last through the initial stage of the war. When the imperial cause becomes evidently meaningless, and the spirit of adventure dies down, nothing holds “the mighty black and yellow web” together anymore (*KG*, 357).⁷¹ Franz

Ferdinand's platoon, mostly on the defensive, has fought one battle when Russian Cossacks defeat them and take them all prisoners. The journey through Siberia and back to Europe extends over a few years, and the next time we encounter Manes and Branco in Vienna, many things have changed.

Manes is under a deportation order and carries a forged passport given to him by his son, Ephraim Reisiger. Ephraim, once believed by his father to be a musical prodigy, is now editor of the communist newspaper *The Red Flag*. “‘Er braucht keine Musik mehr,’ antwortete Manes Reisiger, der Fiaker, ‘er macht die Revolution’” (KG, 417).⁷² Zlotogrod no longer exists, destroyed by war, but a new Zlotogrod is now in Poland. Of the Galician Jews, Spiel notes that they had fled the Russian soldiers, left the successor states, and swelled the numbers of Vienna's inhabitants (212). In the late 1930s these new inhabitants were again departing for fear of Nazi persecution.

As for Branco, he continues to sell baked apples and chestnuts, but he is visibly upset and cynical about the fact that he needs a visa for each country he passes through. “‘Jetzt gibts keine Maroni mehr, ohne Visum,’”⁷³ adds Count Chojniki who defines Branco's trade as symbolic of the old monarchy. “‘Dieser Herr hat seine Kastanien überall verkauft, in der halben europäischen Welt, kann man sagen. Überall, wo immer man seine gebratenen Maroni gegessen hat, war Österreich, regierte Franz Joseph’” (KG, 418).⁷⁴ Of the previous friendship Roth has nothing more to say. However, he strongly infers that the multiethnic triangle of friendship represented by Trotta, Manes, and Branco could only exist in the framework of the multinational monarchy. The structure of the nation could not support it. Austria and the successor states had gone from “being close, if sullen [...] to foreign and unfriendly neighbors” (Spiel, 207).

The fact that Joseph Branco cannot sell his chestnuts without an entry visa reflects the new geopolitical divisions of Europe after WWI. Formerly, Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Galicia, and all other lands of Cisleithania and Transleithania⁷⁵ were open for the chestnut roaster's business. He was a Slovene but always also an Austrian and it was no surprise for his friends on the eastern side of the monarchy to see him every fall. Through Joseph Branco before the war Roth shows how the idea of unity in Austria-Hungary was also based on the fact that from an economic point of view the empire made sense.

In the last pages of his novel, Roth gives us the perspective of the homeless, the disillusioned and dispossessed. The existential mood that prevailed in Austria after the collapse of the monarchy was, according to historian Norbert Leser, that of a “‘reduction shock’.” In his view, Spiel explains, people's state of mind resembled that of “‘a family, unexpectedly evicted from a roomy apartment, who are forced all of a sudden to go on living under impossibly cramped conditions’” (207).⁷⁶ Roth renders this reduction shock in terms of a crisis of identity and belonging. Count Chojnicki's brother, inmate of a hospice, finds it totally ridiculous to be told that he is Polish. Of course he is Polish, he always was, but let him also be an Austrian. He is outraged by those who pretend to know better than himself who he is. He finds it detestable that someone could redefine identity every time borders shifted.

What determines Franz Ferdinand Trotta to reject the center and to embrace the periphery at the beginning of the war resembles his motives at the end of the war to return to the devastated center. His rejection of hypocrisy and affirmation of sincerity play into his decision not to forget the imperial past in the construction of the national present.

In his lecture “What is a Nation?” delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882, Ernest Renan claims that nations come into being through a collective agreement on what to remember and what to forget. Similar to Renan, Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an act of volition, a more or less conscious resolve to invent itself—its people and their history. Through the political conversations at Café Wimmerl, among the formerly aristocratic group, Roth emphasizes precisely this aspect of invention of a new Austria. When Count Chojnicki joins his friends at a coffee-house in Vienna—often a place for ideological exchange—he shares his brother’s resentment of the existing Austrian state: “‘Österreich ist kein Staat, keine Heimat, keine Nation. Es ist eine Religion. Die Klerikalen und klerikalen Trottel, die jetzt regieren, machen eine sogenannte Nation aus uns; aus uns, die wir eine Übernation sind, die einzige Über-nation, die in der Welt existiert hat’” (*KG*, 422).⁷⁷ In the nostalgic even reactionary attitude of Roth’s protagonists, a dichotomy arises between *true old* Austria and *Ersatz* Austria,⁷⁸ between the multinational empire sanctioned by divine authority and what Roth’s protagonists regard as a shrunken artificial nation-state.

But the real conflict is not between one Austria and another. It lies, according to Count Chojnicki, in the twilight of a myth that invested Austria with a European mission unlike any other state. It lies in the rupture of tradition and continuity, a break that made it impossible for some to regain a meaningful identity in the new political context. Roth’s narrator falls in this category. A combination of frustration in his personal life and disillusionment in the Austrian government steer Franz Ferdinand Trotta toward a state he calls “erbitterte Ruhe”—embittered tranquility (*KG*, 427), an absolute apathy toward life. Although he continues to visit Café Wimmerl, he withdraws into his own universe,

hearing almost nothing from his friends' political conversations. All ties are broken for Franz Ferdinand: no family, no home, and no country offer him refuge. With the family assets lost in the War Loan, Trotta's means are substantially reduced and the family barely survives. Unlike Franz Ferdinand, Elizabeth shows a remarkable entrepreneurial aptitude and adapts reasonably well to the new economy. Nevertheless, her love life conveys all the confusion, uncertainty, and alienation of her generation, and the choices she makes do not extend her any emotional stability. When a child is born to the Trottas, both mother and father decline their roles as parents. Weary of motherhood and marriage, the mother embarks on a career as an actress and returns to her former lover, Jolanth Szatmary. As for Franz Ferdinand, he sends his son to Paris to his friend Laveraville, turning down the role of educator, which every father of the Trotta family had fulfilled. He exiles his own son as well as himself. With this, the Trotta dynasty ends. Similar to the aristocratic Trotta lineage in *RM*, the Trottas of *KG* could not survive outside the imperial framework. Roth reinforces the idea that all the Trottas, even those who had been sharp and observant to identify the inherent contradictions of the former empire, belonged to what Zweig called the world of yesterday. Their critique of the monarchy did not turn them into opponents to or outsiders of the system. Their opposition to the monarchy stopped short of the supranational ideal. The only Trottas who survived were probably the Slovenian Trottas, but Roth does not follow that line.

In the context of new Austria, Franz Ferdinand is an exile from among the living. His gesture is not only nostalgic but also reactionary. "Ich war ausgeschaltet; ausgeschaltet war ich. Ausgeschaltet unter den Lebendigen bedeutet so etwas Ähnliches wie: exterritorial. Ein Exterritorialer war ich eben unter den Lebenden" (*KG*, 427).⁷⁹

Etymologically, extraterritoriality means being outside a given territory. In this novel, becoming extraterritorial involves both an action on the part of the nation-state to differentiate itself from all that is foreign as well as a refusal on the part of the individual to participate in the newly created body politic. The predicative adjective “ausgeschaltet” poignantly suggests the double action of becoming an outsider, either by the power of a sovereign authority or by personal choice, elimination or self-elimination. Roth is more interested in the latter aspect of extraterritoriality, insisting on the narrator’s refusal to extend his recognition to the nation-state as the new platform for identity construction. “[I]ch hatte für mich beschlossen, seit langem schon, seit der Heimkehr aus dem Kriege schon, sie nicht zu unterscheiden und sie nicht zu erkennen” (*KG*, 428).⁸⁰ The reference here is to the new military uniforms; metonymically, they suggest the new political establishment, which Trotta refuses to acknowledge.

In the penultimate scene of the novel, Franz Ferdinand is paying his usual visit to the Lindhammer coffee house. Though he never hides his apathy toward the events of the day, Franz Ferdinand is struck by the strange appearance of a young officer, just arrived on the threshold of the coffee house. The officer’s cap reminds him of a bedpan or a caricature of the old Austro-Hungarian caps. “Ich war ferne der Welt und der Hölle, die sie für mich darstellte, keineswegs geeignet, die neuen Mützen und Uniformen zu unterscheiden, geschweige denn, sie zu erkennen” (*KG*, 427).⁸¹ Disturbed in his lack of concern, Trotta hears the news of Austria’s Anschluss: “Die Regierung ist gestürzt. Eine neue deutsche Volksregierung ist vorhanden!” (*KG*, 428).⁸² When Franz Ferdinand maintains that he lacked the knowledge and desire to recognize the new uniforms, he implicitly denies his recognition of the current government.

Franz Ferdinand, whom the coffee house proprietor addresses as “Herr Baron,” more than a decade after nobility titles were abolished in Austria, avows from the first page of the novel his opposition to the present. Roth seems to have created in his last Trotta an image of himself. At the time of the Anschluss, Roth was an exile in Paris, his only refuge being his friends, writing, and alcohol. Critics have noted that *KG* was written in response to Austria’s loss of independence. Like his narrator/protagonist, Roth was deeply disappointed in the course of European history, especially since the rise of fascism. But Germany was not the only cause for his disillusionment. In an essay on Roth and the Habsburg Myth, Philip Manger addresses Roth’s change in political conviction from the political left to the conservative, reactionary right, which happened during his travels in Russia. Roth became disenchanted with the revolutionary cause and discovered himself to be a humanist, a man of the Renaissance (46).⁸³

This shift in conviction is noticeable from *RM* to *KG*. In the first of these two novels, Roth is creator and observer (Bronsen); a deep understanding of the old world with all its frailties, inner contradictions, and strengths pervades the pages of *RM*. Roth is critical of the traditions and norms that “have degenerated into ritual forms without content, and prevent[ed] human relationships” (Manger, 54). The destiny of the young lieutenant Trotta demonstrates the urgency of social and political change within Habsburg society. The creator and observer may be sympathetic and partially nostalgic, but his criticism is poignant, and Roth’s liberal perspective wins out; a new form of government calls for a chance. Six years later, with the publication of *KG*, Roth’s assessment of old Austria takes a different route. The faults and weaknesses of empire

continue to inform its breakdown, but the gist of the narrative tends to subsume everything to what was lost rather than what could have been done.

Through Franz Ferdinand Trotta, Roth communicates the idea that an essential part of his identity remains forever tied to the old monarchy. What Bronsen observes in his biography of Joseph Roth about the narrator of *RM* is also valid for the storyteller in *KG*. “Der Erzähler des Romans gebärdet sich als Miterlebender, Anteilnehmender und Überlebender einer versunkenen Zeit, mit der er seelisch nicht fertig wird” (398).⁸⁴ His opposition to modern Austria manifests itself through a reactionary attitude; he gradually removes himself from society into a self-imposed extraterritoriality. Fascinating is the fact that Roth does not allow his last Trotta to appear as a victim. His extraterritoriality is not based on victim-hood; the issue here at stake is not so much that the nation-state does not extend its recognition to him as a rightful citizen. On the contrary, Franz Ferdinand’s refusal to participate in the life of modern Austria rests on the fact that he perceives his identity and understands his role in the world only as a citizen of the multinational monarchy, to which all Trottas belong. The fact that he has survived the fall of the monarchy appears to him puzzling and meaningless.

Sah ich mich doch seit langem schon, seit der Heimkehr aus dem Krieg, als einen zu Unrecht Lebenden an! Hatte ich mich doch längst schon daran gewöhnt, alle Ereignisse, die von den Zeitungen ‘historische’ genannt werden, mit dem gerechten Blick eines nicht mehr zu dieser Welt Gehörenden zu betrachten! Ich war lange schon ein vom Tode auf unbeschränkte Zeit Beurlaubter! Und er, der Tod, konnte jede Sekunde meinen Urlaub unterbrechen. Was gingen mich noch die Dinge dieser Welt an?... (*KG*, 426)⁸⁵

The young officer’s announcement of the fascist regime in Austria is followed by the immediate departure from the Lindhammer Café of all the evening’s guests. Trotta, as if already departed a long time ago, suddenly discovers himself alone in the coffee house.

“Einen Augenblick später blieb ich, nein, fand ich mich allein. Ich fand mich tatsächlich allein, und es war mir einen Augenblick so, als ob ich mich tatsächlich lange selbst gesucht und mich selbst überraschend allein gefunden hätte” (*KG*, 428).⁸⁶ Like a long-departed visitor from history, who in odd ways has survived his own departure, Trotta has now returned to discover how strangely different the world has become from the moment he stepped out of it.

Trotta’s extraterritoriality also has legal implications. In legal discourse extraterritoriality refers to diplomatic immunity. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, extraterritoriality is “the privilege accorded by the *Law of Nations* to ambassadors of being regarded as outside the territory of the power to which they are sent, and therefore of being free from its jurisdiction.”⁸⁷ Of major importance for international law, the concept of extraterritoriality as diplomatic immunity lies at the foundation of diplomacy itself. But the term can also denote “the right of jurisdiction of a country over its nationals abroad.” If in the metaphorical sense Trotta is extraterritorial, according to the legal definition he cannot be so. Being extraterritorial in a legal sense implies the existence of a legal authority that can grant this status. But the House of Austria, which continues to inform the narrator’s identity, is not a valid legal jurisdiction anymore and so cannot grant him the privilege of extraterritoriality. Austria-Hungary is outside the legal and the living. Neither can the nation extend this privilege to Franz Ferdinand because he does not recognize its state. Situated in a gap between empire and nation, the metaphorically extraterritorial cannot be legally extraterritorial. As such, Trotta is vulnerable. Not recognizing the nation for what it is does not mean that Trotta can remain exempt from its jurisdiction, and especially not during the period of National

Socialism. Paradoxically, his safest refuge is among the dead. The novel closes with a question for which there is no answer: “‘Wohin soll ich jetzt, ein Trotta?’ ...” (*KG*, 430).⁸⁸ Alone in a world that has no place for him, the narrator ruminates on the past and the wasteland that lies ahead.

In the destiny of the Trotta family, Roth represents both the apocalypse of the multinational monarchy and the crisis of identity of The First Republic of Austria in the aftermath of the imperial collapse. In both novels, historical crises find expression in the realm of the family in such a way that the family becomes a receptacle of, and a perspective on, imperial conservatism and inertia, as well as on the fragile multinational unity and cohesion that the former empire had tried to uphold. In both novels, and predominantly in *KG*, Roth expresses nostalgia for the loss of the Dual Monarchy, which in his view had represented a factor of stability in East-Central Europe. In *RM* he looks critically at and deconstructs the metaphor of the monarchy as a great family of nations, but in *KG* Roth deeply regrets the impossibility to reimagine that metaphor in the political climate of Europe in the 1930s.

Notes

¹ “‘Your present always carries a very heavy weight of unprocessed past ... What is the natural consequence of this – ? – That even the healthiest and most flourishing moments of your now will be flawed with a scent of decay – and the atmosphere of the present will be poisoned past recovery ... And within yourself you feel this eternal confusion of past, present and later ...’” (my translation). Arthur Schnitzler, *Die Dramatischen Werke* (Frankfurt am Main, 1962), 1:83, quoted in David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth: Eine Biographie* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1974), 28.

² A prolific Austrian political journalist and novelist of Jewish origin, Roth was born in Brody, Galicia, now Ukraine, on September 2, 1894. He grew up during the last decades of Austria-Hungary in a

richly diverse cultural environment, among Austrian, Yiddish, Polish, and Ukrainian-speaking communities. He studied at the Universities of Lemberg and Vienna. Between 1916 and 1918 Roth was involved in the war, primarily with the military press corps. After the war he started a career as a journalist in Vienna, and after 1925 he traveled for extensive periods to France, Italy, Albania, Poland, and the USSR. From 1923 to 1932 he was a correspondent for *Frankfurter Zeitung*. The last years of his life were spent in exile in France. He published his first novels, *Hotel Savoy* and *Die Rebellion*, in 1924, and continued writing and publishing other works of fiction—*Die Flucht ohne Ende*, *Hiob*, *Tarabas*, *Die Kapuzinergruft*, and others—until his death on May 27, 1939. His best known novel is *Radetzky Marsch* (1932).

³ Ian Reifowitz, “Nationalism, Modernity, and Multinational Austria in the Works of Joseph Roth,” in *Austria in Literature*, ed. Donald G. Daviau (Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, 2000), 120.

⁴ The concept of the Habsburg myth is largely associated with the lengthy study of the Italian Germanist Claudio Magris, *Der Habsburgische Mythos in der Österreichischen Literatur* (Salzburg 1966). According to William M Johnston, prominent scholar of modern Austrian thought, Magris shows how after 1918 Austrian writers “mourned the prewar fragility as if it had embellished a paradise. The myth of Habsburg beneficence beguiled former devotees of Young Vienna like Bahr and Hofmannsthal, who after the war apotheosized the fallen realm” (Johnston, 32). Magris offers many valuable insights, but his analysis fails to define the term myth or differentiate between psychoanalytical, Marxian, or literary meanings. Thus, in Johnston’s view, Magris shows a certain degree of bias when he underscores the Austrian illusions and like Musil and Roth is tempted “to construe the history of Austria-Hungary as a tale of decay” (32). In his own study, *The Austrian Mind* (1972), Johnston attempts to redress Magris’s bias “by stressing forces of cohesion rather than of dissolution” (32).

⁵ “Everything in our almost thousand-year-old Austrian monarchy seemed based on permanency and the State itself was the chief guarantor of this stability.” Stefan Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern: Erinnerungen eines Europäers* (Berlin: G. B. Fischer, 1968), 13.

⁶ “Each one of us, even the smallest and the most insignificant, has been shaken in the depths of his being by the almost unceasing volcanic eruptions of our European earth . . . Never . . . has any generation experienced such a moral retrogression from such a spiritual height as our generation has.” Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography* (New York: The Viking Press, 1943), v-vi.

⁷ Carl Jacob Burckhardt (1891-1974) was a Swiss diplomat, essayist, and historian. In 1937 he was appointed as High Commissioner of the Free City of Danzig for the League of Nations and after the Second World War, he became Swiss ambassador to France. The correspondence between Burckhardt and Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929) offers valuable insights into the last ten years of Hofmannsthal’s life, but also perceptive observations on German and French literature, French history, and world-politics of the twenties.

⁸ ““Everything in our generation is separation. Those who will come after will find it easier, the best will have been forgotten”” (my translation).

⁹ ““The beautiful and marvelous of old Austria, the last universal state [...] were revealed to us rather later, after the collapse, than during the war”” (my translation).

¹⁰ M. W. Swales, review of *Der Habsburgische Mythos in der Österreichischen Literatur*, by Claudio Magris, *The Modern Language Review* 64, no. 1 (January 1969): 230.

¹¹ A year after the completion of *The Emperor’s Tomb*, Roth died in Paris, of alcoholism and deeply disappointed in the course of European history and politics.

¹² Joseph Roth, *Radetzky Marsch*, vol. 1 of *Joseph Roth Werke in Drei Bänden* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1956), 5. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel as *The Radetzky March* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1995). The German title is cited in text as *RM* and the English translation as *TRM*.

¹³ “as if his own life had been traded for a new and alien life manufactured in a workshop [...] he felt he had been sentenced to wear another man’s boots for life and walk across a slippery ground” (*TRM*, 3).

¹⁴ “in the hard German of army Slavs” (*Ibid.*, 5).

¹⁵ “by the grace of Fate and Emperor” (*Ibid.*, 5).

¹⁶ “Captain Trotta was severed from the long procession of his Slavic peasant forebears” (*Ibid.*, 6).

¹⁷ Laxenburg is situated 15 km south of Vienna. The castle and its beautiful grounds used to be a preferred residence of the imperial family during spring and summer.

¹⁸ “feeding the swans, trimming the hedges, guarding the springtime forsythias and then the elderberry bushes against unauthorized, thievish hands, and, in the mild nights, shooing homeless lovers from the benevolent darkness of benches” (*TRM*, 3).

¹⁹ Homi Bhabha, “The World and the Home,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 445.

²⁰ “[b]ack home they lived in dwarfed huts, making their wives fertile by night and their fields by day. White and high, the snow piled around their huts in winter. Yellow and high, the grain billowed around their hips in summer. They were peasants. Peasants! And the Trotta dynasty had lived no differently! No differently!” (*TRM*, 61).

²¹ “[a] lovely village, a good village! He would have given his whole career as an officer for it” (*Ibid.*, 60).

²² William M. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History, 1848-1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 50.

²³ “He was an Austrian, a servant and official of the Habsburgs, and his homeland was the Imperial Palace in Vienna. [...] He was a district captain. In his bailiwick, he represented the Apostolic Majesty. He wore the gold collar, the cocked hat, and the sword. He did not wish to push a plow across the fertile Slovenian soil. The decisive letter to his son contained the words: *Fate has turned our family of frontier peasants into an Austrian dynasty. That is what we shall remain*” (*TRM*, 125-26).

²⁴ “His nose and mouth, when the district captain spoke, were more like wind instruments than facial features. Aside from the lips, nothing moved in his face” (*Ibid.*, 26).

²⁵ “as an insignia demonstrating his fealty to Franz Joseph I, as proof of his dynastic conviction” (*Ibid.*, 26).

²⁶ “But it seemed more,” Roth explains, “as if he wanted to show the rest of the household how to rise, stand, and walk without relinquishing immobility” (*Ibid.*, 27).

²⁷ “The grandson’s curiosity constantly focused on his grandfather’s blurring figure and vanished fame. Sometimes, on still afternoons [...] Carl Joseph would climb on a chair and view his grandfather’s portrait up close. [...] The dead man revealed nothing; the boy learned nothing” (*Ibid.*, 33).

²⁸ “Carl Joseph’s memory clung to this portrait as the sole and final emblem bequeathed to him by the long line of his unknown forebears. He was their offspring. Since joining the regiment he felt he was his grandfather’s grandson, not his father’s son; indeed he was the son of his strange grandfather” (*Ibid.*, 61).

²⁹ Hilde Spiel, *Vienna's Golden Autumn 1866-1938* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 18.

³⁰ "A lot of peoples might exist, but no nations" (*TRM*, 228).

³¹ "It was the last of all the monarchy's stations; nevertheless, it too displayed two pairs of glittering rails ribboning uninterruptedly into the core of the empire" (*Ibid.*, 130).

³² David Bronsen and other critics have opined that Roth created the image of the borderland town in *The Radetzky March* after his native place, Brody.

³³ "The people in this area were the spawn of the swamps. For the swamps lay incredibly widespread across the entire face of the land, on both sides of the highway, with frogs, fever germs, and treacherous grass that could be a horrible lure into a horrible death for innocent wanderers unfamiliar with the terrain" (*TRM*, 128).

³⁴ "All the stones, millions of stones, were swallowed up by the insatiable ground" (*Ibid.*, 129).

³⁵ "Any stranger coming to this region was doomed to gradual decay. No one was as strong as the swamp. No one could hold out against the borderland. By this time, the high-placed gentlemen in Vienna and St. Petersburg were already starting to prepare for the Great War. The borderlanders felt it coming earlier than the others" (*Ibid.*, 129).

³⁶ *k. und k.* stands for *kaiserlich und königlich*, meaning imperial and royal. Franz Joseph I was Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary.

³⁷ "The shopkeepers left their shops, the idle café patrons their tables, the town policemen their customary beats, and the farmers, coming from the villages and bringing fresh produce to the market place, their horses and wagons" (*TRM*, 59).

³⁸ "The officers, nonaristocrats mostly and from a German-speaking background, had been stationed in this garrison for years and years; it had become both their home and their fate. Cut off from their homeland customs, from their German mother tongue (which had become an officialese here), at the mercy of the unending bleakness of the swamps, they fell prey to gambling and to the sharp schnapps distilled in this area and sold under the label 180 Proof. From the harmless mediocrity in which military school and traditional drilling had trained them, they skittered into the corruption of this land, with the vast breath of the huge hostile czarist empire blowing across it" (*Ibid.*, 131).

³⁹ "uniformed winds in military formations, rac[ing] around on the mercuric ponies of their homeland steppes, swinging their lances over their fur caps like lightning streaks on long wooden poles" (*Ibid.*, 132).

⁴⁰ "Lieutenant Trotta didn't realize that his gait was unsteady, his blouse had stains, his trousers had no pleat, buttons were missing from his shirt, his skin was yellow in the evening and ashen in the morning, and his gaze had no goal" (*Ibid.*, 167).

⁴¹ "Impious, derisive, fearless, and without qualms, Chojnicki used to say that the Kaiser was mindless and senile, the government a gang of nincompoops, the Imperial Council a gathering of gullible and grandiloquent idiots, and the national authorities venal, cowardly, and lazy. The German Austrians were waltzers and boozy crooners, the Hungarians stank, the Czechs were born bootlickers, the Ruthenians were treacherous Russians in disguise, the Croats and Slovenes, whom he called Cravats and Slobbers, were brushmakers and chestnut roasters, and the Poles, of whom he himself was one after all, were skirt chasers, hairdressers, and fashion photographers" (*Ibid.*, 135).

⁴² “He always wintered in big cities and in the gambling casinos of the Riviera. But once the forsythia started blossoming on the railroad embankments, the count, like a migrant bird, would return to his ancestral homeland, bringing along a faintly perfumed whiff of high society and tales of gallantry and adventure. He was the sort of man who could have no foes, but also no friends, only comrades, companions, or indifferent acquaintances” (*TRM*, 133-34).

⁴³ ““This empire is doomed. The instant the Kaiser shuts his eyes, we’ll crumble into a thousand pieces [...] All the nations will set up their own filthy states [...]” (Ibid., 136).

⁴⁴ ““Monarchy, our monarchy, is founded on piety, on the faith that God chose the Habsburgs to rule over so and so many Christian nations. Our Kaiser is a secular brother of the Pole, he is His Imperial and Royal Apostolic Majesty; no other is as apostolic, no other majesty in Europe is as dependent on the grace of God and on the faith of the nations in the grace of God [...] The Emperor of Austria-Hungary must not be abandoned by God. But God *has* abandoned him!” (Ibid., 162)

⁴⁵ “The least of his soldiers, who could patrol in front of the tents, was more powerful than he. The least of the soldiers! And he was the Supreme commander in Chief!” (Ibid., 218)

⁴⁶ “smashed and scattered, split up among the many nations of his vast empire” (Ibid., 225).

⁴⁷ “[L]ieutenant Trotta resembled a man who has lost not only his homeland but also his homesickness for his homeland” (Ibid., 225).

⁴⁸ “How simple the world had always looked! The district captain mused. There was a specific attitude for every situation. When your son came home for vacation, you tested him. When he became a lieutenant, you congratulated him. When he wrote his obedient letters, which said so little, you replied with a few measured lines. But how should you behave if your son is drunk, if he cried ‘Father!’ if the cry ‘Father!’ came out of him?” (Ibid., 168)

⁴⁹ Joseph Roth, *Die Kapuzinergruft*, vol. 1 of *Joseph Roth Werke in Drei Bänden* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1956). Translated by John Hoare as *The Emperor’s Tomb* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1984). The German title is cited in text as *KG* and the English translation as *ET*.

⁵⁰ Soon after Austria became part of the German Greater Reich, the Austrian Jews lost their rights.

⁵¹ “He wanted to reform the Empire and save the Habsburgs [...] He dreamed of a joint monarchy of Austrians, Hungarians and Slavs” (*ET*, 8-9).

⁵² “Concentrating completely on the bowl, which he held aloft with small, powerful fingers, he looked like a man whose appetite was indeed a noble impulse and who only disregarded his spoon because it seemed more aristocratic to swallow straight from the bowl” (Ibid., 11).

⁵³ “close to all and omnipresent in the great and brilliant pattern of the Empire” (Ibid., 14-15)

⁵⁴ “something greater, broader, more all-embracing than a Fatherland” (Ibid., 15).

⁵⁵ “[L]andscapes, fields, nations, races, huts and coffee houses of the most widely differing sorts are bound to submit to the perfectly natural dominion of a powerful force with the ability to bring near what is remote, to domesticate what is strange and to unite what seems to be trying to fly apart” (Ibid., 38).

⁵⁶ “For years the workers had coughed, spit blood, fallen ill, and died in the hospitals. But they never went on strike” (*TRM*, 176).

⁵⁷ “Parliament, the Law Courts, the University, the State Bank for Land Credit, the Court Theater, and even the Headquarters of the Police [...] were quite visibly fed [...] by the tragic love which the Crown Lands bore to Austria: tragic because forever unrequited” (*ET*, 60-61).

⁵⁸ “The gypsies of the Puszta, the Huzulen of Subcarpathia, the Jewish coachmen of Galicia, my own kin the Slovene chestnut roasters of Sipolje, the Swabian tobacco growers from the Bacska, the horse breeders of the Steppes, the Osman Sibersna, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the horse traders from the Hanakei in Moravia, the weavers from the Erzgebirge, the millers and coral dealers of Podolia: all these were the open-handed providers of Austria; and the poorer they were, the more generous” (*Ibid.*, 60-61).

⁵⁹ “love was considered an aberration, engagement a form of apoplexy, marriage an incurable disease” (*Ibid.*, 18-19).

⁶⁰ “there prevailed a disdainful pride, an overweening self-identification with ‘decadence,’ so-called, with a half-assumed, over-acted weariness and unfounded boredom. [...] In this atmosphere there was hardly room for sentiment” (*Ibid.*, 18).

⁶¹ “only a kind of brood-animal to which they owed their upbringing and their life, or, at best, something like the landscape of home into which one has by chance been born and to which one devotes no more than a sentimental thought” (*Ibid.*, 21).

⁶² “She loved the son of her husband, not her child. She was a woman. I was the heir of the man she loved, sprung as Fate would have it from his loins, her womb quite incidental to my birth” (*Ibid.*, 68).

⁶³ “Far from being ashamed of this I maintain to this day that during this period of my life my romantic assumptions brought me nearer to reality than the few unromantic assumptions which I forced upon myself. How stupid they are, these preconceived ideas! If one accepts them ... I believe that my observations have always led me to find that the so-called realist moves about the world with a closed mind, ringed as it were with concrete and cement, and that the so-called romantic is like an unfenced garden in and out of which truth can wander at will ...” (*Ibid.*, 63-64).

⁶⁴ “[w]ith his mighty beard and wild unruly hair, facing the rising sun in his coarse linen” (*Ibid.*, 41).

⁶⁵ “of primeval forest, of primitive man [...] of something confused and anachronistic” (*Ibid.*, 41).

⁶⁶ “[He] puffed and blew, all the way shouting, almost bellowing, as if the prehistoric world really had broken through into the modern” (*Ibid.*, 41).

⁶⁷ Erich Kahler, *The Jews Among the Nations* (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1967), 10, quoted in William Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History, 1848-1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 24.

⁶⁸ “That is the mother of my child, a son” (*ET*, 81).

⁶⁹ I mean “performative” in Austen’s understanding, as something that is accomplished in the instant it is performed or declared.

⁷⁰ “For the first time, although I was shocked by the violence of my then beloved people, a sudden insight struck me: that I no longer belonged to them. I stood before them as a powerless judge, no longer a friend, and although I was quite aware that the madness of the wastelands had touched them, I still felt sure that I was impervious to it” (*ET*, 88).

⁷¹ Until 1867, the Habsburg flag was half black at the top, half yellow at the bottom.

⁷² “‘He doesn’t need his music anymore’, replied Manes Reisiger, the *fiaker*, ‘he’s making the Revolution’” (*ET*, 140).

⁷³ “[No] more chestnuts without a visa” (*Ibid.*).

⁷⁴ “‘This gentleman has sold his chestnuts everywhere, in half the European world, one might say. And wherever people ate his roasted chestnuts, it was Austria, and Franz Joseph was on the throne’” (*Ibid.*).

⁷⁵ These were the two great divisions of territory within Austria-Hungary. Cisleithania was under the Austrian governance and Transleithania was mainly in Hungarian control.

⁷⁶ Norbert Leser, *Genius Austriacus: Beiträge zur politischen Geschichte und Geistesgeschichte Österreichs* (Vienna: H. Böhlau Nachf., 1986), quoted in Hilde Spiel, *Vienna’s Golden Autumn, 1866-1938* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 207. Spiel does not specify a page number in Leser.

⁷⁷ “‘Austria is neither a state, a home, nor a nation. It is a religion. The church, and the idiot clericals who now rule us, are making a so-called nation of us. Of *us*, who are a supra-nation, the only supra-nation which has existed in this world’” (*ET*, 145).

⁷⁸ My italics. “Ersatz” in German means substitute.

⁷⁹ “I was obsolete; obsolete indeed. To be obsolete among the living means something like being extra-territorial. I was extra-territorial among the living” (*ET*, 152-153).

⁸⁰ “I [...] had made up my mind from the moment of my return from the war not to distinguish between them or to recognize them” (*Ibid.*, 153).

⁸¹ “I was in no way equipped, being remote from the world and the hell it represented for me, to distinguish between the new caps and uniforms” (*Ibid.*).

⁸² “‘The government has been overthrown. A new, German, people’s government is at hand!’” (*Ibid.*)

⁸³ Philip Manger, “‘The Radetzky March’: Joseph Roth and the Habsburg Myth,” in *The Viennese Enlightenment*, ed. Mark Francis (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 46.

⁸⁴ “The narrator of the novel acts as a witness, participant, and survivor of a lost world, which spiritually he can never let go” (my translation).

⁸⁵ “I saw myself, as I had for so long since my return from the war, as someone who was wrongly alive. I had, after all, accustomed myself for a long time to observing all the events which were described in the newspapers as ‘historic’ with the judicious eye of someone who no longer belonged to this world! I had for a long time been on indefinite leave from death. And death could interrupt my leave at any second. What did the things of this world matter to me ...?” (*ET*, 151)

⁸⁶ “A moment later I was alone. I found myself literally alone, and for a moment it was as if I had been searching for myself for a long time and had found myself, to my surprise, to be alone” (*Ibid.*, 154).

⁸⁷ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Extraterritoriality.”

⁸⁸ “So where could I go now, I, a Trotta?” (*ET*, 157) This can also be translated as, “So where am I supposed to go now, I, a Trotta?”

Chapter 2

Family, Nation, and Minority in Günter Grass's Novel

Die Blechtrommel

“... a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury”
(*Macbeth*, Act v, sc. 5)

In *Die Blechtrommel* (The Tin Drum), Günter Grass proposes to examine history from the perspective of one family: the Matzerath-Koljaiczek-Bronski extended family of mixed German, Polish, and Kashube ancestry. This family is multiethnic, multinational, multicultural, polyglot, and practices various faiths. Within the time frame of the novel the Matzerath-Koljaiczek-Bronski family becomes participant in or witness to various historical events in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. This North-Eastern European family experiences two World Wars, the creation of the Free City of Danzig under the League of Nations, the foundation of the Second Republic of Poland, the rise of interwar angry and frantic nationalisms, the atrocities of the Second World War, and the expulsion and migration of the German population from post-war Poland. Grass describes how the multinational family is gradually established through various chance encounters and historical events. However, he also shows how this family gradually falls apart, partly because of internal conflicts but mainly as a result of competing nationalisms, “that grim prose of power that each nation can wield within its own sphere of influence” (Bhabha, 1).¹ Like Roth, who views the destiny of the Trotta

family as inseparable from the history of the decline of the Dual Monarchy, Grass entwines the destiny of his fictional family with the destiny of two nations and a minority.

The work of Roth and Grass can be examined from a national perspective, but, as literary historian Marcel Cornis-Pope noted, their writing is “perhaps best served today by a historical approach that deemphasizes national boundaries and seeks instead analogies, points of contact, and mediations among various cultures” (ix).² Their writing emerges from a territory larger than that of a single nation, a region with a complex multicultural and multiethnic history that Cornis-Pope, among others, has identified as East-Central Europe.³ The work of both Roth and Grass gives evidence to the idea that “the cultural identity of this region has been based on divergent histories and narratives of demarcation that have periodically oscillated between centripetal and centrifugal pulls” (Cornis-Pope, 1).

Both writers were born within multicultural and multiethnic environments: for Roth it was Austro-Hungarian Galicia and for Grass it was the Free City of Danzig. Born in 1894, two decades before the First World War, Roth had more time than Grass to experience the fertile and diverse traditions of interaction between different cultures and ethnicities. Although his perspective on the Austro-Hungarian monarchy is always critical, his writings also allow a certain nostalgic idealism to seep in. Born in 1927, Grass’s experience of multiculturalism is marred by the rise of extreme nationalism. Nonetheless, in his work Danzig before the Second World War is organically tied to a long, seldom peaceful, history of multiethnic interaction. Cosmopolitanism, multiethnicity, and plurilingualism are integral parts of the city of Grass’s childhood. The

works of Roth and Grass emerge from the confluence of various cultures and not from the traditions of a single nation. These writers negotiate in their work the “tensions between nationalism and regionalism, metropolitan influences and local patriotism” (Cornis-Pope, 5).

In their work, Roth and Grass chronicle the demise of multiethnicity and multiculturalism in East-Central Europe under the homogenizing pressures of nationalism. The collapse of the Dual Monarchy decisively diminished the dynamism and vitality of multiculturalism in the region, as well as removed the social and political support that made multiethnicity possible. In *Die Blechtrommel*, the novel this chapter focuses on, Grass ties the loss of East-Central European multiculturalism to the social and political tensions and military clashes between the German and the Polish nations in the mid-twentieth century. Such conflicts lead to the end of a history of over seven centuries of mixed Slavic and Germanic presence in North-East Europe. The “regionalist impulse” of East-Central Europe is “seriously eroded during and after World War II, becoming a negligible counter-force in most areas of the communist bloc (Cornis-Pope, 5). In Roth and Grass we may locate the final chapter of multiculturalism in East-Central Europe, which started with the breakdown of the Dual Monarchy and culminated in the Second World War.

The stage on which this last chapter of multiculturalism and multiethnicity unfolds in Grass’s novel is the family. Writing about the family allows both Roth and Grass to examine the social and political landscapes of East-Central Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Issues, concerns, and conflicts that occur in the political macrocosm are anticipated in crises within the family. In other words, as in Roth, the

multiethnic family in *Die Blechtrommel* acts as a barometer that measures the pressure of interethnic contact and rising nationalism in North-East Europe. The direct implications of Nazism and Polish nationalism for the Matzerath-Koljaiczek-Bronski extended family from Danzig are the death of the parents, the loss of home and community, exile, and the separation of the remaining family in order to create ethnically homogeneous nation-states.

The dichotomy between the center and the periphery, which in Roth is expressed as an opposition between the Imperial Court and the Crown Lands within Austria-Hungary, becomes in Grass an inquiry of relationships between two hegemonic nations and one minority group, between Poles and Germans, on one side, and Kashubians, on the other side. Both writers' work enunciates a power issue, which Roth and Grass understand differently: in Roth power becomes manifest as conservative politics, the propensity and practice of the center to avoid social change and preserve political immobility; in Grass, the power issue segues into nationalistic politics. In his novels Roth demonstrates the blindness of the center to the needs and petitions of the margin. In a different way, Grass establishes a case in which the issue is that of competing hegemonies over territory between the German and the Polish nations in whose confrontation the Kashubians—a Slavic minority of Pomerania⁴—are forced to renounce their ethnic identity and become either German or Polish.

The periphery in Roth's novels is a place of poverty and inequality, a space of revolutionary and national emancipation, as well as the stage on which the class struggle unfolds. However, the periphery is not unified in its outlook on the center. It is the main stage for progress and liberalization, but, as the case of the Jewish minority shows, the

periphery also maintains an alliance with the center against the rising tide of nationalism. In Roth's novels the periphery is an ambivalent zone: it opposes but it also upholds the center. The Jewish minority within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy offers the best example of political support for the center. In *Radetzky* the Jews of the borderland greet and bless the emperor, proud to find in him their true King of Jerusalem.⁵

In *Die Blechtrommel* the idea of the periphery must be analyzed in ethnic as well as geographical terms. Ethnically, the situation is complicated by the fact that there is not just one center, but two competing centers. Thus, the periphery as Kashubian minority must be examined vis-à-vis the Polish and the German nations' pursuit for supremacy in North-East Europe. The periphery in geographical terms is for Grass a space of fluid and contested borders. The spatial demarcations established by the Treaty of St. Germain satisfied neither the Germans nor the Poles: the German nation had lost territories and Poland wanted more land. The literary as well as the historical stage on which these two nations confront each other is the Free City of Danzig, which both nations had lost.⁶ However, the examination of the borderland in Grass also takes into account the situation of Kashubia in the period between the Two World Wars, split as it was between Germany and Poland.⁷

What is the real test of multiculturalism and multiethnicity? This question can be read between the lines from the beginning to the end of *Die Blechtrommel*. Grass raises it in the context of the family, the city of Danzig, and Kashubia. Like Roth, Grass thinks the answer must come from the periphery as well as the minority, because time and again, they, not the center or the majority, are the stage on which the fate of multiculturalism in East-Central Europe is decided.

Die Blechtrommel (The Tin Drum)

*Die Blechtrommel*⁸ is Günter Grass's first novel, originally published in 1959. By the end of the next decade, Grass had published two more novels, *Katz und Maus* (Cat and Mouse) and *Hundejahre* (Dog Years). These three novels comprise what today is known as the *Danzig Trilogy*. The immediate reaction to these novels in Germany was mixed. Recognized as literary masterpieces by some, they were critiqued by others as blasphemous, sacrilegious, and pornographic. In 1965, when Grass received the prestigious Georg Büchner Prize, *BT* was publicly burned in Düsseldorf by a religious youth organization. During the sixties, some 40 legal actions were launched against the first two novels of the trilogy on grounds of sacrilege, blasphemy, and obscenity (O'Neill, 3).⁹ But the novel sold well in Germany, in the hundreds of thousands, and over the next ten years it was translated into 15 other languages. In Poland, Grass's novels went unpublished for many years.

In *BT* Grass focuses on the last decades of German-Polish history in Danzig and Kashubia-Pomerania. The novel is divided into three books, spanning three historical periods of the twentieth century in chronological order. Book one spans the period in which Danzig is a Free City under the League of Nations's mandate (1919-1939); Book two covers war-time Danzig, ending with the expulsion of the German population from Gdansk in 1945; and Book three evokes the first years after the war in West Germany.

The narrator of the novel is Oskar Matzerath, a dwarf and inmate of a mental hospital in Düsseldorf, who tells the story of his life from before birth to his thirtieth birthday. The story spans over half a century, from 1899 into the 1950s, and takes place

in West Prussia, the Free City of Danzig, and West Germany. Oskar is the son of Agnes Koljaiczek, who married Alfred Matzerath, a native from the Rhineland, whom she nursed during the First World War. His father is either Matzerath or Jan Bronski, his mother's cousin, who is born a Kashube, but later adopts Polish citizenship. Oskar calls them both "my presumptive father," since he never finds out which of the two is his real father. The protagonist is born in Danzig, a few years after the Treaty of Versailles has granted the city its status as a Free City under the League of Nations. He is an unusual child, a clair-audient infant, who takes his life into his own hands from the moment he comes into the world. At age three Oskar carries out a solemn resolution to interrupt his growth and throws himself off the cellar steps. This is Oskar's way of declining to become a grocer, as Matzerath had planned for him, a politician, or anything that grownups had imagined him as. "[Ich] blieb der Dreijährige, aber auch Dreimalkluge, den die Erwachsenen alle überragten, der den Erwachsenen so überlegen sein sollte, der seinen Schatten nicht mit ihrem Schatten messen wollte, der innerlich und äußerlich vollkommen fertig war, während jene noch bis ins Greisenalter von Entwicklung faseln mußten" (*BT*, 47).¹⁰ For more than twenty years he measures the height of a three-year old. Also on his third birthday, the boy receives a red and white tin drum, which becomes his favorite toy during childhood and later, when as an adult he starts writing the story of his life.

Oskar's childhood and adolescence correspond to the years preceding the Second World War. Passing as a child for many years behind stagnant physical growth, Oskar watches the rising tide of Nazi militarism and anti-Semitism in his native city. His narration sweeps through several unconnected events that taken together paint a vivid

picture of Oskar's family, the lower-middle class milieu, and the last years of the Free City of Danzig in its diminishing multiethnic, multicultural, and religious diversity. The narration of family scenes is filled with humor combined with deep-felt affection for each member of Oskar's family. Remarkable are the skat games that Alfred, Jan, and Agnes play together every week, the descriptions of the family grocery store managed by Agnes, as well as Matzerath's fabulous Kashubian cooked dinners. With equal warmth, Oskar evokes his mother's visits to Sigismund Markus's Jewish toy shop, where Agnes buys Oskar new drums, and where every Thursday the child waits for his mother to return from her meetings with her lover, Jan Bronski. With similar sympathy, compassion, and understanding, Oskar describes the inhabitants of his apartment house and the surrounding neighborhood—Meyn, the trumpet player; Greff, the greengrocer and his wife, Mrs. Greff, in whose bedroom Oskar receives his first initiation into love; the Truczinski family, whom Oskar befriends for life; Scheffler, the baker, and Laubschad, the watchmaker. Among the hilarious episodes Oskar recounts are his repeated attempts at the Church of the Sacred Heart to make Christ, the child, play on his drum, or Oskar's disruption of several Nazi rallies into waltz, Charleston, and foxtrot parties. But in spite of the lightheartedness, the comedy, and the innocence that the three-year old's perspective holds, the gravity of the events of the fourth decade of the twentieth century seeps through the lines of his narration. Ethnic tensions flow from children's games, in school and in the city suburb, culminating with the Crystal Night pogrom when Sigismund Markus's shop is set on fire and the owner commits suicide. With these events Oskar's childhood ends. From this moment on, the narrator no longer pairs humor with innocence. Whatever hilarious moments follow, they echo with suffering and loss.

By the time the war begins, Oskar's mother has passed away from an odd combination of fish addiction and food poisoning, and his uncle is soon to be executed. Agnes's death deeply impacts the family. Unable to manage the family business by himself, Alfred Matzerath soon marries Maria Truczinski, the woman Oskar was in love with. Kurt Matzerath is born to the couple, whom Oskar regards as his own son. The war brings major changes to the Matzerath family, the families of the apartment house, and the neighborhood, as Greff the greengrocer hangs himself, Laubschad the watchmaker informs on Meyn the musician, and several young men fail to return from the war. In the Spring of 1945, as the Russian army liberates Danzig, Alfred Matzerath is shot to death in his home cellar.

Wartime means not only loss for Oskar, but also a time of great friendships. Most notable is his friendship to Bebra, fellow dwarf, whom he had met at the Danzig circus sometime in the thirties. In 1943, Oskar joins Bebra's Theater at the Front and departs for Paris. Bebra, a middle-aged jester for the Propaganda Company, makes quite an impression on Oskar. The narrator also meets Roswitha Raguna, singer and dwarf, who becomes Oskar's lover until her death during an air raid in 1944. In the summer of that year Oskar returns to Danzig, in time for Kurt's third birthday. He gives little Kurt a drum, but the latter shows no interest in it. Oskar now joins the Dusters, a group of young people who are against everything, and together they break into several Party headquarters and cathedrals.

As the end of the war approaches, the Russian army sets Danzig on fire. Polish refugees from the East arrive in the city and move into living quarters formerly occupied by German families. In the Matzerath family apartment there now lives Mr. Fajngold, a

Jew, whose entire family perished in the Treblinka concentration camp. Mr. Fajngold helps Maria and Oskar bury Matzerath. At the graveside, burdened with guilt, Oskar throws his toy drum into the pit. A stone aimed at him by Kurt hits him and triggers his own fall into the grave. He spends some time in the hospital, but recovers.

Soon after Oskar's recovery, Maria, Kurt, and Oskar leave Poland on a refugee train to Germany. The third and the last book of the novel unfolds in West Germany, mainly Düsseldorf, where in the beginning the family scrapes together a living by selling synthetic honey on the black market. In the course of a few years, Oskar takes various jobs: as a stonecutter's assistant, a model for the Academy of Arts students, and a drummer. He shares an apartment with other renters, one of whom happens to be a nurse. Although he never meets Sister Dorothea in broad daylight, he falls in love with her. He reads her mail, breaks into her room while she is away, and one night comes face to face with Sister Dorothea, who is so scared of him that the next day she moves out. Oskar meets master Bebra, who is now paralyzed and in a wheelchair, for the last time; Bebra employs Oskar as a concert drummer. He tours the Federal Republic of Germany and soon becomes a celebrity. Enormous crowds gather at his concerts, where Oskar drums back the past—the time of infancy and childhood. In the last pages of the novel he is accidentally involved in the murder of Sister Dorothea and is convicted. As inmate of a mental hospital in Düsseldorf, Oskar narrates the story of his life. His worst fear is that he will be absolved of the crime and released from the hospital. The road to Danzig, now Gdansk, is closed. Oskar can never return to the city of his birth or the land of his ancestors.

The family: entwined paths of ethnicity, nationality, faith, and language

“There is a history in all men’s lives,
Figuring the nature of the times deceased”
(*Henry IV*, Act iii, sc. 1)

i) The photo album

The family in *BT* is both an object of study as well as a perspective. In one of the first chapters of the novel, entitled “The Photograph Album,” the narrator introduces his family to the reader. The photo album, the only memorable Oskar has taken from his home in Danzig when he left Poland at the end of the war, contains photographs of each family member in various groupings. The pictures depict the people and their times. Each detail—the expression of the face, the posture of the body, the clothes, as well as the colors of the photographs—speaks of both the person photographed and the historical period in which the picture was shot. In other words, gestures, expressions, clothing, background, all of these allow Oskar to speak of individual lives and narrate the story of his family as well as to examine the cultural, social, political, and ideological macrocosm of his time.

The three families whose photographs are contained in the album are the Koljaiczeks, the Bronskis, and the Matzeraths. Behind these names we find a rich world of multiethnic, multinational, multifait, and plurilingual interaction, but also interethnic struggle and confrontation. Each name is linked to a different ethnicity or nationality, and therefore each affirms a distinct cultural ethos. But like people, names also travel from one culture to another, and sometimes the name of a person is spelled differently, depending on the individual spelling of a particular language. Such is the case with Oskar’s Kashube grandfather, whose name was spelled Goljaczek in Polish, Koljaiczek in Kashubian, and in America he was called Joe Colchic. The grandfather’s case shows

most clearly how cultural environment interacts with individuals, determining not only the spelling of their names, but also other aspects of their lives. Koljaiczek's German name—Wranka—is the extreme case in which a name is abandoned for the safety of another one. When grandfather Koljaiczek moved his family to West Prussia, he dropped his Kashube name and identified under the name of a German citizen.

Portrait photos may suggest a distinct ethnic ethos, but group photos, in the silent interaction of the subjects in the photographs, deliver an unequalled ethnic richness. Apart from portrait photographs or the wedding picture of Oskar's parents, all others are group pictures holding at least three individuals. Oskar definitely prefers the group photos to the single subject ones. His favorite photos always contain three subjects—his mother, née Koljaiczek (Kashube), his father Matzerath (German), and his uncle/father Bronski (Polish/Kashube). Oskar's family is multiethnic and multinational; they speak three languages and combine cultural elements from three cultures. They live different life styles: the older generation (grandmother Koljaiczek) lives the old life of Kashube farmers, the Matzeraths are shopkeepers in the city, and Bronski is an official at the Polish Post Office in Danzig. Their reunions usually take place in the Matzerath home around the dinner (and card) table.

On the first page of the album grandfather Koljaiczek makes his sublimely grandiose appearance: he is “groß und unerreichbar”—large and unattainable (*BT*, 40). But it is unfortunate, Oskar opines, that his grandfather had let himself be photographed as Wranka the German volunteer fireman and not the firebug Polish sympathizer he had been. “[D]ie straff sitzende Feuerwehruniform [[mit Rettungsmedaille und dem das Tischchen zum Altar machenden Feuerwehrhelm ersetzen den Schnauz des Brandstifters

beinahe” (*BT*, 40).¹¹ An ethnic Kashubian, supporter of the Polish cause, Joseph Koljaiczek lived in West Prussia under the German name of Wranka when the photograph featured in the album was taken. The story of Koljaiczek/Wranka goes as follows: In 1899 grandfather Koljaiczek worked for a German sawmill in Pomerania. Inspired by Polish national sentiment, he painted the fence of the German sawmill in the Polish national colors. Soon after this, the German supervisor smashed two of the patriotic slats on “Koljaiczek’s Kashubian back.” This incited the latter to set the sawmill on fire, “zur Huldigung an ein zwar aufgeteiltes, doch gerade deshalb geeintes Polen” (*BT*, 19).¹² Sitting in her four skirts in the middle of a potato field on a late October day, Anna Bronski, soon to become Anna Koljaiczek, saved the fugitive from the German pursuers, hiding him underneath her bulky four skirts. Wedding the woman who had saved his life, Koljaiczek the firebug decided to start a new life, under the identity of a German citizen, who had disappeared a while back but had never been found dead. Thus, the incendiary pro-Polish Kashube became fireman Wranka and a citizen of the German Empire.

It is impossible to decide Koljaiczek’s identity definitively. He seems to embrace more than one identity and none at the same time. He is very pragmatic, in the sense that identity is meaningful to him as long as it serves him in life. When he got married and established a family, he dropped the Polish cause to settle down as a German citizen. But Oskar suggests that underneath the German uniform his grandfather was a tormented person. Koljaiczek’s gaze betrays his agony at not being able to live his true self: “Wie ernst und um alles Leid der Jahrhundertwende wissend er dreinzublicken weiß. Jener bei aller Tragik noch stolze Blick schien in den Zeiten des zweiten Kaiserreiches beliebt und

geläufig gewesen zu sein” (*BT*, 40).¹³ When later in the novel Oskar initiates an imaginary conversation with his presumptive son, Kurt, about great-grandfather Joseph Koljaiczek, he attempts to restore the old man’s true identity. He paints a vivid image of a man with “flackernden Brandstifteraugen” (flashing incendiary eyes) that emanate a “göttlich polnische Verstiegheit” (divine Polish wildness). And he is sure to add a word about great-grandfather’s brow from which flows “die praktische kaschubische Verschlagenheit”—the practical Kashubian shrewdness (*BT*, 288). Pragmatism is a characteristic that also features in the descriptions of Oskar’s grandmother, and that is why practicality could be the most defining aspect of Joseph Koljaiczek’s identity. But all of these are Oskar’s memories of his grandfather, whom he actually never met in person.

Joseph Koljaiczek is not the only member of the family who, as a Kashubian, endorses the Polish cause. His brother Gregor, “der trunkene Pulvermüller”—the drunken gunpowder-maker (*BT*, 40), seemed to adopt a similar incendiary attitude toward the German occupiers of Kashubia. But even more evocative of pro-Polish sentiment is Vincent Bronski’s picture—Vincent Bronski, a Kashube native, was grandmother Koljaiczek’s brother and Ian Bronski’s father—taken in Częstochowa, the city of the famous Black Madonna icon of the Virgin Mary founded in the 13th century by a Polish prince.¹⁴ Joseph Koljaiczek’s brother-in-law, Vincent, is holding a consecrated candle and the tone of the picture is more mystical (*BT*, 40).

The order of the photographs is chronological. The pictures of Oskar’s grandparents are shot in the early twentieth century, before the First World War. The men of the family have a tragic look on their faces, but the women hardly rise to the occasion in these photographs. Anna Bronski, Oskar’s grandmother, about whom the narrator

writes that she was somebody, “ziert sich auf den Aufnahmen vor Ausbruch des ersten Weltkrieges hinter einem dümmlich draufgesetzten Lächeln und läßt nichts von der Asyl bietenden Spannweite ihrer vier übereinanderfallenden, so verschwiegenen Röcke ahnen” (*BT*, 41).¹⁵ But after the war, when the men look “leicht abgemustert” (rather demobilized), it is the women who take the opportunity to express a melancholy but solemn look and will not conceal “die Untermalung gelernter Schmerz”—an undertone of studied sorrow (*BT*, 41).

It is in this context that Oskar introduces his parents. His mother, Agnes Koljaiczek, is Kashubian and his father, Alfred Matzerath, is a native of the Rhineland, citizen of the German Empire. Matzerath is a newcomer to this region, representing that part of the German population that settled in Danzig after World War I. But Oskar’s lineage is ambiguous because his mother has had an out-of-wedlock relationship to her cousin, Jan Bronski. Oskar could be Bronski’s son as much as Matzerath’s. At thirty, Oskar continues to “believe” and to “doubt” at the same time that Jan Bronski begot him in the name of Matzerath (*BT*, 106). The question of Oskar’s parentage is never settled, which makes the narrator oscillate between his “uniformierter Vater” Matzerath—uniformed father—and his “mutmaßlichen Vater” Bronski—presumptive father (*BT*, 93). Growing up he feels drawn toward Bronski, the chestnut brown-haired, tall, but stooped melancholy man, rejecting the curly blond, bulky, jocund Matzerath. Only after Jan’s death, Oskar thaws toward his “uniformed father,” finally accepting him as much as he had his mother’s lover. At age thirty, the idea that three parents begat Oskar—a Kashube, a German, and a Kashube Pole—is intimately tied to his longing toward the multicultural and multiethnic past.

Grass supplements Oskar's mixed ethnic ancestry with a multinational dimension. If in Alfred Matzerath's case ethnicity and nationality coincide, it is not so with Jan Bronski, who is an ethnic Kashubian and a Polish national. Bronski decides to side with Poland soon after Danzig becomes a Free City. Although his determination to become a Polish civil servant and take a job with the Polish Post Office may be seen as a reaction to Agnes's infidelity when she marries Matzerath, all his later choices are linked to the fate of Poland. Bronski remains stable both in love and in his allegiance to Poland. He marries Hedwig Lemke, a Kashubian girl, but he never stops loving Agnes. Similarly, when Agnes and Alfred try to persuade him to send his son, little Stephan, to the German school instead of the Polish one, Jan refuses. "Schließlich sei er Pole und Hedwig werde es auch, sobald der Antrag genehmigt" (*BT*, 59).¹⁶ In the Koljaiczek-Bronski-Matzerath family photo album, an early photograph from the twenties shows Jan Bronski hiding his rural Kashubian origins behind the festive elegance of a Polish postal official (*BT*, 42).

Jan Bronski is not a patriot but neither is he an opportunist. He is a dreamer, as Oskar calls all Bronskis, and he lacks the Kashubian practical side, which Oskar's grandparents affirm so well. He chooses Polish over German nationality for a reason that is not politically motivated. His decision is personal and embodies a disagreement with Agnes's choice of a husband. But once he becomes a Polish national, he abides by his choice. His entire family becomes Polish. Jan sends his children to the Polish school, notwithstanding that his son becomes a victim of harassment by German children who call him a "Polack" and beat him up. Finally, Bronski participates in the defense of the Polish Post Office on the night of September 1, 1939. But how strong is Jan's conviction to die for Poland? A few hours before the Polish Post Office is under Nazi attack, at the

height of defense preparations, he makes his getaway. An unexpected visit by his nephew, who wants to entrust his broken drum to Kobyella the janitor, compels him to return to the Post Office. Soon after Jan and Oskar return to Polish grounds, the siege begins. Jan hardly knows how to hold a rifle, least of all fight as a soldier. During the First World War military draft he was repeatedly sent home for his sickly appearance. Now he would rather die than kill anyone. He is executed a few days after the Polish Post Office falls to the Germans. After the war he is honored as a Polish hero and his Kashubian ethnicity goes unmentioned.

ii) Behind the family album: Polish and German histories

Kashubians were often regarded as Poles. After Versailles, the Polish minister of foreign affairs claimed that 9% of the Danzig population was Polish (Urban, 289).¹⁷ According to Thomas Urban, German historians have argued that this percentage was obtained by adding to the Polish population the few tens of thousands of Danzigers of a different ethnicity such as the Kashubians and other small West Slavic communities. Various non-Germanic and non-Polish ethnic groups had lived in the German-Polish borderlands in North-East Europe for many generations and were now regarded by Poland as Polish. This inclusion was partly justified by the choices of the Kashubian minority, which seemed to favor a Polish state. So at least it happens with the Koljaiczeks and the Bronskis in the novel, although later, in order to survive during the Nazi period, the Kashubians of Oskar's family will embrace German nationality.

What was the relationship between Germans and Poles at the time of the Free City of Danzig? The harsh provisions of the Treaty of Versailles had left the German Reich utterly discontent and humiliated. Germany had no other choice but to accept these

conditions. “[T]he Allies had stripped Germany of all its overseas possessions and colonies, 13 percent of its territory in Europe, 10 percent of its population... 10 percent of its industrial capacity,” as well as many of its iron-ore deposits, coal fields, steel facilities, zinc sources, farmlands etc. (Tighe, 88).¹⁸ Additionally, there was one aspect of the Treaty that provoked much anger and resentment among Germans. In the establishment of the Polish state, “enormous areas of eastern Germany were handed over to Poland” (Tighe, 89). Now, for the first time since the early seventeenth century, Poland had access to the Baltic Sea coast through the so-called Polish Corridor, which cut through West Prussia:

The Corridor ... ran almost exactly through Pomerelia and the area occupied by the Kaszubes—who were now considered to be Polish. [It] totalled some 16,295 sq km, was 230 km long, 230 km wide at its base, and narrowed to less than 30 km near Danzig. To the north the Corridor had a sea coast of 76 km; to the south it had the river Notec and the Notec canal. The Corridor had a mixed German, Polish and Kaszubian population. The figures from the 1910 German census show the ethnic and linguistic complexity of the Corridor in some detail: in Pomerania as a whole there were 919,102 Germans, 555,337 Poles, 106,598 Kaszubes and 20,456 Bilingual peoples. In Danzig itself there were 315,281 Germans, 9,491 Poles, 2,124 Kaszubes and 3,021 Bilingual. [...] The situation was further complicated by religion. Most Poles were Catholic, but not all Germans were Protestant and there were also German Jews and an increasing number of Polish Jews.

German defeat and the arrangements at Versailles revealed just how complex the political, social and economic balance around Danzig had become. (Tighe, 90)

Few Danzigers enjoyed their city’s independent status, preferring to be a part of the Reich. East of the Polish Corridor was East Prussia, settled by Germans who were also discontented by the separation from the rest of Germany. The situation was so complex that not even the large population of Poles living in the southern part of East Prussia wanted to be included in the newly founded Polish state (Tighe, 91). Carl Tighe stresses the German influence that had increasingly contributed to the Germanization of

the Poles. But Germanization did not always mean a complete assimilation to German identity. The complexity of the relationship between Poles and Germans derives from a wide spectrum of identities—often of mixed national and ethnic provenance. Before the days of extreme nationalism, such ambivalence of national and ethnic loyalties was not uncommon. Tighe explains that even if the Danzig Poles were not keen on Polish rule of their city, they wanted to express their identity as Poles. “[I]n their own way they were proud of their identity—even if it did not quite amount to ‘nationality’ in a conventional sense” (Tighe, 104).

There was a lot of pro-German sentiment in the German-Polish borderlands, but there was also sufficient Polish presence and pro-Polish attitude to create national rivalries. Tighe explains that

[such] rivalries were all the more intense and confused in these districts precisely because it was often not possible to tell who was which nationality, or where a person’s loyalties lay. There were German Catholics in Pomerania, Protestant Poles in Mazuria; there were large numbers of ethnic Poles and Kaszubians in both the southern districts of East Prussia and in Pomerania who spoke German rather than Polish and who had even Germanised their family names. (Tighe, 91)¹⁹

The case of Oskar’s grandfather, Joseph Koljaiczek, speaks to this convoluted state of affairs in the German-Polish borderland.

iii) Behind the family triumvirate: competing nationalisms and gender

The relationship between Matzerath and Bronski cannot be separated from an understanding of the German-Polish rapport in the first half of the twentieth century. After the First World War the Danzig population was 90% German. The majority of Danzigers had been upset by the separation from the German Reich, designating it as “[das] ‘Unrecht von Versailles’”—the injustice of Versailles (Urban, 287). The privileges

Poland held in the Free City of Danzig—a school, a post office, the management of the railway system, one garrison, and an ammunition storage point (Urban, 288)—gave birth to much discontent. The first elections in the early twenties were won by parties that promised to fight for the cancellation of the Polish privileges in the Free City. In Poland, however, for many years after the Treaty of Versailles the Polish press wrote almost unanimously about the fight for Danzig as “a task for the future” (Urban, 288). In the years between the two World Wars, Poland’s political parties and the Polish president Pilsudski intensified their claims on Danzig, which gave rise to much tension between the Danzig parliament and the Polish government in Warsaw. The conflict intensified when Hitler rose to power in 1933 and promised to challenge the provisions of the Versailles Treaty. In March 1933, without consulting the League of Nations, Pilsudski ordered a Polish war ship to anchor in Danzig harbor. Military troops were sent to march through the Free City, with the intention to occupy not only Danzig, but also East Prussia and a part of Upper Silesia. The French support on which Pilsudski counted never came, and thus, Polish troops were compelled to pull back. Meanwhile, the Germans strengthened their position in Danzig. The Nazi administrator, Albert Forster, managed to gain support from several right wing political organizations, which allied in a coalition and won the 1935 elections. From then on, no independent politics could survive in Danzig; all decisions were made in Berlin (Urban, 291). The gradual worsening of relations between the German and the Polish nations in the interwar period is reflected in the *BT* in the shift from a “tense peace” to a belligerent atmosphere in the family. This shift takes place by way of Agnes’s death, which breaks the balance, therefore the peace, between the men of the family.

Looking through the family album, Oskar particularly enjoys remembering his three parents together. In a group picture taken shortly after Agnes's marriage to Alfred Matzerath, Oskar identifies a constellation—a woman sitting in front of two standing men—which inspires him to derive his own metaphysical geometry. Playing with a compass, a triangle, and a ruler, he lends cosmic references to “die Konstellation dieses Triumvirates”—the constellation of this triumvirate (*BT*, 42). In this early chapter and later, Oskar emphasizes his mother's tremendous influence on both men: “Mama ersetzte vollwertig einen Mann” (*BT*, 42).²⁰ Agnes is the driving force of unity, balance, and harmony. Later, without her, the constellation collapses, but in this early photograph,

[a]lle drei scheinen glücklich, einandern gutheiend gegen berraschungen der Art gefeit zu sein, zu denen es nur kommt, wenn ein Partner des Dreibundes Geheimfächer anlegt oder von Anfang an birgt. Zusammengehörend sind sie auf die vierte Person, nhmlich auf Jans Frau, Hedwig Bronski, geborene Lemke, die zu dem Zeitpunkt womöglich schon mit dem spteren Stephan schwanger ging, nur insofern angewiesen, als diese den Fotoapparat auf die drei und das Glöck dieser drei Menschen richten mu, damit sich dreifaches Glöck wenigstens mit den Mitteln der Fotografie festhalten lät. (*BT*, 43)²¹

This is “the balcony scene”—Oskar explains that in the background there is a sunlit balcony of a type seen only in the Polish quarter (*BT*, 42)—which emanates a serenity never encountered in later photographs. The balcony picture, the narrator suggests, contains “behutsam wissenden Gesten [...] die sich wahrscheinlich nur dann ermöglichen lieen, wenn beide Mnner sich hinter, neben Mama stellten oder ihr zu Füen lagen” (*BT*, 43).²² There is one more picture that approaches the serenity of the balcony scene, although it is not quite so intense. In this photograph, the three are playing a game of skat and the image emanates “denselben spannungsreichen Frieden”—the same tense peace (*BT*, 43-4).

Grass connects the microcosm of the Matzeraths and the Bronskis to the larger historical picture. References to a “tense peace” that governed the atmosphere within the “triumvirate,” or the group’s “tripartite solidarity,” or the stiff facial expressions in the photographs taken in the days of the Treaty of Rapallo all point to the extent to which private destinies were influenced or shaped by events in the historical macrocosm. The terms used to describe relationships within the family have a political character. What holds the family together is not affection so much as it is convenience, negotiation, and accord. The mention of the days of the Treaty of Rapallo (April 16, 1922) politicizes the family picture. This treaty represented an agreement between Germany (the Weimar Republic) and the Soviet Union under which each party renounced any territorial claims against the other. It was a treaty regarded as a rapprochement between Germany and Russia against the West. Poland was acutely concerned by the two powers’ strengthening of their positions. Grass proposes to look at the group of the three in a way that lends a perspective to the convoluted relationship between Germans and Poles in Danzig and in Pomerania, the German-Polish borderlands. The parental group of Alfred-Agnes-Jan is a triangle of love. But is it not also a triangle of power?

It is possible to examine Alfred Matzerath’s and Jan Bronski’s love for the same woman as an allegory of competing and contesting nationalisms. Two men loved the same woman. And so did two nations raise claims on the same territory. Both nations’ presence in North-East Europe dates back to the Middle Ages and earlier. Polish pre-modern history is the history of a strong state, but Poland’s modern history gives evidence to a struggling nation, barely able to survive under the imperialistic tendencies of stronger neighboring nations. Conversely, German modern history in North-East

Europe up until the end of World War I is the history of a triumphant nation. When Matzerath entered the family, Jan and Agnes had known each other for a long time and their love for one another remained unbreakable. Without much reasoning, Agnes decides to marry the citizen of the German Reich. But the love relationship between Agnes and Jan continues after her marriage, often under Matzerath's eyes. Alfred never tries to discourage their love, and lives with it as if it were a part of his own relationship with Agnes. Similarly, the Polish nation miraculously survives in spite of three partitions of the Polish state in the late 18th century. Not at all coincidentally, Bronski appears “[s]o klein und gefährdet [...] zwischen den Gesunden und Platzeinnehmenden” (BT, 42).²³ Compared to other members of his family, Jan has a sickly and melancholy look. However, “sein ungewöhnliches Auge, die fast weibische Ebenmäßigkeit seines Gesichtes bilden, selbst wenn er am Rande steht, den Mittelpunkt jedes Fotos” (BT, 42).²⁴

The triangle of love is always also a triangle where relations are negotiated. Love itself is negotiated. Matzerath marries Agnes with whom he has a stable relationship—she proves a skilled manager of their business and Alfred makes a stellar chef in the family—but it is Bronski who is truly loved by Agnes. If their relations to one another resemble relationships within a “triumvirate,” it means that all three are in a joint position of power and authority. And as long as all three parts respect the provisions of the triumvirate, peace and agreement rule in their family. However, relationships within the group also point toward moments of tension. Some day a spark could be enough to endanger the triangular felicity, immortalized by early photography. Was not the Treaty of Rapallo a temporary accord, which was annulled by later historical developments?

It was in the tradition of the family to finish the day—after Matzerath’s copious dinners—with a game of skat:

Das Skatspiel—man kann es, wie bekannt sein dürfte, nur zu dritt spielen—war für Mama und die beiden Männer nicht nur das angemessenste Spiel; es war ihre Zuflucht, ihr Hafen, in den sie immer dann fanden, wenn das Leben sie verführen wollte, in dieser oder jener Zusammenstellung zu zweit existierend, dumme Spiele wie Sechsendsechzig oder Mühle zu spielen. (*BT*, 44)²⁵

Most of the time, in spite of good cards, Bronski is the loser. “Kein Wunder, da er nicht aufpaßte. Hatte ganz andere Dinge im Kopf als seinen Karo ohne Zweien” (*BT*, 54).²⁶ All his energy went into making love to Agnes under the table, touching her thighs and genitalia, while above the game continued. On her side, Agnes could both savor the pleasures of love and focus on the game. She never lost the control of her hand:

Alle Bewunderung für meine Mama, die trotz dieser wollenen Belästigung unter der Tischplatte, oben auf strammen Tischtuch die gewagtesten Spiele, darunter einen Kreuz ohne Viern, sicher und von humorigster Rede begleitet, gewann, während Jan mehrere Spiele, die selbst Oskar mit schlafwandlerischer Sicherheit nach Hause gebracht hätte, unten immer forscher werdend, oben verlor. (*BT*, 54)²⁷

Of the three members of the triumvirate, Agnes is the most enigmatic figure. It is impossible to separate her either from Matzerath or Bronski. And since relationships between the men of the family reflect on historical relationships, Agnes is located at the intersection between competing nationalist discourses. She is the woman the two men share, but also the territory they dispute. Agnes’s association with land runs in the family. In the opening pages of the novel her own mother—Oskar’s grandmother—sits in the middle of the potato field right in the heart of Kashubia. It is there that Agnes is conceived on a late October day. The land of Kashubia was divided between Poland and Germany; it was partly located in Western Pomerania (the German side) and partly within the Polish Corridor. Like divided Kashubia, Agnes maintains a relationship to both

men. But neither the German nor the Polish nation could possess the whole territory, as neither Matzerath nor Bronski could call for the singularity of their relationship to the beloved. In their love for Agnes, Matzerath and Bronski must acknowledge one another as negotiating parts in a mutual arrangement.

On more than one occasion, Anne McClintock has examined the gendering of the national imaginary. In her essay “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Gender, Race and Nationalism,” McClintock argues that “[a]ll nationalisms are gendered,” which means that historically women have been at the center of nationalist discourses and “the technologies of violence” unleashed by nations (89).²⁸ Referring to the fate of Third World women, McClintock notes that nationalism and decolonization were often “waged over the territoriality of female, domestic space,” which was defined as space of authentic national culture. Women were bearers of values and traditions; nevertheless, they were not given access to political power. “Excluded from direct action as national citizens, women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit . . . Women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency” (90). Following Benedict Anderson’s argument on the invented nature of nationalism, McClintock observes, “the male role in the nationalist scenario is typically ‘metonymic’, that is, men are contiguous with each other and with the national whole. Women, by contrast, appear ‘in a metaphoric or symbolic role’” (90).

In *BT* Agnes does not play an active role in either German or Polish nationalism, but her relations to Matzerath and Bronski place her at the center of the two nations’ competing and contesting nationalisms. Further in her essay, McClintock makes

reference to Fanon's examination of the black man's fantasy of territorial displacements in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the contest between the white man and the black man over the white woman, the black man has a fantasy of taking the place of the white master. This, McClintock correlates with a politics of substitution. However, as she further notes, Fanon describes the relation of the black man to the white woman in terms of a politics of appropriation. Thus, the black man does not only want to take the place of the master, but in his desire to possess the white woman, he attempts to take over white civilization. In the contest over Agnes and in the context of Polish nationalism, Ian seems not only to want to occupy Matzerath's place, but also to desire that Poland emerge triumphantly from the confrontation with Germany.

It makes sense to consider Agnes's death from within the allegorical framework Grass creates around her and her family. Hence, her death relates to the grim picture of interethnic struggle in Danzig before the Second World War and reinforces the idea that as a woman, Agnes was excluded from national agency. As a result of a failed family picnic on the Neufahrwasser Baltic Sea coast, Agnes falls ill watching hundreds of eels eating into a dead horse's skull. Matzerath buys the eels from a fisherman and cooks them for dinner. This generates a serious quarrel between Alfred and Agnes, which ends only when Matzerath changes the menu of the evening. But from the next day on, Agnes cannot stop eating great quantities of fish and eels, and this addiction added to her pregnancy is the only identified cause of her death.

It may, however, be possible to see Agnes's role in light of a distinct kind of agency, not related to either German or Polish nationalism. As a Kashube, she is the embodiment of cultural difference, which contests a unified and unitary national

narrative. Through her, the two men have to mutually acknowledge their presence. Their mutual recognition of one another is crucial for the foundation and maintenance of the family triumvirate. Agnes has an essential role in the creation of the triumvirate; she, not the men, makes it possible. The triumvirate is multiple and never reducible to one or another nationalist discourse.

When Agnes dies, the family edifice falls and the comradeship between Matzerath and Bronski discontinues, even though Bronski occasionally visits Matzerath and the game of skat is resumed in a different arrangement. It seems to Oskar that his mother had been searching for years for a way of breaking up “das Dreieckverhältnis”—the triangle, “daß Matzerath, den sie womöglich haßte, die Schuld am ihrem Tod erbe, daß Jan Bronski, ihr Jan, seinen Dienst bei der Polnischen Post mit Gedanken fortsetzen konnte, wie: Sie ist für mich gestorben, sie wollte mir nicht im Wege stehn, sie hat sich geopfert” (*BT*, 130).²⁹ Without Agnes, the two men give free reign to their mutual hostility, which fuels nationalist sentiment on both sides.

The skat triangle survives, as the game continues with a new third player. In Agnes’s place now sits Greff, the vegetable store manager, or Alexander Scheffler, the baker. Everything feels different. Scheffler does not like Jan, but accepts to sit at the table with him on account of Matzerath. Moreover, this new triangle is exclusively male and the balance has shifted toward the German side. Previously, with Agnes in the game, there were three ethnicities and nationalities at play: German, Kashubian, and Polish. In the male and German-dominated triangle, relationships are dead cold. Oskar, who had been an observer of Jan and Agnes’s touch-based communication under the table during

previous years, notes that the two Germans and the Kashubian/Pole playing skat were extremely careful not to touch each other's legs beneath the table:

Der Tod meiner armen Mama hatte das zuweilen fast freundschaftliche Verhältnis zwischen Matzerath und dem inzwischen zum Postsekretär avancierten Onkel, wenn nicht auf einmal und plötzlich, so doch nach und nach, und je mehr sich die politischen Zustände zuspitzten, um so endgültiger entflochten, trotz schönster gemeinsamer Erinnerungen gelöst. Mit dem Zerfall der schlanken Seele, des üppigen Körpers meiner Mama, zerfiel die Freundschaft zweier Männer, die sich beide in jener Seele gespiegelt, die beide von jenem Fleisch gezehrt hatten, die nun, da diese Kost und dieser Konvexspiegel wegfielen, nichts Unzulängliches fanden als ihre politisch gegensätzlichen, jedoch den gleichen Tabak rauchenden Männerversammlungen. (*BT*, 172)³⁰

Here, as in other passages, the likeness of Agnes to the land is striking. With the approach of the war and relations between Germans and Poles deteriorating, the possibility that two or more nations could live side by side on the same territory becomes unlikely. Instead, hard feelings, animosities, and hatreds between Germans and Poles increase. Matzerath and Bronski had both fed on the same body and sought nourishment from the same soul. Over the centuries, the Poles and the Germans fought over much of North-East Europe. The territory of what today is Poland shifted and varied throughout time. Poland went from being one of the most powerful states in Europe in the sixteenth century—the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—to not being a state at all for over a century: from the end of the eighteenth century, when it was partitioned three times among the Russian Empire, the Habsburg Empire, and Prussia, to the end of the First World War. The idea that Agnes's body and soul could not be split between Matzerath and Bronski speaks to the predicament of dividing a territory that has never belonged to one nation alone, but has been a contested territory between Germans and Poles at least since the Middle Ages.

Today historians on both sides agree that the German-Polish conflict after the First World War was the result of the rise of angry nationalism: nationalism based on the singularity of ethnicity, which upholds absolute identification within one group and differentiation from other ethnic groups. This kind of situation polarizes everything around two large entities: the Same and the Other. In *BT* the issue of nationalism, whether German or Polish, is expressed through the trope of blindness. For Grass, the fact of being blind(ed) signifies the reduction of all viewpoints to a binary perspective, whereby everything is black or white and all in-between ceases to exist.

Deprived of their “nourishment and convex mirror” (*BT*, 172), which Agnes had held up to them, Matzerath and Bronski could no longer see themselves as before. The presence of Agnes had enabled the men to view their relationship to one another in light of a mutual agreement, almost friendship. Now, everything they saw and perceived was one another’s increasing anger and frustration, which made them guard their space fiercely. The image of the convex mirror allows Grass to loosen up geography from strong nationalistic claims and make boundaries fluid. Because of its rounded surface, the convex mirror reflects images in an elongated fashion, either vertically or horizontally. This elongation makes the reflected people and objects appear as if they were leaning toward one another, breaking body boundaries as well as conventional spatial relations. Mirroring themselves in the woman they loved, the two men soared vertically or drifted horizontally, crossing into one another’s spaces. But what happened when the convex mirror disappeared? Bronski and Matzerath suddenly found themselves face to face, in the naked truth of their deprivation. Like the two men, the two nations mirrored themselves in the image of the other. And what was there to be seen in a time of rising

nationalism, of mutual distrust and hatred, in a time of little, if any, tolerance to touch? The feeling of loss and frustration outweighed the benefit of a shared peace. When Bronski and Matzerath chose a man to take Agnes's place at the skat table, the only thing they shared with the new player was the same tobacco.

With Agnes at skat, the game had never carried a political signature. Now, with six masculine legs beneath the table, avoiding any contact, the game atmosphere was highly politicized. Oskar describes their game as one “das aus politischen Gründen hätte verboten sein müssen, das aber in jedem Falle eines verlorenen oder gewonnenen Spieles die Entschuldigung, auch den Triumph zuließ: Polen hat einen Grand Hand verloren; die Freie Stadt Danzig gewann soeben für das Großdeutsche Reich bombensicher einen Karo einfach” (*BT*, 173).³¹ Agnes was the protector of love, the keeper of balance, unity, and three-handed harmony, always guarding against fierce binaries or “silly two-handed games” (*BT*, 44). The games with her were games of love dedicated to the shrine of peace. But now they were games of war. “Der Tag ließ sich voraussehen, da diese Manöverspiele ihr Ende finden würden—wie ja alle Manöver eines Tages beendet und auf erweiterter Ebene anlässlich eines sogenannten Ernstfalles in nackte Tatsachen verwandelt werden” (*BT*, 173).³² Agnes dies shortly before the Crystal Night pogrom. With her—the piece on which the (tense) peace rested—gone, the war breaks out. Jan the Pole is executed a few days after the unsuccessful defense of the Polish Post Office. Alfred Matzerath dies in his cellar at the end of the war, shot by a Kalmuk soldier. Danzig is completely transformed through the Russian bombardment; none of the protagonists of the balcony scene lives to see a new peace established.

iv) Faiths in the family

Oskar's family reflects not only the complexity of ethnic relations, but also the mixture of Protestants and Catholics in prewar Danzig. Matzerath is a Protestant and Agnes is a Catholic, and they both feel strongly about their denominations. Matzerath insists on closing the shop on Good Friday, which Agnes accepts, but she also demands that they close on Catholic grounds for Corpus Christi. On such occasions, the family hangs a cardboard sign with two different messages on one side and the other on the shop door: "Es gab einen Pappdeckel, auf dessen einer Seite man lesen konnte: Wegen Karfreitag geschlossen. Die andere Seite der Pappe besagte: Wegen Fronleichnam geschlossen" (BT, 118).³³ The intimacy of the two signs in one shows how closely interconnected and inextricable the lives of Protestants, Catholics, Germans, Poles, and Kashubes were in the days before the war. Although they followed different rituals, their lives depended on one another and their paths crossed and merged in various ways. On Good Friday, "[d]ie Protestanten gingen zur Kirche, die Katholiken putzten die Fensterscheiben und klopfen auf den Hinterhöfen alles, was einem Teppich nur ähnlich war, so kraftvoll und weithallend, daß man meinte, biblische Knechte nagelten auf allen Höfen der Mietshäuser gleichzeitig einen vervielfältigen Heiland auf vervielfältigte Kreuze" (BT, 118).³⁴ Grass underscores the interconnectedness between Protestants and Catholics by transferring the meaning of suffering from the church, where Protestants gathered in service and prayer, to the homes, yards, and streets where Catholics lived, and where they beat their carpets, with like religious fervor, as if they were going through the Passions of Christ. Good Friday, the day Jesus Christ is nailed to the Cross, the day of his last Passions, is a day spent in passion by Protestants and Catholics alike, in church, at home, or, as the case is with Oskar's "Holy Family—Mama, Matzerath, Jan Bronski, and

Oskar,” at the Neufahrwasser breakwater in Brosen, on the shore of the Baltic Sea. This is also the day when Agnes’s own passions start.

On Good Friday, the “Holy Family” starts to hurt and break apart. A painful argument occurs between Alfred and Agnes over eating or not eating eels. What in the chapter “Karfreitagskost” (Good Friday Fare) starts out as a reflection on a Protestant-Catholic relationship gradually segues into a conjugal conflict with an ethnic spin. When Matzerath vanishes into the kitchen, Agnes and Jan sit together holding hands and whispering in Kashubian. Then, when Matzerath carries the cooked eels into the dining room, Agnes runs into the bedroom screaming in a rage in Kashubian. This, Oskar explains, Matzerath could neither understand nor bear. Jan pacifies her, once again addressing her soothingly in Kashubian. It is the language of love and refuge, of mourning, wailing, and prayer. The multiethnic “Holy Family” makes peace and soon cards are being shuffled for a game of skat.

At Agnes’s funeral, the group of mourners, as always, is multiethnic and multi-denominational. Oskar watches Protestants and Catholics mourn and pray together, observing every differing detail in the expression of grief—whether based on individual traditions of faith, hybrid expressions, or private manifestations of sorrow. While grief is common to the gathering, their ways of expressing it differ. Nurses of the Protestant faith, notes Oskar,

[...] falteten die Hände anders als die Katholiken, ich möchte sagen, selbstbewußter, sprachen das Vaterunser mit vom katholischen Originaltext abweichenden Worten und bekreuzigten sich nicht, wie es etwa die Großmutter Koljaiczek, die Bronskis und auch ich taten. Mein Vater Matzerath—ich nenne ihn gelegentlich so, auch wenn er mich nur mutmaßlich zeugte—er, der Protestant, unterschied sich beim Gebet von den anderen Protestanten, weil er die Hände nicht vor der Brust verankerte, sondern die Finger verkrampft unten, etwa

in Höhe der Geschlechtsteile von einer Religion in die andere wechseln ließ und sich offensichtlich seiner Beterei schämte. (*BT*, 130-1)³⁵

In such manifestations of grief and faith, we find similar complexity and intricacy as in the case of ethnicity and nationality within the Polish Corridor and the area surrounding Danzig, where nationality and political loyalty were not always on the same side of the political divide. The extended family of Matzerath-Bronski-Koljaiczek is not only multiethnic but also practices different faiths. And to complicate the picture even more, Grass adds in his descriptions of Alfred Matzerath a variant of the Protestant faith. Through him Grass points to the existence of various forms of Protestantism, as the Koljaiczek-Bronski side of the family alludes to differing forms of Catholicism. Thus, Grandmother Koljaiczek “betet laut und hemmungslos auf kaschubisch, während Vinzent [ihr Bruder] nur die Lippen, wahrscheinlich auf polnisch bewegt” (*BT*, 131).³⁶ Just outside the cemetery there is Sigismund Markus, paying his last respects to the woman he also loved. He is not allowed to join the mourners, since he is a Jew and the year of the funeral is 1938.

Beyond the family: the multiethnic neighborhood

Grass moves from private to public in his study of ethnic networking and multiculturalism in prewar Danzig. The family is the nucleus from which he starts. Then he describes the apartment house, evokes the neighborhood, and finally brings to life the larger city. From the kitchen that smells of nineteen tenants, Grass takes us to the petit-bourgeoisie quarter, through meandering streets of the inner city, and further beyond to the harbor periphery. All these strata are pervaded with the spirit of a space where interethnic encounters are intrinsically a part of anyone’s and everyone’s experience.

Interestingly, within the city, the German-Polish-Kashubian relationship is a dominant one, whereas at the periphery, where the land meets the sea, new ethnicities come into play.

The majority of families who live in the apartment house are German, but Polish names attest to the presence of Poles. Sharing an apartment house with eighteen families means that everybody will come to know some aspects of others' lives. The lodgers' paths cross daily. Voices, music, or slumbering whistling sounds from neighboring apartments make walls seem porous, and so do the smells that penetrate from underneath doors. But the news of someone's death also travels rapidly from one family to another. Upon Kurt's second birthday, shortly before his departure to France with Bebra's Theater at the Front in the summer of 1943, Oskar takes his leave from "das große, mühsam atmende Mietshaus"—the large, heavily breathing apartment house (*BT*, 266). He makes an inventory of the tenants who are alive and those who are already dead. Oskar records their eating habits and their occupations, as well as their life problems. Meyn, the musician who plays the trumpet, has been sent home as unfit for service. He is waiting for them to come again—"und später holten sie ihn auch, nur seine Trompete durfte er nicht mitnehmen" (*BT*, 266).³⁷ Mr. and Mrs. Woiwuth are always eating kohlrabi, Mr. Heinert has stomach trouble and is working in the infantry, while his parents—called by their Polish name Heimowski—are living next door. Then there are old Mother Truczinski, whom Oskar hears making sounds in her sleep, Laubschad the watchmaker, who wakes dead clocks to life, and old man Heilandt who hammers crooked nails straight" (*BT*, 266). Also mentioned are Schlager's son, Eyke's son, and Kollin's son, all dead. The apartment house gradually empties out as the war progresses on various fronts,

and by 1946 all tenants have gone, some of whom are dead or evacuated and forced to join the refugee trains departing for Germany.

Among the several tenants of the apartment house and the immediate neighborhood, there are some who have Germanized their names, as is the case with young Heinert, whose original name was Heimowski. This is a case of recent Germanization, but there is sufficient historical evidence that throughout the long German settlement in Pomerania, including the Danzig territory, many Poles assimilated to the German population and changed their surnames. According to German ethnographic and anthropological research in Pomerania in the decades preceding the Second World War, there was not much difference between Germans and Poles in eastern Germany (Tighe, 154-58). The findings of such research often contradicted Nazi propaganda, which insisted that the Germans of West and East Prussia were direct descendants of the Nordic ideal of pure blood, whereas the Poles were an inferior nation. None of the German ethnographic and anthropological research—which compared physical and anthropological data from the German-Polish borderlands such as the height of Germans and Poles, the breadth of their skull, the shape of their face, the width of their cheek-bones, as well as rural architecture, rural women's headgear, etc.—supported the thesis of a Nordic stock. Völkisch politicians were hoping that anthropological study would identify precise ethnic differences between the Germans and the Slavs of the Baltic territories. But the Germans of Pomerania and East Prussia were not of Nordic descent, since the Scandinavians who had conquered Pomerania hundreds of years ago had come as lords and rulers, rather than settlers. In fact, in many of the scientific measurements, the Poles and Germans of Pomerania were hardly different. In *Gdansk*:

National Identity in the Polish-German Borderlands Tighe addresses precisely this idea of ethnic indeterminacy:

The base population of eastern Germany, running from Russia right through Lithuania, Poland, Pomerania, Brandenburg, and on to the Elbe, were part of the same spectrum. The east Germans were not part of a separate Germanic, 'Nordic' people, but were for the most part Germanised Slavs and Balts. The ethnographic and anthropological data spoke most eloquently of a population continuum where settlement was still overwhelmingly Slav, even though the Slavs now spoke the German language and thought of themselves as German nationals. The real divide that emerged from German research was that there was no sharp distinction between the Poles and Germans, but that the river Elbe and the old Limes Sorabicus showed a very sharp divide between Germans who were ethnically of Scandinavian origin, and Germans who were assimilated from other races. Of the much vaunted 'Saxon' and 'Nordic' influence beyond the Elbe there was but little sign, while of the despised Slav there was an embarrassing proliferation of evidence. (Tighe, 157-58)

The Nazis read in these data the extent to which Germans from eastern Germany had fallen from the Nordic ideal.

Gradual assimilation was one aspect of Germanization, but during the war this process took a forced turn. In *BT* Oskar narrates how Polish nationals of Kashubian ethnicity were transformed into Germans: "Sie waren keine Polen mehr und träumten nur noch kaschubisch. Volksdeutsche nannte man sie, Volksgruppe drei" (*BT*, 247).³⁸

Hedwig Bronski, Jan's widow, married a Baltic German, a local peasant leader in Ramkau. Her children, Marga and Stephan Bronski, were going to take their stepfather's name, Ehlers, once petitions, already under way, were approved. The fact that ethnicity and nationality were discursive phenomena of historical provenance is most clearly expressed in the irony of germanizing domestic birds. Mocking ethnic nationalism, Grass suggests that animals like men, also underwent the process of Germanization. When grandmother Koljaiczek brings a goose on the occasion of Kurt's baptism, she assures Matzerath, against his protests, that the goose is not Kashubian, but a German National

bird. However, she adds derisively, the bird tastes just like before the war. The narrator thus comments, “[d]amit waren alle völkischen Probleme gelöst, und nur vor der Taufe gab es noch einige Schwierigkeiten, als Oskar sich weigerte, die protestantische Kirche zu betreten. [...] ich blieb weiterhin schwärzester Katholik” (*BT*, 248).³⁹

The city: Gyddanyzc, Danczik, Dantzig, Danzig, Gdansk

From motley combinations of ethnicities, nationalities, and Christian faiths in the family and neighborhood, Oskar shifts to the multicultural city. While Agnes is on her regular date with Bronski, Oskar takes walks through the old city, diving into the history of the place. To Oskar, Danzig always makes an impression of a museum. He passes by the Arsenal “deren basaltfarbenes Grau mit verschieden großen Kanonenkugeln, verschiedenen Belagerungszeiten entstammend, gespickt war, damit jene Eisenbuckel die Historie der Stadt jedem Passanten in Erinnerung riefen” (*BT*, 81).⁴⁰ Oskar climbs up the Stockturm, a dungeon museum with many torture rooms. From there he gets a bird’s-eye view of Danzig—“vieltürmig, mit Glocken läutend, altehrwürdig, angeblich noch immer vom Atem des Mittelalters durchweht” (*BT*, 82).⁴¹ Although most, if not all, street names in the Free City of Danzig are German, not all churches are Protestant. Every week Agnes and Oskar walk the streets of Danzig to the Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart where Agnes makes her confession. She takes him by the hand on the afternoon of Passion Monday, and “führt mich Labesweg, Ecke Neuer Markt in die Elsenstraße, Marienstraße, am Fleischerladen Wohlgemut vorbei, am Kleinhammerpark links einbiegend durch die Eisenbahnunterführung, in der es immer gelblich und ekelhaft tropfte, zur und in die Herz-Jesu-Kirche, dem Bahndamm gegenüber” (*BT*, 115).⁴²

Agnes's death brings an end to Oskar's walks through the old city, foreshadowing the death of Danzig as a Free City, but also the end of the German settlement in West Prussia.

At the end of Book Two, Grass makes a brief historical overview of Danzig. The dominant tone of this evocation is that of violence, aggression, and conquest, as if the city had been a continuous battleground ever since the Middle Ages. At a fast-forward pace Grass draws our attention to such events as pillage, destruction, rebuilding, renewed onslaught, and reconstruction. What they all build up to is a palimpsest of inscription and erasure. A pattern of colonization runs from the first Slavic and Gothic settlers to their modern descendants, also expressed in the orthographic variants of the city:

Zuerst kamen die Rugier, dann kamen die Goten und Gepiden, sodann die Kaschuben, von denen Oskar in direkter Linie abstammt. Bald darauf schickten die Polen den Adalbert von Prag. Der kam mit dem Kreuz und wurde von Kaschuben oder Pruzzen mit der Axt erschlagen. Das geschah in einem Fischerdorf, und das Dorf hieß Gyddanyzc. Aus Gyddanyzc machte mann Danczik, aus Danczig wurde Dantzig, das sich später Danzig schrieb, und heute heißt Danzig Gdansk. (*BT*, 327)⁴³

The history of conquest and occupation, which Grass expresses in *BT*, conveys the conqueror's perspective. For centuries the dukes of Pomerelia, the grand masters of the Teutonic Order, the kings and antikings of Poland, the counts of Brandenburg, and the bishops of Wloclawek came through the Danzig area, then destroyed and rebuilt the city. The Hussites, the Teutonic Knights, the Poles, the Swedes, the Dutch, the Danes, and the English, the Prussians, Napoleon's generals, the Russians, and again the Prussians carried on what Grass ironically calls a "time-honored tradition." Intent on pillage and destruction and sometimes on settlement, these various conquerors left their mark on the city in the same time-old habit of conquest. Some did not stay—a number of

foreign sea captains came to be heroes of the sea just by cruising around the Danzig bay, others, like the Prussians “kamen ungerufen und übermalten an allen Stadttoren den polnischen Königsadler mit ihrem Vogel” (*BT*, 328).⁴⁴

The directors of a “zerstörerisches und wiederaufbauendes Spielchen”—a building and wrecking little game” have names (*BT*, 327). The early ones are Subislaus, Sambor, Mestwin, and Swantopolk; Otto and Waldemar, Bogussa, Heinrich von Plotzke—and Dietrich von Altenberg; later they are founders of a nation, like Kazimierz, who became known as the Great, son of Wladyslaw the First; two more Wladyslaws and another Kazimierz follow and the latter’s name is linked to a period of thirteen long years, when he wasted the good money of the Danzig merchants making war on the Teutonic Knights (*BT*, 327). Napoleon’s general Rapp is also mentioned among the subjugators of the city and finally Marshall Rokossovski, the liberator of Danzig/Gdansk. Also mentioned are names of heroes who lost battles, like Stanislaw Leszczynski, the poor King of Poland, who fled to France.

When Grass mentions that this is the history we may read in “our books,” he leaves it to us to decide whether he means German or Polish books. However, is there any difference in terms of their nationalistic drive? Whether German or Polish, both nations’ histories honor their national heroes. These are the ones whom history makes responsible not only for the conquest but also for the rebuilding of the city, even though the laborious and trying task of reconstruction was actually left to the people. The townspeople, the Danzigers, were those who “had to cough up a round million” when Stanislaw Leszczynski, “the poor King of Poland,” on account of whom “eighteen hundred houses were destroyed,” fled to France (*BT*, 328). And when Napoleon’s general

besieged the city, again the people of Danzig had to rap out twenty million francs to him (*BT*, 328). Although the Danzigers almost never had the chance to decide their city's destiny, there were occasional attempts at self-rule. In this concentrated historical survey, Grass briefly chronicles one such attempt, which clearly shows how tired of pillage and occupation the townspeople really were. When the Teutonic Knights were thrown out of the city, the townspeople tore down the fortress the Knights had left behind, sick of having a fortress in their city.

Upon Oskar's return to Danzig in the summer of 1944, his native city lies "noch immer unversehrt und mittelalterlich von Stunde zu Stunde mit verschieden großen Glocken von verschieden hohen Kirchtürmen lärm[end]" (*BT*, 285).⁴⁵ Why the German occupiers left the city intact when they annexed it to Germany in 1939 is explained by the fact that they understood their claim over Danzig to be a rightful one. From their perspective, the Free City was not a foreign territory, but one that was returning to the homeland. Of course, when the narrator describes his city as "intact," he only refers to its infrastructure. From the demographic point of view, no such claim can be made. According to Thomas Urban, there lived in Danzig in the twenties 11000 Jews, who considered themselves partly German. In 1938, only 4000 remained in the City, and after the Crystal Night pogrom—two synagogues in flames and several Jewish shops plundered—the number of Jews decreased to 250, of whom 219 died in concentration camps (Urban, 292). The Polish minority of Danzig was also persecuted or driven away. When Hitler visited the city twelve days after the military success on the Westerplatte in September of 1939, Polish inscriptions had already been erased from Danzig, and Polish officials and clerics had been arrested (Urban, 298). Few Poles remained in the city, the

two Polish churches were burned down and preaching in Polish became illegal. On the one hand, the city emptied of its Jewish and Polish minorities, on the other hand, the wartime German population increased, as approximately half a million German refugees from East Prussia fled the Red Army.

The city remained intact until the arrival of Marshal Rokossovski. As the Russian Army approached the city, Nazi authorities ordered the evacuation of the German population. A third of the German navy sank in the harbor under the attack of the Red Army, including the cruise ship “Wilhelm Gustloff” with thousands of women and children. At the end of March 1945 General Rokossovski, at the head of the Red Army, entered Danzig. Like the historians Tighe and Urban, Grass observes how most of the destruction the Red Army caused in Danzig took place after the capture of the city. The old city had been spared the pillage before the entry of Rokossovski’s forces; not so after that. For several days, the Red Army besieged and plundered Danzig. Hundreds of houses in the old city were set on fire and thousands of women were raped. The Marienkirche also burned down as well as the 500 year old Krantor (the city gate). Marshal Rokossovski remembered his “great international precursors.” He set the whole place on fire with his artillery “damit sich jene, die nach ihm kamen, im Wiederaufbau austoben konnten” (BT, 329).⁴⁶ Grass places the Russian assault in the context of previous sieges. The unwritten law of conquest, which gave the conqueror the right to plunder, devastation, and ruin, is observed in this case as well: “Pommerellen, Brandenburger, Ordensritter, Polen, Schweden und nochmals Schweden, Franzosen, Preußen und Russen, auch Sachsen hatten zuvor schon, Geschichte machend, alle Pahr Jahrzehnte die Stadt verbrennenswert gefunden” (BT, 322).⁴⁷ Yet the scale of the Russian offensive had no

preceden: “Rechtstadt, Altstadt, Pfefferstadt, Vorstadt, Jungstadt, Neustadt und Niederstadt, an denen zusammen man über siebenhundert Jahre lang gebaut hatte, brannten in drei Tagen ab” (*BT*, 322).⁴⁸

In the summer of 1945, Oskar departs for the Rhineland. At the same time, the city is transitioning from German to Polish street names. He takes leave of Marienstrasse, Striessbach, Kleinhammer-Park, Bahnhofstrasse, the Langfuhr station, now called Wrzeszcs. Oskar’s leave-taking from the Free City of his childhood is also a farewell to over seven centuries of uninterrupted German presence and settlement in North-East Europe now disappearing. Danzig becomes Gdansk, a city gradually emptying out of its population and awaiting new inhabitants. The rebuilding of Gdansk becomes the task of the Polish nation and not the undertaking of a multiethnic population.

Poland had won the war, but had also suffered massive losses. In 1939, Nazi Germany and, soon after, the Soviet Union invaded the Second Polish Republic, as interwar Poland was known. During the course of the war, over seven million Poles died and its Polish Jewry—a few million in 1939—virtually disappeared. Various cities were destroyed—Warsaw suffered almost complete destruction—and territories were taken away and never returned. After the war, Poland’s geographic location was shifted to the West, and the eastern borderlands, which the Soviets had seized from Poland with Hitler’s consent and later with Western allies turning a blind eye, were definitively annexed to the Soviet Union. The eastern borderlands represented a larger territory than the former eastern territories of Germany (east of the Oder-Neisse line), which Poland received in 1945 as compensation. Poland was smaller after the war than before. Moreover, it was to become a state built on national lines and not on multinational ones.

The greatest loss for North-East Europe during the Second World War and the aftermath period is the loss of multiethnicity and multiculturalism. Germany had pursued a politics of ethnic cleansing, killing much of the Jewish population of East-Central Europe, but ethnic cleansing continued even after the war. Russia expelled all the Poles from the former Polish eastern borderlands, and Poland drove out the millions of Germans that had lived for generations in the former German eastern territories. In 1945, it was Poland's conviction and probably much of Europe's belief, that future territorial conflicts could be prevented through the creation of ethnically homogeneous nation-states.

Grass combines a synchronic perspective on multiethnicity in Danzig with a diachronic viewpoint. The family and the neighborhood allow Grass to represent the Polish-German-Kashubian social intercourse as it unfolds during the two decades following the Treaty of Versailles. The depiction of the city, however, provides a diachronic perspective on ethnic relationships. The city appears to Oskar as a museum, where various settlers throughout time have left their distinctive mark, expressed in military language and in architecture, as well as in demographics. General Rokossovski's siege is the final conquest of the city in a long historical succession of similar conquests, as well as the terminal point of "a tradition." Finally, Grass is able to combine the synchronic and the diachronic viewpoints in his representation of the periphery of the city—the Sweden Bar.

Herbert's back: family/nation/ethnic history

The Sweden Bar is one of the most international spots in Danzig. Many Scandinavians, but also Scotsmen, “Russen, Polen aus dem Freihafen, Stauer vom Holm und Matrosen der gerade zum Besuch eingelaufenen reichsdeutschen Kriegsschiffe” (*BT*, 142),⁴⁹ frequent the bar for a nip and conversation. Here the present meets the past, meaning that the ethnic mixture of the 1930s can be traced back to similar encounters between ethnic groups one hundred and more years before. In the historical synopsis Grass makes on the occasion of Marshal Rokossovski's “liberation” of Danzig, we come across the same ethnic groups as those represented in the Sweden Bar. The bar is located in the harbor suburb of Neufahrwasser. Herbert Truczinski, a member of the apartment house community and Oskar's good friend, serves there as a waiter. To Oskar the bar appears a “linguistic volcano,” but, as he observes, “[e]s war nicht ungefährlich, in dieser wahrhaft europäischen Kneipe zu kellnern” (*BT*, 142).⁵⁰ Despite his knowledge of three languages and his belief that this was the right place for him, once or twice a month Herbert arrives home in an ambulance. Each time his back has a new wound. When the wound has healed, Oskar is allowed to study the scar.

Herbert Truczinski is an important point of intersection of the family, nation, and ethnic themes this chapter examines. Through Matzerath's marriage to Maria after Agnes's death, Herbert enters the extended Matzerath-Bronski-Koljaiczek family. Maria, Oskar's stepmother, is also Herbert's sister, and thus Herbert becomes Oskar's uncle, taking the place of dead uncle Jan. Herbert's name attests to Polish nationality, but his presence in the novel could not be farther removed from the idea of the singularity of one

nation in Danzig. He is at the center of interethnic conflict, but his participation in such clashes is more circumstantial than intentional. He tries to play the role of the third party, negotiating between the opposing parties, but the clash always leaves him with a wounded back. In this situation, he is a walking record of every new ethnic encounter. The analysis of Herbert's back represents the transition segment in this chapter from the themes of family and nation to a discussion of the minority theme.

Herbert's back does not in the least resemble an ordinary back. It is always in motion and immensely expressive, just like the human face. Herbert's back has a personality of its own that fascinates Oskar. He describes it in terms of a landscape with a very particular kind of vegetation, with "luxuriant growth" and a profusion of colors, a landscape sensitive to changes in the weather:

Eine rosige Landschaft, mit Sommersprossen besät. Unterhalb der Schulterblätter wucherte fuchsiges Haar beiderseits der im Fett eingebetteten Wirbelsäule. Abwärts kräuselte es, bis es in jenen Unterhosen verschwand, die Herbert auch im Sommer trug. Aufwärts, vom Rand der Unterhosen bis zu den Halsmuskeln bedeckten den Rücken wulstige, den Haarwuchs unterbrechende, Sommersprossen tilgende, Falten ziehende, bei Wetterumschlag jukende, vielfarbige, vom Blauschwarz bis zum grünlichen Weiß abgestufte Narben. (*BT*, 143)⁵¹

In the scar landscape Oskar recalls a woman's intimate parts, "ready for love." The scars are "hard," "sensitive," and "disconcerting" (*BT*, 144). But most of all, he finds an association with his own intrauterine life and the umbilical cord. "Oskars Ziel ist die Rückkehr zur Nabelschnur; alleine deshalb der ganze Aufwand und das Verweilen bei Herbert Truczinskis Narben" (*BT*, 144).⁵²

Herbert's back is a multicolored "labyrinth," swollen with Finnish, Polish, German, and Ukrainian knife marks. Each scar carries a story. When Oskar touches any one of them, Herbert knows precisely which story goes with it. At the Sweden Bar

Herbert is often a witness to skirmishes between clients of different ethnicities. Trying to mediate between two parties, he gets himself caught up in their conflict. One night a Pole and a Ukrainian are sitting “like brothers” at the same table. When the Pole calls the Ukrainian “a Russki,”—the last thing the Ukrainian wants to be called—in a flash the conflict has broken out. Herbert interferes to separate the two, but the Ukrainian then calls him “a Water Polack,” which somehow upsets the Pole, who calls Herbert “a Nazi.” While Herbert is explaining to the Ukrainian the difference between “a Water Polack” and “a citizen of Danzig,” the Pole stabs him in the back. “[U]nd das is de Narbe” —and that’s the scar (*BT*, 145), the story ends. Another scar is pressed and Herbert tells the story of a clash between the Finns and the Swedes, who “schon immer was voreinander iebrig” (*BT*, 146).⁵³ A Saxon scar comes from a German whom Herbert calls “the torpedo fritz” because he was working on a torpedo boat and “talked big.” “Torpedo fritz” calls Herbert a “pocketbook German,” which upsets the citizen of the Free City under the League of Nations.

Herbert almost takes pride in his scar landscape and talks jovially about new additions. The wounds heal, but the scars remain, as a testimony to hostile encounters. Yet, such confrontations—as long as they happen without the loss of human life—are also productive. They inscribe within the province of the body an element of alterity, which will not be erased with healing. Ethnic clashes and encounters impress a permanent mark on the body and land geography. Herbert’s back, like the city of Danzig, is able to heal from the wounds inflicted on it. Until one day, in self-defense, Herbert knocks a Latvian sea captain dead. Trying to prevent a Latvian knife from adding a Latvian scar to all the Finnish, Swedish, Polish, Free-City, and German scars on his

“kreuz und quer gepflügten Rücken”—lengthwise and crosswise belabored back (*BT*, 147), Herbert Truczinski responds with unacceptable severity. The Latvian’s death is something Herbert cannot bear, so he resigns from the Sweden Bar. Herbert’s back shifts attention from nationalistic politics to the right of minorities and newcomers. Each visitor has left a story behind, which Herbert’s back has diligently recorded. The stories on Herbert’s back are the kind of narratives that generally do not enter national historiography.

Kashubia and the Kashube people

The German-Polish interface has filled endless pages of historical writing about Danzig and Pomerania. Less visible has been the presence of minority groups like the Kashubians. With a narrator of Kashubian ancestry, Grass now foregrounds the Kashubian theme, placing it on an equal footing with German-Polish historiography.

i) The minority: a Kashubian theme

“To the south and west of Danzig lay the Tuchler Heide and Kaszubia, an area of damp, sandy forest, marshy scrub, brackish lakes and poor farmland. There the Kaszubians occupied smallholdings; all the better farmland towards the coast had long since been taken over by the Germans” (Tighe, 91). Kashubia lies at the heart of the novel. Here, in this poor farmland, the first events of the narrative unfold, when Oskar’s Kashubian grandparents meet and beget their only daughter, Agnes. Oskar Matzerath is a direct descendant of the Kashubians, an old and small ethnic group of Slavic origin that settled in Pomerania in the Middle Ages. Living side by side with Poles and Germans for centuries, the Kashubians preserved their language and their traditions. But their

community never grew large enough to be able to claim a territory as their own and build a nation-state. What happened to this ethnic group in the twentieth century is a consequence of the clash between German and Polish nationalisms. Emphasizing the Slavic connection, Poles counted the Kashubians among their own population. Yet the war forced the Kashubians to assimilate to the Germans. In *BT*, Kashubians like Hedwig Bronski Germanize in order to survive. The destiny of Kashubes with Poles pressing in from one side and Germans on the other side is best expressed by Anna Koljaiczek: “‘unserains nich richtich polnisch is und nich richtig deitsch jenug, und wenn man Kaschub is, das raicht weder de Deutschen noch de Pollacken. De wollen es immer genau haben!’” (*BT*, 344).⁵⁴

Grandmother Koljaiczek is a central figure in the development of the Kashubian theme. Throughout the text, she appears as a matriarch and protector of Kashubia, and is an epitome of constancy and continuity. With times changing and her children hiding their ethnicity behind Polish or German nationality, Anna Koljaiczek remains a stronghold of Kashubian identity. As a young woman, Anna Bronski marries Joseph Koljaiczek, a Kashubian and a Polish sympathizer, and when the latter drowns, she marries his brother, unable to imagine a husband other than a Koljaiczek. Continuing the farming tradition of her family, she comes by train weekly from Bissau, Polish territory between the Two World Wars, to the Langfuhr market in Danzig where she sells fresh eggs, butter, and geese.

Oskar’s descriptions of his grandmother are full of tenderness and warmth, and often nostalgic. She sometimes allows him to lie under her four skirts and breathe in the peace and safety of the place; to Oskar this is Eden. During cold winters, notwithstanding

the harshness of the low temperatures, Anna Koljaiczek continues to sell her produce and goods on the Langfuhr market. Remembering one of these days, Oskar narrates how every hour a man named Schwerdtfeger pushes a hot brick under grandmother Koljaiczek's skirts, taking out the previous one, by now cold. Oskar remembers his longing to be one of those hot bricks.

If we look at Oskar's homes throughout the novel—the multifamily apartment house in Danzig, the small bathroom converted into a room, which Oskar rents in a multi-lodger apartment in Düsseldorf after the War, as well as the mental institution, where he starts and completes his narrative—none of these resemble the perfection of the home beneath Grandmother Koljaiczek's skirts. When Oskar evokes the image of the home under the skirts, he calls it Africa:

Afrika suchte ich unter den Röckern, womöglich Neapel, das man bekanntlich gesehen haben muß. Da flossen die Ströme zusammen, da war die Wasserscheide, da wehten besondere Winde, da konnte es aber auch windstill sein, da rauschte der Regen, aber man saß im Trocknen, da machten die Schiffe fest oder die Anker wurden gelichtet, da saß neben Oskar der liebe Gott, der es schon immer gerne warm gehabt hat, da putzte der Teufel sein Fernrohr, da spielten Engelchen blinde Kuh; unter den Röcken meiner Großmutter war immer Sommer, auch wenn der Weihnachtsbaum brannte, auch wenn ich Ostereier suchte oder Allerheilige feierte. Nirgendwo konnte ich ruhiger nach dem Kalender leben als unter den Röcken meiner Großmutter. (*BT*, 101)⁵⁵

Nonetheless, Oskar also raises the question if the place under his grandmother's skirts is not “das endliche Nirwana”—the ultimate Nirvana (*BT*, 101), which means space of enlightenment as well as space of oblivion. Notwithstanding the answer, the home beneath the skirts is shelter and refuge from the world surrounding it. In Oskar's imagination the space beneath his grandmother's skirts can expand as necessary and give shelter to more than one member of the family. Here—“inside my grandmother”—as Oskar describes it, the entire family meets and relationships unfold:

Erst im Inneren meiner Großmutter Koljaiczek oder, wie ich es scherzhaft nannte, im großmütterlichen Butterfaß wäre es meinen damaligen Theorien nach zu einem wahren Familienleben gekommen. Selbst heute [...] male ich mir, dem nichts unerreichbarer geworden ist als der Eingang zu meiner Großmutter, die schönsten Familienszenen im Kreis meiner Vorfahren aus.

So stelle ich mir besonders an Regentagen vor: meine Großmutter verschickt Einladungen, und wir treffen uns in ihr. (*BT*, 289)⁵⁶

At the end of the war, shortly before Oskar, together with Maria and Kurt, leave for Germany, grandmother Koljaiczek comes to visit. Oskar would like to take refuge underneath her four skirts, “die trotz heftigster, militärischer, politischer und weltgeschichtlicher Ereignisse nicht von ihrer Kartoffelfarbe gellassen hatten” (*BT*, 344).⁵⁷ But in that space Oskar finds now kerosene bottles, synthetic honey, and disinfectant. The path to Africa and the road to Nirvana must be renounced. Oskar can neither remain among his ancestors, nor choose oblivion.

ii) The Kashubian theme continued: subalternity and “Can Oskar talk?”

The path to Africa directs us on a new avenue of analysis: the postcolonial approach. One of the ways in which postcolonial criticism has poignantly addressed minority issues has been through an inquiry of subalternity. This notion was developed by Indian historians in the 1980s to examine issues of emerging nationalism and independence from the British colonial rule. Ranajit Guha, a foremost historian of the Subaltern Studies group, defines as subaltern the masses of people who contributed to the foundation of the Indian nation, but whose contribution was never acknowledged by colonialist or elitist historiography. A discussion of subalternity in *BT* is productive when we analyze the relationship between the Kashubians and the Poles within the context of Polish nationalism. Whenever the question of territory is raised in the German-Polish

debate, Kashubians count as Poles. But how does Kashubian identity play into notions of nationhood in Poland after World War II?

At the core of the Subaltern Studies project is the attempt to write an alternative history and to redefine agency. Subaltern critics like Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Spivak, and others challenge a homogeneous, univocal understanding of history and endeavor to recuperate disempowered voices. Historiography, in these historians' view, is an undertaking of recognizing and recovering the history of the masses, of the numerous subaltern voices and unacknowledged agents of history. Subaltern critics propose an alternative discourse that articulates "the hidden or suppressed accounts of numerous groups—women, minorities, disadvantaged or dispossessed groups, refugees, exiles, etc." (Said, vi).⁵⁸

As Indian historiography suggests, the term "subaltern" can refer both to masses of people as well as minorities. In Guha's studies subalterns are generally peasants and workers, while in Spivak's well-known essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" they are tribal women, marked by caste and ethnicity. In the first case, the voices of the masses go almost unrecorded in the history of India's struggle for independence. In the second situation, the Indian women's voices are lost, silenced as they are in the conflict between the white men and the brown men.

In this chapter, the term "subaltern" is relevant to the identity of Oskar Matzerath and the Kashubian minority. Several elements converge in *BT* that make Oskar Matzerath a subaltern. Most obvious is his ethnic subalternity. He is a member of a Slavic minority that never created a nation. But he is also an inmate of a mental hospital, an eccentric and an unconventional artist—a drummer and a writer—and a most amazing dwarf.

Everything about Oskar speaks of the unusual. He has one mother but he is twice fathered. He is clairaudient from the moment of his birth, distinguishing the sounds of an Eastern European moth that drums his entry into the world. Upon his third birthday, he takes his destiny into his own hands and throws himself down the cellar steps in order to stop growing. For over twenty years he retains the height of a three-year old. Meanwhile, he conceals his out-of-the-ordinary qualities, faking the behavior of a delayed child. He hides underneath the table and eavesdrops on the grownups' conversation and he also disappears underneath rostrums, turning Nazi demonstrations into merrymaking and amusement. In his own opinion, Oskar is nowhere at home: “[I]ch bin weder im Sakralen noch im Profanen beheimatet, dafür etwas abseits in einer Heil- und Pflegeanstalt hause” (*BT*, 118).⁵⁹ It is this quality of a life “on the fringes,” reinforced at every moment of the narrative, which links Oskar to subalternity.

We cannot view the Kashubians as “emergent collective consciousness” (Spivak). Grass never raises the Kashubian question in terms of nationhood, rather in terms of multiculturalism, as a way of life in which people of various ethnic and cultural lineages live side by side, interact, and share a common destiny. Kashubian culture is not something only Kashubians can enjoy, and neither are German and Polish traditions exclusively for Germans and Poles to carry on. Alfred Matzerath marries a Kashubian woman and cooks from Kashubian cuisine. Kashubian mushrooms with scrambled eggs and tripe is a favorite dish of the family. Matzerath is “ein passionierter Koch, [der] Gefühle in Suppen zu wandeln ver[steht]” (*BT*, 32).⁶⁰ Borrowing from other ethnic cuisines could only increase the range of his feelings. Without thinking of his cooking in

terms of a multicultural experience, Matzerath participates, one way or another, in the continuation of an ethnic and cultural practice.

If there is a link between the Kashubian minority and nationalism, it is established through the Polish cause. Whenever the Kashubian is a patriot, he fights for Poland. Joseph Koljaiczek and Jan Bronski, who are both of Kashubian ethnicity and favor a Polish state, exemplify this link. The novel starts with grandfather Koljaiczek who acts as a “firebug” in the name of “a partitioned but for this very reason united Poland” (*BT*, 19). “Volk, das bei Großbränden immer zugegen ist, soll das Lied von der Bogurodzika, der Gottesgebälerin, angestimmt haben—wir dürfen glauben, es ging bei Koljaiczeks Brandstiftungen feierlich zu: es wurden Schwüre geschworen” (*BT*, 19).⁶¹ However, patriotism fades in the next generation, as the case of Jan Bronski shows, where defending Poland becomes a circumstantial event. In fact, Jan never actively participates in the defense of the Polish Post Office. His allegiance to Poland cannot make him blind to the act of killing. Jan never fires his rifle. However, at the end of the War, he is honored as a Polish hero. His identity is obscured by Polish nationalism, for Kashubian ethnicity goes unmentioned.

The distinguished postcolonial critic Edward Said makes a distinction between two types of Indian history: one that “[was] *written* from a colonialist and elitist point of view,” the other “[was] *made* by subaltern classes” (Said, v).⁶² The fate of Jan Bronski confirms the gap between these two histories: he is honored as a Polish patriot, while his identity as a Kashubian remains unrecorded. In Jan’s case, the Kashubian “made” history and the Pole “wrote” it. As Bhabha notes, a certain kind of “ambivalence haunts the idea

of the nation, the language of those who write it and the lives of those who live it” (“Introduction,” 1).

Oskar attempts to change this situation when he takes up drumming. Under his sticks patriotism becomes a mockery. He embraces any cause and none. If Oskar inherited any aspects of his grandfather’s insurgent nature, the two of them never shared the same cause for protest. His weapon is not fire and his cause has little, if anything, to do with nationalism. If his subalternity has a political side, he expresses it in an aesthetic mode. Oskar is not a conventional insurgent. Creeping under the speaker’s rostrums at Nazi demonstrations, he beats his drum so as to manipulate the rhythm of a military march into the joyous waltz rhythm so dearly enjoyed by simple folk. This abrupt shift from the disciplined sounds of the march to the playful waltz and Charleston music, coupled with the laughter and dancing of the crowd, is sufficient to transform the political rally into its reverse—a parody of power. Oskar continues this practice for several years: “Längere Zeit lang [...] habe ich mit meiner Trommel unter Tribünen hockend, mehr oder weniger Erfolg beobachtend, Kundgebungen gesprengt, Redner zum Stottern gebracht, Marschmusik, auch Choräle in Walzer und Foxtrott umgebogen” (*BT*, 99).⁶³

Spivak describes the main objective of subaltern historiography as an attempt to construct a “theory of change”. Such changes, Spivak explains, “are signaled or marked by a functional change in sign-systems ... [as for instance] from crime to insurgency, from bondsman to worker. The most significant outcome of this revision is that the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the ‘subaltern’” (Spivak, 3).⁶⁴ Oskar’s interventions at the Nazi rallies demonstrate this kind of shift in the sign system from

crime to aesthetics. Through drumming Oskar is able to transform political demonstrations into Dionysian gatherings and change his status from criminal to artist.

Looking back upon the years leading to the war, Oskar is able to add some perspective on the attitude of the Free Danzigers toward Germany, as well as to define his insurgency in terms other than “resistance.” Among the crowd gathered on the Mayfield is also Oskar’s “uniformed father,” who had joined the Party in 1934, when it was still unnecessary, but who never attained any higher position than unit leader. Alfred Matzerath was very serious about dressing in his brown uniform every Sunday for the rallies on the meadow. But many of those gathered at the rallies were simple folk, looking for fun. Whether they approved of Gauleiter Forster’s shouting in his foul Bavarian accent, “Home to the Reich,” or appreciated the district chief Lobsack’s ability to speak in “every variety of Danzig Plattdeutsch” to tell “jokes about Bollermann and Wullsutski,” to address “the longshoremen in Schichau, the proletariat in Ohra, the middle class in Emmaus, Schidlitz, Bürgerwiesen, and Praust,” or whether they were looking forward to Oskar’s artful innovations under the rostrum, may still be “much debated and discussed” (*BT*, 94). Refusing to self-aggrandize himself, Oskar defines his insurgency not as an act of resistance to Nazism, but as something personal:

Heute [...] habe ich den rechten Abstand zu meiner Trommelei unter Tribünen. Nichts liegt ferner, als in mir, wegen der sechs oder sieben zum Platzen gebrachten Kundgebungen, drei oder vier aus dem Schritt getrommelten Aufmärsche und Vorbeimärsche, nun einen Widerstandskämpfer zu sehen. Das Wort ist reichlich in Mode gekommen. Vom Geist des Widerstandes spricht man, von Widerstandskreisen. Man soll den Widerstand sogar verinnerlichen können, das nennt man dann: Innere Emigration. Ganz zu schweigen von jenen bibelfesten Ehrenmännern, die während des Krieges wegen nachlässiger Verdunklung der Schlafzimmerfenster vom Luftschutzwart eine Geldstrafe aufgebremmt bekamen und sich jetzt Widerstandskämpfer nennen, Männer des Widerstandes. (*BT*, 99).⁶⁵

Oskar could easily have passed as a resistance fighter on the side of the Polish cause. He broke up Nazi demonstrations on a drum, which was red and white. Red and white had officially been adopted as the Polish national colors in 1831 and in 1919 they became the colors of the Polish national flag. Nonetheless, Oskar warns us not to be misled by the colors of his instrument. His protest is personal more than anything. He asks to be seen as “einen etwas eigenbrötlerischen Mensch [...] der aus privaten, dazu ästhetischen Gründen [...] Farbe und Schnitt der Uniformen, Takt und Lautstärke der auf Tribünen üblichen Musik ablehnte und deshalb auf einem bloßen Kiinderspielzeug einigen Protest zusammen trommelte” (*BT*, 100).⁶⁶ Distancing himself from his grandfather’s cause or from any possibility that after the war he would be identified as a hero and a patriot like his uncle, Oskar prefers to define his dissent in aesthetic terms. The sounds of Nazi speech and rally music were total kitsch, thoroughly unacceptable to the fine ear of the artist. But apart from his personal critique, he drums for causes of minority groups. Interestingly, he does not adopt new convictions and only allows his drum to proclaim different aspirations, as if his toy had acquired a mind of its own:

Ich trommelte nicht nur gegen braune Versammlungen. Oskar saß den Roten und den Schwarzen, den Pfadfindern und Spinathemden von der PX, den Zeugen Jehovas und dem Kyffhäuserbund, den Vegetariern und den Jungpolen von der Ozonbewegung unter der Tribüne. Was sie zuch zu singen, zu blasen, zu beten und zu verkünden hatten: meine Trommel wußte es besser. (*BT*, 100)⁶⁷

As such, Oskar’s “agency is multiple rather than unitary, unpredictable rather than immanent, bereft of dialectical guarantees, and animated by an unsteady and nonlinear relation to time” (McClintock, 96). He has no “rendezvous with victory ... no historical logic” (96). His agency is dispersed and heterogenous.

Later, during the war, Oskar joins the Dusters, a youth group whose mission is to protest against everything. He becomes the leader of these “adolescent Romantics,” and together they raid several Party headquarters—including offices of the Hitler Youth patrols—they steal arms and ammunition, and strip soldiers of their medals and insignia of rank. Once again, Oskar dissociates himself from the Polish resistance movement, as he had during the siege of the Polish Post Office: “was ging mich Polen an! Was war das Polen?” (*BT*, 189)⁶⁸ Back then the only thing he cared for was to bring his drum to safety.

Free from an affiliation to the Polish partisanship or the Red movement, the Dusters’ work was nothing but a protest against the grownups’ world. No other group could offer Oskar a greater sense of belonging somewhere. Yet protest “against everything” is like art for art’s sake. In the early days of using his voice to break glass, Oskar’s opposition always had a purpose. But “später, während der Blüte- und Verfallszeit seiner Kunst, Gebrauch von seinen Fähigkeiten, ohne äußeren Zwang zu verspüren. Aus bloßem Spieltrieb, dem Manierismus einer Spätepoch verfallend, dem *l’art pour l’art* ergeben, sang Oskar sich dem Glas ins Gefüge und wurde alter dabei” (*BT*, 56-7).⁶⁹ If we look at Oskar’s protest in this way, the transition from insurgent to victim does not even define as betrayal. When the police catch up with the Dusters, Oskar “automatically” steps into the role of a sniveling three-year-old who had been led astray by gangsters (*BT*, 314-5). Under the mask of the three-year-old he is also able to escape the consequences of being discovered on the Polish side after the failed defense of the Polish Post Office.

Does Oskar’s subalternity become questionable in the absence of a purpose beyond his peculiar art, or in the revelation of his ability to change sides? What do we

make of Oskar's collaboration with the Nazis when he joins Bebra's Theater at the Front to perform for German soldiers, and adopts to the jaded tastes of the Paris occupation troops (*BT*, 271)? Does his role as a jester make him less prone to accusation? But when Bebra—who frequents the privy chambers of Messrs. Goebbels and Goering—brings up his ancestry as a direct descendant of Prince Eugene, “scion from the tree of Louis XIV,” and speaks of hard times, “von den Schwachen, die zeitweilig ausweichen müßten, vom Widerstand, der im Verborgenen blühe” (*BT*, 253),⁷⁰ Oskar is disappointed. He finds the image of the jester at the king's court hard to accept and when he hears Bebra mentioning the idea of “inward emigration,” this is their parting of ways. The ambivalence of insurgency and collaboration reveals that the subaltern in Grass is not always a noble and progressive agent, but also a conservative constituent. This seems to be a departure from previous Subaltern Studies perspectives, which locate subalterns in a position of non-representation, dispossession, or disenfranchisement. As such, the subaltern is always in the position of the Other. However, in Grass's novel, the subaltern crosses the line between those in power and the powerless.

A major difference between the Subaltern Studies project and Günter Grass is that in the novel the subaltern speaks. Indian subaltern historiography must always look for the subaltern voice in the text of official records to which that voice is organically linked. The subaltern voice reemerges from the gaps and silences of the voice of authority. For Gayatri Spivak the subaltern is always represented one way or another. She points to the German understanding of representation as both “darstellen” and “vertreten.” The first refers to representation in art, the second to representation in politics, when someone speaks in the name of someone else. Spivak's subaltern is a woman trapped between

patriarchy and imperialism, between the white man's *Darstellung* of her as a victim of patriarchy and the brown man's *Vertretung* of her in matters of life and death.

Represented in both cases, the Indian woman remains an object of power and oppression, without the chance to speak. Effaced from history as a speaking and writing subject, she can neither be heard nor read.

The subaltern in Günter Grass is both represented and representing. Oskar's narration shifts perspectives between the first and the third person. He speaks in his own name, but he also mimics the ideas of *darstellen* and *vertreten*. He seems to agree with subaltern historians that it is not possible to separate the subaltern voice from the discourse of authority. Oskar's narrative arises as an alternative version of history in the context of both German and Polish historiography. He combines two mediums of communication in this experimental version of history: the written word and the musical sound. His is a narrative/drumming version of history, a historical and an aesthetic experiment.

Oskar's narrative is often interrupted, continued, and enriched by the sound of his drum. There is no narration without drumming. In his subaltern version of history Oskar makes two references to Africa, and each time Kashubia is also present in the picture. Not only that, but the most nostalgic and moving sounds in Oskar's drumming are heard when he drums back images of his grandmother—whether sitting in the middle of the potato field, or standing above hot bricks in the Danzig marketplace. Her skirts are always the “asylum-giving skirts” (*BT*, 41) the only safe place on earth for her grandson. All his fantasies of peace and security return there, “im großmütterlichen Butterfaß”—in the grandmotherly butter (*BT*, 289). There, “he is searching for oblivion, a home, the

ultimate Nirvana.” But there, under the skirts, he is also “looking for Africa.” Thus, he establishes a powerful connection between Kashubia and the Black continent, the place from where, on the one hand, his family and his community originate and on the other hand, the space where, according to genetic and archeological research, human life on planet Earth started. Africa and Kashubia meet in the descriptions of the “asylum-giving skirts,” a place of origin and unity:

Da flossen die Ströme zusammen, da war die Wasserscheide, da wehten besondere Winde, da konnte es aber auch windstill sein, da rauschte der Regen, aber man saß im Trocknen, da machten die Schiffe fest oder die Anker wurden gelichtet [...] unter den Rücken meiner Großmutter war immer Sommer [...] Nirgendwo konnte ich ruhiger nach dem Kalender leben als unter den Rücken meiner Großmutter. (*BT*, 101)⁷¹

When Oskar drums back the image of his grandmother’s land, a return to Kashubia or under the grandmother’s skirts is literally impossible. Kashubia disappears in the distance, as if engulfed in the distant past of the forebears and the lands of Africa. The farther removed from the present moment, the more idealized the image of the ancestors’ land becomes.

In drumming Grass establishes a connection to the Third World as well as a relationship between the Third World and East-Central Europe. At Oskar’s birth, Africa and Eastern Europe come together in what the narrator calls an orgy of drumming. Oskar evokes a whole world of drumming: frogs drum up and woodpeckers drum out; men beat on basins, tin pens, bass drums, and kettledrums; “man trommelt jemanden heraus, man trommelt zusammen, man trommelt ins Grab”—we drum out, drum together, and drum into the grave (*BT*, 36); and there are composers who write concerti for strings and percussion. However, nothing compares to the drumming a small Eastern European moth performs on two sixty-watt light bulbs:

Vielleicht gibt es Neger im dunkelsten Afrika, auch solche in Amerika, die Afrika noch nicht vergessen haben, vielleicht mag es diesen rhythmisch organisierten Leuten gegeben sein, gleich oder ähnlich meinem Falter oder afrikanische Falter imitierend—die ja bekanntlich noch größer und prächtiger als die Falter Osteuropas sind—zuchtvoll und entfesselt zugleich zu trommeln; ich halte meine osteuropäischen Maßstäbe, halte mich also an jenen mittelgroßen, bräunlich gepuderten Nachtfalter meiner Geburtsstunde, nenne ihn Oskars Meister. (*BT*, 36)⁷²

Apart from the connections between spaces in terms of origin—family, community, humanity—Grass proposes to consider relationships within Oskar’s world from the perspective of the oppression of the Black race by the white man. Oskar’s birth represents the entry into a space of authority and domination. The relationship between the colonized and the colonizer is transferred to Eastern Europe to reflect upon the relationship between the Kashubians and the Germans as well as the Kashubians and the Poles.

But in Oskar’s version of history, the colonizer and the colonized do not have fixed subject positions. The shift from the image of Oskar as the Tom Thumb whom no one could persuade to grow to the exceptionally gifted insurgent questions a fixed relationship between oppressor and oppressed. As a member of an ethnic minority Oskar is a subaltern, but he is also an insurgent and a collaborationist. And contrary to the subaltern’s limited or inexistent access to the written word, he is a master of the art of narration and has the artistry of the gifted musician. He may be a dwarf living “on the fringes,” but his gifted storytelling and exquisite drumming draw crowds to his concerts.

In this latter aspect, he departs from Spivak. But what if we ask Spivak’s question differently: instead of “can the subaltern speak,” what if we shift to “can the subaltern be heard?” Who listens to Oskar apart from fellow dwarfs or his friend Bruno? And does Oskar wish to be heard? With the exception of the musical tours through West Germany

after the war, in which, against his intentions, Oskar becomes a celebrity, offering a cure for the loss of memory in a tearless century, the protagonist prefers to exploit the possibilities of secreted places and the lack of visibility. He disagrees with the cult of Oskarism, favoring the space behind the white bars in a mental institution to the outside world. The listener of his story is Bruno, his keeper and male nurse. Although Maria occasionally visits Oskar, the general feeling of the novel in this last part is that Oskar has no family. Family, like the one into which Oskar was born, multiethnic, multicultural, multi-denominational, and polyglot, is something of the past. No one and nothing can bring it back.

Finally, Oskar's subaltern history should not be mistaken for yet another kind of totalizing history. Oskar recoils from the cult of the masses. He discourages "Oskarism," a totalizing form of his art. Neither his drumming nor his writing replaces existent versions of history, although his form of historiography can only exist in the presence of the official account. "No matter how one tried to extricate subaltern from elite histories, they are different but overlapping and curiously interdependent territories" (Said, viii).

Oskar's narration is also a confession, a testimony in a murder trial. Oskar will be found not guilty. Oddly, he fears the verdict that will release him from his prison. This is the only place where living is bearable, in the absence of a return to Kashubia and his grandmother. At thirty, Oskar feels most comfortable among the mentally ill. Nowhere else does he find a semblance of a home. Outside the hospital a divided world awaits him; nothing resembles the world of his childhood. Europe of the Cold War divides peoples and nations, and denies Oskar the right to return to his birthplace. However, until the very last pages his gaze is turned toward Poland.

“Poland is not yet lost:” from national anthem to a hymn of the dispossessed

In *BT*, searching for Poland implies that for the seeker Poland is an aspiration. Throughout time, more than one nation or community went searching for what today is Polish territory. Germans and Poles are only the most obvious seekers of this land, but the narrator also includes himself in the crowd of those who have gone searching for Poland: “[I]ch suche Polen auf meiner Trommel und trommle: Verloren, noch nicht verloren, schon wieder verloren, an wen verloren, bald verloren, bereits verloren, Polen verloren, alles verloren, noch ist Polen nicht verloren” (*BT*, 86).⁷³ Without the possibility to return to Kashubia, now Poland, Oskar drums a variation of the Polish national anthem, which refers to the partitions of Poland among the great powers of Europe in the 18th century: “Poland is not yet lost./While we live/We will fight (with swords) for all/That our enemies have taken from us”.⁷⁴

Another time the narrator brings up this theme, the war has begun. When Oskar returns home from the Polish Post Office, he is seized with a curious brain fever and spends two months in the Danzig City Hospital. Meanwhile, Poland struggles to survive, which Oskar, seized with convulsions, renders in such terms as “lost” or “not yet lost”: “Polen war noch nicht verloren, dann bald verloren und schließlich, nach dem berühmten achtzehn Tagen, war Polen verloren, wenn sich auch bald darauf herausstellte, daß Polen immer noch nicht verloren war; wie ja auch heute, schlesischen und ostpreußischen Landsmannschaften zum Trotz, Polen noch nicht verloren ist” (*BT*, 204).⁷⁵

Finally, at the end of the novel, the theme is rendered in surreal images. Victor Weluhn, who had deserted the Polish Post Office during its siege on September 1st, 1939,

is brought to his execution twelve years later. Oskar and his friend Vittlar wish to prevent the execution, and toward that purpose, Oskar starts drumming a strange yet familiar rhythm: “Oft und immer wieder rundete sich der Buchstabe O: verloren, noch nicht verloren, noch ist nicht verloren, noch ist Polen nicht verloren!” (*BT*, 479).⁷⁶ Oskar’s drumming awakens the Polish cavalry to life, which descend “ohne Laut, dennoch donnernd, fleischlos, blutlos und dennoch polnisch und zügellos auf uns zu” (*BT*, 480),⁷⁷ take Victor and the two executioners, and gallop off to the east, toward Poland, under the sounds of Oskar’s drum, lost, not yet lost.

It may appear as if Oskar’s variations on a theme of the Polish national anthem bring the protagonist closer to the Polish national cause. However, Oskar never claims to be a patriot, being too passionate about art and freedom of expression. Now the Polish cause no longer exists. In postwar Europe, “Poland is not yet lost” dangerously acquires new meanings in the context of Germany’s revanchist politics, the so-called *Drang nach Osten* (the aspiration to the East). But apart from its militaristic implications, “Poland is not yet lost” may be considered an anthem for all those who lived and experienced loss in North-East Europe. Oskar distances himself from Germany’s postwar claims, and his musical variations on a theme of the Polish national anthem shift the emphasis from the restoration of territorial rights to the claim for the right to remember.

The novel ends with references to the Cold War. Oskar chooses to run to the West, simply because the way to the East is closed. If Book I presents the narrator’s perspective on East-Central Europe as a space in which multi-ethnicity is often contested yet negotiated and operating, Book III shows Europe as a polarized conglomerate of nations. A return to multiethnic, multicultural East-Central Europe is untenable from the

perspective of the fifties. Oskar, a person whom, for want of a better epithet, one can only term cosmopolitan (*BT*, 252), has become homeless.

At the end of the novel, Oskar has no family left, with the exception of Kurt and Maria. But although he continues to see Maria and Kurt, theirs and Oskar's lives have parted ways. The only family member Oskar truly would like to revisit is grandmother Koljaiczek. But she is in Poland, now a communist nation. Drumming his variations of the Polish national anthem, Oskar has no national aspirations, but he understands the necessity to hold on to the memories of his family. There, in the potato fields of Kashubia where Anna Koljaiczek, née Bronski, sits in her four asylum-giving skirts, Oskar meets his beloved multiethnic and multicultural family once again.

In personal history, Grass identifies the possibility to remember experiences and aspects of life that do not fit into a national narrative. Thus, private history contributes to our understanding of historical events a unique dimension of living. Oskar's narration through the matchless perspective of drumming is such an example. The necessity and obligation to remember outside the national or ideological box is a belief that Grass shares with Milan Kundera, whose work the next chapter examines.

Notes

¹ Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: narrating the nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1995), 1.

² Marcel Cornis-Pope, "Introduction: Mapping the Literary Interfaces of East-Central Europe," in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2006), 2: ix.

³ There are different geo-political mappings of this region as well as different names: “Mitteleuropa” and “Zentraleuropa” are linked to pan-Germanism; “Eastern Europe” relates to Soviet political, economic, and ideological dominance in Europe during the Cold War; and “Central Europe” is a term mainly associated with an anti-Soviet intellectual movement initiated in the 1980s. In this chapter I will use Marcel Cornis-Pope’s inclusive term “East-Central Europe” to refer to the region that extends from Balkan Europe to North-East Europe. The term brings together previous mappings and covers the overlapping territories of former Austro-Hungary, former Eastern Europe, and the former Western Soviet republics. I will also use the term “North-East Europe” to refer to the northern part of East-Central Europe.

⁴ Pomerania (German: “Pommern,” Polish: “Pomorze,” Kashubian: *Pòmòrze* or *Pòmòrskô*) is a region on the south coast of the Baltic Sea whose boundaries have fluctuated throughout time, often disputed between the German and the Polish nations. Pomerania currently forms most of Poland’s coastline, stretching roughly from the river Oder in the West to the Vistula river in the East, in whose Delta lies the city of Gdansk. A part of Western Pomerania is located in Germany.

⁵ This was one of over forty titles for Emperor Franz Joseph.

⁶ Danzig had belonged to the German Empire until 1919. At Versailles, Poland had attempted to acquire the port, but had failed.

⁷ If we look at a map of North-East Europe between the Two World Wars, the Baltic coastline of Pomerania from West to East is divided as follows: Germany (West Pomerania), the Polish Corridor, the Free City of Danzig, and the exclave of East Prussia. Kashubia was part in Germany, part within the Polish Corridor.

⁸ Günter Grass, *Die Blechtrommel* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1981). Translated by Ralph Manheim as *The Tin Drum* (New York: Vintage International, 1990). The German title is cited in text as *BT* and the English translation as *TD*.

⁹ Patrick O’Neill, *Günter Grass Revisited*, Twayne’s World Authors Series, ed. David O’Connell (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999), 3. O’Neill has been writing on Grass’s work for many years, and he is also the compiler of *Günter Grass: A Bibliography, 1955-1975* (Toronto, 1976) and the editor of a volume of *Critical Essays on Günter Grass* (Boston, 1987).

¹⁰ “I remained the precocious three-year-old, towered over by grownups but superior to all grownups, who refused to measure his shadow with theirs, who was complete both inside and outside, while they, to the very brink of the grave, were condemned to worry their heads about ‘development’” (*TD*, 60-1).

¹¹ “[Th]e tight-fitting fireman’s uniform with the rescue medal and the fireman’s helmet that gives the table the aspect of an altar almost takes the place of the incendiary’s mustache” (*Ibid.*, 53).

¹² “in honor of a partitioned but for this very reason united Poland” (*Ibid.*, 27).

¹³ “How solemn is his gaze, how full of all the sorrow of those sorrowful years. That proud though tragic gaze seems to have been popular and prevalent in the days of the German Empire” (*Ibid.*, 53).

¹⁴ The village of Częstochowa is first mentioned in historical documents at the beginning of the 13th century. In 1382 the Paulist monastery of Jasna Góra was founded here and two years later the monastery received the famous Black Madonna painting. In the years that followed, Czestochowa became a place of pilgrimage, which it continues to be to this date. The monastery is famous not only for its precious icon, but also as a place where Polish resistance was organized throughout times.

¹⁵ “hides behind a silly glued-on smile that carries not the slightest suggestion of her four great, asylum-giving skirts” (*TD*, 53).

¹⁶ “He is a Pole after all and Hedwig would be one too as soon as the papers came through” (*Ibid.*, 75).

¹⁷ “Die deutschsprachige Presse und auch Politiker aller Lager beschuldigten Polen wiederholt, die Unabhängigkeit der [Freien] Stadt einschränken zu wollen und das ‘Deutschtum der Danziger’ zu bedrohen. Rein statistisch betrachtet gab es allerdings keinen Anlass zu derartigen Sorgen. Bei dem Wahlen zum Volksrat erhielten polnische Gruppierungen 1920 noch 6,1 Prozent der Stimmen; vier Jahre später hatte sich ihre Stimmenanteil fast halbiert. Das polnische Außenministerium vertrat damals die Ansicht, daß rund 35000 Einwohner Danzigs, also neun Prozent Polen seien. In dieser Zahl, die deutsche Historiker für weit überhöht halten, sind die Kashuben enthalten, die, wie auch andere kleine westslawische Völker auf dem Gebiet des Deutschen Reichs, von Warschau pauschal als Polen angesehen wurden.” Thomas Urban, *Von Krakau bis Danzig: Eine Reise durch die deutsch-polnische Geschichte* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2000), 289. “The German press and politicians of all parties repeatedly accused Poles of the intention to limit the independence of the [Free] City and to threaten the ‘Germanness of the Danziger population.’ From a statistical point of view such concerns were groundless. During the elections of 1920, Polish factions obtained a representation in the City council of 6,1 percent; four years later their representation had dropped to a half. The Polish ministry of foreign affairs claimed that 35000 residents of Danzig, therefore nine percent, were Poles. German historians have regarded this number as highly exaggerated, arguing that it also included the Kashubes, who, like other small west Slavic populations, had settled on the territory of the German Empire and were considered by Warsaw as Poles” (my translation). When Urban mentions the percentage of Polish population in Danzig in the 1920s, he cites a Polish source. See more, p. 326.

¹⁸ Carl Tighe, *Gdansk: National Identity in the Polish-German Borderlands* (London: Pluto Press, 1990), 88.

¹⁹ Mazuria was a district in East Prussia.

²⁰ “[S]he gave the full value of a man” (*TD*, 55).

²¹ “[a]ll three seem happy, as though congratulating one another on their immunity to surprises of the sort that can arise only if one member of the triumvirate should acquire a secret life—if he hasn’t had one all along. In their tripartite solidarity, they have little need of the fourth person, Jan’s wife Hedwig Bronski nee Lemke, who may at that time have been pregnant with the future Stephan; all they needed her for was to aim the camera at them, so perpetuating their triangular felicity, photographically at least” (*Ibid.*, 56).

²² “delicate, circumspect little gestures which seem to have been possible only when both men were together, standing behind or beside Mama or lying at her feet” (*Ibid.*, 56-7).

²³ “small and frail amid these robust occupiers of space” (*Ibid.*, 55).

²⁴ “the extraordinary look in his eyes, the almost feminine regularity of his features, make him the center of every picture even when he is on the edge of it” (*Ibid.*, 55).

²⁵ “Skat—as everyone should know, skat can only be played three-handed—was not just a handy game for Mama and the two men; it was their refuge, their haven, to which they always retreated when life threatened to beguile them into playing, in one combination or another, such silly two-handed games as backgammon or sixty-six” (*Ibid.*, 57).

²⁶ “It was no wonder; he wasn’t paying attention. His mind was on very different things than his diamonds without two” (*Ibid.*, 69).

²⁷ “I have to hand it to my mother, who in spite of this woolen provocation [Jan was wearing socks made of wool] beneath the table managed, up there on the crisp tablecloth, to execute the most daring games, including clubs without four, accompanied by a flow of the sprightliest talk, and won while Jan, growing more and more intrepid under the table, lost several games which even Oskar would have carried to a successful conclusion with somnambulistic certainty” (*TD*, 70).

²⁸ Anne McClintock, “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Gender, Race and Nationalism,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 89.

²⁹ “that would leave Matzerath, whom perhaps she hated, with the guilt and enable Jan Bronski, her Jan, to continue his work at the Polish Post Office fortified by thoughts such as: she died for me, she didn’t want to stand in my way, she sacrificed herself” (*TD*, 161-62).

³⁰ “My poor mama’s death had put an end to the relations, sometimes verging on friendship, between Matzerath and my uncle, who had meanwhile been promoted to the position of postal secretary. There was no sudden break, but despite the memories they shared, they had gradually moved apart as the political crisis deepened. The disintegration of my mama’s slender soul and ample body brought with it the disintegration of the friendship between these two men, both of whom had mirrored themselves in her soul and fed on her body. Deprived of this nourishment and convex mirror, they found no substitute but their meetings with men who were dedicated to opposing political ideas though they smoked the same tobacco” (*Ibid.*, 212-13).

³¹ “which should have been forbidden on political grounds, for every hand lost or won admitted of such baleful or triumphant reflections as: Poland has lost a grand hand, or, the Free City of Danzig has taken a diamond single for the German Reich” (*Ibid.*, 214).

³² “It was not hard [observes Oskar] to foresee a day when these war games would come to an end, transformed, as is the way with war games, into hard realities” (*Ibid.*, 214).

³³ “We had a cardboard sign with ‘Closed for Good Friday’ on one side and ‘Closed for Corpus Christi’ on the other side” (*Ibid.*, 146).

³⁴ “[t]he Protestants went to church, the Catholics washed windows and beat everything vaguely resembling a carpet so vigorously and resoundingly in the courtyards that one had the impression thousands of Saviours were being nailed to thousands of Crosses all at once” (*Ibid.*, 147).

³⁵ “[...] folded their hands differently from the Catholics, more self-reliantly I should say, they said the Our Father with a wording that deviates from the original Catholic text, and they did not cross themselves like Grandma Koljaiczek, the Bronskis, and myself for that matter. My father Matzerath—I sometimes call him so even though his begetting of me was purely presumptive—prayed differently from the other Protestants; instead of clasping his hands over his chest, he let his fingers pass hysterically from one religion to another somewhere in the vicinity of his private parts, and was obviously ashamed to be seen praying” (*Ibid.*, 162).

³⁶ “pray[s] loudly and vehemently in Kashubian, while [her brother] Vincent only move[s] his lips, presumably in Polish” (*Ibid.*, 162).

³⁷ “and later on they actually did come for him, but this time they didn’t let him take his trumpet” (*Ibid.*, 323).

³⁸ “They were Poles no longer and spoke Kashubian only in their dreams. German Nationals, Group 3, they were called” (*Ibid.*, 301).

³⁹ “[w]ith this all problems of nationality were solved and everything went smoothly until it came time for the baby to be baptized and Oskar refused to set foot in the Protestant church ... [he] persevered in the blackest Catholicism” (*TD*, 302).

⁴⁰ “[whose] grey façade was larded with cannon balls dating back to various sieges, which record the history of the city of Danzig for the benefit of all who should pass by” (*Ibid.*, 102).

⁴¹ “venerable city of many towers, city of belfries and bells, allegedly still pervaded by the breath of the Middle Ages” (*Ibid.*, 103).

⁴² “[leads] him down Labesweg to the Neue Markt and Elsenstrasse, down Marienstrasse past Wohlgemut’s butcher shop, turning left at Kleinhammer-Park, through the underpass always dripping with some ooze, to the Church of the Sacred Heart across from the railway embankment” (*Ibid.*, 142).

⁴³ “First came the Rugii, then the Goths and Gepidae, then the Kashubes from whom Oskar is descended in a straight line. A little later the Poles sent in Adalbert of Prague, who came with the Cross and was slain with an ax by the Kashubes or Borussians. This happened in a fishing village called Gyddanyzc. Gyddanyzc became Danczik, which was turned into Dantzig, later written without the t, and today the city is called Gdansk” (*Ibid.*, 395).

⁴⁴ “came uninvited and painted the Polish eagle over with their own bird on all the city gates” (*Ibid.*, 396).

⁴⁵ “still intact and medieval [...] resound[ing] with bells of every size ringing out the hour from belfries high and low” (*Ibid.*, 345).

⁴⁶ “in order that those who came after him might work off their excess energies in rebuilding” (*Ibid.*, 397).

⁴⁷ “For centuries Pomerellians, Brandenburgers, Teutonic Knights, Poles, Swedes, and a second time Swedes, Frenchmen, Prussians, and Russians, even Saxons, had made history by deciding every few years that the city of Danzig was worth burning” (*Ibid.*, 389-90).

⁴⁸ “Inner City and Outer City, Old City, New City and Old New City, Lower City and Spice City—what had taken seven hundred years to build burned down in three days” (*Ibid.*, 389). When *TD* was first published in communist Poland, the pages describing the siege of Danzig by the Red Army were removed from the novel (*Urban*, 300).

⁴⁹ “Russians, Poles from the Free Port, longshoremen from Holm, and sailors from German warships” (*TD*, 176).

⁵⁰ “it was not without its perils to be a waiter in this very international spot” (*Ibid.*, 176). What Manheim translates as “very international” appears in the original as “truly European.”

⁵¹ “A rosy landscape strewn with freckles. The spinal column was embedded in fat. On either side of it a luxuriant growth of hair descended from below the shoulder blades to disappear beneath the woolen underdrawers that Herbert wore even in the summer. From his neck muscles down to the edge of the underdrawers Herbert’s back was covered with thick scars which interrupted the vegetation, effaced the freckles. Multicolored, ranging from blue-black to greenish-white, they formed creases and itched when the weather changed” (*Ibid.*, 177-78).

⁵² “Oskar’s aim is to get back to the umbilical cord; that is the sole purpose behind this whole vast verbal effort and [his] only reason for dwelling on Herbert Truczinski’s scars” (*Ibid.*, 179).

⁵³ “always did have it in for each other” (*Ibid.*, 181).

⁵⁴ “we’re not real Poles and we’re not Germans, and if you’re a Kashube, you’re not good enough for the Germans or the Polacks. They want everything full measure” (*TD*, 416).

⁵⁵ “I was looking for Africa under the skirts, or perhaps Naples, which, as we all know, one must have seen before dying. This was the watershed, the union of all streams; here special winds blew, or else there was no wind at all; dry and warm, you could listen to the whishing of the rain; here ships made fast or weighed anchors; here our Heavenly Father, who has always been a lover of warmth, sat beside Oskar; the Devil cleaned his spyglass, and the angels played blindman’s buff; beneath my grandmother’s skirts it was always summer, even when it was time to light the candles on the Christmas tree or to hunt for Easter eggs; even on All Saint’s Day. Nowhere could I have been more at peace with the calendar than beneath my grandmother’s skirts” (*Ibid.*, 125-26).

⁵⁶ “In those days [of war] it seemed to me that true family life was possible only in the interior of my grandmother Koljaiczek, in the grandmotherly butter tub, as I liked to call it. [...] And yet, though nothing is farther away from me today than the entrance to my grandmother, it is among my forebears that I picture the most beautiful family scenes.

These fantasies come to me mostly on rainy days; my grandmother sends out invitations and we all meet inside her” (*Ibid.*, 349-50).

⁵⁷ “which despite the most violent military, political, and historical upheavals had never lost their potato color” (*Ibid.*, 416).

⁵⁸ Edward Said, “Foreword,” in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Ch. Spivak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), vi.

⁵⁹ “today I am at home neither in the sacred nor the profane but dwell on the fringes, in a mental hospital” (*TD*, 146).

⁶⁰ “an impassioned cook, [who has] a knack for metamorphosing feelings into soup” (*Ibid.*, 43).

⁶¹ “The crowd that always turns up at big fires is said to have struck up the hymn to the Bogarodzica, Mother of God—Koljaiczek’s fires, we have every reason to believe, were solemn affairs, and solemn oaths were sworn” (*Ibid.*, 28).

⁶² My italics.

⁶³ “For several years [...] my drum and I spent a good bit of our time huddling under rostrums, observing successful or not so successful demonstrations, breaking up rallies, driving orators to distraction, transforming marches and hymns into waltzes and fox trots” (*TD*, 123).

⁶⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Ch. Spivak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3.

⁶⁵ “It has become possible for me to see my drumming under rostrums in proper perspective, and it would never occur to me to set myself up as a resistance fighter because I disrupted six or seven rallies and threw three or four parades out of step with my drumming. That word “resistance” has become very fashionable. We hear of the “spirit of resistance,” of “resistance circles.” There is even talk of an “inward resistance,” a “psychic emigration.” Not to mention those courageous and uncompromising souls who call themselves Resistance Fighters, men of the Resistance, because they were fined during the war for not blacking out their bedroom windows properly” (*TD*, 124).

⁶⁶ “an eccentric who, for private and what is more esthetic reasons [...] rejected the cut and color of the uniforms, the rhythm and tone of the music normally played on rostrums, and therefore drummed up a bit of protest on an instrument that was a mere toy” (*Ibid.*, 124).

⁶⁷ “For it was not only demonstrations of a brown hue that I attacked with my drumming. Oskar huddled under the rostrum for Reds and Blacks, for Boy Scouts and Spinach Shirts, for Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Kyffhauser Bund, the Vegetarians, and the Young Polish Fresh Air Movement. Whatever they might have to sing, trumpet, or proclaim, my drum knew better” (*TD*, 124).

⁶⁸ “What was Poland to me? Or the Poles for that matter?” (*Ibid.*, 232)

⁶⁹ “later on, in the heyday and decadence of his art, [Oskar] exercised it even when not impelled by outward circumstances. Succumbing to the mannerism of a late period, he began to sing out of pure playfulness, becoming as it were a devotee of art for art’s sake” (*Ibid.*, 72).

⁷⁰ “of the weak who must temporarily incline, of the resistance that thrives in concealment” (*Ibid.*, 308),

⁷¹ “This was the watershed, the union of all streams; here special winds blew, or else there was no wind at all; dry and warm, you could listen to the whisking of the rain; here ships made fast or weighed anchors [...] beneath my grandmother’s skirts it was always summer [...] Nowhere could I have been more at peace with the calendar than beneath my grandmother’s skirts” (*Ibid.*, 125-26).

⁷² “Perhaps there are Negroes in Africa who, with their well-known gift of rhythm, might succeed, in imitation of African moths—which are known to be larger and more beautiful than those of Eastern Europe—in drumming with such disciplined passion; I can only go by my Eastern European standards and praise that medium-sized powdery-brown moth of the hour of my birth; that moth was Oskar’s master” (*Ibid.*, 48).

⁷³ “I, meanwhile, conjure up Poland on my drum. And this is what I drum: Poland’s lost, but not forever, all’s lost, but not forever, Poland’s not lost forever” (*Ibid.*, 108).

⁷⁴ The anthem originates at the end of the 18th century, after the country’s loss of independence in a series of partitions among Prussia, Russia, and the Habsburg Empire (1771, 1792, 1795). It is sung for the first time in 1795 “in Reggio di Emilia in Italy, on the occasion of the departure of the Polish legions, led by general Jan Henryk Dabrowski (1755-1818) to fight in the Napoleonic wars” on the French side. “Dabrowski’s Mazurka was officially recognized as the national anthem in Poland in 1926” (http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish_music/reperto/dabrowski.html).

⁷⁵ “Poland was not yet lost, almost lost, and finally, at the end of those famous eighteen days, Poland was lost, although it was soon to turn out that Poland was not yet lost; just as today, despite the efforts of the Silesian and East Prussian patriotic societies, Poland is not yet lost” (*TD*, 251).

⁷⁶ “Over and over again the letter O took form: lost, not yet lost, Poland is not yet lost!” (*Ibid.*, 574)

⁷⁷ “soundless yet thundering, fleshless, bloodless, and yet Polish [and unrestrained]” (*Ibid.*, 575).

Chapter 3

Family, Nation, and Central Europe in Milan Kundera's Writing

Throughout the twentieth century, in Europe, nations, empire, and socialism all shared the kinship-familial metaphor: The nation used the metaphor of the family in order to emphasize a kinship relationship among its people on the basis of ethnicity, language, history, and territory; the Austro-Hungarian monarchy projected an image of the world as a large family of nations led by a father-monarch divinely appointed; and socialism created “a system of family resemblances” (Verdery, 12),¹ which united nations across ethnic, cultural, lingual, and geographical lines, in a common fight against famine, inequality, poverty, and exploitation.

The writings examined in this dissertation show how the family metaphor has provided empire, nationalism, and Eastern European socialism with a coherence that encouraged either conservatism (Austria-Hungary) or a kind of solidarity that upheld ethnic identification (ethnic nationalism) or adherence to a one-party system (communism). The socialist nation and the ethnonation have advanced a cognitive organization of the world based on the principles of inclusion and exclusion—as either within the family or outside it. Often, being an outsider is tantamount to being an enemy of the nation or to communism. As seen in the previous chapter, whenever a nation makes ethnicity the principle factor of inclusion into the nation-as-family, the multiethnic nuclear family is afflicted in profound ways. Similar hegemonic tendencies also existed in socialism. Claiming to have eradicated ethnic, gender, and other social inequalities, the

socialist states of Europe had no tolerance toward those aspects of social and political life that did not support and uphold the system of government led by the Communist Party. The history of twentieth century Europe shows how the usage of the family trope in the discourses of empire, nationalism, and socialism has led to major social crises.

The major concepts of this chapter are family and nation, communism and Central Europe. Milan Kundera, whose work this chapter explores, opposes the hegemony of communism and the provincialism of small nations, shifting the focus from family to community. This chapter starts with an investigation of communism's appropriation of the family trope, and further examines the nuclear family as a major theater in which the social crisis unleashed by communist hegemony unfolds. This crisis must be understood as the crisis of individualism at odds with the totalitarian power machine. One of the emblematic texts of the communist period that challenges the socialist nation-as-family, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, by Milan Kundera, examines the crisis of individualism in the confrontation between the public and the private spheres of life in communist Czechoslovakia. In this text Kundera also opposes the concept of Central Europe as a supranational community of values, traditions, and history to the image of Eastern Europe as the international family of communist states.

In shifting the focus from family to community, Kundera challenges a kind of social biology, which communism seemed to have established through a paternalistic relationship between the state and the citizens as well as between the Soviet Union and the satellite communist states of Europe. Thus, he attempts to restore the centrality of culture. Kundera opposes the highly politicized and reductive term "Eastern Europe" with that of "Central Europe," a concept that suggests the diversity of culture and ethnic

plurality throughout many centuries. In doing so, he reinstates the right of history and tradition over politics and ideology.

Milan Kundera was born in 1929 in Brno, Czechoslovakia. He was twice a member of the Communist Party and twice expelled, the second time in 1970, as a result of his views regarding reform socialism and his attitude toward the invasion of his country by Soviet troops in August 1968. His name was blacklisted and his books were branded as subversive and banned. In 1975, Kundera left Czechoslovakia and settled in France, where he has resided ever since. Until the 1990s, Kundera wrote and published in Czech, but his later novels were written in French. In the mid-eighties, Kundera undertook the translation of all his novels into French, and thereupon gave his French works the authority of the original. Today, Kundera is referred to as a Franco-Czech writer and is known as an advocate of multiculturalism.

Kundera's pre-1989 novels and short stories—*The Joke* (1967), *Laughable Loves* (1974), *The Farewell Party* (1976), *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979), and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984)—decisively engaged with the history of communism in Czechoslovakia and the experience and nature of totalitarianism in post-World War II Europe. Crucial themes for Kundera are memory and forgetting in the landscape of precarious existence under communism, Soviet imperialism, Central Europe, and the fate of small nations:

For Kundera, the problem is not the impossibility of accumulating a past, but the horrific consequences of being forcibly severed from it... and thus the most terrifying prospect in life is the loss of this past through forgetting. This is Kundera's own dilemma as an exile, it is the dilemma of his native country whose customs were systematically destroyed through a process of "organized forgetting" and replaced with official Soviet ideology. (Workman, 37)²

This is also the predicament of small nations, which, as Kundera notes in his book of essays *Testaments Betrayed*, do not have “the comfortable sense of being there always, past and future’ (192).³

Kundera’s work has always shown an affinity to a cultural heritage that transcends national culture. On several occasions, Kundera has expressed the idea that judging a writer or an artist solely within the national landscape is limiting and unjust. Great writers and artists belong to the world, and their art should be considered in the larger world context of artistic production that has no spatial or temporal boundaries. Kundera’s writing draws inspiration from the tradition of Central European writing and culture, from writers and thinkers like Robert Musil, Hermann Broch, Franz Kafka, Witold Gombrowicz, Martin Heidegger, and composers like Leoš Janáček, Béla Bartók and Arnold Schönberg. As a novelist, Kundera also feels indebted to Laurence Sterne and Denis Diderot, Cervantes, Rabelais, Nietzsche, and other Western European writers and philosophers. It is thus impossible to consign Kundera’s work to one national literature. His work is of Czech, French, Central European, and Western European inspiration. He is a writer of the world.

Communism as “a system of family resemblances”

As Katherine Verdery observes in her book *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (1996), among the central principles that gave socialist societies the coherence of “a system of family resemblances” were socialist paternalism, the “etatization” of time, and the control of bodies (such as the deployment of bodies in time). In communism, the state had control over both the means of production and the social product. Socialist

paternalism was a centerpiece of Party rule, according to which the Party took care of every family's needs—affordable housing, cheap food, medical care, and education. The state collected the total social product and redistributed it as the Party thought necessary, thus creating “a quasi-familial dependency” (Verdery, 63). “Instead of political rights or ethnocultural similarity, [socialist paternalism] posited a moral tie linking subjects with the state through their rights to a share in the redistributed social product. Subjects were presumed to be grateful recipients—like small children in a family—of benefits their rulers decided upon for them” (Verdery, 63). The socialist society as a family was headed by a wise father—the Party (or the leader of the communist party and state)—“who made all the family's allocative decisions as to who should produce what and who should receive what reward” (Verdery, 64). Thus, the socialist state was like a “parent-state,” but it was not singular in putting emphasis on the family as an essential aspect of its organization. Other political systems also made use of the family trope. Nonetheless, Verdery emphasizes, “it went even further than most in seeing society not simply as like a family but as itself a family, with the Party as parent” (Verdery, 64). Verdery compares the socialist society with “the classic *zadruga*: as an extended family, it was composed of individual nuclear families, but these were bound into a larger familial organization of patriarchal authority with the ‘father’ Party at its head. We might call the result a ‘*zadruga-state*’” (Verdery, 64). Among the long-term goals of the socialist state as a ‘*zadruga state*’ was the gradual homogenization of society, by diminishing ethnic and cultural differences or abolishing gender differences, thus creating a large social fraternity under a unique leadership.

Discussing the use of time in Ceaușescu's Romania, Verdery shows how the state thought out a plan to reduce the private time of its citizens, engaging them in activities that would either benefit the state or minimize the probability of opposition to leadership. One way was the use of time to increase production in rural areas. Peasants worked an eight-hour shift in collectives, and used the rest of the day to raise their own barnyard animals as well as keep a vegetable garden around the house. Beginning in 1983, the state began transferring some of the private product to state ownership. Villagers were required to give some of their animals—pigs, chickens, calves—as well as a certain amount per year of potatoes and other produce to the state for minimal payment. Another way in which private time was used up was through an “economy of shortage” (Verdery, 42). The state saved on warm water supply (sometimes also cold water), electricity and gas for heating and cooking. People could not choose their time to cook or bathe; they had to follow the schedule of water and heat availability. That is why cooking was often done at the earliest hours of the day, when gas was available. “Both directly, through policies expressly aimed at the marking of time, and indirectly, through policies aimed at solving other problems but implicating people’s use of time, the Romanian Party leadership gradually expropriated Romanians of much of their control over time” (Verdery, 40). Verdery calls this process “etatization,” borrowing the term from Romanian writer Norman Manea, who had used the word *etatizare* (literally meaning to nationalize) “to describe the fate of people’s private time in his native country” (Verdery, 40).

The seizure of people’s private time in socialist societies is closely related to the deployment of bodies in time. One example is the immobilization of bodies in food lines.

The economy of shortage in Romania produced scarcity of food, which made people use up more time to procure such essentials as butter, eggs, sugar, oil, flour, and the like. The shortage of fuel was part of the same strategy to immobilize bodies, making people use their time in waiting for public transportation, buses and trains, rather than use time for other purposes. “Tens of thousands of Romanians waited daily, in contexts in which they could do nothing else: time that might have gone to counterhegemonic purposes had been expropriated” (Verdery, 49). But probably the most perverse “etatization” of time was time “seized by power for the celebration of itself” (Verdery, 49). This was the case of the parades and pre-organized demonstrations, which used the time of thousands or tens of thousands of people to celebrate the achievements of the socialist state, the communist Party, and their leader—called in Romania “the most beloved son of the nation.”

Even if there were differences among the socialist states, the “family resemblances ... were more important than their variety” (Verdery, 19). The socialist states used the kinship-familial metaphor to explain the internal organization of society, but this metaphor also worked in a way that linked the satellite states to the Soviet Union to imagine the large family of communist nations, or, to use Kundera’s pithy phrase, “the brotherhood of men on earth” (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 251).⁴ Brotherhood, however, did not mean that all communist nations were equally sovereign. Similar to the top-down internal structure of individual communist states, with absolute power in the hands of a hegemonic Party leadership, the Soviet Union, as the most powerful communist nation in the Eastern bloc, forced upon the other socialist states a relationship of quasi-subordination to the leadership in Moscow. This was the case of Hungary, East Germany, and Poland, and it was surely also the case of Czechoslovakia, whose invasion

in August 1968 by Soviet troops proved how fragile was any attempt to veer away from the mainstream communist path and break that relationship of subordination.

The family trope and the concealment of imperialism

Although Verdery does not examine the hierarchy within the big international family of communist states, placing her study of the family trope and socialist paternalism within the international context makes it highly relevant to Kundera's examination of Soviet imperialism in Eastern Europe.

In *UL*, Kundera recreates the difficult social and political climate in Czechoslovakia after the Soviet invasion. The world in which his protagonists live is highly politicized, and every aspect of their lives involves them in a dynamics of power that adjudicates everything by communist affiliation or anti-communist tendency. Whether he follows the destiny of his main protagonists, Tomas and Tereza, in post-1968 Czechoslovakia, or Sabina's path into exile, Kundera engages in a thorough critique of dichotomized modes of thinking and organizing the world in communism and the Europe of the Cold War era. The crisis both dissidents and exiles experience in Kundera's work originates in the impossibility to express alternatives and live by them.

Tomas, an accomplished neurosurgeon, is dismissed from the hospital and forced out of medical practice when he refuses to retract an article the communist authorities expose as defiant to the communist establishment. He must accept a job as a window washer and thus becomes one of the many *déclassé* intellectuals of the normalization period, which followed the Soviet military invasion. Similarly, his wife, Tereza, is unable to continue her work as a photographer, which she had carried out before the Soviet

invasion, and finds work as a waitress. Meanwhile, in exile, Sabina, a painter and one of Tomas's many sex partners, finds it easy to sell her work to a Swiss public briefly interested in the political situation of her country. However, Sabina is disgusted by the limited understanding of Western intellectuals and art lovers, who cannot see her art outside the context of communism. She meets Franz, a university professor with strong socialist views, who falls in love with her. Franz is unhappily married, which partly explains his affair, but he is drawn to the Czech artist ironically because of his Marxist views. Soon Sabina ends their affair, and Franz joins a socialist march to Cambodia. As Sabina continues her flight westward to the United States, back in Czechoslovakia, Tomas and Tereza decide to flee the city and settle in the countryside. They take with them their dog Karenin, who has become an inseparable member of their family. In this rural setting, where most people leave for the city, they are able to escape political persecution. Tomas works as a truck driver and Tereza tends to the cows. Their happiness is interrupted by Karenin's death. Not long after, they die in a car crash, and the news reaches Sabina in the United States.

On August 21, 1968, following Brezhnev's orders, Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia, stifling the so-called Prague Spring, a reform socialism initiated under then Czech president Alexander Dubcek, which aimed to establish "socialism with a human face." The Soviet establishment in Moscow viewed Dubcek's politics as a threat to Soviet-type communism, and intervened with force. In a book-length study of the Prague Spring and its aftermath, historian Kieran Williams describes the magnitude of the Soviet occupation:

Within a week [...] approximately half a million foreign soldiers and more than 6,000 tanks were roaming over Czechoslovak territory [...] The armed

intervention was intended to install a more reliable regime in Prague, intimidate the ‘counter-revolutionary’ forces into submission, and signal to the world that the Soviet Union would only enter détente from a position of strength, with its sphere of influence unassailable and united. (Williams, 112)⁵

Since no Soviet troops had been stationed on Czechoslovak territory prior to August ’68, the country had previously not felt its sovereignty to be under any threat. Williams points out how during the Prague Spring, “Czechoslovak reformers suffered from a delusion of sovereignty” (Williams, 10). Dubcek later recalled, “‘I thought that we were much freer than we were’” (Williams, 11). The decision to invade is generally regarded as an erosion of trust in Moscow toward the Dubcek team, which did not meet Soviet expectations of “proper political conduct (‘political love’)” (Williams, 110).

In *UL* Kundera evokes the dire atmosphere that besets the Czechoslovak presidency and government after Dubcek’s return from the Kremlin. In a radio broadcast, Dubcek is heard stuttering and gasping for breath, “making long pauses between sentences, pauses lasting nearly thirty seconds” (*UL*, 26). Kundera shows the impact of political domination on national memory, transferring the stammering from Dubcek’s voice to the voice of the nation: “For ever and ever, [the Czech nation] will stutter, stammer, gasp for air like Alexander Dubcek ... Workaday humiliation had begun” (*UL*, 26).

In spite of a very complex and difficult political situation, Czechoslovakia remained independent. The territorial accords contracted in Europe at the end of World War II called for compliance of border agreements. The country was not incorporated into the Union of Soviet Republics, like the Ukraine, the Baltic nations, or the Soviet Asian republics. Neither did the Soviet Union colonize by relocating Russians on Czech territory. However, the country’s political autonomy was severely impaired when

Dubcek's reforms were abolished, and cultural history was reformed. Many writers, including Kundera, were prevented from publishing, their books were banned in public libraries, and their names were erased from history books. Historians were removed from their posts, and Czech cinema disappeared (Finkielkraut, 16-17).⁶

According to the Soviet understanding of the events of August 1968, the military occupation of Czechoslovakia took place in the name of solidarity and brotherhood. The Soviet Union did not act against the Czechoslovak nation, but only helped it regain the path it had lost in its liberalizing experiments of the Prague Spring. In an essay Kundera published in 1986, he recounts a personal anecdote that gives the Russian invasion precisely this spin. Three days after the invasion, a Russian officer explained to Kundera that the occupation was a misunderstanding because, in truth, the Russians loved the Czechs ("An Introduction to a Variation," 470).⁷ In a brotherly gesture, the Russians had come to rescue the Czechs from themselves. Or, to use Verdery's imagery, the Big Father from the East had come to discipline his unruly children.

In his essay "The Power of the Powerless," originally published in 1978, Václav Havel explains how within the framework of totalitarian ideology, "military occupation becomes fraternal assistance" (44).⁸ The "post-totalitarian system," as Havel calls the communist system, distinguishing it from other dictatorships limited in time and space and without historical roots, "touches people at every step, but it does so with its ideological gloves on. This is why life in the system is so thoroughly permeated with hypocrisy and lies:"

[G]overnment by bureaucracy is called popular government; the working class is enslaved in the name of the working class; the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his or her ultimate liberation; depriving people of information is called making it available; the use of power to manipulate is called

the public control of power, and the arbitrary abuse of power is called observing the legal code; the repression of culture is called its development; the expansion of imperial influence is presented as support for the oppressed; the lack of free expression becomes the highest form of freedom; farcical elections become the highest form of democracy; banning independent thought becomes the most scientific of world views. (“The Power of the Powerless,” 44)

In the same line of thought, military occupation becomes fraternal assistance. Havel shows how the family metaphor in this case was part of the ideological apparatus of the “post-totalitarian system,” but also a pragmatic and dignified way of legitimizing a foreign intervention.

On various occasions, Kundera has defined the Soviet invasion of his country as a colonizing event. In a scene of *UL*, Tomas and Tereza return to the small spa town where they had met six years before. At first nothing looks different. The trees, the hotel, and the little stream over which people bend with glasses are all there and seemingly unchanged. But looking more closely at the sign of their hotel, a Russian name catches their attention. It is now Baikal, no longer the Grand. Soon they notice the street names: Moscow Square, Stalingrad Street, Leningrad Street, Rostov Street, Novosibirsk Street, Kiev Street, Odessa Street, and the new building names, Tchaikovsky Sanatorium, Gorky Cinema, Café Pushkin (*UL*, 165). Tereza remembers how during the first days of the invasion, in an act of resistance to disorient the Russian troops, Czech and Slovak people pulled down the street signs. But their resistance became meaningless when the occupiers put out new signs and created “a miniature imaginary Russia” on Czechoslovak territory. The national past was suddenly “confiscated” (*UL*, 166). Creating an anonymous space, the townspeople had only eased the task of the colonizer. From behind the family mask, the Soviet presence became the embodiment of an aggressor never before encountered in

Czech history, which erased, transformed, and replaced native signs with the signs of a foreign authority.

In an interview with Alain Finkielkraut, Kundera continues this line of thinking about the Soviet invasion in terms of colonization. He is adamant that Soviet totalitarianism attempted to rewrite the cultural and political history of the Czech and Slovak nations: “There are no traces of Franz Kafka left, nor of T. G. Masaryk, who in 1918 founded the Czechoslovakian Republic” (Finkielkraut, 17). The Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, in Kundera’s view, resembles a combination of a classic and a “reverse-cultural type” of colonization. In an article published in *PMLA* in 2001, David Moore distinguishes four types of colonization, and defines the Russian expansion to the West as a “reverse-cultural type.” Moore claims that in the colonization of Central Europe by Russia, the latter was “saddled with the fear or at times belief that it was culturally inferior to the West. Mittel-European capitals such as Budapest, Berlin, and Prague were seen in Russia, at least by some, as prizes rather than as burdens needing civilizing from their occupiers” (Moore, 121).⁹ While Kundera may agree with Moore that the Soviet Union’s occupation of Czechoslovakia differed from the British Empire’s conquest of the Indian subcontinent, nevertheless, he saw in the August 1968 events a long-term project of occupation whose objective was to transform the Czechoslovak nation into a variant of Russian civilization:

If we consider the ‘60s as the period of the progressive westernization of a Socialism imported from the East, then the Russian invasion of ’68 marked the definitive moment of cultural colonization of a western country. All that has characterized the West since the time of the Renaissance—tolerance, a methodical doubt, a plurality of thought, the personal nature of art (and of man too, of course)—all this is destined to disappear there. And all this brain-washing, far from being simply a provisional measure, is part of a long-lived, patient, and

coherent strategy designed to move a country into the sphere of another civilization. (*Finkelkraut*, 17)

There are only a couple of scenes in *UL* that involve the Soviet invasion. Apart from the visit to the spa town in which Tomas and Tereza are shocked into the realization of the large-scale foreign occupation, there is another scene where Kundera describes the occupation as remedial for Tereza's conjugal troubles and thus renders the invasion once again as an act of "fraternal assistance."

For several years, Tereza has had nightmares, involving her husband as a communist oppressor. Suddenly, for the duration of the actual military invasion, Tereza is able to forget the violence of her dreams and sleep peacefully. During the first week of the occupation, "in a kind of trance almost resembling happiness" (*UL*, 25), Tereza makes roll after roll of film, roaming the streets among Soviet tanks, the Russian troops, and the Czech people. In the midst of political disaster she is able to experience an enormous relief in her private life: "The days she walked through the streets of Prague taking pictures of Russian soldiers and looking danger in the face were the best of her life. They were the only time when the television series of her dreams had been interrupted and she had enjoyed a few happy nights. The Russians had brought equilibrium to her in their tanks" (*UL*, 27).

But when instead of proceeding to full democratization, Czechoslovak society was forced to undergo normalization, "fraternal assistance" became the restoration of Soviet-type communism. In Tereza's experience, the occupation, which had temporarily relieved her from the footage of her dreams, now reveals its true, monstrous, side. After the first week, the nonviolent protest against the foreign aggressor is silenced and the dream series starts anew. This abrupt return of Tereza's nightmares is closely linked to

the reinstatement of totalitarian control. “[T]he gradual widening by the ruling elite of ‘the non-prohibited zone, the sphere of things permitted, the space where people can feel more or less free’” (Williams, 30), which the Prague Spring had represented, is interrupted and thoroughly abolished. The intervention was followed by two decades of an authoritarian regime, which reintroduced censorship and fully undid liberalization.

As the dynamic of power between Moscow and Prague is reestablished, Kundera renders the aftermath of the occupation as a renewed crisis within the family. But this time the focus is not on the metaphorical family, but on the actual families Kundera represents in his novel. Now, Kundera shifts his attention from the invasion of a country to the conquest and domination of the private space, which in *UL* is represented by the nuclear family.

The family and the invasion of the private space

The complexity of the political dimension in a totalitarian regime arises from the fact that the political/ideological apparatus permeates the totality of human existence. Every aspect of life passes through the ideological machine, and any aspect that does not participate in it becomes a possible threat. Existence is highly politicized, and human relationships become a mirror of such circumstances. This is seen in *UL*, where paternal, maternal, and conjugal relationships take on aspects of totalitarian experience.

Kundera analyzes relationships within three families—the families in which Tereza and Sabina grow up, and Tereza’s marriage—and in each case a crisis arises in the clash between the individual and totalitarian authority. Kundera makes extensive use of the prison imagery in all his examples, with parents as prisoners or jailors and children as

victims of detention. Tereza comes from a family in which the father is an actual political prisoner and the mother is a jailor in a metaphorical sense. For “speaking openly what was on his mind,” Tereza’s father is arrested and sent to a communist prison (*UL*, 43). Sentenced to a long term, he dies in jail, and Tereza is sent to live with her mother. Married a second time, to an adulterous man, Tereza’s mother makes her daughter responsible for the failures and unhappiness in her life. “The only person who belonged to her and had no means of escape, the hostage who could do penance for all the culprits, was Tereza” (*UL*, 43).

Verdery’s notion of the immobilization of bodies in time in communism finds an eloquent example in Kundera’s image of totalitarian terror in the deployment of bodies within the private space of the family as well as within the public arena. Shamelessly marching about the flat in her underwear or, on hot summer days, completely naked, Tereza’s mother objects to her daughter’s sense of shame. “Her stepfather did not walk about naked, but he did go into the bathroom every time Tereza was in the bath” (*UL*, 45). When Tereza insists on the right to privacy by locking herself in the bathroom, the mother finds her daughter’s gesture “more objectionable ... than the possibility of her husband’s taking a prurient interest in Tereza” (*UL*, 45). Kundera describes Tereza’s battle with her mother as “a longing to be a body unlike other bodies,” but the mother forces upon her an image of the world as “nothing but a vast concentration camp of bodies, one like the next, with souls invisible” (*UL*, 47). The situation worsens when the mother steals Tereza’s secret diary and reads from it in public, mocking her writing at every sentence. In the climate of Tereza’s family, where mother and father appear as

agents of a powerful ideological system, the private space of body and mind becomes nonexistent.

More than brutality and violence, “the obliteration of privacy” is for Kundera the essential characteristic of a concentration camp (*UL*, 137). When Tereza describes how she felt about life with her family she uses precisely this image of the concentration camp. Under the roof of her mother, no privacy existed. But the transparency and domination of the private space was also one of the principle goals of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia and throughout the socialist bloc. It used informants and the latest bugging devices to thwart the illusion of privacy and refuge. Private conversations were always haunted by the specter of the informant, who could have been a friend or, in a rare but worst scenario, a life partner.

Away from her mother’s oppressive influence, Tereza longs to find in her marriage the missed opportunities of her childhood and adolescence. But Tomas is a maniac of eroticism and leads an adulterous life. His erotic adventures reinforce the view that women’s bodies are alike and that uniqueness is a delusion. “She had come to him to escape her mother’s world, a world where all bodies were equal. She had come to him to make her body unique, irreplaceable. But he, too, had drawn an equal sign between her and the rest of [the women]” (*UL*, 58). Tomas transfers his approach to the human body from the operating table to the lovers’ bed. The lover and the surgeon work upon a woman’s body with different means but with a similar mindset and curiosity. The only difference Tomas perceives between having sex and being in love is when it comes to spending the night with a woman. He thinks that allowing himself to fall asleep next to Tereza is indubitable proof of his love for her. With every other woman Tomas finds

reasons to end the relationship by midnight. No matter how hard Tereza tries to comprehend and embrace her husband's view of women and the distinctions he makes, the question of uniqueness recurs with harrowing intensity.

The lack of privacy combines with the trauma of uniformity in a series of nightmares Tereza experiences in the period before the Soviet invasion. In one of the recurring nightmares, Tereza is forced to march with a group of naked women around a swimming pool, while singing and doing kneebends. Tomas sits in a basket hanging from the pool's roof and shoots at any woman who makes a wrong movement. Yet for Tereza, the fact that women are shot dead and corpses float at the surface of the water is not as horrifying as the paradox that the marching women appear to rejoice in their condition. The real terror does not emerge from the women's deprivation of their basic rights, or even the termination of life, but rather from the women's total identification with the purpose of totalitarian power:

Not only were their bodies identical, identically worthless, not only were their bodies mere resounding soulless mechanisms—the women rejoiced over it! Theirs was the joyful solidarity of the soulless. The women were pleased at having thrown off the ballast of the soul—that laughable conceit, that illusion of uniqueness—to become one like the next ... The women, overjoyed by their sameness, their lack of diversity, were, in fact, celebrating their imminent demise, which would render their sameness absolute. (*UL*, 57-58)

In "The Power of the Powerless," Havel also shows how in the "post-totalitarian system"—by which he means the communist system—individuals must surrender their individuality in order to "confirm the system, fulfill the system, make the system" and thus *become* the system (45). What Kundera describes as "the joyful solidarity of the soulless ... [who] have thrown off the ballast" of individuality (*UL*, 57), Havel calls the essence of the "post-totalitarian system:" "it draws everyone into its sphere of power, not

so they may realize themselves as human beings, but so they may surrender their human identity in favor of the identity of the system, that is, so they may become agents of the system's general automatism" ("The Power of the Powerless," 52). This automatism makes the poolside women's involvement in the system appear as something "natural," arising as personal desire, "with no external urging" ("The Power of the Powerless," 52).

Totalitarian ideology and subjection

In her examination of totalitarianism in Europe in the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt shows how totalitarian regimes shifted the agency of freedom from the individual to the abstract idea of historical development, also referred to as the flow of history. Throughout the centuries the meaning of freedom changed, but it always bore a relation to human agency, whether in the Aristotelian sense, as communal freedom of the agora, or in a Kantian sense, as spontaneity. Totalitarianism claimed a different understanding of freedom, which integrated human beings and their free will into the flow of history. Individuals are thus "totally caught up in the 'freedom' [of history], in its 'free flow,' [...] they can no longer obstruct it but instead become impulses for its acceleration" (Arendt, 121).¹⁰ In the scene of the marching women around the pool, Kundera renders an eloquent picture of a world in which the concept of politics, which Arendt always defines in relation to freedom, has been replaced by the concept of history. If we continue to think in terms of politics, the pool scene would be an example of deprivation of freedom. But for Kundera the quintessential image of totalitarianism is one in which the women have become "impulses" of an arbitrary historical agency. "This is accomplished by means of coercive terror applied from outside and coercive ideological thinking

unleashed from within—a form of thinking that joins the current of history and becomes, as it were, an intrinsic part of its flow” (Arendt, 121).

The ultimate horror of totalitarianism is less the coercive terror from the outside as much as the invasion of the inner space of existence through ideology. In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser makes the distinction between, on one hand, state power or the repressive state apparatus, and on the other hand, ideological state apparatuses (ISAs).¹¹ State power is exercised through such institutions as the government, the army, the police, the courts, the prisons, all of which suggest that the state apparatus “functions by violence” (Althusser, 143), or at least uses a repressive mechanism. However, the ISAs have no direct relationship to the idea of repression, and they “function by ideology” (Althusser, 145). This distinction is not that solid, in the sense that the state apparatus and the ISAs both use repression and ideology, but while state power functions predominantly by repression, using ideology as a secondary means of control, the ISAs reverse this order. It must be noted that Althusser mainly refers to capitalist society, mentioning a plurality of ISAs, which in communist society would not exist: the trade unions or the different political parties. But in spite of this, the gist of his argument does not change in major ways when we consider the ISAs of the communist system not as a plurality of ideologies (since this is not the case), but rather in the way such institutions as the school system, the press, radio, and television, literature and the arts, and the family administer “the ruling ideology.”

If in precapitalist society, the Church and the Family are the main ISAs, in capitalist society the Church is replaced by the educational system, and thus the School-Family couple becomes the predominant ideological partnership. In communism, as

Kundera's novel shows, the School-Family alliance remains in place. "[S]queezed between the family State apparatus and the educational State apparatus," for eighteen years, the child receives and internalizes "a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology" (Althusser, 155). Any relationship to one's surroundings thus becomes possible only by and through ideology. As "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser, 162), "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (Althusser, 170). In other words, ideology is constitutive of subjecthood to the same degree that subjects produce ideology. In a Lacanian vein, Althusser claims that all individuals are always already "ideological subjects" (Althusser, 171), or "always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects" (Althusser, 176). In his view, there can be no outside to ideology. In the pronatalist politics in Romania under Ceaușescu, which banned abortion, we find a relevant example of how communist ideology already interpellated individuals as subjects before they were born. The fetus was always already a subject with a predetermined identity, on which the communist state was counting to fulfill its ideological purpose.

Althusser also refers to the category of the "Subject," and the example he gives is that of the religious apparatus. In this case, "the interpellation of individuals as subjects presupposes the 'existence' of a Unique and central Other Subject, in whose Name the religious ideology interpellates all individuals as subjects" (Althusser, 178-79).

According to Althusser, ideology works by four steps: "the interpellation of 'individuals' as subjects; their subjection to the Subject; the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject" (including the recognition of other subjects and one's own self as subject); and finally, the guarantee that this is the only way to exist, "the absolute guarantee that

everything really is so” (Althusser, 181). Althusser’s observation that through interpellation subjects “work by themselves” (Althusser, 181) is analogous to Arendt’s understanding that totalitarian subjects work as impulses within the system, or Havel’s idea that these subjects become the system itself.

For Althusser, ideology has no history, because interpellation by and through ideology has always defined the process by which individuals become social subjects. In this, he differs from Arendt and Havel, whose analyses of totalitarianism and “post-totalitarian” ideology refer specifically to historical developments in twentieth-century Europe. Moreover, unlike Althusser, Havel believes in an outside to ideology. But such differences are less important when we consider these thinkers’ views on human agency. For Arendt, totalitarianism marks a definitive break in our understanding of human agency. It is in the twentieth century, with the onset of totalitarianism, that human agency is no longer a result of a free subjectivity, but a product of a larger suprapersonal structure, the flow of history. For Havel, who is specifically referring to communist ideology, the latter “is a specious way of relating to the world” (“The Power of the Powerless,” 42), by “consign[ing] reason and conscience to a higher authority” (“The Power of the Powerless,” 39). Likewise, Althusser’s notion of interpellation powerfully suggests that freedom lies not in individual thinking and action, but in the subject’s participation in an ideological system:

[T]he individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ‘all by himself’. There are no subjects except by and for their subjection.* That is why they ‘work all by themselves.’ (Althusser, 182)

If we replace the “commandments of the Subject” with the commandments of History or the commandments of the Party, Althusser’s text also describes Arendt’s and Havel’s views on the position of the individual/subject under communism or any totalitarian regime, “not considered by the system to be worth anything in themselves, but only as things intended to fuel and serve [the system’s] automatism” (“The Power of the Powerless,” 44).

Althusser’s, Arendt’s, and Havel’s views on ideology and/or the fundamental nature of totalitarianism complement the image of the world as we find it in Kundera’s novel. Kundera focuses on the family as one of the communist ISAs, to which he adds culture and the educational system. However, like Althusser, Kundera is less interested in the repressive state apparatus and a great deal more interested in the idea of subjection, as the poolside scene illustrates. Althusser’s model of subjection partly corresponds to Kundera’s understanding of communism as a regime that interpellates individuals as ideological subjects in such a way that they become constitutive parts of the system. But, similar to Havel, Kundera maintains that there exists an outside to ideology, which allows him to envision an alternative to totalitarianism. The best way to describe this is to say that the ultimate goal of communism is to interpellate all individuals as subjects of ideology, but the third step Althusser describes as part of the interpellation process—the recognition of the Subject/Party by the subject/citizen—does not occur in all cases. Even Althusser mentions the existence of the so-called “bad subjects,” or those who do not agree with ideology or the center of power, and therefore do not participate in the mutual recognition of subject and Subject.

In the context of Tereza's family, subjection is mainly directed toward the domination of the body. Her mother, her stepfather, and her husband seem to have become "impulses" of the same repressive order, demanding the total surrender of the body to the system. Within Sabina's family, Kundera offers a different example of subjection, to the ISA of socialist art and culture. This is a family of artists, but the father's and daughter's views on art differ greatly. Though not clearly a follower of socialist realism, the father is nevertheless a convinced supporter of realist art. On the contrary, Sabina is a rebel, fundamentally opposed to the transformation of art into a channel of ideology. Thankful to her father for initiating her into the art of drawing, as a mature artist, Sabina distances herself from his artistic universe. "[A] small-town puritan, who spent his Sundays painting away at canvases of woodland sunsets and roses in vases" (*UL*, 91), the father is too absorbed in realism to appreciate cubism. He once introduces Sabina to Picasso only to make fun of him. When she leaves her home and enters the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, she feels liberated from her father's ideological agenda. However, like Tereza, who discovers that her mother's roof extended over the entire world, Sabina also learns that there can be little escape from the paternal gaze anywhere she goes. "It was the period when so-called socialist realism was prescribed and the school manufactured portraits of Communist statesmen. Her longing to betray her father remained unsatisfied: Communism was merely another father, a father equally strict and limited, a father who forbade her love (the times were puritanical) and Picasso, too" (*UL*, 91).

Ideology, "the categorical agreement with being," and kitsch

It was not unusual in communism to imagine the nation as a big family of the working people, at the head of which stood the father, best and beloved party and country leader. Paintings, sculptures, and monuments were dedicated to the fathers of communist nations—Stalin in the Soviet Union, Ceaușescu in Romania, Mao Zedong in China, and others—and their portraits were ubiquitous in public spaces and in school manuals. At communist parades and demonstrations it was customary for the people to pay homage to their beloved statesman, the father-leader. His virtues were sung, his leadership was praised, and gratitude and love were expressed collectively. For Tereza “the quintessential image of horror” was “marching naked in formation with a group of naked women” (*UL*, 57), but in Sabina’s view the image that rendered totalitarianism in the most accurate of terms was the May Day parade. This parade, the image of subjection to the ISA of proletarian culture, celebrated the achievements of the communist nation, as one big family, whose leadership had taken care of social inequalities and effaced ethnic differences. Fittingly, Verdery describes parades as “the ultimate ‘etatization’ of time, seized by power for the celebration of itself” (Verdery, 49).

Sabina’s disgust for pretended sentimentality, which the May Day parades encouraged in the grotesque mask of beauty these events wore, was even greater than her revolt against communism. Her “enemy [was] kitsch, not Communism!” (*UL*, 254). Sabina is repulsed by the ideals expressed in the May Day parade, the personality cult that the demonstration helped construct, and the hypocrisy behind a collective expression of trust and enthusiasm in the Party leadership. The May Day parade was the utmost expression of socialist kitsch.

“Kitsch is the aesthetic ideal of all politicians and all political parties and movements. [...] But whenever a single political movement corners power, we find ourselves in the realm of totalitarian kitsch” (*UL*, 251). Kitsch is usually defined as a form of aesthetic manifestation expressing pretentious sentimentality that hinges on vulgarity. In totalitarian kitsch the pretense is so powerful that it becomes a form of oppression. The oppressiveness of communist kitsch is based on what Kundera calls “the categorical agreement with being” (*UL*, 248). This is an agreement that all parts of society will work in consonance and consensus toward the fulfillment of a totality, that the only acceptable morality is that of the Party, and identity is realized through the “supra-personal,” or one’s total participation in the system. Such an agreement is a fundamental prerequisite of the communist system.

Sabina’s experience of socialist kitsch is closely related to the horror Tereza experienced in her dreams. “Tereza could not address a single question, a single word, to any of the women; the only response she would have got was the next stanza of the current song” (*UL*, 253). Like her, Sabina could not question and doubt because “art that was not realistic was said to sap the foundations of socialism” (*UL*, 63). Moreover, no question could be asked unless the answer confirmed what was already known. “In the realm of totalitarian kitsch, all answers are given in advance and preclude any questions” (*UL*, 254). Or, as Havel notes, in “the post-totalitarian system,” reason and conscience are “consign[ed] to a higher authority” (“The Power of the Powerless,” 39).

What Sabina calls totalitarian kitsch is a constitutive part of communist ideology, which Havel defines as a “precise, logically structured, generally comprehensible and, in essence, extremely flexible ideology that, in its elaborateness and completeness, is almost

a secularized religion. It offers a ready answer to any question whatsoever; it can scarcely be accepted only in part, and accepting it has profound implications for human life” (“The Power of the Powerless,” 38). The idea that all social, political, aesthetic, moral, and existential questions in communism are answered by and through ideology demonstrates once again that “the center of power is identical with the center of truth” (“The Power of the Powerless,” 39).

Opposition: “betrayal” of family and nation

In different ways, both Sabina and Tereza refuse to acquiesce to “the categorical agreement of being” and oppose their interpellation as communist subjects. Their families offer the ground for their interpellation into the totalitarian system, but they struggle to find a different path of identity and existence beyond the system. Sabina opposes her father as well as the metaphorical family, and she conceives her opposition to both as a “betrayal.” When she goes to the Academy of Arts, she perceives her departure from home as a relief and a betrayal of her father, and when she goes into exile, she again betrays a Father and a Family, the Party and her Nation. Betrayal becomes a *modus vivendi* for her, but for that same reason she can never establish a long-term relationship. Sabina perceives any family as an ISA, even outside the borders of Czechoslovakia. When she meets Franz, a Swiss university professor, who falls in love with her—partly because of his association of her with the unfulfilled ideals of socialism—and offers to marry her, she leaves him without a note. For Sabina, family seems to be a compromised idea, although, paradoxically, that does not stop her from desiring to be a part of one.

The critique and resistance to kitsch gradually blend in with an irresistible desire for kitsch when Sabina is surprised and thrown off guard by her own longing for a peaceful home with a “loving mother” and a “wise father.” For several years in exile, Sabina continues to flee or “betray” anyone who comes too close to her. In America she joins an elderly couple who call her their daughter. This could be the perfect home, except for a key aspect. The old man and the old woman resemble less Sabina’s parents than the children she has never had. “The less her life resembled that sweetest of dreams, the more sensitive she was to its magic, and more than once she shed tears when the ungrateful daughter in a sentimental film embraced the neglected father as the windows of the happy family’s house shone out into the dying day” (*UL*, 255). Through Sabina, Kundera shows how interpellation works subtly even in the case of the “bad subjects” (Althusser), driving them to a state of perpetual opposition to—or endless “betrayals” of—the father (we do not know how long her acceptance of the new family lasted) and any kind of establishment, whether Eastern European, Western European, or American.

Opposition: Eroticism and the search for individuality

Sabina and Tereza both oppose uniformity and struggle to (re)-discover and (re)-affirm uniqueness, individuality, and plurality. But so does Tomas, even though in the first part of the novel, in Tereza’s dreams, he appears as a supporter of the repressive state apparatus. After Tomas’s medical career is interrupted through political persecution, the former neurosurgeon accepts a job as a window washer. Under the disguise of the new job, he embarks on a wild path of sexual conquests. Hedonism becomes a refuge from communist oppression. Commenting on the erotic climate of Prague during the

early eighties, Kundera remarks that “there, eroticism has become the only arena for freedom and self-realization [...] when I left Czechoslovakia, I had the impression that I was leaving an erotic paradise that I would never find again” (Finkielkraut, 25). In the novel, Tomas is the expression of that liberation through sex and play.

For Tomas hedonism is the arena in which he can experience and marvel at the infinite possibilities of human expression. He looks at women’s bodies with the understanding of the clinician, but also with an artist’s perception. Tomas’s recent memory of his conquests brings back images and sensations from his medical past. “Going over them, he felt the joy of having acquired yet another piece of the world, of having taken his imaginary scalpel and snipped yet another strip off the infinite canvas of the universe” (*UL*, 207). Completely different from the way he approaches women in Tereza’s dreams, in reality Tomas meets every woman not only with the expectations of a surgeon ready to open the body to the scientifically objective gaze, but also with the expectations of an artist, who seeks to uncover the secrets of beauty in the minute details of a woman’s body. Tomas’s pursuit is a quest for uniqueness and he defines this uniqueness in the woman as the “millionth part dissimilarity” (*UL*, 206).

Just like Tereza, Tomas is obsessed with uniqueness, with that part of the human body that makes it “unimaginable.” The task of unveiling the “one-millionth part dissimilarity” as opposed to admitting to the reality of the “nine-hundred ninety-nine thousand nine hundred ninety-nine millionths parts similarity” seems almost impossible to achieve. Tomas’s obsession becomes the expression of a mission—a form of resistance to the world communists had created, in which every aspect of human existence had been forced into a predictable state and placed under surveillance. Free of his mission as a

healer, Tomas embarks on a new mission, opposing the inescapable reality of the “eternal repetition of the same” that obstructs the quest for individuality. “Tomas was obsessed by the desire to discover and appropriate that one-millionth part; he saw it as the core of his obsession. He was not obsessed with women; he was obsessed with what in each of them is unimaginable, obsessed, in other words, with the one-millionth part that makes a woman dissimilar to others of her sex” (*UL*, 199-200).

For a while, as long as Tomas can study the unique details of women’s bodies, eroticism functions as a form of resistance to totalitarian rule. Like Sabina, in his pursuit of eroticism and adulterous life, Tomas acts out against the regime and also betrays the family. But when women, five times his size, start showing up in his dreams, pinning his body to the ground in a brutal and repressive embrace, eroticism becomes a monstrous replica of the regime Tomas tried to escape. When the women become anonymous pieces in the great sex machine, allowing Tomas no time to remember their faces or their distinctive marks, the erotic encounters become encounters with torturers. These women represent now the invading army of a system that is able to penetrate the most private chambers of individual lives. When the mistress has become a body on a “mechanized spit” rotating to a perfect even tan (*UL*, 225), hedonism ceases to represent a warranty of freedom and becomes instead another mask of the same grotesque totalitarian regime.

Throughout the novel, Tomas’s and Tereza’s marriage is acted out as a repressive relationship, in which each partner plays the role of either despot or victim. In real life—due to Tomas’s adulterous behavior—and in Tereza’s dreams, Tomas is the oppressor and executioner and Tereza is the oppressed. But later, they exchange roles, and Tereza appears as the unrelenting warden of the gate to Tomas’s “poetic memory,” the one who

prevents other women from leaving a lasting impression or claiming Tomas's love. Poetic memory, Kundera explains, is the space of love. "Tereza occupied his poetic memory like a despot and exterminated all trace of other women" (*UL*, 208). In this new role, as oppressor, Tereza is responsible for Tomas's demise. In the last dream of the novel Tereza leads Tomas to his execution, where he is transformed into a frightened rabbit. Not until the last chapter does this repressive relationship within their marriage change.

All family relationships in *UL* take on aspects of ideological subjection and repression. Whether it is the communist nation-as-family or the actual families in this novel, paternal, maternal, and conjugal relationships reproduce a power system in which individuals become ideological impulses of a self-directed totality. Imagining itself as a large family, the communist nation transformed the private sphere from a space of independent self-constitution and self-organization, of freedom and individuality, into a channel of totalitarian subjection and discipline.

Nonetheless, the family in Kundera's novel is not only a space where the state runs a repressive mechanism and individuals acquiesce to a suprapersonal, state-imposed identity, reproducing the system. The family is also what Havel has called "the area of the existential and the pre-political," where "usually without any conscious efforts, living within the truth becomes the one natural point of departure for all activities that work against the automatism of the system" ("The Power of the Powerless," 61). But it is vital to highlight that in Kundera's vision this kind of family is always linked to a larger community, fundamentally diverse.

From family to community

Havel associates opposition to the totalitarian regime with “an attempt to *live within the truth*” (“The Power of the Powerless,” 55). All three main protagonists in Kundera’s novel struggle against ideological subjection, trying to maintain a space where they would be true to themselves. In Sabina’s case, Kundera makes the same distinction as Havel, between truth and lie. Sabina describes her artwork as “an intelligible lie on the surface; underneath, the unintelligible truth showing through” (*UL*, 265). But art is not the only sphere in which Sabina practices living within the truth. An act as simple as wearing a bowler hat while making love to Tomas can have that same connotation. The bowler hat, having been passed down in Sabina’s family through three generations, is a memento of a time before communism. Without having an overt political connotation, the hat is a sign of a world untouched by totalitarian ideology. Havel does not associate the sphere of those who wanted to live within the truth with any political thought or action, but he notes that anything nonpolitical, which claimed to have an existence independent of ideology, could be identified as a potential threat to the regime:

[I]n the post-totalitarian system, the real background to the movements that gradually assume political significance does not usually consist of overtly political events or confrontations between different forces or concepts that are openly political. These movements for the most part originate elsewhere, in the far broader area of the ‘pre-political,’ where ‘living within a lie’ confronts ‘living within the truth,’ that is, where the demands of the post-totalitarian system conflict with the real aims of life. These real aims can naturally assume a great many forms. Sometimes they appear as the basic material or social interests of a group or an individual, at other times, they may appear as certain intellectual and spiritual interests; at still other times, they may be the most fundamental of existential demands, such as the simple longing of people to live their own lives in dignity. Such a conflict acquires a political character, then, not because of the elementary political nature of the aims demanding to be heard but simply because, given the complex system of manipulation on which the post-totalitarian system is

founded and on which it is also dependent, every free human act or expression, every attempt to live within the truth, must necessarily appear as a threat to the system and, thus, as something which is political *par excellence*” (“The Power of the Powerless,” 65).

In *UL*, there are signs of the “pre-political,” and one of them is the bowler hat. A family inheritance, the bowler hat is the only object Sabina chooses to take with her into exile. It is a “bulky, impractical” thing, but also “a sign of her originality, which she consciously cultivated” (*UL*, 87). For Sabina, the hat “was a vague reminder of a forgotten grandfather,” an Austro-Hungarian civil servant, “the mayor of a small Bohemian town during the nineteenth century” (*UL*, 87). But it was also “a memento of her father,” whom she had opposed, betrayed, and yet loved. After his funeral, Sabina’s brother appropriated all their parents’ property, and she, refusing to fight for her rights, took the bowler hat as her only inheritance. By the time it reached Sabina’s studio, the hat was filled with memories of the family. Sabina added new memories, and once, undressing herself in front of the mirror with Tomas watching her reflection, she put the bowler hat on her head. From then on, the black bulky hat became a part of Sabina’s and Tomas’s love games, which both regarded as a way to elude any kind of ideological conformity and homogeny. But most importantly, by actively involving the hat in her life, Sabina felt she could maintain a connection to the past. The memories Tomas and Sabina created in their love games echoed and harmonized with the memories of the past. In Zürich, when the lovers met for the last time, the hat, “no longer jaunty or sexy, turned into a monument to time past” (*UL*, 87). The hat had become “a sentimental object” and Tomas and Sabina were both touched. “For this meeting was not a continuation of their erotic rendezvous, each of which had been an opportunity to think up some new little

vice; it was a recapitulation of time, a hymn to their common past, a sentimental summary of an unsentimental story that was disappearing in the distance” (*UL*, 88).

Kundera defines the bowler hat as “a motif in the musical composition that was Sabina’s life” (*UL*, 88). The motif recurs again and again, and each new situation enriches it with new meanings:

[Th]e bowler hat was a bed through which each time Sabina saw another river flow, another *semantic river*: each time the same object would give rise to a new meaning, though all former meanings would resonate (like an echo, like a parade of echoes) together with the new one. Each new experience would resound, each time enriching the harmony. (*UL*, 88)

The story of the family’s hat resembles the history of the Bohemian folk song, which Kundera describes in an earlier novel, *The Joke*. Like folklore music, which predates the founding moment of the Czechoslovak nation, the bowler hat holds memories from the precommunist period. As shown in *The Joke*, the Bohemian song, a creation of the early twentieth century, arose from nineteenth century Hungarian music, which was spread throughout Central Europe by the Gypsies; these songs emerged from seventeenth and eighteenth century songs of the native Slavs, underneath which lay the fourteenth century Wallachian music of archaic tonalities. Still, another lower layer were the oldest songs of all, the “mowing songs or harvest songs” of pagan times (*The Joke*, 133).¹² Just as the folk song had grown in semantic complexity, receiving new musical motifs throughout the centuries, the hat had accumulated memories from Sabina’s family from the time of Austria-Hungary to the second half of the twentieth century, and was resounding with a rich polyphony. The polyphony or heteroglossia of the bowler hat arises not only from the history of Sabina’s family, but also from the history of the Czech nation as a Central European nation. The fact that Kundera chooses to describe the bowler hat in terms of a

musical composition speaks to a very important theme in his work: the question of Central Europe. In Kundera's work Central Europe works as an alternative to communist Europe and the nation-as-family.

Central Europe: deconstructing the family trope

Throughout his writings, Kundera opposes the notion of Central Europe, a pre-communist concept, to that of Eastern Europe, a concept which replaced Central Europe in the geopolitical vocabulary of Europe after 1945 and came to reflect strongly life under communism and the Cold War partition of the continent. All three protagonists resist and challenge such notions as brotherhood, conformity, homogeneity, and agreement, which relate to the communist ideology of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and they seek to reaffirm individuality, difference, and plurality, which characterize Central Europe in Kundera's work. In *UL*, family is a problematic notion, being mainly a dominion of the strict father and thus associated with the imposition of sameness and the suppression of difference. That is why Sabina feels the need to betray the father, the family, and the nation, and similarly, Tereza cannot wait to break away from her authoritarian mother—really, the equivalent of the strict father. However, the novel does not propose the idea of a community as an easy and ready alternative to the dysfunctional family. The presence of Central Europe must be sought in the protagonists' attitudes toward the world as they experience it, as well as in their quest to imagine a different, diverse, and more inclusive world. In order to understand how Kundera works with the notion of Central Europe in *UL*, it is important to place this notion in the context of his work as well as the writings of other Central and Eastern European scholars of his time.

The theme of Central Europe runs throughout Kundera's entire work. Ladislav Matejka calls it a theme with many variations (210).¹³ It surfaces in Kundera's speeches, in his interviews, in his essays, and in his novels. Matejka observes in Kundera's variations a confessional mode, as the writer evokes the legacy of Central Europe, or a messianic tone coupled with a degree of fatalism, as Kundera looks at twentieth century Czech history, "torn between democracy, fascist enslavement, Stalinism and socialism, and further complicated by its unique nationalistic problem" (Matejka, 211).

In Central Europe, Kundera finds a discourse that is radically different from that of Eastern Europe. First of all, what distinguishes Central Europe from Eastern Europe emerges from the difference between a political and a cultural understanding of territory. The borders of Eastern Europe coincide with the borders of the communist states, but Central Europe has a variable geometry (Babeți, 9).¹⁴ In geographical terms, it does not exist, but mentally it is not impossible to draw its lines. A political notion par excellence, Eastern Europe signifies occupied Europe. However, Central Europe is a cultural concept more than anything else, and the map Kundera proposes to look at is in essence cultural and historical.

Kundera calls upon culture and history to distinguish between Central Europe and Russian civilization, and in his essays this task appears almost like a mission. The Central Europe he describes includes countries like Poland, whose proximity to Russia has exposed it to conquest and occupation, but it also includes such countries like Czechoslovakia and Hungary, which until the mid-twentieth century had nothing in common with Russia, apart from—in the case of Czechoslovakia—the Slavic origin of their languages. In Central Europe and Russia, Kundera identifies two different

civilizations: Russian civilization and Western civilization. Like Kundera, Czeslaw Milosz emphasizes the differences between Poles and Russians, citing Joseph Conrad's qualification of the barrier as an "incompatibility of temper" (*Native Realm*, 128).¹⁵ In his autobiography, Milosz confirms Kundera's understanding of Russian civilization as something entirely distinct:

I could not avoid an encounter with Russian poetry. There was a basic 'otherness' in the very language, a completely different emotional attitude to people and things, a special kind of 'otherness,' which was really that of a self-contained civilization. Nothing is more deceptive than the apparent similarity between the Polish and Russian languages. A different man looks out from behind each, and their confrontation is like a meeting between a Sicilian and a Chinese. (*Native Realm*, 122)

Like Milosz, Kundera gradually deconstructs the whole idea that Czechoslovakia and other Central European nations could be part of the same historical, cultural, and linguistic family as the Soviet Union.

Setting apart Central Europe from Russia, Kundera underscores the close affinity between Central Europe and the West. Central Europe is that part of Europe in which Western civilization has unfolded its great adventure, "its Gothic, its Renaissance, its Reformation" (Matejka, 213). In the "Afterward" to *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Kundera observes that in Central Europe, "'modern culture found its greatest impulses: psychoanalysis, structuralism, dodecaphony, Bartok's music, Kafka's and Musil's new aesthetics of the novel'" (Matejka, 213). Showing the extent to which Central Europe contributed to the creation, growth, and maturity of the Western heritage is for Kundera an essential point through which to combat Soviet imperialism and an overwhelmingly political view of Europe.

Kundera is not alone in establishing Central Europe as a cultural and visionary concept rather than a political one. Milosz defines Central Europe as “an act of faith, a project ... even a utopia” (107).¹⁶ György Konrad speaks of Central Europeans as “a venture, a cultural alliance, a literary chivalry; record-holders of ambivalence, problematic by profession. We are more poets than activists. Central Europe, after all, is no more than a dream” (Konrad 113).¹⁷ Disappointed that in order to travel from Budapest to Vienna for an evening at the opera, he needs special permission, Konrad calls out, “Make yourselves!” Central Europe is a mission of reinvention, an obligatory undertaking toward a “spiritual surgery” (Konrad, 114). Let us be “matriots” instead of patriots is Konrad’s call.

Another way to distinguish Central Europe from Eastern Europe is by referring to ethnic makeup. In communism, ethnic difference was a secondary, an undesirable way of expressing identity, which was mainly defined in terms of nationality and party association. However, in Kundera’s writings and the work of other East-Central European scholars like Milosz, Konrad, and Eliade, Central Europe appears as a motley territory of various languages, cultures, and ethnicities across national lines. Kundera proposes to consider this concept in terms of a supranational construct—a community of culture and history—whose borders “are imaginary and must be drawn and redrawn with each new historical situation” (“The Tragedy of Central Europe,” 35).¹⁸ Central Europe in Kundera’s understanding often appears to be a residual Austria-Hungarian construct, but this must not be confused with a desire to see the former monarchy, or a political system resembling it, resurrected. What draws Kundera to Central Europe in the image of Austria-Hungary is the idea that identity could be plural and emerging from free,

spontaneous, unexpected, boundless encounters of various cultures, as opposed to being the result of a unique national heritage. This is how Kundera describes Central Europe:

Their unity was *unintentional*. They were kin to one another not through will, not through fellow-feeling or through linguistic proximity, but by reason of similar experience, by reason of common historical situations that brought them together, at different times, in different configurations, and within shifting, never definitive, borders. (*The Curtain*, 46)¹⁹

For Kundera, the history of Central Europe is always a narrative of interethnic and multicultural relationships, whether he refers to the gathering of Czech, Austrian, Bavarian, Saxon, Polish, Lithuanian, Hungarian, and Romanian intellectuals at Charles University in Prague in the fourteenth century, discussing the idea of a multinational community, or the united nations of the Hapsburg Empire defending Europe against the Turks, Central European music and art in the baroque period, or Central European modernism in literature and art in the twentieth century. Within fluid cultural borders, different nations shared memories, problems, and traditions, grouping and regrouping continuously throughout the centuries. Kundera identifies several examples of Central European writers who were born to mixed families, and whose language of writing was sometimes other than the language of their parents. Such is the case of Kafka who wrote in German, while his father spoke Czech. Freud's family originated in today's Poland, moved to Moravia and later lived in Austria. Roth's family came from Galicia, but Roth spent his youth in Vienna—also the city of Mahler (born in Moravia) and Schoenberg. Kundera never uses the term *Mitteleuropa*, which gives too much weight to the German component of the region to the detriment of all other cultures of Central Europe. Central Europe is inherently “*polycentric*” (*The Curtain*, 46).

Kundera takes most of his examples from among the Jews of Central Europe, who are “the integrating element in Central Europe ... its intellectual cement ... creators of its spiritual unity,” but also the nation whose destiny describes the fate of Central Europe most poignantly. Central Europe is a territory created from small nations, susceptible to invasion and conquest. “What is Central Europe? An uncertain zone of small nations between Russia and Germany ... what are the Jews if not ... *the* small nation par excellence?” (“The Tragedy,” 35). A small nation, according to Kundera, is one that lives with a sense of vulnerability at all times. In Kundera’s work the Central European vision of the world is “based on a deep distrust of history” (“The Tragedy,” 36). It is the vision of victims and outsiders, those who at any moment can be faced with the danger of domination or loss.

The decade before the fall of communism saw the publication of various essays and books by various writers, literary critics, and historians on the topic of Central Europe. Reinventing Central Europe was for some writers a way to reestablish a link to a plural, pre-communist heritage (Kundera), and for others, Central Europe represented a metaphor of protest against Soviet imperialism (Todorova).

A few months before the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, various writers and thinkers met at a round table in Budapest to discuss whether or not Central Europe existed, and if it existed, what its significance was. For the Austrian poet H. C. Artmann, Central Europe had something unsettling about it: unlike the term *Mitteleuropa*, Central Europe did not reflect adequately the German influence on the region until WWII. Russian novelist Edward Limonov called Central Europe a notion lacking honesty. In its opposition to the term Eastern Europe, associated with post WWII

Soviet imperialism, Central Europe concealed its own ambitions, ambivalences, and internal hierarchies. Hungarian writer Péter Esterházy expressed a pessimistic view that neither Central Europe nor the Central European writer existed. A writer, he insisted, belonged to a language and not to a region. Identifying as a Central European writer could only mean “being the product of a defensive way of thinking, of fear. We’re trying to defend ourselves against all kinds of superpowers ... [and] we find that we are crammed within the fences of Central Europe” (Esterházy, 27).²⁰ Susan Sontag seemed to agree with him. But writers like Milosz, Konrad, and Kundera defended Central Europe and underscored the great value of this concept. “In a period when the Russian world tried to reshape my small country in its image, I worked out my own ideal of Europe thus: *maximum diversity in minimum space*” (*The Curtain*, 31). In view of the cultural and ethnic range of the small nations that constitute Central Europe, Kundera realizes that “cultural diversity is the great European value” (*The Curtain*, 31).

Central European attitudes

In his essays Kundera often argues for a kinship between Central Europe and the West, but in *UL* that kinship is missing. In this novel, Kundera remains skeptical that the West could still be interested in Central Europe. No one seems to remember it after 1945, and exiles from Eastern Europe are either identified as victims of communism or associated with the ideals of socialism, as the relationship between Franz and Sabina illustrates. When Sabina wears the bowler hat in the presence of her Swiss lover, Franz feels uncomfortable. Unlike she and Tomas, she and Franz have no common past, and

when the hat seems to speak to Franz in a language he does not comprehend, it becomes an emblem of “the abyss” separating them (*UL*, 88).

Most of the time, Franz and Sabina’s relationship is a misunderstanding. “[He] listened eagerly to the story of her life and she was equally eager to hear the story of his, but although they had a clear understanding of the logical meaning of the words they exchanged, they failed to hear the semantic susurrus of the river flowing through them” (*UL*, 88). Franz shows great admiration for the ideals of the left movement, and sees in parades, in “the marching, shouting crowd ... the image of Europe and its history. For Franz, Europe is the Grand March, the march from revolution to revolution, from struggle to struggle, ever onward” (*UL*, 99). Words like banned books, prison, persecution, tanks, and occupation fill Franz with “a curious mixture of envy and nostalgia” (*UL*, 102). In complete opposition, Sabina detests parades and marching crowds. In Paris, a year into her exile, she refuses to join the protest march against the occupation of Czechoslovakia, to say nothing about shouting with the crowd. “[B]ehind Communism, Fascism, behind all occupations and invasions lurks a more basic, pervasive evil and ... the image of that evil was a parade of people marching by with raised fists and shouting identical syllables in unison” (*UL*, 100).

In this novel, Sabina is the skeptic par excellence. Her betrayals must be seen in light of her deep skepticism toward any political agenda, social cause, moral ideal, or “glowing tomorrow” (“Anatomy of a Reticence,” 303).²¹ Various writers like Havel, Milosz, and Kundera have underscored skepticism as a defining Central European attitude. In his well-known essay “Anatomy of a Reticence,” Havel explains the reasons for the far-reaching “Central European skepticism about utopianism of all colors and

shadings, about the slightest suggestion of utopianism,” which makes a Central European individual decline the call to participation in an international march for peace or a women’s movement (304). As a Central European, Sabina detests pathos and sentimentality, and finds overstatements insufferable. What Kundera describes as intense dislike, Havel calls fear, which adds to Sabina’s perception of kitsch:

I want only to illustrate that strange, almost mysterious horror of everything overstated, enthusiastic, lyrical, histrionic, or overly serious that is inseparable from our spiritual climate. It is of the same kind, and stems from analogous roots, as our skepticism about utopianism, with which it is often co-extensive: emotional enthusiasm and rationalistic utopianism are often no more than two sides of the same coin. (“Anatomy,” 308)

When Sabina leaves Franz, she becomes, paradoxically, the embodiment and purpose of Franz’s utopianism. He joins a peace march to Cambodia thinking of Sabina as the approving angel of his actions. “[S]keptical, sober, anti-utopian, understated” (“Anatomy,” 319), Sabina, however, emanates a deep distrust of history. In her attitudes and actions, she radiates an undeniably Central European spirit. Betraying the father and the nation-as-family, she asserts her moral independence from any predetermined and permanent bonds.

The trouble with small nations

When Sabina calls kitsch a greater enemy than communism, she identifies a deeper, more fundamental problem in our modern world. In 1968 Sabina has a good intuition and thinks beyond communism. Kitsch is “the *supreme aesthetic evil*” in Central Europe (*The Curtain*, 51), and, as a Central European skeptic and artist, Sabina uses her insight into kitsch to detect power and ideology in any system. The fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has dissolved the system of family resemblances

which communism represented, but it has not solved the problem of kitsch, as one of the avatars of hegemony. Sabina has no illusions that the world will ever be rid of hegemonic systems of power, because, as Kundera rightly notes, “[n]o civilization and no ideology has a monopoly on totalitarianism.” (Finkielkraut, 22). For Kundera, communism is not the only political system hostile to the existence of a free, diverse, and unbound world. Examining this hypothesis brings us closer to understanding how Kundera further deconstructs the family trope.

So far, we have seen Kundera define the small nations of Central Europe in terms of their uncertainty with regard to their destinies and borders. The term “small nations” is “quantitative; it describes a situation, a destiny,” because “at some point in their history, [these nations] have passed through the antechamber of death” (*Testaments Betrayed* 192). Many times in history, a small nation’s destiny has been in the hands of a powerful nation. “[A]lways faced with the arrogant ignorance of the large nations, [small nations] see their existence perpetually threatened or called into question; for their very existence is a question” (*Testaments*, 192).

In *Testaments Betrayed* and *The Curtain*, two volumes of essays in which Kundera deals with aspects of the modern novel, Kundera looks at the small Central European nations not only from the perspective of their troubled histories, but also from their inability to rise above their small contexts. He calls this “the provincialism of small nations ... the inability to see one’s own culture in the *large context*” (*The Curtain*, 37). This is exactly Sabina’s point of disagreement when she is invited to join a group of Czech émigrés in Zürich. Her opposition does not end with communism; it is also directed against manifestations of nationalism or the attempt to push someone back into

the national context. As a great admirer of Picasso, Sabina feels more at home in the house of modern art than among her fellow countrymen.

To the small, national context, Kundera opposes the large context of *Weltliteratur* or the history of art, from where writers and artists have often drawn their inspiration. The history of the novel, to which Kundera often makes reference in his writings, proves this point most eloquently: Laurence Sterne reacted to Rabelais, Sterne set off Diderot, Cervantes provided the inspiration for Fielding, against whom Stendhal measured himself, Flaubert continued living in Joyce, Hermann Broch developed his poetics of the novel reflecting on Joyce, and Kafka inspired Garcia Márquez to try a new avenue of writing a novel (*The Curtain*, 35). That is not to say that the national context could not provide inspiration for artists, but the danger with the national context as far as the small nation is concerned is that it often forces art to participate in the destiny of that nation, limiting or stifling its spontaneity and independent spirit.

In part seven of *Testaments Betrayed*, Kundera discusses precisely this predicament of the small nation. For various historical reasons, unlike large nations, “a small nation resembles a big family and likes to describe itself that way” (*Testaments*, 193). The word for family in Icelandic is *ffölskylda*, whose etymology Kundera finds eloquent: “*skylda* means ‘obligation’; *fföl* means ‘multiple.’ Family is thus ‘a multiple obligation.’ Icelanders have a single word for ‘family ties’: *ffölskyldubönd*: ‘the cords (*bönd*) of multiple obligations.’ Thus in the big family that is a small country, the artist is bound in multiple ways, by multiple cords” (*Testaments*, 193). Reflecting on the cords of small and large nations, Kundera notes that when Western European artists break away from the national tradition or leave their homeland to live in a preferred country, fellow

citizens do not take offense, but if a citizen of a small nation dared to act in a similar way, “his family would curse him as a detestable traitor” (*Testaments*, 193). Language is not the greatest barrier to international recognition for writers of a small nation. “[W]hat handicaps their art is that everything and everyone (critics, historians, compatriots as well as foreigners) hook the art onto the great national family portrait photo and will not let it get away” (*Testaments*, 193). It happened to Gombrowicz, whom critics tried to “polonize” and “push him back into the *small context* of the national,” instead of setting him in the “*large context*” of the international modern novel, which best explains the value and originality of his work (*Testaments*, 194):

Ah, small nations. Within that warm intimacy, each envies each, everyone watches everyone. “Families, I hate you!” And still another line from Gide: “There is nothing more dangerous for you than *your own* family, *your own* room, *your own* past... You must leave them.” Ibsen, Strindberg, Joyce, Seferis knew this. They spent a large part of their lives abroad, away from the family’s power. (*Testaments*, 194)

Like the writers he mentions, Kundera left his homeland and settled in France, his adoptive country. In *UL*, the protagonist whose views on family and nation come closest to Kundera’s own ideas is Sabina, the artist. Her betrayals can now be understood, not only in relation to communism, but also as a refusal to be pushed back into the nation-as-family construct, perceived as limiting and oppressive.²²

The family reconsidered

In “The Tragedy of Central Europe” (1984), Kundera underscored the extent to which Central Europe belonged to the West and called for adequate recognition of this other Europe and a return to the West, but in his later volume of essays, *The Curtain* (2005), he envisions a different role for Central Europe: “Between the *large context* of

the world and the *small context* of the nation, a middle step might be imagined: say, a *median context*. Between Sweden and the world, that step is Scandinavia. For Colombia, it is Latin America. And for Hungary, for Poland?" (*The Curtain*, 45). In the 1980s Konrad espouses a similar view: being a Central European means rising above petty provincialism and "narrow national cultures" (Konrad, 110), encouraging diversity and sophistication. "Someone is Central European if he finds the partition of our area painful, upsetting, disturbing" (Konrad, 113).

In *UL*, Kundera pursues his protagonists on opposing paths: into exile and back to the homeland. With a bowler hat from her nineteenth-century grandfather as her only possession, Sabina flees her country in search of a kitsch-free world. She cannot find that world; kitsch, considered "the *supreme aesthetic evil*" in Central Europe (*The Curtain*, 51), seems to have spread over the whole world, even into her own life, in her inexplicable longing for a peaceful home with a "loving mother" and a "wise father." But her self-irony is another of her Central European attitudes. In a paradoxical way, Sabina lives as a Central European in a world that no longer remembers Central Europe.

The other path is that of Tomas and Tereza, who find it hard to live in exile and assume an enormous risk in returning to occupied Czechoslovakia. They pay a price. This is also what Kundera mentions about Leoš Janáček, the great twentieth-century Czech composer, whom he describes as "that ingenious patriot," for whom leaving his homeland "was inconceivable. And he paid the price" (*Testaments*, 194). The price Janáček paid was to be misjudged by his fellow countrymen and remain mostly unknown to the world at a time when his operas, string quartets, and orchestral works could have influenced the course of modern music. In part seven of *Testaments Betrayed*, entitled "The Unloved

Child of the Family,” Kundera describes Janáček’s destiny within the national context. In the early years of the twentieth century, Czech musicology eulogized Smetana and disdained Janáček’s otherness. Professor Nejedlý, whom Kundera calls “the Pope of Prague musicology” (*Testaments*, 195) and who in 1948 became minister of culture in Stalinized Czechoslovakia, made it an ambition of his life to denigrate Janáček. Max Brod recognized Janáček’s talent and translated his operas into German, “thereby opening frontiers to them and delivering them from the exclusive power of the jealous family” (*Testaments*, 195). His first opera, *Jenufa*, waited over a decade to be performed in Prague, and when the score finally saw the light of the stage, it was reddened with humiliating deletions and corrections. Kundera tells us that Janáček “eventually came to be tolerated in Bohemia:”

I say “tolerated.” If a family doesn’t succeed in annihilating its unloved son, it humiliates him with maternal indulgence. The common view in Bohemia, meant as favorable, tears him out of the context of modern music and immures him in local concerns: passion for folklore, Moravian patriotism, admiration for Woman, for Nature, for Russia, for Slavitude, and other nonsense. Family, I hate you. Not a single important musicological study analyzing the *aesthetic newness* of his work has to this day been written by any of his compatriots. There is ... [n]o complete recorded edition of his works. No complete edition of his theoretical and critical writings.

And yet that little nation has never had any artist greater than he. (*Testaments*, 196)

The summer of 1928 and the last days of his life found Janáček in his little country house. Kundera mentions a visit from his young beloved and her two children, a walk into the forest, a cold, pneumonia, and death. The story goes that on his deathbed, Janáček made love to the young woman. The existence of the story makes Kundera think of a likely reconciliation between the unloved child and his family. “What better coronation for the wild euphoria that was his old age? And it is also proof that within his

national family there were, after all, people who loved him. For that legend is a bouquet set upon his grave” (*Testaments*, 197).

There is some resemblance between Janáček’s destiny and the destiny of Kundera’s protagonists who take upon themselves the risk of returning to Soviet-occupied Czechoslovakia. Tomas gives up on a promising career in exile only to be humiliated and persecuted in his homeland. One is a victim of nationalism, the other of communism, and both are “the unloved child[ren] of the family” (*Testaments*, 179). But at the end of their lives, they enter upon a different relationship to those who surround them, and they are able to enjoy their existence peacefully, not in a misunderstanding with the world. Janáček’s last works are “more and more bold, free, merry,” and freedom of spirit is something Tomas is also able to celebrate in the last year of his life.

In the last pages of *UL*, Tomas and Tereza have left Prague to resettle in a small country house. Here, they enter a rhythm of life different from the one communism had forced on them in the city. They find in the remote village a place of memory that seemed to have been overlooked by communism. “No one bothered to look into the political past of people willing to go off and work in the fields or woods; no one envied them” (*UL*, 281-2). Tomas is employed as a pickup truck driver and Tereza leads the young cows out to pasture twice a day. As they make this place their home, they open to the beauty of their simple surroundings. When Tereza initially ponders moving to the countryside, she pictures herself and Tomas in the space of her ancestors, which she mostly knew from books. There is a sense of harmony in the image of the pre-communist village where hard-working people get together at the end of the week for dance, church service, or a chat and a drink at the village pub.

However, village life under communism “no longer fit[s] the old-age pattern.” Church holidays have disappeared and have not been replaced by others, the tavern has been transformed into office space, and the young people have nowhere to dance. Private land and animals have been collectivized and no one cares for the collective farms as much as they did for their own property.

For déclassé intellectuals, living indefinitely in remote rural areas without permission to leave was a form of detention. Kundera compares the new life of Tomas and Tereza to the trees’ anchorage in the soil. “None of the crooked apple trees growing along the slope could ever leave the spot where it had put down its roots, just as neither Tereza nor Tomas could ever leave their village” (*UL*, 281). The language Kundera uses at the beginning of the last chapter to describe the couple’s situation is reminiscent of their political persecution: “Life in the country was the only escape open to them” (*UL*, 281). For Tomas there can be no question of a return to the medical profession. The chairman of the collective farm, a former patient, tries several times to obtain permission for Tomas to return to his profession, but the authorities deny his request. For the rest of his life Tomas must be a truck driver. “[T]here was no escape,” Tereza recalls as she dreams of Tomas’s final execution and his transformation into a rabbit.

However, when Kundera compares his characters’ lives in the village to the immovability of the trees, he does not seek to stress the interdiction of free movement. On the contrary, in this place, where they have recently grown roots, Tomas and Tereza feel free at last. Their new situation coincides with Tomas’s liberation from erotic compulsion and a completely changed conjugal relationship. Similar to the way in which throughout the novel repressive relationships within the family are linked to the power

dynamics of the communist regime, in the final chapter, the transformations Tomas and Tereza experience in their love relationship must be seen in light of the diminishing control of the state over their lives. “Perhaps it was the fact that no one wished to settle there that caused the state to lose its power over the countryside” (*UL*, 283). Or perhaps it was the fact that Tomas and Tereza discovered that the ideological and repressive spheres of the regime did not engulf their whole existence. Or perhaps it was that the family, wherein they had experienced some of the most repressive moments of their lives, was now changed. In the last chapter, the oppressive signs of the hegemonic regime gradually disappear not because they physically stop to exist, but because they cease to be perceived, because Tomas and Tereza find a way to break the totality of the system, reaching out to a place beyond it. As Havel would say, their longing to live their own lives in dignity shows them the way toward a life within the truth. Tomas is no longer dishonest to Tereza, and Tereza is no longer burdening Tomas with her measurements of and demands for true love. Thus, the family is not only a site of repression, but also the place where the refusal to go along with power and domination takes place and where difference and change are most likely to emerge. As their writing demonstrates, Kundera and Havel agree on this point.

The remarkable shift in the conjugal relationship coincides with an ample discussion of the relationship between man and animal. Karenin, the family dog, shows Tomas and Tereza the way out of the dichotomy of power and domination. Tereza disagrees with man’s dominion over the animal and in defining the human as “the cow parasite” who “suck[s] their udders like leeches” she questions the agreed-upon hierarchy that makes man supreme master of the world and the animal an inferior creature (*UL*,

287). In this and in her love for Karenin she feels “cut off, isolated.” The village is a regained home, but Tereza is no ordinary shepherdess. Her attitude toward animals does not mirror Descartes’ view that beasts are mere automatons. Before communism cows had names, which Tereza regards as a sign of also having a soul. She watches her heifers “rub one another . . . calm, guileless, and sometimes childishly animated” and she thinks they look like “fat fifty-year olds pretending they [are] fourteen.” At that moment nothing seems “more touching” for the shepherdess than “cows at play” (*UL*, 287). Kundera juxtaposes Tereza’s image to one of Nietzsche’s last images before the onset of his mental illness, when the philosopher shed tears over the ill treatment of a horse by a coachman. Embracing the animal’s head, “Nietzsche was trying to apologize to the horse for Descartes.” Just as Nietzsche turns philosophy against metaphysics or steps out of the space of sanity, where horses are beaten, Tereza withdraws from a power relationship between man and animal. “And that is the Nietzsche I love, [Kundera writes] just as I love Tereza with the mortally ill dog resting his head in her lap. I see them one next to the other: both stepping down from the road along which man, ‘the master and proprietor of nature,’ marches onward” (*UL*, 290). Stepping down from a predetermined role, Tereza initiates a new kind of relationship in which the animal is man’s equal. Her new way of thinking liberates the animal from his position of inferiority in a pre-established hierarchy, and gives him the same right to love and life.

Contributing to the couple’s liberation in the novel is their relationship to Karenin. The dog is dying of cancer, but Tereza dreams that Karenin is pregnant and gives birth to a bee and two rolls of bread. His death starts with a pregnancy and an unexpected beginning. Moreover, his death is also a reflection on love. Tereza compares

the love between Tomas and herself to the love between herself and the dog. “Her feeling was rather that, given the nature of the human couple, the love of man and woman is a priori inferior to that which can exist (at least in the best instances) in the love between man and dog, that oddity of human history probably unplanned by the Creator” (*UL*, 297). Her love for Karenin is completely selfless, so different from her love for Tomas, fraught with demands, reproaches, expectations, testing, and measuring. Tereza can accept Karenin “for what he [is]; she [does] not try to make him over in her image” (*UL*, 297).

The renunciation and rejection of a life of missions is another aspect of the couple’s liberation. At first, Tereza blames herself for Tomas’s failure—she had been the first to return from exile and Tomas had followed her—but he retorts that he “[has] not lost a thing.” “‘Haven’t you noticed I’ve been happy here, Tereza?’ Tomas said. ‘Surgery was your mission,’ she said. ‘Missions are stupid, Tereza. I have no mission. No one has. And it’s a terrific relief to realize you’re free, free of all missions’” (*UL*, 310). The freedom from all missions releases Tomas and Tereza from their obligations toward the communist family or the nation-as-family. Free of all hierarchies and the demands of power, in a harmonious relationship to their surroundings, and happy to be together, Tomas and Tereza seem to walk the path of a regained Paradise.

The last chapter stands out in stark contrast to the rest of the novel. Kundera is no longer interested in the totalitarian context, and so the family as a repressive mechanism disappears. There is a strong feeling of a new beginning: a new relationship between man and animal, a life without missions, love without demands and reproaches. For a good reason Kundera makes Nietzsche part of this landscape of change. Who would be more

appropriate to define the extent of transformation in Tomas's and Tereza's new life if not the philosopher who broke with the tradition of metaphysics? Without constituting an organized opposition to the power establishment, the new family, a triangle of love and friendship, which Tomas, Tereza, and Karenin stand for, becomes the moral sphere from where change emerges.

The destiny of Central Europe

In this change, Kundera points toward the past as well as toward the future. As *UL* and his essays suggest, for Kundera the past is always connected to Central Europe, a space of diversity and plurality. However, the future is not a recreation of Central Europe as it once was. In the last chapter of the novel Tomas and Tereza recognize the signs of the pre-communist past, but there is hardly any continuity between the past and the present. As much as Central Europe could give meaning to identity before the Second World War, later in the century only a faint memory of Central Europe survives. Sabina's skepticism and Tomas's and Tereza's determination not to give up on the idea "to experience the diversity that the world always is in its totality" (Arendt, 202) are two pieces of that memory.

In the last part of *The Curtain*, in a short essay entitled "A Forgotten Europe," Kundera notes that at the end of the eighteenth century Friedrich Schlegel could define the Europe of modern times just by referring to one political event—the French Revolution; a novel—Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*; and one philosophical work—Fichte's *Epistemology* (*The Curtain*, 159). To describe Europe of the second half of the twentieth century, prior to the fall of communism, Kundera tries putting together "[d]ecolonization,

Heidegger's critique of technology, and Fellini's films" (*The Curtain*, 160), but the list is unconvincing to him.

And now? Who would dare to attribute equal importance to a cultural work (of art, of thought) with (for instance) the fall of Communism in Europe? Does work of such importance no longer exist? Or have we lost the capacity to recognize it? These questions have no meaning. The Europe of Modern Times is gone. The Europe we live in no longer looks for its identity in the mirrors of its philosophy and its arts. But where then is the mirror? Where shall we go to find our face? (*The Curtain*, 160)

We know how much the culture of plurality and diversity is part of the Central European landscape. But two world wars, communism, and nationalism have altered that landscape as they have transformed the entire continent. For Kundera, the destiny of Central Europe is intimately tied to the destiny of Europe as a whole. The crisis of Europe will always be a crisis of Central Europe as well. Or could it be that in its role as mediator, between then national context and the world context, Central Europe could still be the place to find a reliable and desirable mirror?

In *UL* and other writings, Kundera strongly suggests that our world has arrived at a point where such notions as family and nation, and even community and Central Europe, must be revisited, in order to be more perceptive to our own needs and the needs of others and to be able to live our lives more meaningfully.

Notes

¹ Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 12.

² Rolando Perez, *Multicultural writers since 1945: an A-to-Z guide*, ed. Alba Amoia and Bettina L. Knapp (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004), 300.

³ Milan Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed: An Essay in Nine Parts*, trans. Linda Asher (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), 192.

⁴ Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 251. Abbreviated hereafter as *UL*.

⁵ Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its aftermath: Czechoslovak politics, 1968-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 112.

⁶ Alain Finkielkraut, "Milan Kundera Interview," *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture* 1 (1982): 16-17.

⁷ Milan Kundera, "An Introduction to a Variation," *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture* 5 (1986): 470.

⁸ Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," in *Václav Havel, or, Living in truth*, ed. Jan Vladislav (London: faber and faber, 1986): 44. Translated by Paul Wilson.

⁹ David Chioni Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique," in "Globalizing Literary Studies," special issue, *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (January 2001): 121.

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 121.

¹¹ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

¹² Milan Kundera, *The Joke*, rev. ed. (New York: Perennial, 2001), 133. This is the definitive version fully revised by the author.

¹³ Ladislav Matejka, "Milan Kundera's Central Europe," in *Critical Essays on Milan Kundera*, ed. Peter Petro (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999), 210.

¹⁴ Adriana Babeți, "Cuvînt înainte: Europa Centrală—un Concept cu Geometrie Variabilă" [Preface: Central Europe—a Concept with a Variable Geometry], in *Europa Centrală: Nevroze, dileme, utopii* [Central Europe: Neurosis, dilemmas, and utopias], ed. Adriana Babeți and Cornel Ungureanu (Iași: Polirom, 1997), 9.

¹⁵ Czesław Miłosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*, trans. Catherine S. Leach (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 128.

¹⁶ -----, "Central European Attitudes," *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture* 5 (1986): 107.

¹⁷ György Konrad, "Is the Dream of Central Europe Still Alive?" *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture* 5 (1986): 113.

¹⁸ Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," in *The New York Review of Books* 31, no. 7, trans. Edmund White (1984): 35.

¹⁹ Milan Kundera, *The Curtain: An Essay in Seven Parts*, trans. Linda Asher (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 46.

²⁰ H. C. Artmann, Péter Esterházy, & al., “Central Europe—Identity and Culture,” in *Cross Currents. A Yearbook of Central European Culture* 10 (1991), 27.

²¹ Václav Havel, “Anatomy of a Reticence,” in *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990*, ed. Paul Wilson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 303. The translation is by Erazim Kohák.

²² In exile, Sabina realizes that large nations can be as provincial as small nations, in their self-sufficiency and lack of genuine interest in other cultures. Kundera defines the provincialism of large nations in the same way as the provincialism of small nations, “the inability (or refusal) to imagine one’s own culture in the large context” (*The Curtain*, 40).

Chapter 4

Family, the Legacy of Empire, and Alien-nation in Postwar Austria in Ingeborg Bachmann's Work

From the early writings of Ingeborg Bachmann, literary critics recognized in her an avant-garde writer who probed into questions of existentialism and language philosophy, but it was only later that they also perceived in her work a dimension of social criticism. In 1984 Sigrid Schmid-Bortenschlager called Bachmann an eminently political writer, who developed a lucid and cogent critique of society. For critics like Schmid-Bortenschlager, the novel *Malina* was no longer the story of an illness from a subjective point of view, but a demonstration of a woman's destiny under patriarchal conditions (21).¹ Today, scholars agree that Bachmann was always a socially and politically engaged writer. Sara Lennox, a leading Bachmann scholar, shows emphatically how rooted Bachmann's writing is in the historical conditions of her time.

In one of her *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* (*The Frankfurt Lectures*), which Bachmann delivered at the University of Frankfurt am Main in the winter semester of 1959/60, she remarked that literature is a product of each writer's realities, constantly changing throughout time:

Daß Dichten außerhalb der geschichtlichen Situation stattfindet, wird heute wohl niemand mehr glauben—daß es auch nur einen Dichter gibt, dessen Ausgangsposition nicht von den Zeitgegebenheiten bestimmt wäre. Gelingen kann ihm, im glücklichen Fall, zweierlei: zu repräsentieren, seine Zeit zu repräsentieren, und etwas zu präsentieren, für das die Zeit noch nicht gekommen ist (196).²

Bachmann's work emerges from the issues and concerns, and views and attitudes of postwar Austria because, as she often confessed, she could not write about another place or time. She anchors her work in personal history as well as in the history of her nation. She examines the legacy of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, which she experienced in the aftermath of its disintegration, in the multicultural and multilingual environment she grew up in, but she also approaches Austria's involvement in the Second World War. Her investigation of the past is both a celebration and a condemnation of Austria.

Nonetheless, her critique has implications that transcend her time, growing into a critique of Western civilization—of the white man's domination of the world. Moreover, when Bachmann observes that fascism starts in the relationship between a man and a woman, she transcends a particular historical moment to address a fundamental issue within the history of humankind: patriarchy.

Bachmann chooses a particular perspective through which to study the past and convey her perception and understanding of the present. It is the perspective of the family. From this perspective, she examines attitudes toward the imperial past and ways of thinking in postwar Austria, as well as develops a civilizational critique. The family is the seat of identity, but it is also the (first) seat of violence and oppression. It is a home to return to or to escape from. Family is a source of strength as well as vulnerability.

Bachmann's work conveys the idea that questions regarding Austria's complex legacy need to be addressed first and foremost in the intimate environment of the Austrian family.

The families this chapter focuses on—the Matreis from Bachmann's short story "Drei Wege zum See" (Three Paths to the Lake), the Ranners and Jordans from the

unfinished novel *Der Fall Franza* (The Book of Franza), and the Ivan-I-Malina constellation as well as the unnamed narrator's family from *Malina*, Bachmann's only completed novel—all have roots in the imperial past. Some of Bachmann's protagonists express nostalgia for this past and take refuge in it as they contrast it to the present, they seek answers and solutions for the problems of their times, and even propose it as a utopian model. Others seek to recapture and reinvent some of the power Austria had as an empire. The celebration of the imperial/multinational past can never be seen in isolation from Austria's more recent past of war and fascism, or even from the broader implications of violence in Western civilization.

It is important to distinguish between imperial and multinational in Bachmann's work. Bachmann celebrated the multinational past as fertile ground for unequalled cultural production and ethnic interaction, but she never lost sight of the past as power. A multinational empire like Austria-Hungary had represented the confluence of several nations that together created rich cultural interfaces, but Habsburg Austria had for centuries been among the great powers of Europe, and the collapse of the imperial state brought about a loss of that sense of power among many Austrians. Bachmann recognized in fascist Austria the desire to return to the greatness of the imperial past.

Ingeborg Bachmann was born in Klagenfurt, the capital of Carinthia, Austria, in 1926. As a child, she spent many summers in the Dreiländereck, the region where Austria borders on Slovenia and Italy. The memories of these summers were among the most cherished recollections in Bachmann's life. However, these memories of childhood were partly shadowed by her father's decision to join the Austrian National Socialist Party when Ingeborg was six years old. At twelve she witnessed the entry of Hitler's troops

into Klagenfurt. Both events made a profound impression on her and later found expression in her work. Bachmann never made direct references to her father or her family's history in her fictional work. Yet the question of her father's association with fascism must have been a persistent thought, which Bachmann transferred to her writing into various narrative situations that have to do with paternal and conjugal violence.

Bachmann studied philosophy, psychology, law, and German literature at the universities of Innsbruck, Graz, and Vienna, and in 1950 she received her Doctor of Philosophy degree with a dissertation entitled "The Critical Reception of the Existential Philosophy of Martin Heidegger." After graduating, Bachmann worked as a scriptwriter and an editor at the American radio station *Rot-Weiß-Rot*³ in Vienna, where she also published her first radio dramas.

Bachmann's writing spans several literary genres. She wrote poetry, novels, short stories, opera libretti, radio plays, and essays. In the late fifties, she stopped writing poetry and turned exclusively to drama and prose. Two volumes of short stories appeared in print—*Das dreißigste Jahr* (The thirtieth year) in 1961, for which she was awarded the Berliner Kritikerpreis,⁴ and *Simultan* (1972). In 1971 *Malina* was published, the first novel of a trilogy Bachmann had started in the early 1960s. Referring to the overall conception of the novel cycle *Todesarten* (Styles of Death), Bachmann envisaged it as "eine einzige Studie aller möglichen Todesarten... ein Kompendium... ein Manuale... und zugleich das Bild der letzten zwanzig Jahre" (*Werke*, 4:432).⁵ Two other incomplete novels appeared posthumously—*Der Fall Franza* (The Book of Franza) and *Requiem für Fanny Goldmann* (Requiem for Fanny Goldmann). All three novels of the *Todesarten* cycle were narrated by women and presented stories of their death.

Finding “the political and literary atmosphere of Vienna corrupt, stagnant, and stifling,” Bachmann decided to go into self-imposed exile (Lennox, 32).⁶ She left Austria in 1953 and traveled widely throughout Europe, the Middle East, Egypt, and Sudan. Except for a few brief visits, she never returned to live in her native country. She resided in various places, on the island of Ischia and in Naples, Munich, Zürich, Berlin, and finally she settled in Rome. In 1973 she suffered severe burns from a fire in her apartment in Rome and died shortly after that. She was 47 years old.

This chapter examines three texts by Bachmann: *Malina*, Bachmann’s only completed novel, the unfinished novel *Der Fall Franza*, and the short story “Three Paths to the Lake” from the *Simultan* volume. Published first and envisaged as an overture to the *Todesarten* trilogy, *Malina* is the text Bachmann wrote last, after she had completed significant parts of *Der Fall Franza* and *Requiem für Fanny Goldmann*. When *Malina* first appeared in 1971, the initial critical reception was mixed. Bachmann had not published for several years, and literary critics had been looking forward to reading new work by her. But not many were ready to welcome a novel that portrayed and examined the breakdown of the self. As Sandra Frieden observes, 1971 was “a year in which a critic could still speak pejoratively about ‘die Geschichte einer Neurose,’ and yet, Bachmann’s novel with its intensively interiorized perspective proved to be a precursor of the *Neue Innerlichkeit* novels of the 1970s, and an early proclamation of the intention to explore the self in a neurotic world” (61).⁷ Part of the difficulty in the reception of *Malina* was the fact that the content and form of writing were so new that criticism had to catch up. The novel is a depiction of social conflicts and contradictions as much as a reflection on the inner challenges and incongruities of the self in postwar Austria.

Bachmann had worked on a series of drafts for novels since the 1950s, but her journey to Egypt in the summer of 1965 had a decisive impact on the development of the *Todesarten* cycle, and especially on *Der Fall Franza*, which is partly located in Jordan and Egypt. Bachmann envisaged *Der Fall Franza* as the third installment of the cycle, and only her untimely death prevented her from completing it. The unfinished novel first saw the light of print posthumously, in 1978. In this novel Bachmann develops the crucial idea that fascism, rather than being the absolute product of sweeping historical events, arises from intimate relationships between a man and a woman. Moreover, war does not end with peace, but continues in spite of it, in everyday circumstances, with murder cases that remain largely unnoticed and unreported, because the way in which they occur is slow and gradual and does not have the appearance of an abnormal event.

“Drei Wege zum See” (“Three Paths to the Lake”) is the story that ends the *Simultan* volume, the last complete text to be published during Bachmann’s lifetime (1972). In the five short stories included in this volume, Bachmann delves into the lives of Austrian women, whose common experience is their alienation from the past—often their childhood—as well as their sense of isolation and remoteness from the present and the surrounding world. Elisabeth Matrei, the protagonist of “Drei Wege zum See,” attempts to escape her alienation by returning from London to Klagenfurt, her native town, as well as by searching for a home in a relationship to a man, whose family ties are deeply set in their country’s Austro-Hungarian past. He is the son of Joseph Roth’s main character from *Die Kapuzinergruft* (The Emperor’s Tomb), who at the end of the novel is sent to live in Paris. In “Drei Wege zum See” Bachmann pursues the destiny of the Matrei family half a century after the fall of Austria-Hungary. This family’s relationship

to the vanished empire is established through a multifaceted legacy that fundamentally shapes their identity.

Several literary as well as real-life intersections exist between Bachmann and the writers discussed in the previous chapters of this dissertation. The connection to Roth is the most obvious one, since both Roth and Bachmann grew up in the Austrian literary tradition, and in her work Bachmann approached the legacy of the Habsburg myth, which Roth had helped invent. Bachmann and Grass are linked through their interest in writing about war and violence. They frequented the gatherings of *Gruppe 47*, a well-known literary forum of postwar German writers, whose members included Ilse Aichinger, Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Heinrich Böll, and Paul Celan, among others. Both Bachmann and Grass shared their work with *Gruppe 47* and were awarded the prize of the forum. Although no special intellectual friendship is known to have developed between Grass and Bachmann (as, for instance, between Bachmann and Celan), in 1965, a year after Bachmann had received the Georg Büchner Prize, her acceptance speech appeared in book form, with drawings by Günter Grass.⁸ Moreover, in the afterword to the first edition of the translation of *Malina* into English, Mark Anderson mentions that Bachmann collaborated with Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, and Uwe Johnson, engaging politically against the Vietnam War (Anderson, 227).⁹

Finally, the relationship between Bachmann and Kundera can be established on the basis of the Central European cultural heritage they were both rooted in. Although their writing styles are very different, both writers were inspired by the literary traditions established by Musil, Roth, Broch, and Kafka. Moreover, for personal or political reasons, Bachmann, like Kundera, decided to write from exile. However, the most

important aspect of Kundera's and Bachmann's work for this dissertation is the fact that, unlike Roth and Grass, who represented the family as the recipient of established norms and mentalities and conflicts of empire and nations, Kundera and Bachmann distinguished the family as a mechanism of totalitarian violence. Bachmann went even further than Kundera, identifying in familial relationships the very source of conflict and hostility in society.

Four major themes stand out in the texts this chapter examines: the legacy of Austria-Hungary, alienation in postwar Austria, fascism, and patriarchy. To approach them starting from the family and through the family reveals how profoundly interconnected these themes are in Bachmann's work. Like Roth, Grass, and Kundera, for whom the construction of family relationships was a path to register and dissect social and political crises pertaining to the societies in which they lived—dissolution of empire (Roth), extreme nationalism (Grass), and totalitarianism and imperialism (Kundera)—Bachmann focused on intimate tragedies in the realm of the family in order to construct a broad critique of Western civilization. She pictured cold-blooded murderers among fathers and husbands in order to address issues of patriarchy and violence toward women in post-WWII Austrian society. In her work Bachmann often linked patriarchy and war, and although Austria's involvement in fascism was a theme she often returned to, Bachmann identified a type of war that was less visible and continued even after peace was reestablished. Like Kundera who extends his examination of totalitarianism beyond communism, Bachmann singles out the continuation of violence, crime, and prejudice beyond fascism and the Second World War. Perpetual war, hostility, brutality, and a

sense of profound vulnerability and powerlessness of the individual in the face of such horrendous experiences are at the heart of Bachmann's work.

Austria-Hungary in *Malina*, “Drei Wege zum See,” and *Der Fall Franza*

Bachmann lived in Rome more years than in Vienna, but she could not write about Italy and Italian relationships. Her writing capital consisted of memories of childhood and youth, and these memories came to her from Austria. But in order to write about Austria, Bachmann felt she needed to be away from her native country. Austria was closest to her from a distance, in the same way that Austria-Hungary defined her identity in complex and profound ways from the distance of history.

Born in Carinthia after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Bachmann grew up in a region that, by virtue of its multiculturalism, resembled a piece of old Austria. In her writing, Bachmann often returned to her native region. In an early text, “Das Honditschkreuz” (1943), Bachmann celebrated the Carinthian borderland, where Austria, Italy, and Slovenia meet. Here, the border created the community of the Windish people (“Windische,” in German), who were Slovenes assimilated in the Austrian borderlands. The life on the border had shaped their language, customs, and traditions so that what started as the meeting of Slovenes and Austrians was transformed into the birth of a third community, the product of a contact zone:

Die Windischen leben im Gailtal ebenso wie überall im Süden Kärntens inmitten von Deutschen, sie haben ihre eigene Sprache, die weder von Slowenen noch von Deutschen so richtig verstanden wird. Mit ihrem Dasein ist es, als wollten sie die Grenze verwischen, die Grenze des Landes, aber auch der Sprache, der Bräuche und Sitten. Sie bilden eine Brücke, und ihre Pfeiler sitzen gut und friedlich drüben und herüber. (*Werke*, 2:491)¹⁰

In an essay entitled “Biographisches” (Biographical Matters), Bachmann describes the crossing of the border from one culture into another as an extraordinary yet commonplace experience during her childhood. The strange sounding words of another language were part and parcel of her experience of home. Particularly noteworthy is the bilingual space of the valley of Gail—Gailtal in German and Zilja in Slovenian—near the border with Slovenia, where Bachmann spent several summers:

Ich habe meine Jugend in Kärnten verbracht, im Süden, an der Grenze, in einem Tal, das zwei Namen hat—einen deutschen und einen slowenischen. Und das Haus, in dem seit Generationen meine Vorfahren wohnten—Österreicher und Windische—trägt noch heute einen fremdklingenden Namen. So ist nahe der Grenze noch einmal die Grenze: die Grenze der Sprache—und ich war hüben und drüben zu Hause, mit den Geschichten von guten und bösen Geistern zweier und dreier Länder; denn über den Bergen, eine Wegstunde weit, liegt schon Italien. (*Werke*, 4: 301)¹¹

Bachmann’s second language was Italian, and the proximity to the Italian border made Italy appear as a continuation of her home, not as a foreign country. Here, Bachmann defines her homeland in terms of language, not in terms of nationhood. She felt at home in several languages: “Meine Heimat [ist] ein Stück wenig realisiertes Österreich, eine Welt, in der viele Sprachen gesprochen werden und viele Grenzen verlaufen“ (*Werke*, 4: 302).¹² When Bachmann remembers the monarchy it is often in terms of an ideal of a multicultural and multilingual community.

In Bachmann’s work, places and protagonists are Austrian. Schmidt-Bortenschlager remarks that her characters are Austrian in a double sense: by virtue of their location in Austrian postwar society, as well as in the spirit and sensibility of literary writing in Austria after the First World War. Bachmann positions her protagonists in the context of previous work by Hofmannsthal, Roth, and Musil.

We cannot rely on Bachmann's biography to explain her literary choices, but there is enough evidence that she processed personal history and experience into her writing. All her protagonists come from Carinthia: the Matri family from the story "Drei Wege zum See" as well as the "I-figure" and Malina from the novel with the same name originate in Klagenfurt, Bachmann's native town; Franza and her brother, Martin, from *Der Fall Franza*, are born in Galicien, likewise a place in Carinthia. None of these characters, with the exception of the aging Herr Matri, live in Carinthia, but they have a special relationship to it. Whether they return to their native place to reestablish a connection to their past or to escape an oppressive condition, they always institute a connection to "Haus Österreich" (the old House of Austria).

i) The House of Austria: the multinational perspective on the past

In an interview in 1971 Bachmann called her native country "Haus Österreich." When present-day Austria alienated Bachmann, her refuge was the House of Austria, with which she experienced an extraordinary intimacy:

Es gibt kein Land Österreich, das hat es nie gegeben. Und was wir heute so nennen, trägt seinen Namen, weil es in irgendwelchen Verträgen so beschlossen wurde. Aber der wirkliche Name war immer "Haus Österreich." Ich komme aus dieser Welt, obwohl ich geboren wurde, als Österreich schon nicht mehr existierte. Doch unterirdische Querverbindungen gelten für mich immer noch, und die geistige Formation hat mir dieses Land, das keines ist, gegeben. (*Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden*, 79)¹³

The way in which Bachmann speaks about the House of Austria indicates that, like Roth, she perceived it as a great family of nations. The House of Austria is a home for many Bachmann protagonists, because only there do they connect with their ancestors and become aware of their foundation of strength, vitality, and identity. In *Malina*, the narrator whose name is never mentioned recalls her multicultural inheritance making

reference to the same “Haus.” She favors the expression “House of Austria” because it best explains her ties to Austria, better than any other expression. “Ich muß gelebt haben in diesen Haus zu verschiedenen Zeiten, denn ich erinnere mich sofort in den Gassen von Prag und im Hafen von Triest, ich träume auf böhmisch, auf windisch, auf bosnisch, ich war immer zu Hause in diesem Haus ...” (*Malina*, 100-1).¹⁴ In this novel as in her essays, Bachmann emphasizes the idea of language as home, and when later in *Malina*, the unnamed narrator—the “I-figure”—develops her critique of postwar Austria, Bachmann contrasts the concept of language-as-home to the idea of the nation-state as a home.

The “I-figure” lives on Ungargasse (Hungary Street) in the third district of Vienna and calls her street “mein Ungargassenland” (my country on Hungary Street). The street has small cafés and many old inns and taverns. There are also “[t]wo inconspicuous plaques ... ‘Kaiser Franz Joseph I, 1850’ and ‘Office and Chancellery,’” but these “aspirations to nobility” interest the “I-figure” less than the busy traffic which calls to mind the street’s distant youth, the old Ungargasse “in der die aus Ungarn einreisenden Kaufleute, Pferde-, Ochsen- und Heuhändler hier ihre Herbergen hatten, ihre Einkehrwirthshäuser” (*Malina*, 11).¹⁵ Her lover is a Hungarian with a Slavic name: Ivan (without an accent).

Gábor Kérékès observes that the correct spelling of Ivan in Hungarian is Iván, and he interprets the misspelling as an aspiration toward multiculturalism. When the unnamed narrator in *Malina*, an Austrian from Carinthia who also speaks Windish, falls in love with a Hungarian man whose name has a Slavic spelling, the resulting contact zone is more than the meeting of Austria and Hungary, pointing toward a more complex multicultural space in which Slavic language and culture played a role.

In “Drei Wege zum See,” Bachmann chooses two venues to refer to the House of Austria: a topographical and a literary one. Recently returned from London to Klagenfurt—Elisabeth’s native town—to visit her aging father, Elisabeth Matrei has planned to hike through the neighboring woodland and climb down to the Wörthersee lake, where she used to go swimming as a child. To reach the lake, she uses a tourist map of borderland Carinthia from 1968, which describes the territory of the Kreuzbergl region, where Austria borders on Slovenia and Italy. Once this territory belonged to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

Auf der Wanderkarte für das Kreuzberglgebiet, herausgegeben vom Fremdenverkehrsamt, in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Vermessungsamt der Landeshauptstadt Klagenfurt, Auflage 1968, sind 10 Wege eingetragen. Von diesen Wegen führen drei Wege zum See, der Höhenweg 1 und die Wege 7 und 8. Der Ursprung dieser Geschichte liegt im Topographischen, da der Autor dieser Wanderkarte Glauben schenkte. (“Drei Wege zum See,” 119)¹⁶

Exhausted, Elisabeth finds solace in the Carinthian landscape. Each of her hiking trips is an occasion to meditate on the multicultural past of her native region. “Auf dem Höhenweg 1 kam sie wieder zur Zillhöhe mit den Banken, und sie setzte sich einen Moment, schaute kurz auf den See hinunter, aber dann hinüber zu den Karawanken und weit darüber hinaus, nach Krain, Slawonien, Kroatien, Bosnien, sie suchte wieder eine nicht mehr existierende Welt...” (DW, 154).¹⁷ Repeatedly, Elisabeth searches for the signs of a past world, in her surroundings as well as within her own personal history: She drives home with her father through Radetzky Street, which gives her a pleasant feeling of familiarity and security (*Geborgenheit*); she offers her father a book about Sarajevo, the only topic she knows he continues to be interested in; she tries to rewrite Emperor Franz Joseph’s war announcement “An Meine Völker” (“To My Peoples”), imagining that she could have saved the vast monarchy from its collapse; and she recalls the figure

of her lover, Franz Joseph Trotta, a name from Roth's novels. This is where the literary connection to the House of Austria comes into play. The world Elisabeth is searching for as she gazes upon the *Dreiländereck*—the intersection between Austria, Slovenia, and Italy—brings to her mind the world of the Trottas: “[...] sie suchte wieder eine nicht mehr existierende Welt, da ihr von Trotta nichts mehr geblieben war, nur der Name und einige Sätze, seine Gedanken und ein Tonfall” (DW, 154).¹⁸

In *Der Fall Franza*, Bachmann connects her protagonists to the House of Austria through name genealogy. Like Elisabeth, Franza also returns to her native place. Succeeding in her escape from the sanatorium where her husband, Leopold Jordan, a famous psychotherapist from Vienna, had confined her, Franza returns to Galicien, a village in borderland Carinthia. After writing a desperate letter to her brother, Martin Ranner, they meet in their childhood home. The village of Galicien is, like Klagenfurt, a part of the territory Elisabeth identifies as the meeting of three countries and three languages, but its name also alludes to the Austro-Hungarian land of Galicia, which was later divided between Poland and Ukraine. Paradoxically, the place in Galicien that has preserved the multicultural legacy of the old monarchy is the village graveyard. During their short visit, Franza asks her brother to walk with her to the graveyard. There they wander among the tombstones in search of their family's past. “[S]ie fingen an, die Namen auf den Grabsteinen zu studieren, und schätzten ab, mit wem sie noch verwandt sein könnten und mit wem doch nicht, mit den Gasparin gewiß, so müßten wir doch eigentlich heißen? Sagte Franza, mit den Katzianka, den Napokojs, Wutti, den Kristan V JEZUSU KRISTUSU JE ŽIVLJENJE IN VSTAJENJE” (*Der Fall Franza*, 372).¹⁹ Martin and Franza wonder at the incredible mixture of German and Slavic names, which it was

the nature of the graveyard to preserve against more recent geopolitical transformations. As Franza utters the names engraved on the tombstones, she switches between German and Slovenian:

Nicht nur die Ranner und die Gasparin hatten sich so immer im Kreis gedreht, und dazu um ihre Hausnamen, die vulgo Tobai, damit sie doppelt getauft waren wie das Haus Österreich, das sich mit seinen drei doppelten Namen immer im Kreis gedreht hatte bis zu seinem Einsturz und davon noch an Gedächtnisverlust litt, die Namen hörte für etwas, das es nicht mehr war. (*FF*, 372)²⁰

The House of Austria is the preferred home of all the protagonists of the three texts this chapter examines. While TP sketches the image of this past home using elements of a literary topography, *Malina* and *FF* strongly suggest that the search for the House of Austria must start from the premise of language-as-home.

ii) Nostalgia and imperial conservatism

Nostalgia is a major component in the attitude of Bachmann's protagonists toward the past. But nostalgia comes in many degrees. It may combine with conservatism (Herr Matrei), or support a kind of "sickness of the past" (Franza and Trotta), or stand at the basis of a reinvention of a new "House" while fueling anger and cynicism toward the present (the "I-figure"), or even paradoxically blend with a desire to rise above a sickening longing for the past (Elisabeth Matrei and Martin Ranner).

In Herr Matrei we recognize the lonely Franz Ferdinand Trotta from *The Emperor's Tomb* as well as the loyal district commander von Trotta from *The Radetzky March*. Herr Matrei is as old as Franz Ferdinand would have been had the latter lived after the German Anschluss of Austria. But even more, in his austere and self-restrained lifestyle, he resembles the district commander from the time of the Monarchy, whom Roth calls a Spartan among the Austrians (*The Radetzky March*, 25). Elisabeth is

reminded of both men when she ponders how much her father, an Austrian of Carinthia, resembled the loyal Slovenes of Austria-Hungary: “Mehr als ein halbes Jahrhundert später gab es wieder jemand, der jemand ähnelte aus einer anderen Welt, einer versunkenen” (DW, 192).²¹ Herr Matrei rarely walks to downtown Klagenfurt, and when he does so, he walks with his head bent, to shield himself from the intruding images of the present.

Unlike his daughter and her lover, Trotta, or the female protagonists in *Malina* and *FF*, Herr Matrei’s nostalgia toward the past is not a longing for the multicultural and multinational dimensions of the Dual Monarchy. Herr Matrei never expresses any thoughts on these aspects, although his wife, barely mentioned in the short story, was Slovenian. There is one distinctive trait that connects Herr Matrei to the past monarchy: conservatism. In public life, Elisabeth’s father pretends to support the Socialist Party, but in his private life he is very conservative. He finds innovation an intrusion into his privacy. Elisabeth remembers how extremely reluctant her father had been to accept a telephone in their house. He had opposed it for a long time and finally gave in on condition that Robert and Elisabeth pay for it. He reckoned that his children needed a lesson, because to use the telephone was tantamount to madness: “Telefonieren mußte ja die reinste Krankheit sein zwischen den jungen Leuten heute” (DW, 175).²² In his dislike for telephones, Herr Matrei resembles the Emperor Franz Joseph. Franz Joseph distrusted telephones, trains, and cars, and electric light made his eyes sore (Johnston, 34).²³ Herr Matrei shares the Emperor’s uneasiness toward trains. After many years of coming to the small Klagenfurt railway station to welcome his daughter, Herr Matrei continues to feel anxious and nervous, deeming the information regarding Elisabeth’s arrival as inaccurate,

although, as the narrator observes, there could hardly be a question of or mistake in a railway station where there were only two tracks. Separated from a bygone community and mostly self-confined to his quiet home, the only visitors Herr Matrei welcomes are his children, who have both settled abroad. Herr Matrei is a relic from the past. He has retired from the present, the way the empire retired from history, continuing to debate in his own realm the events of 1914, which, he thinks, were responsible for all the disasters in Europe that followed the outbreak of the First World War.

iii) Nostalgia: the search for a time before fascism and the impossible return

Compared to Herr Matrei, whose nostalgia is anchored in imperial conservatism, Bachmann's female protagonists in all the three texts examined in this chapter return to Austria's multinational past in search for a time before fascism. Their attitude toward the past is influenced by their attempt to find solutions to pressing issues in their own lives in the present. Franza's, Elisabeth's, and the unnamed narrator's conundrum is to navigate through the past without draping themselves in nostalgia or exchanging the contradictions of the present with those of the past. Their challenge is to find in the past—in their family history, intrinsically tied to the multinational past—those elements they could use in order to challenge the present and create an alternative world.

Significant is the fact that the three female protagonists' return to the past is also an acknowledgment of discontinuity. None of the three women have lived in their native place uninterruptedly. This lack of continuity is essential to their perceptions of identity and destiny. All three women departed for Vienna and one of them settled abroad—Elisabeth lives in France and works for a Parisian newspaper—eager to live in a great city and experience the world beyond the periphery. When Franza and Elisabeth return to

their childhood home, to reconnect to the source of strength and vitality their native place may offer, they are puzzled at what they feel and experience. The world they thought they knew has changed: landscapes are different and so are the people. And they, themselves, are very much changed also.

The idea of discontinuity is most striking in *DW*, suggested through topographical transformations. Trying to reach the Wörthersee lake by foot, Elisabeth walks on three different paths, but each time the trail suddenly stops and leaves Elisabeth a step away from falling down into a precipice. Bulldozers have hauled off an enormous part of the wooded Austrian mountainside, preparing the land for the construction of a future highway. The pedestrian access to the lake is cut off, and the only way to reach the Wörthersee lake is by taking the bus, which Elisabeth and her father reluctantly decide to do. The lake, like everything that surrounds it, has changed and no longer represents for Elisabeth and her father an experience of home. The changed physical landscape in *DW* is the counterpart of the unrecognizable inner landscape of Franza's psyche in *FF*. Here, Bachmann concentrates on the psychological transformations of Franza, in her transition from Galicien to Vienna. The departure from Galicien changes Franza, who drops her Galicien accent to adopt a different accent in Vienna. Married to a former Nazi doctor, Franza gradually becomes her husband's hostage, and Vienna becomes the city of Franza's suffering, torture, and imprisonment. When Martin reunites with Franza in their childhood house in Galicien, he finds her in a state of complete mental disarray and physical exhaustion, which are all a consequence of her living with her husband, Leopold. Martin is struck by the lack of resemblance between the sister he had grown up with and someone else's distraught and dejected wife who now sits opposite him and

begs for his help. Leopold Jordan, a Nazi doctor during WWII who had performed various experiments on prisoners and after the war had subtly and gradually killed two wives before marrying Franza, had continued his wartime experiments, in a different manner, on Franza. She associates Vienna with her husband and the fascist past. Once a city of arts and delight, Vienna is now a concentration camp. Here Franza imagines trying to save her own child—a dead fetus—from being incinerated. Back in Carinthia, Martin thinks that there is nothing left of Galicien in Franza.

Franza's return home is an attempt to reconnect to a part of herself before Vienna and her marriage. As the graveyard scene demonstrates, the time before marriage is also related to a mixed Slavic and Germanic family genealogy, through which the multinational past of the House of Austria is expressed. The return to Galicien is also a return to language before Vienna, when brother and sister spoke in the Windish dialect to one another, when Martin called Franza by the endearing "Gitsche," the Windish word for girl. Remaining parentless in her early teens, Franza took upon herself the role of the mother for Martin, and the two developed a genuine friendship. This was a world the "Fossil," Martin's reference to Franza's husband, had never set foot in.

Franza is not looking into the past for an expression of imperial power, but rather for the manifestation of multinationality in the articulation of shared differences. Walking through the graveyard, submerged in the past, Franza passes from one gravestone to another: "Sie schaute zurück, drehte sich in ihren wirklichen alten Namen, und wenn er sie ansprach, dann wachte sie auf, aber als hätte sie beinahe vergessen, daß sie es war" (*FF*, 372).²⁴ She feels at home in the presence of Germanic and Slavic names, and

reawakens to the vigor and strength that come from being able to identify with more than one culture.

However, Franza soon realizes that nostalgia is an impossible return. As she attempts to find her place in the family genealogy, and thus reestablish a connection to a time before Leopold, she is surprised by the feeling that the name she is enveloping herself with and which was her first name “bedeckte sie nicht mehr ganz, nur noch die Blößen” (*FF*, 372).²⁵ Franza still wants to keep hold of Galicien, but a more recent past is claiming her. Thus, she cannot separate the past from the present, as she is unable to leave behind her tormented self and become once again her old self.

The village of Galicien is also briefly mentioned in *Malina*. This is where the unnamed narrator is evacuated to in 1945, and where after each of the last wars, the border between Yugoslavia and Austria was to be drawn. “Galicien, das niemand außer mir kennt, das anderen Menschen nichts bedeutet, von niemand besucht und bestaunt wird, geriet immer genau unter den Federstrich auf den Stabskarten der Alliierten ... (*Malina*, 101).²⁶ The villagers, for whom “Galicien wäre natürlich Galicien geblieben, unter jeder Flagge,”²⁷ waited patiently for the turmoil to cease. “[I]n der Familie hieß es immer, wenn das vorbei ist, dann werden wir wieder nach Lipica fahren, wir müssen unsere Tante in Brünn besuchen, was mag aus unseren Verwandten in Czernowitz geworden sein, die Luft ist besser im Friaul als hier, wenn du groß bist, mußt du nach Wien und Prag gehen, wenn du groß bist...” (*Malina*, 101).²⁸ The narrator fakes indifference toward the postwar territorial agreements, claiming that her feeling of belonging would have remained the same, no matter what nation she would have ended up with. She truly belonged to the House of Austria, in spite of what post-WWI treaties

had decided. However, like Franza, the “I-figure” is strangely surprised by the impact of the more recent historical events on her perceptions of family and places. The farther away in the past the House of Austria moves, the more it becomes a myth, and nostalgia combines with the realization of the impossible return:

Trotzdem bin ich anders gereist nach Prag als nach Paris, nur in Wien habe ich zu jeder Zeit mein Leben nicht wirklich, aber auch nicht verloren gelebt, nur in Triest war ich nicht fremd, aber es wird immer gleichgültiger. Es muß nicht sein, aber ich möchte einmal und bald, vielleicht dieses Jahr noch, nach Venedig fahren, das ich nie kennenlernen werde. (*Malina*, 102)²⁹

Martin identifies a peculiar kind of ailment in Franza, which he calls “die Krankheit des Damals”—the sickness of the past (*FF*, 372); this suffering manifests itself through symptoms of a collapse. Franza’s way of thinking and feeling makes Martin connect his sister with the name “fossil,” the same name he gave her husband: “Und das galt mit für alle Zumutungen, die von langher kamen, für alle diese Erpressungen, für die Erpresser wie Jordan und die Erpreßten wie Franza” (*FF*, 373).³⁰ In Martin’s understanding, Franza was twice oppressed—in her marriage, as well as in her resolve to turn away completely from the present and relive a time before her illness, fascism, and war.

Similar to *FF*, where the protagonist roams around the graveyard in search of her family’s multinational past, before fascism, the narrator of *Malina* walks through the third district of Vienna in postwar Austria picturing in her head the heavy bustle of merchants from all over Austria-Hungary before the First World War. In *Malina*, Bachmann explores an ambivalent attitude toward the Habsburg past, ranging from nostalgia to irony and even cynicism. In love with Ivan, who was born in Pécs, Hungary, formerly Fünfkirchen, and who lives now on Ungargasse, the unnamed narrator is

inspired to create a union of “Two Houses.” Undoubtedly, the new union is grounded in ideas of “the House of Austria,” but the narrator tries to mask her nostalgia with a disavowal to reinhabit the former monarchy: “[I]ch war immer zu Hause in diesem Haus [...] ohne die geringste Lust, es noch einmal zu bewohnen, in seinen Besitz zu gelangen, einen Anspruch zu erheben [...] ich habe abgedankt, ich habe die älteste Krone in der Kirche Am Hof niedergelegt” (*Malina*, 100-01).³¹ The narrator makes a real effort not to appear nostalgic, but it is obvious that her abdication is tinged with regret. In an interview with Herr Mühlbauer, the editor of the *Vienna Evening Edition*, the narrator confesses that earlier “fühlte ich mich benachteiligt wie ein Enterbter“ (*Malina*, 96),³² but now she gets along well with Vienna: “Ich bin einverstanden mit dieser Stadt und ihrer verschwindend kleinen Umgebung, die aus der Geschichte ausgetreten sind“ (*Malina*, 96-7).³³ Herr Mühlbauer is alarmed by the narrator’s observation, but she has no desire to hide behind hypocritical remarks and adds: “Man könnte auch sagen, daß, als Beispiel für die Welt, hier ein Imperium aus der Geschichte verstoßen worden ist, mit seinen Praktiken und von Ideen verbrämten Taktiken ...“ (*Malina*, 97).³⁴

iv) *Ungargassenland*: A new union denied

As the narrator of *Malina* creates her own version of a dual state, she tries to avoid the mistakes of the past monarchy. In contrast to the vast territories of the former Austro-Hungarian empire, the territory of the narrator’s union is tiny and encompasses the space on a street between two nearby houses:

Die Grenzen waren bald festgelegt, es ist ja nur ein winziges Land, das zu gründen war, ohne Gebietsansprüche und ohne rechte Verfassung, ein trunkenes Land, in dem bloß zwei Häuser stehen, die man auch im Dunkeln finden kann, bei Sonnen- und Mondfinsternis, und ich weiß auswendig, wieviel Schritte ich machen muß, von mir schräg zu Ivans Haus, ich könnte auch mit verbundenen Augen gehen. (*Malina*, 26)³⁵

While the narrator's imaginary union of two houses—hers and Ivan's—reminds one of the 1867 compromise between the ruling Hapsburg House and the Hungarians, which led to the creation of Austria-Hungary, this new coalition is an odd replica of the historical union. It is peculiar not only from a territorial or constitutional point of view, but also because no agreement was established between the two parties, Ivan and the “I-figure.” There is no question of marriage, since Ivan has made it clear that he does not love the narrator. Theirs is a union of friendship, although not even that describes their relationship accurately. The narrator insists on differences between “her” land and the former monarchy, as if afraid that it could have a similar destiny. She is aware of the fragility of the new union, and tries to defend it:

[...] damit mir mein Ungargassenland nicht vergeht und ich es immer festhalten kann, mein einziges, mein über alles liegendes Land [...] Mein herrliches Land, nicht kaiserlich-königlich, ohne die Stephanskrone und ohne die Krone des Heiligen Römischen Reichs, mein Land in seiner neuen Union, das keine Bestätigung und keine Rechtfertigung braucht. (*Malina*, 48)³⁶

In this new House nothing happens, but precisely because of that, the narrator thinks she can better evaluate what is going on, without being distracted by imperial practices and tactics.

However, while the narrator is drawing the borders of this new union, while she and Ivan are “working things out so effortlessly,” something terrible is happening just outside their borders:

[D]ieses Gemetzel geht weiter in die Stadt, unerträgliche Bemerkungen, Kommentare und Gerüchtfetzen zirkulieren in den Restaurants, auf den Parties, in den Wohnungen [...] im Kino und durch die Bücher, in denen von Dingen auf eine Weise die Rede geht, daß die Dinge sich empfehlen und zurückziehen zu sich selber und zu uns [...] und die Ratlosigkeit nach den Einbrüchen, den Entkleidungen, den Perlustrierungen und Visitationen nimmt zu [...] und das Gesetz der Welt liegt unverstandener denn je auf allen. (*Malina*, 32)³⁷

The Ungargassenland, which the narrator initially compares to the Dual Monarchy, is now placed in the context of what seems to be wartime Austria. As such, it cannot distance or dissociate itself from the disagreements, the violence, and the bloodshed that surround it. Just like Franza, who finds out that the world of Galicien and the world of Vienna cannot be separated from one another because they both converge in her and act upon her, the “I-figure” realizes that retreating into her alternative world is temporary, because the conflicts and contradictions of the outside world are hers as well. Moreover, Ungargassenland is not spared its own paradoxes, drama, or suffering.

The title of the chapter “Happy with Ivan” is the first indicator of a contradiction in the narrator’s relationship with Ivan and their unilateral union. The “I-figure” is far from being happy with this man, in fact she is quite miserable but does not want to admit it. The love she nurtures for him is not reciprocated, and Ivan has indicated that he cares only for his five and seven year old sons, Béla and András. Apart from the time Ivan and the woman spend together, playing chess, visiting each other, and occasionally going out for a walk in the company of Ivan’s children, there is hardly anything in their relationship that could be a reason for joy. Ivan shows no interest in learning about the narrator’s past and it is unclear if he knows how anguished she is by some past trauma. He vehemently opposes her timid attempt to introduce him to her writing, which he calls gloomy and inexplicable for someone who is “always mad with joy” (*Mal*, 30). When the narrator, editor, and free-lance writer mentions her book in progress, entitled *Death Styles* or *Darkness in Egypt*, Ivan disagrees with her propensity to write somber books and proposes a title like *Exultate Jubilate*. Moreover, the telephone conversations between Ivan and the “I-figure,” which the woman always looks forward to, often consist of

unfinished or interrupted sentences, devoid of true communication of feeling or thought. Frequently, the narrator spends hours next to the telephone expecting her lover to call and simply content to listen to the tone of his voice for a few moments. She and Ivan are like “[z]wei Wesen [...] die nichts miteinander vorhaben, nicht die Koexistenz wollen, keinen Aufbruch woandershin und in ein anderes Leben, nicht Abbruch, keine Vereinbarung auf eine vorherrschende Sprache. Auch ohne Dolmetscher kommen wir aus, ich erfahre nichts über Ivan, er erfährt nichts von mir” (*Malina*, 105-6).³⁸ The narrator’s strong desire to be happy blinds her to the irony of her relationship to Ivan. For a while she is able to deceive herself, but her whole story stands in sharp contradiction to the title of the first chapter, “Happy with Ivan.”

v) Nostalgia and the colonial/postcolonial perspective: another way to look back on the past

In *Malina*, *FF*, and *DW*, nostalgia arises from three different perspectives on the past: a conservative perspective expressed in the distrust and disdain for anything modern and the regret for Austria’s loss of power in the world; a perspective informed by war and fascism, which represents the past as the only place of refuge and identity; and the colonial/postcolonial perspective, which proposes to look back on the Austro-Hungarian past via an examination of Europe’s involvement in the Third World.

Like the world that the “I-figure” in *Malina* is reinventing, Elisabeth Matrei’s world is not without contradictions. Some of these are related to her nostalgia for the past and others originate in the part she plays as a photojournalist in the Third World. *DW* starts with Elisabeth’s visit to Klagenfurt after her brother’s wedding in London. For Elisabeth, the happy event is also a disturbing experience. Sixteen years apart, Elisabeth

and Robert have had a unique relationship. From Robert's infancy, Elisabeth regarded her brother as her own child, jealously competing for his affection with their mother. When Robert marries at thirty-four, Elisabeth is saddened to lose him to another woman (another Liz). Their marriage feels like an intrusion into the union she has had with her brother, and it completely alters, even ruptures, the landscape of the siblings' relationship. Looking over the wedding pictures in the company of her father, Elisabeth mentally switches places with the bride, and notes to herself that she and Robert could have passed as the newly wed couple. She would like to banish Liz from the picture, to restore a past "union." Elisabeth repeats this kind of mental switch on her hiking trips, as she searches for the Austro-Hungarian world beyond the Wörthersee lake, where Austria borders on Slovenia and Italy, and imagines the borderland without borders.

Bachmann conveys the impact of Elisabeth's parting from her brother in the descriptions of her unsettling experience of London after Robert's wedding. Shortly before her visit to her native Carinthia, Elisabeth is held back in London for ten days due to an error in her flight reservations. Meanwhile, she witnesses the assault on the city by hordes of tourists. Locked in a hotel room or walking fatigued and blasé through the streets of the city that in the past used to inspire her immensely, she feels lost and estranged. To Elisabeth it seems that crowds of people, foreigners from Asia and Africa, move aimlessly through the city, communicating in an Esperanto whose message remains mostly unintelligible. In the hullabaloo of the city turned "caricature"—"die Karikatur der Großstadt in der Großstadt" (DW, 132)³⁹—as the British metropolis is described, where Elisabeth is pestered and besieged with meaningless demands, she longs for the tranquility of the pure and unadulterated countryside. Contrasted to the exhausting and

nightmarish experience of London, the Carinthian forest has the resemblance of an oasis. “Sie mußte nicht London sehen, es war ihr gleichgültig, sie war müde, sie wollte weg und nachhause, sie wollte in den Wald und zum See” (DW, 132).⁴⁰

In her study of Bachmann, *Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters*, Sara Lennox examines Elisabeth Matrei’s involvement and complicity in “a colonial/postcolonial paradigm” (284). Elisabeth is both surprised by and dismayed at the new image of London she encounters. The city she had once enjoyed is now transformed by the arrival of masses of postcolonial people. “[D]ie Zimmerkellner waren Inder, Philippinen, Neger, einmal war ein alter Engländer darunter, aber auch die Gäste waren alle aus Asien und Afrika, in den großen Lifts fuhr sie inmitten einer schweigenden Menge mit, als einzige Weiße” (DW, 131).⁴¹ She had not been apprehensive during her previous travels to Africa or Asia, when she had been the only woman “who rode away” from her group. Lennox analyzes Bachmann’s reference to D. H. Lawrence’s 1925 short story “The Woman Who Rode Away,” in which a white American woman living in Mexico leaves her European husband, riding away in search of the “secret haunts of [the] timeless, mysterious, marvelous Indians of the mountains’ who still maintain ‘their own savage customs and religions’” (Lennox, 285).⁴² In the postcolonial metropolis, where English is transformed and replaced by an Esperanto with a limited vocabulary, Elisabeth is surprised at her own discomfort, and longs for the pure Carinthian landscape.

Lennox regards Elisabeth as “the epitome of modernity” (287). She is an emancipated woman, who is introduced to her profession by well-established male photographers “and insists on assuming the position of men even on the most dangerous Third World assignments” (Lennox, 287). Elisabeth takes her profession seriously,

convinced that she is part of a mission of enlightenment that contributes a truthful understanding of events in the Third World. “Via her success at taking on the power of the male gaze, Elisabeth is able to assume the stance of the universal, disembodied (i.e., male) Enlightenment subject” (Lennox, 288). In that position, Elisabeth also assumes the view of the Western liberal “who regards the model of progress and development advocated by the West as world-historical” (Lennox, 288). In the Euro-centric grand-narrative of humanity, “the West’s others either become (like) Europeans or remain in their proper place” (Lennox, 289). Elisabeth’s distressed attitude at visiting postcolonial London, where migrants from the Third World refuse the site of alterity allotted to them and talk in a language they have appropriated from the West and made almost unrecognizable, speaks to the protagonist’s complicity with a model of humanity in which the West is superior to the rest of the world. But the new condition of postcoloniality calls into question this system of values, which Elisabeth had so eagerly embraced. Leaving London, Elisabeth shifts from an encounter with postcoloniality to an experience of postimperial Austria.

In London, Bachmann anticipates Elisabeth’s changed relationship to her native space and the imperial past. Estranged and lonely in the postcolonial metropolis, Elisabeth tries to compensate through a return to the world of her childhood. Compared to the postmodern chaos of the city, the forests of Carinthia appear as a place of refuge, but soon Elisabeth realizes that the native rural landscape resembles only vaguely the familiar territory she had once known. “Daheim war sie nicht in diesem Wald” (DW, 136).⁴³ The new autobahn under construction for German tourists has cut off the pedestrian access to the lake. Her father is angry at these changes, which he interprets as

an attempt to colonize Austria once again, more perfidiously than during the war. In Herr Matrei's opinion, for many years now, a large part of the population of the Rhein-Ruhr district has been "invading" Carinthia. The Germans had lost the war, but there were subtle ways in which they had not been defeated. According to Herr Matrei, a second invasion of Austrian territory occurred after the war. The Germans were slowly occupying parts of Carinthia: "[J]etzt eroberten sie Österreich wirklich, jetzt konnten sie es sich kaufen, und das war schlimmer, für ihn war ein käufliches Land schlimmer als ein verirrt und zerschlagenes" (DW, 192).⁴⁴ The Germans' subtle and uncharted occupation of Carinthia after the Second World War is reflected not only in land ownership but also in language. Stopping for a meal at a restaurant, Elisabeth and her father peruse the new menus and notice a large number of German meal names that have replaced traditional Austrian names. What some regard as an intrinsic part of tourism, the old man calls occupation, because Austrians have become invisible among the new German visitors and owners in the lake-district.

After repeated failed attempts to reach the Wörthersee on foot, Elisabeth and her father decide to take the bus. But in order to avoid the new crowds of tourists, they choose a rainy day for their swim. The tranquility of the lake briefly brings back the atmosphere of the past they had been longing and searching for. But soon the site of the huge camping ground reminds Herr Matrei of the clamor of what he calls the "unwanted" newcomers. Elisabeth is less outspoken on the issue of occupation, but she basically agrees with her father when she notes to herself, "[d]ieser See ist auch nicht mehr der See, der uns gehörte, sein Wasser schmeckt anders, es schwimmt sich anders darin. Er hat uns nur eine halbe Stunde lang im Regen gehört" (DW, 191-92).⁴⁵ Their critique of

German imperialism makes them both blind to their own prejudices. Like her father, Elisabeth longs for an unadulterated past, a time they identify with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But neither of them takes the time to analyze the political and ideological implications of the imperial heritage, which now Bachmann connects to Europe's history of colonialism in the Third World. As such, Elisabeth exhibits the same conservative nostalgia as her father.

In an essay entitled "Ingeborg Bachmann's Sentimental Journey through the 'Haus Österreich' and (Post)Colonial Discourse in 'Drei Wege zum See'," Zorana Gluscevic observes how biased Elisabeth is toward the German heritage to the detriment of the Slavic legacy. Gluscevic identifies this attitude in Bachmann as well, and wrongly views Elisabeth as a spokesperson for the writer herself. Thus, she notes, "Bachmann's conception of Slavic identity rests on the innate division between Orient and Occident, and her representation of Slavic figures frequently involves stereotypical racial and ethnic images of the South Slavs" (352).⁴⁶ The mother in DW is hardly mentioned, and when she appears, Elisabeth shows total animosity toward her. She disliked her mother who spoke German with a harsh Slav accent, but loved her father, whose culture she identified with. "[S]he is a hybrid who denies and dislikes her late Slovenian mother" (Gluscevic, 352). Moreover, "[s]he dismisses Elisabeth Mihailovics, an Austrian of Slavic background, as 'die kleine, arme, schüchterne Mihailovics,'⁴⁷ and refers to her Slovenian companion as a primitive-looking peasant" (Gluscevic, 352).

A crucial part of Elisabeth's nostalgia for the past is her relationship to Franz Joseph Eugen Trotta, the son of Roth's narrator in *The Emperor's Tomb*. When Elisabeth gazes upon the lake and then toward Carniola, Slavonia, Croatia, and Bosnia, she

remembers Trotta and through him a world that no longer exists. Like his father in *The Emperor's Tomb*, Franz Joseph in Bachmann's short story lives on a leave of absence granted to him by death. In Bachmann's text, Franz Joseph is a shadow character, a vanishing figure, a figure of death. Like all the Trottas, Franz Joseph belongs to imperial temporality, and thus, he only speaks through Elisabeth's recollections. The more Elisabeth remembers their conversations, the more she is unable to reimagine his face. His presence becomes language—a name, a series of sentences—and a tone of voice.

Keine Geschenke, keine vertrockneten Blumen, und nicht einmal sein Gesicht konnte sie sich mehr vorstellen, denn je besser sie ihn verstand, desto mehr verschwand von ihm, was wirklich gewesen war, und die Geistersätze kamen von dort unten, aus dem Süden: Verschaff dir nichts, behalt deinen Namen, nimm nicht mich, nimm dir niemand, es lohnt sich nicht. (DW, 154)⁴⁸

Elisabeth calls Trotta the lost traveler of their times, who lives in the present by sheer accident. But he denies his living altogether: “Ich lebe überhaupt nicht, ich habe nie gewußt, was das ist, Leben” (DW, 145).⁴⁹ Trotta's present is national time, but like his father he cannot perceive in the time of the nation his own time of living. We know little about Franz Joseph and what we know originates in Elisabeth's recollections of him. He grew up in Paris, fought in the French Resistance, and after the War he traveled through Europe (including Austria) and Africa. He met Elisabeth in Paris and fell in love with her, but after some years he fled their relationship without notice, never to return to her. A few years later Elisabeth learned about his suicide in Vienna. As a postimperial, Trotta is a migrant in space and language, and no place can offer him the comfort of a home. Unlike all the previous Trottas in Roth's novels, Trotta of Bachmann's short story is heir not only of the multinational monarchy, but also of the legacy of fascism and colonialism.

Trotta is the migrant, the rootless postmodern, a nostalgic who longs for a lost home, but also a homeless subject who has lost the desire for home, because no home is possible for him anymore. As a perpetual exile, who no longer yearns to return to an original home, Trotta becomes Elisabeth's mentor in the Austrian legacy, which marks the beginning of a radical transformation in Elisabeth's awareness of her belonging. From an adventuress, who has left Austria filled with a sense of discovery of the world beyond the province, she is transformed into an exile, banished from her country. Traveling becomes for Elisabeth not the fulfillment of wonder, but living her condition as a perpetual foreigner. This becomes more obvious when Elisabeth reflects on the impossibility of families like the Matreis to survive in modern Austria. She depicts her father as a relic from the past and envisions herself and her brother as the last carriers of their name. She and her younger brother Robert are fugitives: "Robert und sie [hatten] sich zwar in die Fremde gerettet" [weil] "dieses Land keine Matreis mehr brauchte" (DW, 124).⁵⁰

... was sie zu Fremden machte überall, war ihre Empfindlichkeit, weil sie von der Peripherie kamen und daher ihr Geist, ihr Fühlen und Handeln hoffnungslos diesem Geisterreich von einer riesigen Ausdehnung gehörten, und es gab nur die richtigen Pässe für sie nicht mehr, weil dieses Land keine Pässe ausstellte. (DW, 124)⁵¹

Nostalgia does not completely blind Bachmann's protagonists to the irreconcilable contradictions that plagued the former monarchy. When Elisabeth tries to rethink Emperor Franz Joseph's address to the nation in 1914, she acknowledges the numerous internal misunderstandings, hatreds, and rebellions. The old empire had not been a politically functional ideal, but it had been nevertheless a model, which many Bachmann protagonists contrasted to the negatively perceived present.

From Austria-Hungary to alien-nation in postwar Austria to “perpetual war”

All protagonists in Bachmann’s work are deeply disillusioned by the transformations in postwar Austria. Whether they continue to live in Austria or decide to depart from it, they turn a critical eye on the contradictions existing in their country after the Second World War. They cannot reconcile themselves to Austria’s return to normality after 1945, the economic wonder, and their nation’s rapid moral recovery. For Franza, Elisabeth, and the “I-figure” in *Malina*, postwar Austria is a nation that alienates them; they are unable to perceive a transition from a war situation to real peace. This is a nation they continue to connect with the horrors of National Socialism, which no return to the Habsburg past can alter. For Bachmann and her protagonists, adjustment to the postwar era means complicity (Schmid-Bortenschlager, 31):

[D]aheimbleiben, nach Hause zurückkehren, hat nicht den Charakter einer neuen Heimatideologie, einer Verherrlichung der Ursprünge, des Blut-und-Boden Mythos, sondern es bedeutet vielmehr ein Aussteigen, ein sich Nicht-Anpassen an die Wirtschaftswunderwelt, an das Erfolgsstreben, die internationale Geschäftigkeit und Gleichmacherei. (Schmid-Bortenschlager, 31)⁵²

In *Malina* and *FF*, Bachmann’s interest shifts from tapping into the roots of identity to identifying the roots of violence. If for Elisabeth Matrei the return to her father’s house is part of her search for identity as it connects to the old House of Austria, for the “I-figure” in *Malina*, the encounter with the father is not only devoid of any Habsburg connections, but also suggests a completely different genealogy, that of “der ermordeten Töchter”—the murdered daughters (*Malina*, 182). Bachmann maintains that the kind of violence we have identified as fascism and attributed to a war situation has always existed within the patriarchal family, in the relationships between husbands and

wives, fathers and daughters. Thus, family as a safe home and the seat of identity becomes an illusion. Family becomes complicit with the terror of fascism and perpetual violence.

i) Alien-nation in postwar Austria

Of all the protagonists discussed in this chapter, the “I-figure” engages in the most eloquent critique of her nation. She is drawn toward the past much more than toward the present, and finds the new details on Ungargasse that constantly arrest her attention insulting. The “I-figure,” once an editor at a Viennese newspaper, works now from home, writing several letters daily, smokes a lot, and occasionally accepts to be interviewed on subjects like perceptions of the past and present in Austria. In a conversation with Herr Mühlbauer from the *Vienna Evening Edition*, the narrator poignantly expresses her ideas of the past and present. As the discussion shifts from the monarchy to the republic, the narrator’s tone also changes. If the critique of the past is softened by the narrator’s nostalgic attitude, the present has nothing to defend it against a harsh judgment. According to the narrator, in today’s Vienna one is neither “selbgerrecht” (self-righteous) nor “selbstzufrieden” (self-satisfied), “weil hier keine verschonte Insel ist, sondern an jeder Stelle Untergang ist, es ist alles Untergang, mit dem Untergang der heutigen und morgigen Imperien vor Augen” (*Malina*, 97).⁵³ When Herr Mühlbauer, who has brought his own agenda to the interview, defends the republic, the “I-figure” responds sarcastically and calls it “eine unauffällige, kleine, ungelernte, schadhafte, aber unschädliche Republik” (*Malina*, 98).⁵⁴ The narrator’s remarks on postwar Austria are cutting and cynical, wrapped in a thin veil of assumed tolerance.

Herr Mühlbauer takes a different stance. Unhappy with Austria's minor or insignificant role in post WWII Europe, where, as the narrator remarks, "nothing more is happening" (*Malina*, 60), Herr Mühlbauer proposes a new role and mission for his nation: the role of mediator with a spiritual mission. But the narrator totally rebuffs such pretentious suggestions:

[H]ier [in Wien] handelt es sich um etwas anderes, um die kultische Administration eines Totenreichs, ich weiß nicht, aus welchem Grund Sie oder ich stolz sein sollten, die Aufmerksamkeit der Welt noch auf uns ziehen wollen, mit Festspielen, Festwochen, Musikwochen, Gedenkjahren, Kulturtagen, die Welt könnte nichts Besonderes tun, als geflissentlich wegsehen, um nicht zu erschrecken, denn es könnten ihr die Augen aufgehen, was auf sie noch zukommen wird, im besten Fall, und je leiser es hier zugeht, je heimlicher unsre Totengräber arbeiten, je verborgener alles geschieht, je unhörbarer es gespielt und zu Ende gesagt wird, desto größer würde vielleicht aber die wahrhaftige Neugier werden. Das Krematorium von Wien ist seine geistige Mission, sehen Sie, wir finden die Mission doch noch [...] (*Malina*, 100)⁵⁵

In *Malina* as well as *FF*, Vienna is a synecdoche for postwar Austria. Here Bachmann identifies a tendency to move the country away speedily from a painful past in order to rise again under the sign of greatness. However, the picture she paints in her novels is radically different. For Franza, Vienna is a vast concentration camp, the place of her torture and planned annihilation, the city of her SS husband, the stage where war continues without interruption.

In the image of Vienna, Bachmann merges the past of the Habsburg Empire as one of the great powers of Europe with Austria's more recent past, fascism. Likewise, in the image of Franza's husband, she joins imperial supremacy with fascist authority. Leopold Jordan, the Fossil, has a slightly nasal tone "die nur einige Wiener auf der höchsten Leitersprosse und ehemalige k. und k.-Offiziere noch zu produzieren wußten, aber bei dem Fossil war es eine Spezialmischung aus Bildungsnasal und Autoritätsnasal"

(*FF*, 348).⁵⁶ Leopold uses the past to establish a direct line of descent between Habsburg Austria and fascist Austria, a continuity of power from one state to another. For Bachmann's female protagonists there is nothing celebratory in Vienna, and this city becomes the site of their conjugal oppression—which also defines the relationship between the “I-figure” and the two men in her life.

ii) Patriarchy as a “perpetual war”

The theme of alienation in postwar Austria is for Bachmann an opportunity to engage in a critique of patriarchy. Bachmann viewed the relationship between a man and a woman as fraught with conflict and violence. The woman either falls victim to the patriarchal system (Franza and the “I-figure”) or becomes complicit with it (Elisabeth). In her novels and interviews, Bachmann often observed that murder and violence do not happen only in wars or concentration camps, but all the time:

Die Gesellschaft ist der allergrößte Mordschauplatz. In der leichtesten Art sind in ihr seit jeher die Keime zu den unglaublichsten Verbrechen gelegt worden, die den Gerichten dieser Welt für immer unbekannt bleiben. [...] ich habe alle diese Friedensspiele, so geben sie sich nämlich aus, als wären es keine Kriegsspiele, in ihrer ganzen Ungeheuerlichkeit zu spüren bekommen. (*Malina*, 290-1)⁵⁷

A fundamental aspect of Bachmann's critique of patriarchy is the idea of a perpetual war. In the *Todesarten* trilogy, Bachmann developed the idea of perpetual war as a condition of uninterrupted hostility of men toward women, in which peace is a sham. “In den Zeitungen stehen oft diese gräßlichen Nachrichten. In Pötzleinsdorf, in den Praterauen, im Wienerwald, an jeder Peripherie ist eine Frau ermordet, stranguliert” (*Malina*, 292-3).⁵⁸

Malina is divided into three parts: In the first part, “Glücklich mit Ivan” (Happy with Ivan), the narrator is always waiting for Ivan or spending time with him, a

Hungarian refugee established in Vienna after the 1956 Revolution in Hungary; in the second part, “Der dritte Mann” (The Third Man), the narrator remembers past scenes of violence, incest, and crime, at the center of which is her murderous father; and, in the last part, “Von letzten Dingen” (Last Things), Ivan has left the narrator, who now spends more time in Malina’s company, conversing on existential issues and the limits and possibilities of writing. Malina is the man with whom the “I-figure” has shared an apartment for several years, and who, unlike Ivan, is convinced that the only book the “I-figure” should write is a book about suffering and war. At the end of the novel, the “I-figure” commits suicide by entering a crack in the wall of her apartment. The telephone rings, Malina answers, and when someone asks to speak to the unnamed narrator, Malina declares that no one except he has lived in the apartment.

In the second part of *Malina*, entitled “The Third Man,” Bachmann links the notion of perpetual war to the family. She stages a rapid succession of murder scenes, in which the narrator is repeatedly murdered by her father. Bachmann uses the dream world to intensify the image of the patriarch as a ubiquitous and ever-present tormentor and murderer. The dream allows the narrator more spatial and temporal fluidity, as well as the possibility to be in more than one place and time at the same time. She mentions that the events in this part of the novel do not take place in Vienna, although the name of the city is mentioned several times, and when she calls the place “Überall und Nirgends”

(Everywhere and Nowhere), she has not departed Austria:

Die Zeit ist nicht heute. Die Zeit ist überhaupt nicht mehr, denn es könnte gestern gewesen sein, lange her gewesen sein, es kann wieder sein, immerzu sein, es wird einiges nie gewesen sein. Für die Einheiten dieser Zeit, in die andere Zeiten einspringen, gibt es kein Maß, und es gibt kein Maß für die Unzeiten, in die, was niemals in der Zeit war, hineinspielt. (*Malina*, 181)⁵⁹

In this chapter, Bachmann combines an ahistorical perspective on patriarchy with a perspective on war and violence directly informed by the Second World War. The chapter is a long inventory of crimes—incest, drowning, beatings, and gas chamber murders—with the father figure at the center of this monstrous world. He is constantly changing from one murderer into another, and his victims are his daughter, his wives, and other women in his life:

[E]r trägt den blutbefleckten weißen Schlächterschurz, vor einem Schlachthaus im Morgengrauen, er trägt den rothen Henkersmantel und steigt die Stufen hinauf, er trägt Silber und Schwarz mit schwarzen Stiefeln vor einem elektrisch geladenen Stacheldraht, vor einer Verladerampe, auf einem Wachturm, er trägt seine Kostüme zu den Reitpeitschen, zu den Gewehren, zu den Genickschußpistolen, die Kostüme werden in der untersten Nacht getragen, blutbefleckt und zum Grauen. (*Malina*, 246)⁶⁰

In one of the narrator's nightmares, the father is leading his daughter to a lake surrounded by numerous graves without crosses. The father rests his hand on the narrator's shoulder, and a gravedigger joins them and explains to the woman, "Das ist der Friedhof der ermordeten Töchter" (*Malina*, 182).⁶¹ The image of "the cemetery of the murdered daughters" also appears in *FF*, and it becomes one of Bachmann's crucial tropes of patriarchy. In the feminist scholarship that emerged after the writer's death, this metaphor acquired a history of its own. At first "the cemetery of the murdered daughters" symbolized the "women-as-victims-of-patriarchy" (Lennox, 2); later, the dream image became a synecdoche representing "all victims, either of 'the whites' (as *The Book of Franza* seems to suggest) or more particularly of National Socialism" (Lennox, 2). But Lennox argues that it would be a mistake to read Bachmann's image as an undifferentiating trope of patriarchy. Thus, Austrian/German women who after 1945 regarded themselves "as entirely victims of a regime which they in fact helped to sustain"

could never parallel their experience to the millions the Nazis murdered (Lennox, 3). Lennox repudiates this feminist posture, “banishing to the graveyard of history any notion that the ‘daughters’ *tout court* are always and everywhere victims of the fathers *tout court*” (2).

Like the ubiquitous father, the man, Malina, is also present in the rapid succession of nightmares. Malina could pass as the narrator’s husband. To many of their acquaintances, the two appear as husband and wife, although the idea of marriage never occurs to them. In her interviews, Bachmann describes Malina as a *Doppelgänger*, the narrator’s double. She is defined by emotion and he by rationality and calculation. Whenever the “I-figure” has lost control over herself, Malina is there to bring her back to an acceptable normality. As opposites, the narrator submits to every emotional appeal (*Malina*, 261), whereas Malina is always calm, steadfast and composed. He looks at everything with a dispassionate eye and ridicules the narrator’s profuse imagination. “Für ihn ist offenbar die Welt, wie sie eben ist, wie er sie vorgefunden hat” (*Malina*, 262),⁶² but for the woman every aspect of the world is tinted with the color of her emotions. For a while, Malina’s equanimity appears reassuring, but in the end it is alienating and destructive, driving the narrator to utter despair.

At the end of the second chapter of *Malina*, the “I-figure,” who had been fighting fiercely with Malina over matters of war and peace, disputing his conviction that peace is nothing more than an “intermission”, has accepted war as permanent—both within society and within herself:

Malina: Du wirst also nie mehr sagen: Krieg und Frieden.
 Ich: Nie mehr.
 Es ist immer Krieg.
 Hier ist immer Gewalt.

Hier ist immer Kampf.
Es ist der ewige Krieg. (*Malina*, 245)⁶³

The novel *Malina* is very fragmented and eclectic. The long journey of the main character toward death is punctuated with excerpts from the “I-figure’s” unfinished novel, fragments of a play, stage directions, musical passages, and musical notations. In this text, Bachmann uses a variety of literary genres, traditions, allusions, and references to diverse literary and musical texts. In her study *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann*, Karen Achberger has analyzed the ways in which Bachmann actively engaged the work of Thomas Mann, Bertold Brecht, Christa Wolf, Arnold Schönberg, Beethoven, Wagner, Mahler, Freud, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger in her novel.⁶⁴ The tripartite organization of Bachmann’s text according to theme may have come from Arnold Schönberg’s composition *Pierrot Lunaire*, in which Schönberg employed numerous musical forms like the canon, fugue, rondo, passacaglia, and free counterpoint, and a new singing technique called the “Sprechstimme” (speech-voice). This technique combines speech with singing, using abrupt shifts in rhythm and pitch. Similarly, *Malina* combines literary language with musical notations. As Mark Anderson has observed, the novel “is not a book one picks up—or puts down—lightly” (226).⁶⁵

However, in spite of the difficulty of the novel, Bachmann was able to convey through *Malina* an extraordinary sense of immediacy between fiction and life. She described her book as an erratic monologue through the night, in which the individual, who during the day has done one thing and another, has entered her true self and started thinking (*Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden*, 73). Bachmann suggested reading the novel as an autobiography, but not an autobiography in a traditional sense. “Eine geistige, imaginäre Autobiographie. Diese monologische oder Nachtexistenz hat nichts mit der

gewöhnlichen Autobiographie zu tun, in der ein Lebenslauf und Geschichten von irgendwelchen Leuten erzählt werden” (*Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden*, 73).⁶⁶

Bachmann’s spiritual or imaginary autobiography is an account of her perception of postwar Austria. At every moment in her text, and especially in the middle—the nightmare—section, Bachmann is anchored in the contemporary history of her nation.

Das ganze Buch ist heute, in jedem Moment Gegenwart, jetzt. [...] Warum heute? Das wird von Anfang an begründet: Sie, das Ich, sagt: Bis zu meinem letzten Augenblick wird für mich in einer pathologischen Erregung immer heute sein. Auch in der Beziehung zu Ivan. Sie will sich auch gar nicht daran erinnern, wie das war, als sie ihn kennengelernt hat. Die Erregung im Jetzt: Weil das Heute so frenetisch gelebt wird, kann sie über gar nichts anderes sprechen. (*Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden*, 75-6)⁶⁷

When critics reproached Bachmann for isolating herself from society with two characters on Ungargasse, she argued that her work is not a reproduction of words spoken in society, but a radical transference of the present moment into the moment of writing. The representation of reality through perception was the only way Bachmann saw fit to convey a sense of her time. “[Die Gesellschaft] muß sich radikal anders zeigen, denn sonst wird man nie wissen, was unsere Zeit war. Und die Krankheit, die Folter darin, und die Krankheit der Welt, und die Krankheit dieser Person, ist die Krankheit unserer Zeit für mich” (*Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden*, 72).⁶⁸ In *Malina*, Bachmann chose the dream realm to convey an acute sense of violence and social conflict. It was through the dream that she could best express the nature and the extent of crime in her society.

In *FF* Bachmann continues to develop the theme of patriarchy as perpetual war. When Franza speaks to her brother about her marriage, she describes it as lawlessness and war. Martin is surprised to hear the word “fascism” depict a personal relationship, but he admits, “das ist gut, denn irgendwo muß es ja anfangen, natürlich, warum redet man

davon nur, wenn es um Ansichten und öffentliche Handlungen geht?“ (*FF*, 403)⁶⁹

Leopold Jordan, a woman hater, has transformed marriage into a diabolic experiment.

With two wives dead and one gravely ill, he has an elaborate plan and calculated tactics to destroy Franza. To kill Franza with his own hands would amount to a crime like any other, but Leo Jordan’s manner of killing is sophisticated, prolonged, subtle, unlike other murders. His plan is to unleash a war within Franza that would drive her to self-annihilation. She, no one else, would have to perform the (final) crime against her own self. In *Malina* and *FF*, Bachmann shows how suicide is a cover for murder.

This idea is illustrated in the relationship between men and women as well as in the relationship between the West and other civilizations. In *FF*, Bachmann transfers the paradigm of perpetual war from postwar Austrian society to the relationship between the West and the Third World. Here, the critique of patriarchy and the critique of colonialism converge into a broad critique of Western civilization. The white woman and the people of color have suffered violence and injustice at the hands of the white man. When her journey takes Franza away from Europe and into Africa, when all the whites have disappeared from the surroundings, she feels relieved and safe among people of color, with whose destiny she identifies. Her illness acquires a new dimension in the context of colonialism. Traveling into the “Egyptian darkness,” she identifies with a lower race that was wiped out or wiped itself out from contact with civilization:

In Australien wurden die Ureinwohner nicht vertilgt, und doch sterben sie aus, und die klinischen Untersuchungen sind nicht imstande, die organischen Ursachen zu finden, es ist eine tödliche Verzweiflung bei den Papuas, eine Art des Selbstmordes, weil sie glauben, die Weißen hätten sich aller ihrer Güter auf magische Weise bemächtigt (*FF*, 413)⁷⁰

Just as the Incas died from a suffering whose organic causes have not been identified—an affliction Franza describes under the broad rubric of “contact with civilization”—Franza’s illness remains unidentified. In the context of the Third World, Franza understands her illness in light of what she imagines must have happened to the Papuans or the Murutes of North Borneo who have been gradually dying out: someone tried to break her, her instincts, and her little piece of heaven, setting off the war within her.

Initially, Franza’s journey into Africa is an escape from a terrifying marriage and an unidentified illness. Martin hopes that away from Vienna and Austria, Franza will find the peace she needs and be cured of her suffering. However, the desert landscapes Franza walks through or her identification with a lower race transforms the journey from an escape into a confrontation with the desert within herself. Like the Egyptian desert, the inner wasteland cannot be removed; the only thing Franza may be able to do is to learn to live with it.

Traveling on the Nile to a peninsula, Franza asks Martin to cover her in mud, so she would be healed by the mud of the Nile. Covered in mud completely and looking like a mummy, Franza cannot speak or move, and she is overwhelmed by the feeling that “sie war eingemauert” (she was walled in) and “lebendig begraben”—buried alive” (*FF*, 433). *Malina* ends with a similar image, of a woman walled in: “Ich bin an die Wand gegangen, ich gehe in die Wand, ich halte den Atem an. Ich hätte noch auf einen Zettel schreiben müssen: Es war nicht Malina. Aber die Wand tut sich auf, ich bin in der Wand, und für Malina kann nur der Riß zu sehen sein, den wir schon lange gesehen haben” (*Malina*, 354).⁷¹ When the phone rings, Malina picks it up and denies the existence of another person at the number dialed. “Schritte, immerzu Malinas Schritte, leiser die Schritte,

leiseste Schritte. Ein Stillstehen. Kein Alarm, keine Sirenen. Es kommt niemand zu Hilfe. Der Rettungswagen nicht und nicht die Polizei. Es ist eine sehr alte, eine sehr starke Wand, aus der niemand fallen kann, die niemand aufbrechen kann, aus der nie mehr etwas laut werden kann” (*Malina*, 355).⁷²

The image of a woman walled in and thus murdered can be found in an old story that circulated in the mythology of Eastern Europe and became known as the legend of the artist creator. Various versions of the legend exist throughout the Eastern European space, in Romania (*Meşterul Manole*), Hungary (*Kőműves Kelemen*), Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria. Bachmann had a genuine interest in fairy tales and it is very likely that she was familiar with this legend, where a sacrifice is performed and the victim is a woman.

In Romanian mythology, the story is known as the legend of Master Mason Manole and it is the founding legend of the *Curtea de Argeş Monastery* in Wallachia. According to the legend, Negru Voda (ruler of Wallachia) had asked mason Manole to build a church unsurpassed in beauty. The mason and his men had worked on the church for seven years, but never managed to complete it. Each time the church was almost finished, its walls tumbled down and the builders had to start their work once more. Manole prayed to God to help him. One night a vision appeared to him in his dream, which revealed that the only way to complete the church was to sacrifice a human being—the first person to arrive at the construction site the next morning—by burying her alive in its walls. At the break of dawn, carrying the first meal of the day for her husband, Ana, pregnant with child, set on her way to where Manole was. When he saw Ana, he prayed to God to intervene and stop her coming. The story tells how dark clouds

gathered and a severe torrent came down from the sky. But in spite of the severity of the downpour, Ana did not back away. She was walled in and the cathedral was completed.

The legend of Master Mason Manole was passed down from the Middle Ages as the story of the artist who, in order to create a work of art of everlasting beauty, performs a supreme sacrifice. For centuries it was read as a man's tale of sacrifice. Even Ana's cries and suffering were regarded as instrumental in augmenting her husband's ordeal to unbearable heights and emphasizing the formidable power of art. The glorification of Manole's sacrifice was a task for many generations, while Ana's destiny was always seen as a necessity. In the twentieth century, the Romanian poet and playwright Lucian Blaga rewrote the myth as the story of an inner journey of creation, even though in his play, as in the earlier folklore version, Ana is never asked to speak for herself.

The Eastern European myth sheds light on the last words of *Malina*, "Es war Mord"—It was murder (356). The wall where the "I-figure" is now buried is described as a place "aus der nie mehr etwas laut werden kann" (from where no sound can ever be heard again), which speaks directly to Franza's concern regarding women's stories, especially now that Malina has erased all traces that could speak of a woman's existence in his apartment. Minutes after the "I-figure" has disappeared into the wall and before the telephone rings in Malina's apartment, Malina tears the narrator's letters and breaks her glasses, bends her record, crumples up her will, makes the narrator's coffee cup and sleeping pills disappear from the nightstand, and clears the table. Everything is thrown into the wastebasket. Every memento that could attest to the past existence of the "I-figure" vanishes. In *FF*, Franza voices thoughts and raises questions the "I-figure" is unable to express in her own story. "[I]ch war lebendig begraben. Meine Geschichte und

die Geschichten aller, die doch die große Geschichte ausmachen, wo kommen die mit der großen zusammen. Immer an einem Straßenrand? Wie kommt das zusammen?“ (FF, 433)⁷³ It is as if the “I-figure” speaks now between the lines of Franza’s narrative. But Franza’s story is as imperiled as that of the “I-figure.”

A couple of months after Franza’s death, Martin watches a documentary movie about the River Nile and the cities he and Franza had visited not long ago. He is stunned and distressed by his realization that nothing presented in the film matches his memories of Egypt:

Das war also Assuan, das war Abu Simbel, da war wieder Kairo, aber wie er auch versuchte, die Bilder mit den erinnerten Bildern übereinzubringen—es gelang nicht, es war nichts auf dem Filmstreifen von dem, was sein Gedächtnis gespeichert hatte, nicht nur nichts von den Plagen, nichts von dem Sand und der Helle, nicht einmal etwas von dem klobigen Abu Simbel, das von allen Seiten gezeigt wurde. Kein Film konnte ihm seine Schwester in dem Tempel zeigen, sitzend auf den großen Zehen des Ramses, Kühlung suchend, und auch er war nicht darin, mit einer Lampe die Wände beleuchtend und eine Geschichte erlebend. (FF, 472)⁷⁴

Martin realizes that the closest he had come to experiencing the desert was through Franza’s desolation. There only, he had caught glimpses of the real wasteland. But he felt he could not explain it all to his trusted friends in Döbling, “ein Weißer unter Weißen”—a white among whites: “Wie [...] hätte er [...] erklären können, warum jemand gesagt hatte, die Weißen, sie sollen verflucht sein, und wie etwas von einer Wüste, die er durch die Verwüstung eines anderen zuletzt doch erfahren hatte” (FF, 473).⁷⁵

iii) Patriarchy and the continuation of Western domination

Of the three Bachmann female protagonists discussed in this chapter, Elisabeth Matri is the only one in a position to speak to the world and be heard. But, unlike Franza

and the “I-figure,” Elisabeth adopts a man’s way of life and for a long time she is unaware of her entrenched position in patriarchy and the continuing Western domination in the Third World. She travels extensively to places of conflict in Europe (Hungary, 1956) and the Third World (Algeria, Sudan, Vietnam), where she takes photographs of revolutions and wars, convinced that photography and journalism could raise the awareness of the Western public regarding issues of freedom in Eastern Europe and the postcolonial world. She insists, “es gibt für Algerien nichts Wichtigeres als die Freiheit” (DW, 145).⁷⁶ For Elisabeth, liberty and independence are necessary historical stages, which prove that both the Third World and the West are capable of moral and political progress. Her skeptical lover, Franz Joseph Trotta, remains entirely unimpressed and he retorts cynically: “... die Freiheit, die dauert, wenn sie kommt, kaum einen Tag und ist ein Missverständnis” (DW, 145).⁷⁷

In DW Bachmann establishes a connection between the persistence of colonial violence and patriarchy. Through her name, Elisabeth Matrei is connected to Elisabeth Trotta from Roth’s novel *The Emperor’s Tomb*, who fails to see the contradictions in her actions after the collapse of the monarchy: determined to fashion an independent life for herself, she leaves her husband and her baby son in order to renew a relationship to a domineering lesbian and try a career in acting. Elisabeth Matrei inherits the desire to forge her own destiny, but, like her predecessor, she is blind to the fact that a man’s way is the only way she chooses, and that liberation from colonial rule is not the end of oppression or Western domination in the Third World.

When postimperial Trotta shows skepticism toward the idea of postcolonial freedom, it is not to minimize the value of decolonization. His perspective should rather

be understood as the view of the eternal exile. The burdens of twentieth-century Europe—imperialism, war and fascism, communism, and nationalism—have initiated him into the club of the skeptics. Trotta speaks to Elisabeth about the depravity of the Austrian soldiers during World War Two, when “der Genuß an jeder erdenklichen Brutalität [war] wirklich in die Visagen geschrieben” (DW, 152).⁷⁸ The sense of a difficult and painful belonging to the Austrian past combines in Trotta with the colonial heritage he acquires through his adoptive country, France. In different ways, the histories of Austria and France in the twentieth century make him feel like an exile of both nations. In Elisabeth Matrei’s initial perspective on Algeria and the war of decolonization, we identify the belief that independence and freedom from colonialism, oppression, and inequality mark the beginning of a just and independent Algerian nation-state, according to the European model. But when Elisabeth returns to Europe at the end of the war, she is beset with disappointment, with concern for what her lover calls a one-day achievement, and she suddenly perceives in the images she submits to print an enormous lie. They are like the documentary film about Egypt, which Martin Ranner watches a few months after Franza’s death. They can hardly convey anything of the “desert” in the lives of those who become victims of war and postwar violence.

Trotta not only gets Elisabeth to realize her condition as an exile in postimperial Austria, but he also shatters her faith in the moral mission of her work. Trotta disputes Elisabeth’s desperate claim that her war photography shakes people out of their slumber of ignorance or indifference, by saying that understanding does not rely on information, and that the value of her photography is exclusively a result of Western aesthetic judgment:

Glaubst du, daß du mir die zerstörten Dörfer und Leichen abfotografieren mußt, damit ich mir den Krieg vorstelle, oder diese indischen Kinder, damit ich weiß, was Hunger ist? Was ist denn das für eine dumme Anmaßung. Und jemand, der es nicht weiß, der blättert in euren gelungenen Bilderfolgen herum, als Ästhet oder bloß angeekelt, aber das dürfte wohl von der Qualität der Aufnahmen abhängen, du sprichst doch so oft davon, wie wichtig die Qualität ist, wirst du denn nicht überall hingeschickt, weil deine Aufnahmen Qualität haben? fragte er mit leisem Hohn ... Wach sind doch nur diejenigen, die es sich ohne euch vorstellen können. (DW, 142)⁷⁹

Elisabeth's photography not only fails to convey the suffering of the people whose faces and bodies it represents, but it also unwittingly wrongs these people. It brings the violence of war to the breakfast table, over a cup of coffee, in a sterilized package of news and images. The immediacy of violence has disappeared, transferred into words and images. According to Franz Joseph, Elisabeth's photography converts the reality of war into a monstrous unreality. Thus, he notes, "... ich habe überhaupt die Menschen nie verstehen können, die sich diesen Abklatsch, ach nein, diese in die ungeheuerlichste Unwirklichkeit verkehrte Realität ansehen können, man schaut sich doch Tote nicht zur Stimulierung für Gesinnung an" (DW, 142-43).⁸⁰ In one of the lovers' conversations, Trotta challenges the foundation of Elisabeth's work in the Third World. "Einmal, es war im Sudan, dort ist mir weiter nichts aufgefallen, nur eine Aufschrift überall, für alle diese Weißen, weil ja nur die kein Schamgefühl kennen, es sei verboten, bei hoher Strafe, 'human beings' zu fotografieren. Den Nil und alles andere habe ich vergessen, dieses Verbot nicht" (DW, 143).⁸¹ Like Franza's brother who cannot find anything of his and his sister's experience of Egypt in a Western documentary film, Trotta objects to the aestheticism of Elisabeth's photography and points to the persistence of Western domination in the Third World through media technologies. Unlike Franza and the "I-figure," Elisabeth has the means to tell the story of the oppressed. But she fails to do so

because she does not recognize her entrenched position in a Western paradigm of representation.

The difference between the protagonist in DW and the women of the *Todesarten* novels is that Elisabeth never tries to oppose her entrenched location in the patriarchal and imperialistic structures. According to Lennox, she remains there. In her study of the short story, Lennox continues to associate Bachmann's central figure with "the woman who rode away" (Lawrence), as well as Trotta's response to Elisabeth, both of which locate the protagonist within "a discursive paradigm that permits only one monolinear history, the history of the victors," without allowing the colonized to tell a different story (Lennox, 292). At the end of TP, Elisabeth has accepted an assignment in Saigon. Whether she can act differently, drawing on Trotta's teachings, remains open-ended.

Trotta is instrumental in "erod[ing] Elisabeth's confidence in the values on which her activities had been premised [...] Once she relinquishes her belief that she is contributing to a project of universal human liberation, she is finally forced into a kind of ontological exile like Trotta's own" (Lennox, 292). Alienation becomes Elisabeth's destiny and story.

"A day will come:" the promise of the future

In the writings of Ingeborg Bachmann, the family is the focal point of any examination of the double legacy of monarchism and fascism in Austria. In their search for identity or refuge from a disappointing present, Bachmann's protagonists turn to the old House of Austria, which they perceive as their true home. The families in the three texts discussed in this chapter are deeply rooted in the multinational genealogy of the

former monarchy. The House of Austria is a spacious home for various nations, cultures, tongues, and traditions. The degree of artistic and intellectual productivity and interethnic contact remained unequalled after the fall of the Dual Monarchy. For Bachmann's protagonists, the transition from the monarchy to the republic is likened to an amputation or disinheritance and brings feelings of exile and strong alienation. Nostalgia for the past becomes a predominant emotion and response to the predicaments of the present. However, unlike the treatment of nostalgia in Roth's novels, in Bachmann's work nostalgia is also a path on which to deconstruct the concept of Austria-Hungary as a family of nations.

The crises experienced by each family reflect on the many contradictions that challenged the cohesion of the House of Austria and led to its demise. Thus, in her portrayal of Herr Matrei, Bachmann alludes to the conservatism and inertia that characterized the imperial establishment. In *Malina*, the inability of the "I-figure" to form the Union of Two Houses on Ungargasse with Ivan reflects not only Ivan's lack of desire to coexist with the narrator or come to know her—Ivan is "devoid of all intentions" and does not want to reconcile himself to "a prevailing tongue"—but also suggests the hypothesis that Austria-Hungary had not been a true union of nations. In spite of what the chapter title "Happy with Ivan" might suggest, the "I-figure" is truly unhappy in this union. Thus, in a very subtle manner, Bachmann hints at the social and political discontent that led to the rise of nationalistic movements throughout the imperial realm. Finally, nostalgia in *FF* is not only the channel through which to convey the rich multicultural genealogy within Franza's family, but also the mechanism through which another more recent and disturbing past is revealed: Leopold Jordan's involvement in

fascism and a conjugal relationship that shows war and fascism abiding even in peacetime Austria.

In Bachmann's work, the family is the seat of identity as much as the site of war and violence against women. Starting from Austria's history of the twentieth century, Bachmann engages in a critique of patriarchy, which she develops into a critique of Western civilization. Her protagonists travel to the Third World where they either identify with the oppressed or become complicit with the Western system of representation and the West's continued supremacy. Bachmann's concept of "perpetual war" reflects on Austria's attitude in the post-WWII era—a nation eager to forget an undesirable past—as much as it describes an ongoing war between men and women and the West's uninterrupted domination in the world.

Bachmann's writings do not offer much hope for a change in women's condition. Her view is mostly pessimistic, but there are some rare moments in her narratives when women seem to rise to the occasion and very briefly regain control over their lives. Struggling against the bareness of the present, Bachmann's protagonists try to envisage a different future. What is extraordinary about Franza is her realization that she can do something for herself to change her condition. She is not alone in her opposition to domination, and as a victim of patriarchy, she learns from those who were victimized by colonialism. Their resilience in spite of adverse destinies—determined by a "contact with civilization" or by natural causes—is an inspiration for her to start "[e]in anderer Versuch [...] den sie selber an sich vornehmen würde" (*FF*, 421).⁸² In Hurghada, where water is scarce but provided to everyone in equal measure, Franza ponders, "es darf auch mir hier etwas nicht verweigert werden. Ich komme zu meinem Recht" (*FF*, 429).⁸³ The scarcity

of water afflicts the inhabitants of the region and the travelers, men and women, in the same way. The adversity of nature allies every human being to pursue a common goal: to survive. Paradoxically, the dryness of the land and the scarcity of the water give Franza back some of her lost vitality. She no longer walks stooped and sits at the table less and less scrunched. “Wasser, ein Hauptwort, und ein Existenzkampf auf den letzten begehbaren Quadratmetern, zwischen einem mörderischen Meer und ein paar Kontrollstationen in der Wüste, die machten in ihr etwas lebendig, und dieser Stolz, mit dem sie sagte: ich werde hier zu meinem Recht kommen” (*FF*, 429).⁸⁴ Here, where the natural enemy has replaced the human adversary, Franza regains her strength and discovers the will to oppose her condition. Some of the most precious moments Martin experiences on their journey are those in which he sees his sister laugh. In those moments, Martin has hope that she may be able to feel the joy of life once again.

If in *FF*, the protagonist finds hope with the oppressed of the Third World, in *Malina*, the hope comes from the fairytales of the Danube region. Disappointed and alienated by Austria’s postwar economic wonder and the fast recovery from feelings of guilt for a war fought on the side of the aggressor, *Malina*’s narrator turns toward the past. However, the narrator is drawn not only to the House of Austria and the multinational past. In the book she writes, she imagines and explores an earlier time when neither Cisleithania nor Transleithania existed.⁸⁵

In her fairytale manuscript entitled *The Mysteries of the Princess of Kagran*, the narrator locates her story in a time of great migrations, before any kind of boundaries had been established and the ancient lands of “Rhaetia, Marcomannia, Noricum, Moesia, Dacia, Illyria, and Pannonia” (*Malina*, 62). “Kagran” is a region near Vienna,

etymologically connected to the French word for suffering, *chagrin*. In this tale, set along the Danube River, a brave and beautiful princess captured by the Hungarian Hussars escapes her captivity with the help of a stranger, a rider on horseback in a black cape. The savior does not show his face in the night, nor does he mention his name, but only leads the princess in the direction of the river, leaving her to continue on her own. The princess travels upstream, alone, through uninhabited lands, unaware “daß hier einmal eine Grenze durchs Wasser gezogen würde, zwischen zwei Ländern mit Namen” (*Malina*, 65).⁸⁶ Days later she meets the stranger once again and although he refuses to join her and her people, the princess knows that they will meet again after many centuries, in a country, in a city, on a street, at the card table. She rides back to her people and when she arrives at the castle, she is bleeding to her death. More than twenty centuries later, a woman and her lover are playing chess and card games.

In the brief moments the princess and the stranger spend together, she talks about a time to come, when they will be able to actually be together. Thus, the princess is seen as a precursor of the narrator and Ivan is identified with the black rider. The stranger is confused by the words the princess uses—“century,” “city,” “street”—and asks her to explain their meaning to him, but the princess responds that these are things they will both discover in the future, for she only knows the names, not the reality they designate. For Schmid-Bortenschlager the story of the princess of Kagran holds a utopian promise. The princess’s difficulty in defining certain words lies in the fact that the reality they designate does not exist yet. The coming together of the princess and the black rider as two lovers is something only the future can bring to them. In spite of the princess’s death, the legend offers hope for a reunion.

However, the end of *Malina* is more hopeless than the ending of the legend. Ivan and the “I-figure” may be the reincarnation of the princess and the stranger in the twentieth century—thus also suggesting a continuation of living in the Kagran-Vienna region along the Danube River—but they do not fulfill the princess’s hope for love. The words “century,” “city,” and “street” have come to reflect an existing reality, but the promise of the legend has not been fulfilled. In light of the legend of the Princess of Kagran, the novel is a struggle to fulfill the promise of love. As Bachmann notes in an interview with Veit Mölter, love wants eternity, but always experiences decline. “Die Liebe ist für das Ich im Buch von solcher Ausschließlichkeit, daß nichts daneben Platz hat. Sie drückt sich nicht durch ein Geschehen aus, sondern durch Intensität, durch Fanatismus” (*Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden*, 74).⁸⁷ The narrator’s love for Ivan, Bachmann explains in the same interview, is so intense and exclusive that it is impossible for Ivan to reciprocate or even understand it. “Aber zwischen Ich und Ivan gibt es keine Kommunikation. Denn wo sie ist, befindet er sich nie. Und umgekehrt. Für sie ist es etwas Ungeheures, wenn das Telephon läutet, für ihn ist das einfach ein Telephonanruf” (*Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden*, 75).⁸⁸ At the end of the novel, the woman falls victim to the existing patriarchal relationships. The three men who dominate her life lead her step by step to the brink of despair and meaninglessness. Ivan thwarts expressions of love, the imaginary father shows the path to hell, and Malina makes sure that the war unleashed within the woman leads her to an act of self-annihilation.

All the female protagonists in the *Todesarten* novels journey toward death. The moments of hope in *Malina* and *FF* are scarce, like the water in Hurghada. Ultimately, Bachmann did not see a way out of the patriarchal quagmire for her heroines. Franza

never escapes the city of her imprisonment (Vienna) and her husband, and neither does the unnamed narrator forsake Malina, the Ungargasse, and Vienna. Paradoxically, the experiment Franza decides to perform on herself is not to find a cure to her illness, but to follow through with her destiny. Likewise, in the end, the “I-figure” acknowledges that society is founded on the basis of an uninterrupted war and she is one more casualty in that war.

The shocking aspect about these women is that their oppressors bring them to a point where they will raise their hand against their own selves. In Egypt, Franza visits a German doctor who during the war had been involved with the euthanasia program—“die Ausmerzung unerwünschten Volkstums [...] die direkte Ausmerzung unerwünschter Kranker, die Sterbehilfe, der Gnadentod” (*FF*, 456).⁸⁹ She asks Körner to assist her with her own death. He refuses, but two days later Franza is dead, after a fall at the Great Pyramid in Giza. Like the death of the unnamed narrator in *Malina*, Franza’s death is ambiguous. Was it murder or an accident? A rape seems to take place at the base of the pyramid—a white man assaults Franza—and she hits her head against the stone wall. Concomitantly, Franza remembers a similar scene in a library in Vienna, where her husband “hatte sie [...] an die Bibliothek mit den harten Kanten gestoßen und das getan, nicht um diese Franziska zu umarmen, sie, die dort in Wien seine Frau war” (*FF*, 466).⁹⁰ Franza never leaves Vienna on her Egyptian journey. The fall preceding her death takes place in the Saharan desert, but it also takes place in Vienna: “Ihr Denken riß ab, und dann schlug sie, schlug mit ganzer Kraft, ihren Kopf gegen die Wand in Wien und die Steinquader in Gizeh und sagte laut, und da war ihre andere Stimme: Nein. Nein.” (*FF*, 467).⁹¹

There is a struggle in Bachmann's writings over the promise of love. *FF* offers the most inhospitable environment for the possibility of love, and *Malina* represents a unilateral attempt to bring love to fulfillment. Finally, in *DW*, the last text published during the writer's life, the three paths to the lake are also three failed paths of love. Three men from Roth's novels, *The Radetzky March* and *The Emperor's Tomb*, enter Elisabeth Matrei's life and invite her on their path. But just like the three paths to the lake, they do not lead Elisabeth to her desired destination. Besides Trotta, there is Manes from *Zlotograd*, who in Bachmann's text acts as Trotta's double (Achberger). Manes enters Elisabeth's life soon after Trotta has left it, but their relationship has the same denouement: after a time, he leaves Elisabeth without even a note, never to reappear in her life. The third man, also originating in Roth's work, is Branco, Trotta's cousin and son of Joseph Branco, the chestnut vendor, who, after the disappearance of the legendary village of Sipolje, has moved to Ljubljana. He represents the path Elisabeth has not even thought to explore until it is too late. When Elisabeth hastily leaves Austria and her father, she meets Branco in the Vienna airport. She finds out that Branco has loved her for many years, but gave up on her and married a girl in Ljubljana. The difference between the Trotta cousins is that while Franz Joseph embraced French citizenship and fought the fascists, Branco remained home and thus escaped alienation (Schmid-Bortenschlager, 31). But Branco is also a citizen of Yugoslavia. The fact that Elisabeth finds out about Branco's love for her from a note only after Branco has boarded a plane for Moscow—and she is already in the air, flying to Paris—reveals once again the fact that Elisabeth's condition is that of alienation. It is unlikely that Elisabeth could have ever recognized Yugoslavia as her home.

The quest of Bachmann's protagonists for love cannot be extricated from their longing for the House of Austria. All of Bachmann's female protagonists place their hopes in men whose family background ties them to the former monarchy, the family of nations. But when fulfillment in love does not come from these men and from the past, the women turn toward the future. They are disillusioned, the past hurts them like an amputation (Elisabeth), they feel alienated in their country, and aspire toward a future that would redeem their suffering and disappointment. But that future is very uncertain, as Bachmann expresses in DW:

Nur eine Hoffnung durfte und wollte sie sich nicht offen lassen, denn wenn sie in fast dreißig Jahren keinen Mann getroffen hatte, einfach keinen, der von einer ausschließlichen Bedeutung für sie war, der unausweichlich für sie geworden war, jemand, der stark war und ihr das Mysterium brachte, auf das sie gewartet hatte, keinen, der wirklich ein Mann war und nicht ein Sonderling, Verlorener, ein Schwächling oder einer dieser Hilfsbedürftigen, von denen die Welt voll war, dann gab es den Mann eben nicht, und solange es diesen Neuen Mann nicht gab, konnte man nur freundlich sein und gut zueinander, eine Weile. Mehr war nicht daraus zu machen ... (DW, 174-75)⁹²

The New Man is a man of the future, yet he resembles a man from the past, the only man Elisabeth had truly loved, thirty years before—Franz Joseph Trotta. Elisabeth relies on the past to create the future, in the same way that Trotta is a reference point for her in the recognition of the New Man. Similarly, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy functions as a reference point, but disconnected from any temporality and geographical representation. "... [D]ie österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie [ist] nur ein jeder Zeitlichkeit und geographischen Festlegbarkeit enthobener Vor-Schein, ein Wort, dem noch keine Realität entspricht..." (Schmid-Bortenschlager, 30).⁹³

The past is the place where Bachmann's women protagonists look for an alternative to a disappointing or distressing present, but in this process, the women distill

the past and transform it into a concept that seems to have no corresponding reality. They try hard to find a language that would describe the place and time where there would be no suffering from the ongoing war between men and women or between civilizations. As Bachmann suggested in her *Frankfurt Lectures*, the task of the writer is not only to describe the times, but also to envision new moral possibilities and existential alternatives. In DW Elisabeth envisages a transformed relationship between men and women. She suggests that the transformation of the existing relationship must start with an agreement between men and women to maintain a distance from one another for a period of time:

... es sollten die Frauen und die Männer am besten Abstand halten, nichts zu tun haben miteinander, bis beide herausgefunden hatten aus einer Verwirrung und der Verstörung, der Unstimmigkeit aller Beziehungen. Eines Tages konnte dann etwas anderes kommen, aber nur dann, und es würde stark und mysteriös sein und wirklich Größe haben, etwas, dem jeder sich wieder unterwerfen konnte. (DW, 175)⁹⁴

The narrator is groping for words as she tries to imagine a new beginning. That one day something else might come along becomes a leitmotif in *Malina*, expressed in the narrator's book: A day will come when people will be free, humanity will be liberated from civilization, goodness will prevail in the world, and men and women will regain a lost unity. "Ein Tag wird kommen, an dem die Menschen rotgoldene Augen und siderische Stimmen haben, an dem ihre Hände begabt sein werden für die Liebe, und die Poesie ihres Geschlechts wird wiedererschaffen sein... [...] und ihre Hände werden begabt sein für die Güte, sie werden nach den höchsten aller Güter mit ihren schuldlosen Händen greifen" (*Malina*, 142).⁹⁵ A day will come when humankind will rise above all wars and hostility and will be able to reestablish a lost equilibrium. Then, the narrator

thinks, it will be possible to see all those things in the world that civilization has blinded us to:

In den Wüsten wird das Wasser versiegen, wir werden wieder in die Wüste können und die Offenbarungen schauen, die Savannen und die Gewässer in ihrer Reinheit werden uns einladen, die Diamanten werden im Gestein bleiben und uns allen leuchten, der Urwald wird uns aus dem Nachtwald unserer Gedanken übernehmen, wir werden aufhören, zu denken und zu leiden, es wird die Erlösung sein. (*Malina*, 144-5)⁹⁶

In these passages, the language is devoid of all concrete political and historical references to state unions, nations, or borders. The “New Man,” “Redemption,” and revelation represent concepts through which Bachmann’s narrator is attempting to envision something for which the time is not yet ripe. But the “I-figure” believes that “die Menschen [...] werden nicht ewig warten müssen...”—humanity will not have to wait forever” (142).

Notes

¹ Sigrid Schmid-Bortenschlager, “Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie als utopisches Modell im Prosawerk von Ingeborg Bachmann,” *Acta neophilologica* 17 (1984): 21.

² “Today, no one will believe that writing takes place outside the historical context—that there exists even one single writer whose starting point will not be determined by the circumstances of his/her time. In the ideal case, a writer can achieve two things: to represent his time and to present something for which the time is not ripe yet” (my translation). Ingeborg Bachmann, “Frankfurter Vorlesungen: Probleme zeitgenössischer Dichtung” [Frankfurt Lectures: Problems of Contemporary Writing], in *Ingeborg Bachmann Werke* [Works], ed. Christine Koschel, Inge von Weidenbaum, and Clemens Münster (München: Piper, 1978), 4:196.

³ Red-White-Red.

⁴ Berlin Critics Prize.

⁵ “one single study of all possible styles of death... a compendium... a manual... and at the same time the picture of the last twenty years” (my translation). This passage by Bachmann is cited in an essay

included in the addendum to vol. 4 of Bachmann's *Werke*. Ellen Marga Schmidt, "Ingeborg Bachmann in Ton- und Bildaufzeichnungen" [Ingeborg Bachmann in sound and video recordings], in *Ingeborg Bachmann Werke* [Works], ed. Christine Koschel, Inge von Weidenbaum, and Clemens Münster (München: Piper, 1978), 4:432.

⁶ Sara Lennox, *Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 32.

⁷ Sandra Frieden, "Bachmann's *Malina* and *Todesarten*: Subliminal Crimes," in *The German Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (January 1983): 61.

⁸ Hans-Gunnar Peterson, "Expressing the Dark," <http://art-bin.com/art/abachmanneng.html> (accessed August 1, 2008).

⁹ Mark Anderson, "Death Arias in Vienna," in *Malina*, Ingeborg Bachmann, trans. Philip Boehm (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1990), 227.

¹⁰ "The Windish people live in the valley of Gail like everywhere else in Southern Carinthia amidst the Germans; they have their own language, which neither the Slovenes nor the Germans completely understand. It is as if through their way of life they wanted to blur the borders, the border of the country but also the boundaries of language, customs, and traditions. They represent a bridge and their piers span peacefully from one side of the border to the other" (my translation). Ingeborg Bachmann, "Das Honditschkreuz" [The Honditsch-Crucifix], in *Ingeborg Bachmann Werke* [Works], ed. Christine Koschel, Inge von Weidenbaum, and Clemens Münster (München: Piper, 1978), 2:491.

¹¹ "I spent my youth in Carinthia, in the South, near the border, in a valley that has two names—a German and a Slovenian name. The house in which my ancestors have lived for many generations—Austrians and Windish—continues even today to have a strange sounding name. Near the border there is yet another boundary: the boundary of language—and I was at home on either side, with the stories of good and bad spirits of two and three countries; because over the mountains, an hour away, there lies Italy" (my translation). Ingeborg Bachmann, "Biographisches" [Biographical Matters], in *Ingeborg Bachmann Werke* [Works], ed. Christine Koschel, Inge von Weidenbaum, and Clemens Münster (München: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1978), 4:301.

¹² "My country is a piece of Austria, a world in which many languages are spoken and many borders run through" (my translation). *Ibid.*, 303.

¹³ "The country Austria has never existed. If we use 'Austria' as a name today, it is because it has been decided so through some agreements. But the real name has always been 'The House of Austria.' I come from this world, although I was born when Austria no longer existed. Nevertheless, I am bound through subterranean ties and my spiritual makeup emerges from this land, which is not a country" (my translation). Ingeborg Bachmann, *Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden: Gespräche und Interviews* [We have to find true sentences: conversations and interviews], ed. Christine Koschel and Inge von Weidenbaum (München: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1983), 79.

¹⁴ "I must have lived in this house at different times, as I can immediately call to mind the streets of Prague and the port in Trieste, I dream in Czech, in Windish, in Bosnian, I have always been at home in this House..." (*Malina*, 61). Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980), 100-101, trans. by Philip Boehm as *Malina* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1990). The German title is cited in text as *Malina* and the English translation is abbreviated as *Mal*.

¹⁵ "where merchants and traders returning from Hungary with horses, oxen and hay kept their lodgings" (*Mal*, 3).

¹⁶ “There are ten trails on the 1968 edition of the hiking map for the Kreuzbergl Region issued by the Tourist Office in cooperation with the Land Survey Office of the provincial capital of Klagenfurt. Of these ten, three lead to the lake: Ridge Trail 1 and Trails 7 and 8. Thus the origins of this story lie in topography, for the author has faith in this hiking map” (“Three Paths to the Lake,” 117). Ingeborg Bachmann, “Drei Wege zum See,” in *Simultan: Erzählungen* [Short Stories] (München: R. Piper, 1991), 119, trans. by Mary Fran Gilbert as “Three Paths to the Lake,” in *Three Paths to the Lake* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1989). The German title is henceforth abbreviated as DW and the English title as TP.

¹⁷ “On Trail 1 she came to the Zillhöhe with its benches where she sat down for a moment, gazing down at the lake; but then she looked up to the Karawanken and, beyond, to Carniola, Slavonia, Croatia, Bosnia; once more she was searching for a world that no longer existed ...” (TP, 154).

¹⁸ “[...] she was searching for a world that no longer existed because there was nothing left of Trotta except the name and a few sentences, his thoughts and tone of voice” (Ibid., 154).

¹⁹ “[T]hey began to study the names on the gravestones and conjectured which ones they might be related to. Certainly she was related to Gasparin, for shouldn’t our names really be that, asked Franza, and aren’t we also related to Katzianka, Napokojs, Wutti, and Kristian ‘V Jezusu Kristusu Je Življenje In Vstajenje?’” (*The Book of Franza*, 34) Ingeborg Bachmann, *Der Fall Franza*, vol 3 of *Ingeborg Bachmann Werke* (München: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1978), 372, trans. by Peter Filkins as *The Book of Franza*, in *The Book of Franza & Requiem for Fanny Goldman* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999). The German title is henceforth abbreviated as FF and the English translation as BF.

²⁰ “Not only had Ranner and Gasparin repeated themselves, but also other names by which they were known, such as vulgo Tobai, meaning that they were baptized twice over, like the House of Austria with its sixfold set of names constantly repeated until its collapse, and even afterward suffering the urge to maintain a memory, the names standing for something that no longer was” (BF, 34).

²¹ “More than half a century later someone existed who was so similar to someone from another, submerged time and place” (TP, 193).

²² “[T]his phoning around was one of the real problems of today’s youth” (Ibid., 175).

²³ William M. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History, 1848-1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 34.

²⁴ “She looked backward, spinning amid the past, clad in those ancient names, and only when he spoke to her did she seem to awaken, but as if she had almost forgotten that she herself was there” (BF, 34).

²⁵ “no longer covered her entirely, but rather the bare essentials” (Ibid., 34).

²⁶ “Galicia, which no one knows except me, which doesn’t mean a thing to anybody else, which nobody visits and which doesn’t amaze a soul, always fell right in the path of the pen on Allied staff maps...” (*Mal*, 62).

²⁷ “Galicia would have remained Galicia under any flag” (Ibid., 62).

²⁸ “[A]t home we always said that once it’s over we’ll go back to Lipica, we have to visit our aunt in Brünn, what could have possibly become of our relatives in Czernowitz, the air in Friuli is better than here, when you grow up you have to go to Vienna and Prague, when you grow up...” (Ibid., 62).

²⁹ “Nonetheless, traveling to Prague was different from traveling to Paris, but all the time in Vienna I wasn’t really living my life—nor can I say it was completely lost—only that in Trieste I wasn’t a stranger, but now it’s becoming more and more indifferent. It doesn’t have to be, but sometime and soon, maybe this year, I’d like to go to Venice, which I will never get to know” (Ibid., 62).

³⁰ “And that went for all such imposition that had ever existed, all such oppression, be it that of the oppressor, such as Jordan, or the oppressed, such as Franza” (*BF*, 35).

³¹ “I have always been at home in this House [...] without the slightest desire to re-inhabit [it], to come into its possession, to raise any claims [...] I abdicated, at the Imperial Church am Hof I renounced the oldest crown” (*Ibid.*, 61-2).

³² “she felt as disadvantaged here as someone who has been disinherited” (*Mal*, 59).

³³ “I get along well with this city and its small environs which have retired from history and are now disappearing altogether” (*Ibid.*, 59).

³⁴ “You might also say that an empire, along with its practices and tactics embellished with ideas, was evicted from history as an example to the world ...” (*Ibid.*, 59).

³⁵ “The borders were soon defined, after all only a tiny country had to be established, without territorial claims or even a proper constitution, an intoxicated land with only two houses you can find in the dark, even during total eclipses (solar and lunar), and I know by heart how many steps it takes, going diagonally, to reach Ivan’s” (*Ibid.*, 13).

³⁶ “[...] so that Ungargassenland doesn’t go to pieces and so I can always keep a grip on it, my own land, my country above all others [...] My glorious country, not kaiserlich-königlich, devoid of King Stephan’s crown and the crown of the Holy Roman Empire, my country in its new Union, my country which needs no justification or acknowledgment” (*Ibid.*, 27).

³⁷ “[T]he carnage continues in the city; insufferable remarks, commentaries and scraps of gossip circulating in restaurants, at parties, in apartments [...] in movies and books where things are discussed in such a way that they depart, retreat and withdraw into us [...] and the helplessness increases following the break-ins, the strippings, the searches and the interrogations [...] and the law of the world lies upon everyone, more misunderstood than ever before” (*Mal*, 16-7).

³⁸ “[t]wo beings devoid of all intentions toward one another, who do not want coexistence, do not want to take off somewhere and begin a new life, do not want to break off or reconcile themselves to a prevailing tongue. We manage just as well without an interpreter, I don’t discover anything about Ivan, he doesn’t discover anything about me” (*Ibid.*, 65).

³⁹ “the caricature of a city within a city” (*TP*, 130).

⁴⁰ “She felt no urge to see London, she was completely indifferent, she was tired, she wanted to leave and go home, she wanted to go to the woods and the lake” (*Ibid.*, 131).

⁴¹ “Room service consisted of Indians, Filipinos, and Africans, once there had been an old Englishman, and all the guests, too were from Asia and Africa, [Elisabeth] rode in the large elevators in the midst of silent masses, the only Caucasian” (*Ibid.*, 130).

⁴² D. H. Lawrence, “The Woman Who Rode Away,” in *Short Stories*, ed. Stephen Gill (London:Dent, 1996), 347, quoted in Sara Lennox, *Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 285.

⁴³ “She wasn’t at home in these woods...” (*TP*, 135).

⁴⁴ “[N]ow they were really conquering Austria, now they could buy it, and that was worse, in his opinion a country that could be bought was worse than one that had gone astray or been cursed” (*TP*, 193).

⁴⁵ “This lake isn’t the lake that once belonged to us either, its water tastes different, swimming in it isn’t the same. It only belonged to us for half an hour in the rain” (TP, 192).

⁴⁶ Zorana Gluscevic, “Ingeborg Bachmann’s Sentimental Journey through the ‘Haus Österreich’ and (Post)Colonial Discourse in ‘Drei Wege zum See,’” in *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 38 (2002): 352.

⁴⁷ “the small, poor, timid Mihailovics” (my translation).

⁴⁸ “No presents, no withered flowers, she couldn’t even imagine his face anymore: as she came to understand him better, the most real part of him receded, and the haunting sentences drifted up from below, from the south: Don’t try to get ahead, keep your own name, don’t take me, don’t take anyone, it’s not worth it” (TP, 154).

⁴⁹ “I don’t live at all, I’ve never known what it is to live” (Ibid., 144).

⁵⁰ “She and Robert had escaped abroad [because] this country no longer needed Matreis” (Ibid., 122).

⁵¹ “But what made them strangers wherever they went was their sensitivity, because they came from the periphery and thus their thoughts, feelings and actions were hopelessly bound to this ghostly empire of gigantic dimensions. The right passports didn’t exist for them, for it was a country which didn’t issue passports” (Ibid., 123).

⁵² “[R]emaining or returning home does not have the character of a new national ideology, the glorification of origins or the blood-and-land myth, but it means much more a stepping down, a refusal to adjust to the economic wonder, to the aspirations for success, to international activity and leveling” (my translation). For complete reference, see note 1.

⁵³ “as this is not some protected island, but a haven of decay, wherever you go there is decay, decay everywhere, right before your eyes, and not just the decay of yesterday’s empire, but of today’s as well” (*Mal*, 59).

⁵⁴ “an inconspicuous, small, ignorant, dilapidated but harmless republic” (Ibid., 60).

⁵⁵ “[H]ere in Vienna something else is going on, the cultic administration of an Empire of the Dead. I don’t know why you or I should be proud, why we should want to attract the world’s attention with all these festivals: Festspiele, Festival Weeks, Musical Weeks, Memorial Years, Days of Culture. The world could do nothing better than ignore them all so as not to get scared, because at best they could serve as an eye-opener to the world, a demonstration of what will happen next, and the more silently things proceed here, the more secretly our gravediggers go about their work, the more obscurely things occur, the more inaudibly the requiem is played and the last words are spoken, then perhaps, true curiosity would be all the greater. Vienna’s crematorium is its spiritual mission, you see, we’re discovering a mission after all [...]” (Ibid., 61).

⁵⁶ “that only those Viennese of the highest echelons and formerly of the imperial-royal order could still practice, though in the Fossil’s case it was a special mixture of a cultured tone and a tone of authority” (*BF*, 11).

⁵⁷ “Society is the biggest murder scene of all. In it the seeds of the most incredible crimes are sown in the subtlest manner, crimes which remain forever unknown to the courts of this world. [...] I felt the full effects of these peace games—that’s how they’re passed off, as if they weren’t really war games—in all their monstrousness” (*Mal*, 182).

⁵⁸ “The news is often filled with such ghastly reports. In Pötzleindorf, at the Prater, in the Vienna Woods, on every periphery a woman is murdered, strangled” (*Mal*, 183).

⁵⁹ “The Time is not today. In fact, the Time no longer exists at all, because it could have been yesterday, it could have been long ago, it could be again, it could continually be, some things will have never been. There is no measure for this Time, which interlocks other times, and there is no measure for the non-times in which things play that were never in Time” (*Ibid.*, 113).

⁶⁰ “[N]ow he’s wearing the bloodstained apron of a butcher standing before a slaughterhouse at dawn, now he’s wearing a hangman’s red coat and climbing up the steps, now he’s wearing silver and black, with shiny black boots, standing in front of electric barbed wire, in front of a loading ramp, inside a watchtower, he’s wearing his costumes to fit the riding crops, the rifles, the execution pistols, his costumes are worn in the deepest night, bloodstained and horrible (*Ibid.*, 154).

⁶¹ “This is the cemetery of the murdered daughters” (*Ibid.*, 114).

⁶² “The world seems to exist for him exactly as it is, exactly as he first found it” (*Ibid.*, 164).

⁶³ “Malina: So you’ll never again say: War and Peace.

Me: Never again.
It’s always war.
Here there is always violence.
Here there is always struggle.
It is the eternal war” (*Ibid.*, 155).

⁶⁴ Karen R. Achberger, *Understanding Ingeborg Bachmann* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 96-129.

⁶⁵ See note 9 for reference.

⁶⁶ “A spiritual, imaginary autobiography. These monologues or night existence have nothing in common with an ordinary autobiography, which recounts the life story of certain people” (my translation). Ingeborg Bachmann, *Wir müssen wahre Sätze finden: Gespräche und Interviews* [We have to find true sentences: conversations and interviews], ed. Christine Koschel und Inge von Weidenbaum. (München: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1983), 73.

⁶⁷ “Each moment in the book takes place today, in the present, now. [...] Why today? This is explained in the beginning. She, the I, says: For me it will always be today, until the very last moment, with a kind of pathological agitation. Even in her relationship to Ivan. She doesn’t even want to remember how it was when they met. The excitement and edginess in the Now: She cannot speak about anything else, because she lives in the present with such passion” (my translation). (*Ibid.*, 75-6).

⁶⁸ “[Society] must reveal itself through a radically different image, because otherwise we will not know what our time was like. For me, the disease, the torture, the disease of the world, and the disease of this person, is the disease of our time” (my translation). (*Ibid.*, 72).

⁶⁹ “that’s an interesting idea, for it had to begin somewhere. Why does one only refer to fascism when it has to do with opinions or blatant acts?” (*BF*, 75)

⁷⁰ “In Australia the aborigines were not exterminated, and yet they are dying out, though clinical research is unable to come up with organic reasons as to why, it being a deadly doubt that infests the Papuans, a kind of suicide, since they believe the whites have stolen all of their goods by magical means” (*BF*, 79).

⁷¹ “I have walked over to the wall, I walk into the wall, holding my breath. I should have written a note: It wasn’t Malina. But the wall opens, I am inside the wall, and Malina can only see the fissure we’ve been looking at for such a long time” (*Mal*, 223).

⁷² “Steps, Malina’s incessant steps, quieter steps, the most quiet steps. A standing still. No alarm, no sirens. No one comes to help. Not the ambulance and not the police. It is a very old wall, a very strong wall, from which no one can fall, which no one can break open, from which nothing can ever be heard again” (*Ibid.*, 224-5).

⁷³ “I was buried alive. My story and the story of all those who make up the larger history, how do these find a place within the whole of history? Are they always left by the side of the road? How do they find a place?” (*BF*, 107)

⁷⁴ “That’s Aswan, that’s Abu Simbel, there’s Cairo again. But as he tried to match up the images with those he remembered, it simply didn’t work. There was nothing in the rolls of film of what was stored within his mind—most of all nothing of all the troubles, nothing of the sand and the bright sun, nothing even of massive Abu Simbel, which was shown from all sides. No film could depict his sister inside his head as she sat on the huge toes of Ramses in order to cool off, nor was there anything of him lighting up a wall with a flashlight in order to learn an entire history” (*Ibid.*, 144-5).

⁷⁵ “[H]ow could he explain why someone had said that whites should be damned, or how could he even capture something of a desolate desert which in the end he had only experienced through another’s desolation?” (*Ibid.*, 145)

⁷⁶ “I mean the most important thing for Algeria is liberty ...” (*TP*, 144).

⁷⁷ “... liberty—if it comes at all, liberty hardly lasts a day and is always a misunderstanding” (*Ibid.*, 144).

⁷⁸ “[t]he enjoyment they got out of every kind of brutality imaginable was written clearly all over their ugly faces” (*Ibid.*, 151).

⁷⁹ “Do you suppose you have to photograph those devastated villages and corpses so that I can imagine what war is like, or take pictures of children in India so I know what hunger is? What kind of stupid presumption is that? And someone who doesn’t know would page through your brilliantly successful photo stories for their aesthetic value or the nausea they induce, that should depend on the quality of the pictures, you’re always talking about the importance of quality, isn’t that the reason they send you all over the place, because you do quality work? He asked with an undertone of contempt ... The only ones who are awake are the ones who can imagine it without your help” (*Ibid.*, 141).

⁸⁰ “... I’ve never been able to understand people who can bear to look at that poor imitation, no, at the most atrocious unreality of all turned into reality, looking at corpses is not the way to stimulate liberal-mindedness” (*Ibid.*, 141-42).

⁸¹ “Once, in Sudan, the only thing that really struck me there were notices everywhere, put up for all the whites, because of course they were the only who had no sense of decency, stating that it was prohibited, at the risk of a severe penalty, to photograph ‘human beings.’ I’ve forgotten the Nile and everything else, but not that prohibition” (*Ibid.*, 142).

⁸² “another experiment [...] that she would perform on herself” (*BF*, 95).

⁸³ “there’s something here that even I can’t be denied. I am discovering my rights” (*Ibid.*, 102).

⁸⁴ “Water was a key part of a battle for existence within each last traversable square meter between a murderous sea and a couple of sentry posts in the desert. It brought something to life in her, as well as the pride with which she said: I will discover my rights here” (*BF*, 102).

⁸⁵ Cisleithania was the Austrian part of Austria-Hungary and Transleithania represented the Kingdom of Hungary in the Dual Monarchy.

⁸⁶ “that one day a border would be drawn through the water, between two countries with names. For at that time no countries existed, and there were no borders” (*Mal*, 38).

⁸⁷ “Love is for the narrator of such exclusiveness that no room remains for anything else. It is expressed through intensity and fanaticism, not a particular event” (my translation). See note 48 for reference.

⁸⁸ “Between Ivan and the I there is no communication. He is never in the same place as the I and vice-versa. For her, to hear the telephone ring is something tremendous, but for him it is simply a telephone call” (my translation).

⁸⁹ “the eradication of undesirables [...] the eradication of the unwanted sick, the assisted deaths, the mercy killings” (*BF*, 129).

⁹⁰ “had shoved her against the hard edges of the shelves and done it, not in order to embrace the Franziska who, there in Vienna, was his wife” (*Ibid.*, 139).

⁹¹ “Her thoughts raced, and then she hit the wall, smashing her head, slamming it with full force, her head smashing against the wall in Vienna and the stone wall in Giza, her voice returning, herself saying aloud, No, No” (*Ibid.*, 140).

⁹² “There was only one hope she didn’t and wouldn’t allow herself to hold on to: that if, in almost thirty years, she hadn’t found a man, not a single one, who was exclusively significant for her, who had become inevitable to her, someone who was strong and brought her the mystery she had been waiting for, not a single one who was really a man and not an eccentric, a weakling or one of the needy the world was full of—then the man simply didn’t exist, and as long as this New Man did not exist, one could only be friendly and kind to one another, for a while. There was nothing more to make of it ...” (*TP*, 175).

⁹³ “... [T]he Austro-Hungarian monarchy is only an appearance disconnected from any temporality and geographical representation, a word that does not yet have a corresponding reality...” (my translation). See note 1 for reference.

⁹⁴ “[...] it would be best if women and men kept their distance and had nothing to do with each other until both had found their way out of the tangle and confusion, the discrepancy inherent in all relationships. Perhaps one day something else might come along but only then, and it would be strong and mysterious and have real greatness, something to which each could once again submit” (*TP*, 175).

⁹⁵ “A day will come when all mankind will have redgolden eyes and starry voices, when their hands will be gifted for love, and the poetry of their lineage shall be recreated... [...] and their hands will be gifted for goodness” (*Mal*, 88).

⁹⁶ “All water will run dry in the deserts, once again we will be able to enter the wilderness and witness revelations, savanna and stream will invite us in their purity, diamonds will remain embedded in stone and illuminate us all, from the nocturnal forest of our thoughts we will return to the primeval forest, we will cease thinking and suffering, it shall be the Redemption” (*Ibid.*, 90).

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined literary representations of family and nation as well as the convergence of these two concepts in the trope of the nation-as-family. Family and familial relationships constitute the perspective through which Roth, Grass, Kundera, and Bachmann reflect on issues of imperial conservatism, war, nationalism, or totalitarianism at distinct moments in twentieth-century East-Central Europe. For these writers, the domestic space represents an arena on which various historical crises are played out, but none of them has suggested a simple cause and effect relationship between the external crises within society and the internal crises of the family. While the family operates as a receptacle of historical forces, it also conveys its own internal conflicts, challenges, and contradictions that, in turn, reflect on social mentalities and macro-political relationships.

The family in Roth's novels not only represents a stronghold of conservative politics and mentality, reflecting the conservatism of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, but it also represents the site where the breakup of Austria-Hungary as a multinational family is anticipated. The family becomes the stage on which imperial inertia and loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty clashes with a different allegiance to a modern, democratic nation-state. Like Roth, Grass uses the family as a focal point of historical tensions and clashes, but unlike Roth, who focuses on the disintegration of the imperial world, Grass concentrates on the process of imagining a nation in the context of extreme conflicts of competing nationalisms. In the breakdown of a multiethnic, multicultural family from

Danzig/Gdansk, Grass represents the destruction of North-East European multiculturalism through war and devastating nationalism.

With Kundera's novel, a shift occurs in the treatment of the family, which, aside from being a theater for the representation of the crisis of individualism, also becomes an instrument that acts on behalf of totalitarian regimes and fuels the automatism of a single-party system. Kundera deconstructs the metaphor of the (socialist) nation-as-family and challenges both communist paternalism and the provincialism of small nations. In doing so, he also attempts to reestablish the concept of Central Europe as a space of ethnic diversity, a community of culture and history with fluid geometry, and possibly a political alternative to the limited, homogenizing imaginings of both communism and nationalism. In different ways, Kundera and Grass identify the family not only as a site of oppression, but also as the location from where opposition to nationalist and totalitarian domination arises and where alternatives of living can be imagined.

Similar to Roth and Grass, Bachmann represents the family as a source of vitality, character, and identity, but unlike Roth, Grass, or Kundera, Bachmann locates in the family the roots of violence and oppression in society. She identifies the origins of fascism, and conveys the concern that war is never-ending and abiding in the relationships between a man and a woman, the West and the Third World.

From the writings of Roth, Grass, Kundera, and Bachmann, a striking difference arises between, on the one hand, the trope of the nation-as-family and, on the other hand, the representation of Austria-Hungary as a family of nations and Central Europe as a supranational community. The nation-as-family is defined by common ethnicity, shared language and territory, and, as the writers studied in this dissertation have shown, the

nation can often be an oppressive construct for those individuals whose sense of belonging is at odds with the nation's homogenizing imaginings. In contrast, a multinational or supranational entity, whether limited by territory or not, is ethnically diverse, inclusive of many languages, and culturally boundless. In his biography of Roth, David Bronsen notes that only in the context of the multinational monarchy was it possible for German literature, art, and science to produce a Rilke and a Kafka from Prague, a Roth from Brody, a Karl Kraus from Gitschin, a Sigmund Freud from Freiberg, a Paul Celan from Czernowitz, all of whom used the German language to enrich the whole world (181). Such figures will never exist again. "Was heute aus diesen Gebieten hervorgeht, gehört nicht mehr der deutschen Kultur an" (181).¹ Bronsen observes that today the standards are much smaller and provincialism has permeated the territories of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

In different ways, Roth and Grass, Kundera and Bachmann, could not reconcile themselves to the limited imaginings of the nation-state as a unified and cohesive community, whose prerequisite is to fashion a common destiny through sacrifice and forgetting. These four writers had a difficult and fraught relationship to their native place that more or less involved issues of nationalism, and they either chose to live abroad or were compelled to do so. Born in Brody, Galicia (now Ukraine), Roth lived in Vienna, and with Germany's rise to power in the 1930s, he moved to Paris. Deeply disappointed in the rise of nationalist radicalism in Europe, Roth considered himself the heir of a lost heritage. As a Central European who saw the multicultural world of his childhood disintegrate through war and grim nationalism, Grass's early life experience was in certain respects similar to Roth's. Further, Kundera has often expressed criticism toward

nationalism, even though his opposition to communist totalitarianism was more visible and seen as the main cause of exile from his native Czechoslovakia. Kundera has never been content to be identified with one single national culture. His literary genealogy has always pointed away from the singularity of the national heritage toward the larger context of Central and Western European culture. In Bachmann's case, the issue of nationalism comes across both in her identification with the old House of Austria as well as in her dissociation from Austria's postwar politics of rapid moral recovery. Like Roth and Kundera, Bachmann could not tolerate the provincialism of small nations.

These writers' disagreement with the narrow philosophy of the nation comes across in all the writings examined in this dissertation in the representation of familial crises. Forces of nationalism and totalitarianism affect the destinies of all the families, whether it is the Trotta family, who cannot reconcile to an impoverished single-national sense of belonging, or the Matzerath-Bronski-Koljaiczek extended family, who transgress the limits of both German and Polish nationalist imaginings, or the love triangle of Tomas, Tereza, and Sabina, who challenge communist and nationalist hegemonies alike, or the families and love unions in Bachmann's work, who try to reimagine a new and different union of nations, free of imperial or nationalist tactics and practices.

Identity is never reducible to the imaginings of one nation or another, and, as the four writers have differently expressed in their work, it is the task of the writer to resist and transcend the limits of one's national family. Often, the discontented, dispossessed, and disenfranchised are the ones to think through moral and political alternatives, or simply hint at concepts whose realization is left to the future. Such is the case of the narrator in Roth's novel *Die Kapuzinergruft* whose condition as a country-less individual,

an extraterritorial, and a perpetual refugee from the time of the monarchy points not only to the inadequacy of the nation to accommodate the narrator's identity, but also to a different avenue of understanding identity and belonging. The concept of extraterritoriality offers an alternative path to conceive identity, beyond the national paradigm.

In his work, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben defines the concept of extraterritoriality as an alternate way of imagining territory and identity. Unlike the nation-state, whose basic category is that of the citizen, extraterritoriality takes the category of the refugee as fundamental. The refugee is evidence that the nation-state distinguishes between the rights of man and those of the citizen as different sets of rights. This is already suggested in the ambiguity of the title of the text of the French Revolution, *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*. Deprived of their rights as citizens of a country, refugees fall back on their basic rights as human beings. But history has confirmed that basic human rights, granted to individuals at their birth, amount to little outside the framework of the state and the concept of citizenship. A country-less individual is disquieting for the nation-state, and, according to Agamben, "the status of a refugee has always been considered a temporary condition that ought to lead either to naturalization or to repatriation. A stable statute for the human in itself is inconceivable in the law of the nation-state" (19).² In the mere possession of human rights there is always a nakedness that requires to be covered by the national garb. Thus, the ambiguity of the title of *The Declaration of Rights* can also be read as "a hendiadys in which the first term is ... always already contained in the second" (Agamben, 19). In today's world, the rights of man only make sense if they are connected to the rights of the

citizen. The refugee shows how the sovereignty of the nation is grounded in a fictitious identity between nativity and nationality, between the human and the citizen. However, in Agamben's view, the refugee represents "nothing less than a limit-concept that at once brings a radical crisis to the principles of the nation-state and clears the way for a renewal of categories that can no longer be delayed" (Agamben, 21-22). The concept of extraterritoriality becomes a way to break the trinity of state-nation-territory. In a post-nation world there would not exist an organic connection between the nation-state and territory, and thus, two or more communities would be able to share the same territory without menace or sacrifice of human life. Referring to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Agamben observes that,

[i]nstead of two national states separated by uncertain and threatening boundaries, it might be possible to imagine two political communities insisting on the same region and in a condition of exodus from each other—communities that would articulate each other via a series of reciprocal extraterritorialities in which the guiding concept would no longer be the *ius* (right) of the citizen but rather the *refugium* (refuge) of the singular. (23)

By analogy, Agamben envisages "Europe of the nations" becoming extraterritorial space and European identity, a condition of individuals of "being-in-exodus" from each other. Insisting on the irreducible difference between the categories of birth and nation, the "being-in-exodus" would not necessarily mean a condition of movement, but could well be a condition of immobility. Agamben distinguishes national territories or their topographical sum from extraterritorial space, which acts on national territory "by articulating and perforating [it] topologically as in the Klein bottle or in the Möbius strip, where exterior and interior in-determine each other" (24). Thus, Agamben notes, "[o]nly in a world in which the spaces of states have been thus perforated and topologically deformed and in which the citizen has been able to recognize the refugee

that he or she is—only in such a world is the political survival of humankind today thinkable” (25).

Agamben’s concept of extraterritoriality is in stark contrast to the metaphor of the nation-as-family, as much as the condition of “being-in-exodus” is the opposite of belonging to the national family. In the destinies of the Trotta family in Roth’s novels, the Matzerath-Bronksi-Koljaiczek family in *Die Blechtrommel*, and the love triangle in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, there is a strong sense of conflict and incompatibility with the political and philosophical poverty of the modern nation-state. These families represent what Anne McClintock has called “the antithesis of history” (91).³ None of them supports the idea of a single national genealogy, and they are therefore removed from national power. In each of the families examined in this dissertation there are individuals who find themselves in a state of “being-in-exodus,” exiled from the nation-state or the nation-building community. Some, like Roth’s protagonists, are paralyzed by the historical crisis and unable to think beyond their nostalgia or reactionary attitude, yet others like Sabina or Oskar Matzerath, artists par excellence—skeptical or satirical—will transgress all existing boundaries, of nations, families, and even nature, to create and recreate in accordance with a boundless imaginary.

In one of the scenes in Book One of *Die Blechtrommel*, Oskar and his hospital keeper, Klepp, cut their passport photographs and rearrange the pieces to create different selves. Oskar is upset with the utilitarian character of the modern photo, degenerated from early art photography of the 1900s, and imagines the gloom of being shut in a room with the framed photographs of the day. But in spite of his argument with modern photography, Oskar, joined by Klepp, frequents photo shops, where the two men ask for

passport pictures. Describing the faces that show from the passport photographs as “passive and neutralized,” Oskar alludes to one of the insipid and inflexible requirements of citizenship: that the first and predominant modality of identification be that of nationality. They take their “passive and neutralized” faces, cut them into pieces, and rearrange the body parts, borrowing from one another and creating different creatures:

Wir knickten, falteten, zerschnitten mit Scheren, die wir eigens zu diesem Zweck immer bei uns trugen, die Bildchen. Wir setzten ältere und neuere Konterfeie zusammen, gaben uns einäugig, dreiäugig, beohrten uns mit Nasen, sprachen oder schwiegen mit dem rechten Ohr und boten dem Kinn die Stirn. Nicht nur dem eigenen Abbild widerfuhren diese Montagen; Klepp lieh sich Details bei mir aus, ich erbat mir Charakteristisches von ihm: es gelang uns neue, und wie wir hofften, glücklichere Geschöpfe zu erschaffen. (Grass, 39-40)⁴

This activity gives Oskar and Klepp a kind of freedom in their dealings with themselves, the feeling that their identity is a personal matter and they can be in charge of it as easily as they can challenge the fundamentals of citizenship. The passive and neutralized face is cut, “perforated and topologically deformed” (Agamben, 25), until it no longer fits into a passport, unless the nature of this document is also altered. The changed topography of the face points into a new direction of understanding territory, whereby national borders as we know them become fluid and temporary not because they are disputed between nations, but because it is no longer impossible to transcend an exclusively nationalistic way of thinking.

Among the few poems Bachmann wrote in the period between 1964-1967, there is one poem in which the poet acts out a radical mental rearrangement of Europe’s topography. In “Böhmen liegt am Meer” (Bohemia lies by the sea), Bohemia is no longer an inland province at the center of Europe, but lies by the sea. The poet—a vagrant and a bohemian—is contemplating and comparing borders of land and boundaries of language.

The poem starts out with eight lines of conditional clauses in which the poet explores social and physical terrain, “Sind hierorts Häuser grün, tret ich noch in ein Haus. / Sind hier die Brücken heil, geh ich auf guten Grund” (616),⁵ as well as territories of language, where words border on bodies, “Grenzt hier ein Wort an mich, so laß ich’s grenzen.”⁶ The poet imagines a map in which Bohemia lies by the sea, but the conditional clause, “Liegt Böhmen noch am Meer, glaub ich den Meeren wieder. / Und glaub ich noch ans Meer, so hoffe ich auf Land” (616),⁷ lends this map a provisional status. The temporal adverb “noch” (still) indicates that the physical location in conjunction with the discursive layout of territory have existed for some time, but it also signals that this alternate arrangement cannot be taken for granted or as something permanent. Bohemia by the sea and Central European Bohemia are two different ways of understanding Bohemia, but they do not exhaust the range of possibilities for imagining this place in Europe.

The poem is a meditation on the relationship to places and territory. It suggests the view of a wandering soul, who has no possessions and is held by nothing, traveling on a contentious sea (“vom Meer, das strittig ist”). This perspective involves many trials and errors, but one day, Bohemia is released and allowed to lie by the sea. Addressing Illyrians—a group of peoples who once inhabited the western part of the Balkans—or communities like the Veronese and the Venetians, the poet invites them all to be nonconformists or bohemians.

Spielt die Komödien, die lachen machen
Und die zum Weinen sind. Und irrt euch hundertmal,
Wie ich mich irrte und Proben nie bestand,
Doch hab ich sie bestanden, ein um das andre Mal.

Wie Böhmen sie bestand und eines schönen Tags

Ans Meer begradigt wurde und jetzt am Wasser liegt. (616)⁸

Political geography is a product of human imagination as much as it is its captive.

Suggesting that Bohemia was one day “released” from Central Europe, the poet implies that for an undefined period of time this region was held prisoner, locked within a fixed political paradigm; today this paradigm is that of the nation-state. One way to explain how Bohemia could be released from the discursive confines of the nation-state is to consider the meanings of the term bohemian. Bohemians are not only natives or inhabitants of Bohemia. A bohemian can be a member of a Gypsy community, a country-less individual, a nonconformist artist, or the description of an unconventional conduct or lifestyle. Thus, it is not Central Europe’s Bohemia, a defined and limited territory, which is moved from inland Europe to a seashore location. In Bachmann’s poem, Bohemia epitomizes a way of thinking and acting in the world, and imagining places as the possible home for anyone in need of a home, a base, or, simply, a place of departure and arrival.

For Bachmann language can be a prison house of thought as much as fertile ground for new imaginings. The line, “Ich grenz noch an ein Wort und an ein andres Land” (616),⁹ suggests either that land partitions follow from unchallenged categories of language, or that physical space can support and accommodate as many imaginings, as words can do in the unbound territory of language. In this latter case, boundaries shift at every moment, and it is no longer possible to hold on to one single, hegemonic vision of territory and identity. Like Grass’s protagonist, who rearranges the parts of a face in a passport photograph, challenging not only a strict facial topography but also a world strictly divided by national boundaries, the “I-figure” in Bachmann’s poem suggests a

transcendence of the limited imaginary of the nation-state upon which political geography today is based, and alludes to a time of greater possibilities for making choices of belonging: “[I]ch grenz, wie wenig auch, an alles immer mehr, / ein Böhme, ein Vagant, der nichts hat, den nichts hält, / begabt nur noch, vom Meer, das strittig ist, Land meiner / Wahl zu sehen” (616).¹⁰

In their representations of families and nations, Roth, Grass, Kundera, and Bachmann speak to some of the fundamental concerns and issues of our age: nationalism, war, totalitarianism, and, as the chapter on Bachmann’s work shows, patriarchy, which for Bachmann is a concept fundamentally linked to fascism and war. In different ways, all these writers address the necessity to envision alternate avenues of building community, constructing identity, reimagining human relationships and new relations to territory, that are plural, diverse, and nonhegemonic.

Notes

¹ “What comes out of these territories no longer belongs to German culture” (my translation). David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth: Eine Biographie* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1974), 181.

² Giorgio Agamben, “Beyond Human Rights,” in *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 19.

³ Anne McClintock, “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Gender, Race and Nationalism,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 91.

⁴ Günter Grass, *Die Blechtrommel* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1981), 39-40. Translated by Ralph Manheim as *The Tin Drum* (New York: Vintage International, 1990). “We bent and folded the pictures, and cut them up with the little scissors we carried about with us for this precise purpose. We juxtaposed old and new pictures, made ourselves one-eyed and three-eyed, put noses on our ears, made our exposed right ears into organs of speech or silence, combined chins and foreheads. And it was not only each with his own

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