



Radetzkymarsch

Joseph Roth

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In der Schlacht bei Solferino im Jahre 1859 rettet der slowenische Infanterieleutnant Joseph Trotta dem österreichischen Kaiser Franz Joseph I. das Leben. Er wird dafür geadelt und mit Orden ausgezeichnet und verläßt unwiderruflich den Weg seiner bäuerlichen Vorfahren. So beginnt die Geschichte der Familie von Trotta in einer Zeit, in der die Herrschaft der Habsburger noch einmal eine glorreiche Blüte erlebt. Der Kaiser ist mächtig, das Reich ist groß, die bestehende Ordnung der Welt scheint unvergänglich. Und doch wird hinter diesem Glanz eine Müdigkeit fühlbar, eine Erstarrung, eine Ahnung von Verfall und Auflösung. Von der knorriegen Stärke des "Helden von Solferino" ist bei seinem weichen und feinfühligen Enkel Carl Joseph von Trotta nichts übriggeblieben. Er erkennt, daß neue Kräfte die Zukunft bestimmen werden, aber er kann nicht selbst daran teilnehmen. Im Aufstieg und Verfall einer Familie spiegeln sich die letzten Jahrzehnte der Donaumonarchie. *Radetzkymarsch* gilt als das Hauptwerks des großen Epikers Joseph Roth.

Radetzkymarsch Details

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Lyn Elliott says

Well, here it is months after I read Roth's The Radetzky March, and I find I never did write the review I intended. I've come here now to add some notes by Roth's excellent translator, Michael Hofmann, in his introduction to the last novel Roth wrote, The Emperor's Tomb, which I intended to read but found the thought of it too bleak at present and I'll have to come back to it.

In The Radetzky March, Roth portrays the closed world and dying days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire through the lives of three generations of Trotta men somewhere in the empire's provinces, and in the army on the eastern edge of the empire. There are no noble characters, no warmth between individuals. Moral lassitude prevails, as the hierarchical bonds that held society in place begin to shake loose and are broken in the war that we know as World War I.

Now for my notes of what Hofmann has to say:

The Radetzky March is strictly patrilineal, begins and ends with scenes of battle - Solferino, where the family's rise in status began, and KrasneBusk in Eastern Galicia.

It 'impresses with its orchestration, its stateliness, its pageantry, the glorious Tolstyan fullness of its realisation, ("done in oils) and 'recalls "broad discs overhanging one another, like the records cued on and old-fashioned gramophone".

It 'conveys a whole gone world', and H believes that it is a great novel about anywhere, that Austria is to some extent accidental. I can't place it anywhere else, because I don't know enough about Europe, but if it were set anywhere else it would be a completely different book.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"That was how things were back then. Anything that grew took its time growing, and anything that perished took a long time to be forgotten. But everything that had once existed left its traces, and people lived on memories just as they now live on the ability to forget quickly and emphatically."

There are eras when time seems to stand still and the period before the beginning of World War I was one of those times for the Austro-Hungarian empire. The empire was in decline, but not yet aware that their way of life was about to end. There was a way that things were done and any deviation was stressful and possibly scandalous. Reviewers have mentioned the dream like qualities of this book and I believe that is achieved by not only superb writing, but the evocation of a quality of life that is foreign to the fast track environment that exists today.

Joseph Roth was quoted as saying that he only really cared about writing one great sentence a day. This book shows the painstaking self-editing that I usually only associate with F. Scott Fitzgerald. The imagery he creates out of the most mundane moments reminds me of the Dostoevsky ability to write about the nuances of a character getting out of bed in the morning and keeping the reader fascinated.

This is a book about three generations of Trottas beginning with the Battle of Solferino. The last battle in world history by the way that both armies were lead by their supreme Monarch. Kaiser Franz Joseph lead the Austrians and Emperor Napoleon III lead the French. In the midst of the battle Franz Joseph approaches the front lines. He raises a pair of field glasses to view the enemy and Lieutenant Trottas, knowing that snipers were looking for anything indicating an officer throws himself in from the Kaiser and takes a bullet in the back that was meant for his Supreme Leader. He becomes known as the Hero of Solferino. Later he is incensed when he discovers that his act of heroism has been greatly distorted by writers for childrens books putting him in a much more heroic role than the actual event. He resigns his commission and asks the Kaiser to expunge the act of heroism from future books. For us, this might seem like an over reaction, but Trottas did not desire platitudes that he did not deserve. He found the whole business unseemly.

His son is not a military man, but does end up in a role of District Captain due to his position of a Baron, a designation that had been consigned upon the first Trotta by the Kaiser. His life is so consistently the same ever day that even the most minor deviation causes great trepidation.

"One morning in May Herr von Trotta sat down at the table in the breakfast room. The egg, soft-boiled as usual, was in its silver cup. The honey shimmered golden, the fresh kaiser rolls smelled of fire and yeast, the butter shone yellow, embedded in a gigantic dark-green leaf, the coffee steamed in the gold-rimmed porcelain. Nothing was missing. Or at least it seemed to Herr von Trotta at first glance that nothing was missing. But then he promptly stood up, put down his napkin, and scrutinized the table again. The letters were missing from their usual place. For as long as the district captain could remember, no day had ever passed without official mail. First Herr von Trotta went to the open window as if to convince himself that the world still existed outside."

As it turned out his man servant Jacques was very sick and could not perform his normal duties of fetching the mail. This was *"highly annoying"*. Later we find out that Jacques is not his name, but the name conferred on him by the first von Trotta because the nobleman didn't want to have to remember a different name from the servant in that capacity before.

The grandson of the hero of Solferino does join the military and steps into the ranks as a Lieutenant. He becomes mired in a series of affairs with married women. The last being with Frau Von Taussig who is married to a noble, but the mistress of a wealthy friend of Trotta and yet she has a hunger for young lieutenants. Trotta first meets her when he is assigned to escort her on a trip.

"He doesn't have the nerve to ask who the woman is. Many faces of unknown women--blue, brown, black eyes, blond hair, black hair, hips, breasts, and legs, women he may once have brushed up against, as a boy, as an adolescent--they all sweep past him, all of them at once: a marvelous, tender storm of women. He smells the fragrance of these strangers; he feels the cool, hard tenderness of their knees; the sweet yoke of naked arms is already around his throat and the bolt of intertwined arms lies in back of his neck.

There is a fear of voluptuousness that is itself voluptuous, just as a certain fear of death can itself be deadly. Lieutenant Trotta is now filled with the fear of voluptuousness."

Okay I need to take a moment to fan myself. Is the room really warm suddenly or is it just me?

Trotta becomes mired in gambling debt much the same way he became mired in the latest elicit affair, second hand. A friend and higher ranking officer asks him to sign for his debts, and Trotta with barely a consideration signs away his life. His friend becomes more and more in debt and eventually kills himself (An event that was in vogue in this era of Austrian history. In fact at the time Vienna had the highest suicide rate

of any European city.) leaving Trotta with responsibility for the owed money. He eventually ends up having to ask his father for the money. The father goes to the Kaiser and the Kaiser remembering the service of the family (well after a few false starts.) grants amnesty to the young lieutenant and has the moneylender (a Jew) deported.

Lieutenant Trotta disillusioned with his service quits the military, but then when war breaks out he of course rejoins. His father is feeling disillusioned as well, and some what embarrassed over the near scandal of gambling debts.

"He was old and tired, and death was already lurking, but life would not yet let him go. Like a cruel host it held him fast at the table because he had not yet tasted all the bitterness that had been prepared for him."

The book begins with an act of heroism and ends with an act of heroism. I will not reveal the final moments of our young Lieutenant in case there are those of you that will read this Austrian Masterpiece. A wonderful book, a book that captures a time precisely and leaves me with the continued belief that fiction is so important for our collective memory. Our desires, our thoughts, our way of speaking, and our history are recorded more accurately in fiction books than it is in nonfiction. Highly Recommended!!

Szplug says

Jesus wept, and so did I during that pungently bitter and elegiac final section, when old Herr von Trotta received the letter regarding his son's death, and his noble-but-frail, son-of-the-Hero-of-Solferino head began a shaking that would scarcely cease before he, too, shortly crossed over into death to rejoin the child who was living nightly in his impatiently awaited dreams. I haven't had actual liquid, salty tears squeeze from my eyes since the potent textual sorrow worked upon me so masterfully by James Agee. I guess that every reader has chambers in their heart, recesses in their soul, compactly swollen with loneliness and personal anguish, the acrid strains of rebounded or distorted feeling and the mournful traces of love extinguished in the physical world, with the skeined accumulation of loss—and the knowledge that further loss is but an inevitability—that are there to be opened and drawn from by the skilled hand of the author, and Lord, but did Roth know how to access *mine* with his fictional probe. He writes in beautiful, poetic prose, creating scenes of fiery autumnal colors and verdant springtide hues, all in the purpose of depicting the mournful and empty final years of the Austro-Hungarian empire, joining the ranks of Musil and Broch in capturing the collision of a conservative and tradition-rich monarchy with an identity- and individual-asserting modernity that refused to abide by the rituals and routine of an unrepresentative and fossilized institution.

Roth's Franz Joseph I—whose life was saved in 1859 by the aforementioned Hero, father and grandfather to the von Trottas who open this review—is a frail, elderly, and dignified man with an immense personal authority and aura, who commands a vast conglomeration of ethnicities and religious beliefs that has no legitimate reason for existence outside of the simple fact that God has so willed this eclectic state of affairs. With the von Trottas living under the omnipresent shadow of that single, historically important moment when the Hero took a bullet for his sovereign whilst pushing the latter firmly to the ground—and survived this reflexive act—they endeavor to make their strong sense of duty and obligation to the benefactee of their progenitor's presence of mind into something firm and strong enough to repel the utterly empty and abscessed spaces that exist, and are constantly expanding, within their ramrod bodies and pliable souls. Whilst the Hero came quickly to perceive that his personal belief in the virtue and honor of the Emperor, and his Empire, were, in fact, chimerical self-delusions, ribbons and bows wrapped around a brilliant-but-brittle imperial shell constructed and sustained through guile, his descendants will do their best to avoid the

realization of such bitter truths in the vain hope that service in furtherance of the august founder of their ennobled names will impart a meaning to the confusion, pain, guilt, and grief that continually amasses with every day that passes.

The entire book is populated by Eliot's *Hollow Men*, enacting pantomimes, playing civil servant for a government that is obeyed but not loved; soldier in an army that lives only to fight, but *knows* neither it, nor the empire it defends, can survive a real war. Thus do father and son exist, fervently holding on to a fated, holy service to the faltering old man who heads the empire they no longer truly believe in. The same Austrian rigidity and austerity that firms up their belief system—and shores up the peasant virtues they inherited from their simple-but-sturdy Slovenian forebears—prevents either from expressing to the other the *pain*, the *torment* of earnest service on behalf of a false belief—and so Herr von Trotta seeks solace in his unvarying routine as a Moravian District Commissioner whilst the son, a Lieutenant in first the Cavalry, and then the infantry, passes his days in soldierly fashion whilst using hard liquor and affairs with older married women to numb his sense of being both a failure *and* doomed to cause the death of those whose paths he crosses in any meaningful way. This unexpressed love between father and son, so movingly evoked by Roth's gifted pen, carries within it the grief that permeates the entire novel; things are going to end, and they are going to end badly—and neither parent nor child can give the other what he so desperately needs with the unwavering and stern gaze of the Hero of Solferino—captured for eternity by a painter friend of the District Commissioner in a portrait that glares down from the lofty peaked roof of the latter's home—relentlessly bearing down upon their bodies—even when hundreds of miles intervene. *Duty above all*; though, as one of the novel's Cassandras, the Polish noble Chojnicki, observes, the Empire is dying: and those who serve, maintain, and, most importantly, *believed* in it are already dead men. The chill of Death lingers throughout the book whilst the story progresses; Roth reminds us that the grim charnel house horrors of the First World War lay *just* over the horizon, and that a good majority of the characters encountered—peasant, worker, civil servant, soldier, aristocrat—will have been claimed by the skeletal Grand Master of this Soirée of the Trenches before the festivities ended.

Roth saw with his own eyes the terrible results of the partitioning of that great Central European power, and the savage returns paid out for such an inflamed and pervasive investment in nationalist pride. His depictions of the various constituent elements of the *Kaiserlich-und-Königlich* Monarchy—the lush, rolling hills of Moravia; the pastel boundlessness and wood-studded swamps of Ruthenia; Vienna, all hurried and snooty rainbow activity belying a deep-rooted unease—are just beautifully done, stamping the images they portray upon the reader's mind with a vivid detail. The novel is not perfect—the few female characters are almost indistinguishable, and Roth seemed to grow impatient with certain chapter scenarios that would, inexplicably, terminate just when I felt they had reached their peak of interest; and at times the character's actions don't impart the depth that perhaps Roth believed they were uncovering, but this is all eminently forgivable and forgettable, because the writing is just gorgeous and heartfelt, and the wit, humor, melancholy, nobility, and, crowning all, the *grief* are given free rein to grace every page and turn it into a marvelous thing. It's not as great a literary achievement as Musil's; it's not as cohesive and penetrating as Broch's; but it's more moving than both, and, in many ways, more beautiful while being just as true—and in the end that puts it right up there with both of them on the *Masterpiece* shelf where it so rightfully belongs.

Zanna says

It's very difficult to describe the pitch of this book, its approach to the military and administrative life of the Austro-Hungarian empire in the years before WWI. I'm tempted to use the word 'camp', which Susan Sontag delineates as 'failed seriousness'. It is not quite satire, because it is too sincere, but it is certainly not serious

in the sense except in its pathetic, touching sincerity. All of the Trottas and almost everyone else in the book has this quality. The significant exception is the generous, sensible, hedonistic (I use these words carefully) nobleman Chojnicki, who, in more than one sense sees the gathering storm and its consequences. If it were not for Chojnicki, the book might be unbearable; the intellectual and emotional balance of the book hangs on him as on a tent pole.

While it is Chojnicki's clear-sightedness that throws the rest of the cast into campy tragic silliness, he himself actively facilitates the carnival atmosphere, relieving the corrosive boredom of military life in peacetime and keeping up the appearance of high old world civilisation in the manner of a string quartet playing on the doomed deck of the Titanic. On the night that the news of Franz Ferdinand's assassination reaches them (I trust this isn't a spoiler), our protagonist Carl Joseph and his colleagues are capering about festooned with paper garlands at one of Chojnicki's parties, and as the band drunkenly play Chopin's Funeral March, the guests dance. This is the decadence that the war crunched up and swallowed, along with Herr Trotta's pantomime of self adornment, along with a generation of men across Europe. Roth's painting of this world is ridiculous, and never even slightly sentimental, but it is impossible not to be moved by it.

Roth's rendering of physical detail is exquisite, even excessive; I feel it's a modernist device. His lengthy dwellings on food and dinners are as lavish as Woolf's, if less frequent. However, as Michael Hofman's introduction points out, The Radetzky March is full of action, of meaningful plot. Rather than expanding days or hours like Woolf and other modernists, Roth spans generations like a Russian classic, with the result that it feels like an epic. Actually though, it's not a very long book; it has the tragic brevity of a meagre life cut short.

What kept me hungrily reading was Roth's ability to capture the ineffable feelings of transcendence that attends pivotal and sometimes trivial moments of life by dramatising their attire, their context. Somehow he finds the right landscape feature, the right constellation of sense data, to make the sudden overwhelming symphony of emotion audible to me. I take off my hat to Hofman for his luminous, crystalline translation. The fruit of his labour is poetry.

The glimpses of Jewish lives offered in this book made me urgently want to read more of Roth's reflections on this subject. I am usually fascinated by books from the pre-war and inter-war periods (like Patrick Leigh Fermor's youthful memoirs) because they depict this glorious tapestry of life in Europe that was utterly destroyed. The Radetzky March focusses on the military pageantry of the last days of Austria-Hungary, but it contains, like precious stones, in the obscure yearnings of Carl Joseph, whose life is so disastrously misdirected, flashes of lives not woven of pomp and parade, about which Roth is almost romantically solicitous of sympathy, the lives of peasants and workers, culturally diverse, oppressed, mysterious to officialdom. Carl Joseph's manservant Onufri and his (grand)father's butler Jacques read, superficially, like fairytale cliche, but there is an undertow so treacherous and powerful that Roth has to break the wall to begin to express it. These types exist, he insists, and the caricatures of them in literature are 'bad copies'. Herr Trotta and his son are, finally, morally and intellectually unworthy of those over whom they have power.

[P] says

There is a lot said about the gifted but unappreciated, the genius who dies without recognition, or the capable man who never fulfils his potential. Are these tragedies? Perhaps. But I've often thought the greater sadness, the bigger tragedy, is the simple man, or more specifically, the mediocre man, elevated, despite his lack of abilities, beyond his appropriate station. How does the unimaginative man, the middling man, who has little

of worth to offer, approach a world that expects something worthwhile from him? You might argue that Thomas Mann touched on this somewhat in his great novel *The Magic Mountain*, but Hans Castorp doesn't confront the world, and by extension his own lack of ability, but rather he avoids it, he hides from it in a Swiss sanatorium, and in an illusion of ill-health.

Joseph Roth's masterpiece, *The Radetzky March*, deals with three generations of the ordinary, but suddenly favoured, Trotta family. The first, Captain Joseph, saves the life of the Austro-Hungarian Emperor, Franz Joseph I [you'll have some trouble keeping all the Franz's and Joseph's straight in your head!], at the battle of Solferino.

[The Battle of Solferino by Carlo Bossoli]

As a reward, the Emperor awards him the medal of Maria Theresa, promotes him, and ultimately ennobles him. However, far from pleasing Trotta, these gifts appear to burden him; as does his standing as a hero. With his promotion, and new status, comes certain expectations; expectations from which he shrinks. In a key scene, Trotta one day spies a propagandistic story in his son's school book, which exaggerates his bravery in the battle of Solferino. To everyone's surprise, he is livid and wants the story to be removed. On the surface his behaviour may seem to be about honour and truth, but, for me, it is about hiding, about wanting to avoid the spotlight, and about not being able to accept an image that is the opposite of how you see yourself. In the same situation a brilliant man would have made the most of the opportunities afforded him – his promotion and status as a hero etc – but Trotta is an average man, the simple son of a Slovenian peasant.

One of the most interesting aspects of the novel is how Trotta's actions during the battle of Solferino, and his subsequent ascension, do not only profoundly alter his own situation. In a kind of butterfly effect, Roth shows how one incident can have far-reaching consequences, can influence the lives of numerous people, across generations. Even his relationship with his own father is changed by it, is, in fact, made impossible. Not long after his promotion, he goes to visit the old man, who, in turn, does not really know how to approach his now-famous son. Trotta wishes that he would speak Slovenian to him, as he used to, even though he – the son – barely understands the language, but, alas, he does not oblige. At the end of the visit, Trotta reflects that this will be the last time he will see his father; an unbridgeable gap has opened up between them. There is a lot of this sort of thing in the book, episodes involving this emotionally-stunted family fumbling through their interactions with each other, wary of intimacy, unable or unwilling to say what ought to be said or do what ought to be done. I found it incredibly moving.

To my mind, much of *The Radetzky March* is about identity, about what defines you as a person. This is particularly true in relation to Carl Joseph, the hero's grandson, who dominates the greater part of the novel. While the grandfather is, in a sense, trying to avoid an identity that is being thrust upon him, Carl Joseph is trying to find one. Joseph Trotta is the hero; Carl Joseph is merely the relative. This title, the grandson of the hero of Solferino, weighs heavily upon him [he is almost haunted by a painting of the old man], and, he feels, he can't live up to it. As expected, he joins the military, but he isn't suited to the army at all; he doesn't look good on horseback, is awkward when put in positions of responsibility, and fails miserably the one time he is called to lead his men in a confrontation.

Due to his awkwardness, Carl Joseph struggles to make friends, and it is significant that the one that he does make, Dr Demant, is also an outsider. Demant is a Jew, and, like Carl Joseph, feels out of place; he has, other officers say, the most unmilitary bearing. As his story progresses young Trotta is plunged more and more

into crisis, a professional crisis, a literal crisis, involving a duel and large debts, but more so a crisis of the soul. At one stage he gets himself a mistress, Frau Von Taussig, and, for a brief time, while wearing his civilian clothes, he feels like a free man, like someone. It is worth noting that one of the central principles of the army is a lack of individuality; rules, procedures, orders dominate; the self is negated; not only that but, as noted, in the army he is the grandson of the hero of Solferino; it is only in civvies that he feels comfortable, or happy. Yet this brief period of happiness does not last; Carl Joseph is a tragic figure; he will not win the day. He cannot, for he lacks the mental wherewithal to save himself. He is, unfortunately, a poor dumb schmo.

It ought to be pretty clear by now that *The Radetzky March* is not a particularly lighthearted, joyous book. Beautiful? Yes, very, but there's very little happiness. It may, therefore, not surprise you to learn that a lot of people perish throughout the 350 or so pages. [Indeed, it is very clever that a book so concerned with death begins with a man's life being saved.] The high body count serves, I think, two purposes. Dealing with death in a healthy way is, of course, difficult for most of us; but for the Trottas, for unimaginative men who do not know how to live themselves, and certainly do not know how to grieve, it is impossible. So you could see Roth's use of death as simply one more thing to throw at his emotionally crippled central characters; it brings into even sharper focus their sad inability to deal with the vagaries of existence. Furthermore, the novel is set in the late 1800's and early 1900's, and so the preoccupation with death also serves to foreshadow the impending Great War, by which I mean, of course, World War One, where hundreds of thousands of people will die, when such issues as what it means to be an individual, Carl Joseph's chief concern, will become meaningless. That is, perhaps, the most heartbreak thing of all about *The Radetzky March*; that, throughout most of it, one is aware that very soon none of this will matter, all of this agonising about identity, honour, duty, family, etc, will be washed away in chaos and blood.

William2.1 says

I want to single out *The Radetzky March* as my favorite book of 2011. It is the story of the fall of the Austrian Empire as reflected in the fortunes of the Trotta family through three generations. Our story largely centers around young Carl Joseph von Trotta of the third generation and his father, the District Captain of W. To get to that story, however, Roth compresses into the first 35 pages or so, a beautifully patterned and nuanced story of Carl Joseph's forebears. That is, first the story of Joseph Trotta, the peasant from Sipolje, who, on saving the life of the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph I at the Battle of Solferino is raised to the rank of captain and ennobled, and his father. (Carl Joseph's great grandfather.)

Carl Joseph von Trotta is a sensitive fellow capable of deep love and friendship whose time in the Army is a mistake from the start. We watch him endure his upbringing by a widower father who has even less intellectual acumen than himself. Carl Joseph is the grandson of the Hero of Solferino. He cannot sit a horse, nevertheless he is in cavalry. He is allowed to skate through academic challenges he would otherwise fail. Opportunities are open to him that his fellow officers could never attain. We see the empire though his eyes as one of empty pomp and immense drunkenness which leads to a terrible entropy that pervades everything. The multi-cultural empire's time is passing. No longer will such a vast heterogeneous stew of ethnic groups (Magyars, Poles, Ukranians, Czechs, Serbs, Croats, Romanians, etc. representing all three monotheistic faiths) allow themselves to be artificially melded together by foreign force. We are at the onset of the age of nationalism and sectarian violence. Hitler and Stalin are in the wings.

This political context is important but it is the narrative of the Trottas that brings it home and gives it tragic

immediacy. Everyone is so locked into their roles. When Carl Joseph writes his father to announce the news that he will leave the army, his father's world, much like the son's, comes tumbling down. All the assumptions about the correct path to dignity and honor are changing. Indeed, the District Captain simply looks up one day and notices that everything *has* changed--and he never saw it coming. The District Captain then says something that for me encapsulated the thrust of the whole novel. When he is told by a club crony, Dr. Skowronnek, that he is starting to play chess like a champion, he says: "Maybe I could have become one!" Dr. Skowronnek then sums it all up:

Things were different back then, he says. Now not even the Kaiser bears responsibility for the Monarchy. Why it even looks as though God himself no longer wishes to bear responsibility for the world. It was easier in those days. Everything was so secure. Every stone lay in its place. The streets of life were well paved. Secure roofs rested on the walls of the houses. But today, Herr District Captain, the stones of the street lie askew and confused, and in dangerous heaps, and the roofs have holes, and the rain falls into the houses, and everyone has to know on his own what street he is taking and what kind of house he is moving into. When your late father said you would become a public official rather than a farmer, he was right. You became a model official. But when you told your own son he had to become a soldier, you were wrong. He is not a model soldier.

It is about this time, too, rather late in the book, that the tone turns elegaic. It's as if we're seeing the past glories of the Empire rushing past like the lives of the dying are said to do. From the start the writing is vivid and sustained over great stretches in a way that seems almost miraculous. Highly recommended.

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????????? Ταμετο?ρο Αμ **says**

«...και αν το εμβατ?ριο Ραντ?τσκυ χαρακτηρ?στηκε ως
[η Μασσαλι?τιδα του συντηρητισμο?], ο συντηρητισμ?ς του Ροτ ?χει μια γε?ση γλυκι? και πικρ?
ταντ?χρονα, μια γε?ση που δεν αφ?νει καν?ναν ασυγκ?νητο».

Αυτ? το λογοτεχνικ? αριστο?ργημα του 20ου αι?να γρ?φτηκε στις αρχ?ς της δεκαετ?ας του 1930.

Πραγματε?εται την ιστορ?α παρακμ?ς σε σ?γχρονο παρελθ?ν της οικογ?νειας Τρ?τα, μ?σα απο
τρεις γενι?ς (1859-1916). Καθ?ς και την επικε?μενη παρακμ? και κατ?ρρευση της Αυστροουγγρικ?ς
αυτοκρατορ?ας, με κληρονομι?ς και αξ?ες που εξακολουθο?ν να επηρε?ζουν αυθεντικ?ς
κοινων?ες εως σ?μερα.

?λο το βιβλ?ο διαπν?εται απο μια σκοτειν?, μελαγχολικ?, κεν?, μ?ταια και αναπ?φευκτη δι?θεση
που επηρε?ζει ?μεσα και επ?δυνα την ψυχολογ?α του αναγν?στη.
Δεν γ?νεται να ξεφ?γεις απο τη συναισθηματικ? φ?ρτιση που προκαλε? η α?ριστη, θλιβερ? και
εντον?τατα λυρικ? αφ?γηση του συγγραφ?α.

Παρακολουθε?ς ?να ορμητικ? ποτ?μι μν?μης κοινωνικ?ν-πολιτικ?ν και πολλαπλ?ν συνδυαστικ?ν
γεγον?των και καταστ?σεων, που παρασ?ρει την ανθρωπ?τητα, με μη αναστρ?ψιμη πορε?α, στην
τελικ? πτ?ση, στον καταρρ?χτη της παγκ?σμιας ιστορ?ας.

Εκπληκτικ? γραφ?, θλιβερ? και τραγικ? μορφη. Συγκινητικ? και ?κρως επικ?νδυνη.

Οι χαρακτ?ρες ?ψογα δομημ?νοι και ποιοτικ? ακ?ραιοι σε ?τι εκπροσωπο?v, μπορο?v ε?κολα να ταυτιστο?v με τον αναγν?στη.

Απο τον πιστ?, γλυκ? και αφοσιωμ?νο υπηρ?τη της οικογ?νειας Τρ?ττα, μ?χρι την απεικ?νιση των τελευτα?ων χρ?νων εν?ς γερασμ?νου και ?ρρωστου πνευματικ? αυτοκρ?τορα.

Εν?ς καταρρακωμ?νου και ξεμωραμ?νου στρατηλ?τη που ?σο εξελ?σσεται η μυθιστοριογραφ?α γ?νεται ?λο και πιο σημαντικ?ς χαρακτ?ρας.

Οι Τρ?ττα, απο ?να τυχα?ο γεγον?ς αν?ρχονται κοινωνικ? και οικονομικ?.

Ο παππο?ς, ?νας ασ?μαντος Σλοβ?νος αγρ?της σ?ζει τη ζω? του χαρισματικ? αυτοκρ?τορα Φραγκ?σκου Ιωσ?φ σε κ?ποια μ?χη και χρ?ζεται Βαρ?νος.

Ο γιος και ο εγγον?ς του ?ρωα αποκτο?v αυτ? τη βαρι? τιμητικ? κληρονομι? και συνεχ?ζουν την παρακμιακ? πορε?α της ζω?ς τους παρ?λληλα με τον ξεπεσμ? της αυτοκρατορ?ας.

Ο Καρλ Γι?ζεφ (εγγον?ς) σε αντ?θεση με παππο? και πατ?ρα δεν ?θελε να ε?ναι Αυστριακ?ς στρατιωτικ?ς, υπηρ?της και υπ?λληλος της αυτοκρατορ?ας των Αψβο?ργων.

Ε?ναι αναγκασμ?νοι ?μως, ο ?νας, μ?σα απο τις προσωπικ?ς αποτυχ?ες του αλλο?, να αποδεχτο?v με σκληρ?ς συν?πειες, τις αλλαγ?ς του κ?σμου και των αξι?v που π?στεψαν και τ?μησαν, μ?χρι την τελικ? κατ?ρρευση.

Ορ?σημο αποτελε? η ?ναρξη του
? Παγκοσμ?ου Πολ?μου,
?μως η αποδ?μηση των φρονημ?των της ζω?ς τους και η κατ?ρρευση των Αψβο?ργων
αποτυπ?νονται αριστουργηματικ? απο τον συγγραφ?α μ?χρι την τελευτα?α σελ?δα.

Ο Ροτ ε?ναι μαγευτικ?ς στο να καταγρ?φει την βαθμια? απεικ?νιση της επικε?μενης καταστροφ?ς και του θλιβερο? διχασμο? αν?μεσα στους υποταγμ?νους λαο?ς του Αυτοκρ?τορα, οι οπο?οι εν?νονται μ?νο απο το κοιν? α?σθημα μ?σους προς τους Εβρα?ους.

Σχεδ?ν ?λοι οι πρωταγωνιστ?ς ε?ναι αρσενικ? γ?νους, το εμβατ?ριο Ραντ?τσκυ αποτελε? επαν?ληψη τραγικ?ς νοσταλγ?ας και ο θ?νατος που κυριαρχε? στην εξ?λιξη της ιστορ?ας μας δεν δ?νει ποτ? θ?ση στην χαρ? της ν?ας ζω?ς.
Ο ?ρωτας πα?ζει ρ?λο παρασκηνιακ? και αποτυχημ?νο.

Συγκλονιστικ?ς ο εσωτερικ?ς μον?λογος του πατ?ρα Φραντς φον Τρ?ττα (η πιο τραγικ? φιγο?ρα της ιστορ?ας)για τον γιο του Καρλ Γι?ζεφ.
Οταν πια οι βαρι?ς αλυσ?δες που ?σερναν π?ντα -ως εξ?χοντα πρ?σωπα- της π?στης, του πατριωτισμο? και της οικογενειακ?ς τιμ?ς, χαλαρ?νουν και π?φτουν αφ?νοντας π?σω παρ?σημα, απ?γνωση και θ?νατο.

«... η παραφροσ?νη δεν σ?μαινε τ?ποτα το τρομακτικ?, μολον?τι βρισκ?ταν πρ?τη φορ? σε φρενοκομε?ο. Τρομακτικ?ς ?ταν μ?νο ο θ?νατος. Κρ?μα! Σκ?φτηκε. Αν ε?χε τρελαθε? ο Καρλ Γι?ζεφ, εγ? θα μπορο?σα να τον φ?ρω στα συγκαλ? του. Κι αν π?λι δεν τα κατ?φερνα, θα 'ρχομουν κ?θε μ?ρα να τον βλ?πω. [...] μπορε?ς να κοιτ?ζεις και μ?σα σε παρανο?κ? μ?τια! Φτ?νει να ε?ναι τα μ?τια του γιο? σου. Εντυχε?ς οι πατερ?δες που οι γιο? τους ?χουν τρελαθε?».

Η ?ντονη α?σθηση του συγγραφ?α για μια αναχρονιστικ? αποσ?νθεση προκαλε? δ?ος. Μια αποσ?νθεση που υπαιν?σσεται και μεταδ?δεται μ?σα απο τους χαρακτ?ρες σε ?ναν κ?σμο που επιβι?νει χορε?οντας προς την ?βυσσο.

*Κ?θε αρνητικ?ς συμβολισμ?ς ? επικ?νδυνος παραλληλησμ?ς σχετικ? με «εμβατ?ρια», «εθνικιστικ? ιδε?δη», «?ναρχοσοσιαλιστικ?» και «φ?λομοναρχικ?» ιδεολογικ? πιστε?ω του συγγραφ?α, που ?σως ενοχλ?σουν κ?ποια ευνουχισμ?να μυαλ?, ειλικριν? με αφ?νουν παγερ? αδι?φορη και δεν απασχολο?ν το γνωσιολογικ? και αναγνωστικ? μου πεδ?ο.

Ως εκ το?του σχ?λια και απ?ψεις σχετικ? με την δρ?ση του Ραντ?τσκυ ? μιλιταριστικ? και εθνικιστικ? συμπερ?σματα που καταπν?γουν τις λα?κ?ς επαναστ?σεις θα σβ?νονται αναπ?ντητα. Ευχαριστ?!!

???????????????????

Καλ? αν?γνωση!
Πολλο?ς ασπασμο?ς!!

Marita says

A young Slovenian steps out of line during the Battle of Solferino, places his lowly hands on the Emperor Franz Joseph, and hurls him to the ground. Will he get the death penalty? No, he is rewarded as he himself has just taken the bullet meant for the Emperor. He is now Captain Joseph Trotta and ennobled by the addition of 'von Sipolje' to his name, and he has received a decoration: the Order of Maria Theresa. He has just changed his family's future.

Joseph marries, has children. However, due to an event that displeases him he decides that his son shall not have a military career, and so Franz, having initially commenced with a career as a lawyer, obtains political office and becomes district captain. Franz would have preferred a military career.

Carl Joseph von Trotta, son of Franz continues the family's military aspirations. He is a pupil at a military school. At home during vacation Carl Joseph's life follows a strict regimented pattern. Nothing changes. Everything runs with clockwork precision in the Trotta household. Carl Joseph goes for walks with the idea of sauntering and relaxing, but cannot help himself marching instead as if he were marching to **The Radetzky March** which is regularly played: "*Every one of these outdoor concerts – they took place under the Herr District Captain's balcony – began with 'The Radetzky March'. Though all the band members were so thoroughly familiar with it that they could have played it without a conductor, in the dead of night, and in their sleep, the kapellmeister nevertheless required them to read every single note from the sheets.*" "*The rugged drums rolled, the sweet flutes piped, and the lovely cymbals shattered.*"

In this regimented world of Carl Joseph's there are strict rules of behaviour and codes of honour. It is a time when the slightest insult results in a duel and death. But times are changing. It is the start of the twentieth century, people are able to communicate by telephone, universal suffrage is introduced. Even these so-called 'codes of honour' are open to question.

This novel reminds me of some of the Japanese novels I have read, such as the works of Natsume Soseki. Like its Japanese counterparts this novel explores a world in which sweeping transitions take place and values change. In early twentieth century Japan underwent major changes during the Meiji era, and Japanese

authors wrote about young men with one foot in the old system and the other foot in the new one. Here Carl Joseph finds himself in a similar situation. As a young lieutenant he finds himself posted to an area bordering Russia. And while he is on this edge of the world, the world is on the cusp of major events and change. In Vienna and in St Petersburg careful preparations are already beginning to take place. *"By this time, the high-placed gentlemen in Vienna and St Petersburg were already starting to prepare for the Great War."* There are whispers that the monarchy is doomed.

Back at the Trotta estate, old Herr Franz von Trotta is perplexed and annoyed that his world is also changing. Small changes are taking place in his household, but they reflect the big ones on the horizon. To Trotta senior these petty inconveniences are a personal affront. But he too comes to feel that far reaching changes are afoot. And so his life which for many years had followed the exact same pattern is now different. *"He had been forced to discard all sorts of long-ingrained habits."*

Even natural elements contribute to the feeling of coming doom: a physical storm looms, and chattering birds are replaced by squawking ravens.

Soon all that is needed is the spark that will ignite World War I...

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Quotes

"Their ears were not sharp enough to catch the whirring gears of the great hidden mills that were already grinding out the Great War."

"I'm going to be a hero out of stupidity, according to the code of honour and military regulations. A hero!"

"Now the district captain felt that his house was changed: empty and no longer homely. He no longer found his mail next to his breakfast tray, and he also hesitated to give his orderly new instructions."

"The district captain was sobered by the night wind, but a vague fear nestled in his heart. He saw the world going under, and it was his world."

"What good was a revolver? They saw no bears and no wolves in the borderland. All they saw was the collapse of the world!"

"Never before had he had such thoughts! Now they flew to him like a flock of exotic birds, nesting in his brain and fluttering around him nervously."

"He was totally surrounded by revolutionary individuals. He even thought he noticed that they were multiplying unnaturally, in a way that was not suitable for human beings."

"He had lost his meticulous sense of the passing of time ever since he had given up several old habits. For after all, the hours and the days were meant precisely to maintain those habits, and now the hours and the days resembled empty vessels that could no longer be filled and that need not be bothered with any more."

"But between lightning and thunder, eternity itself was crammed in."

"Instead of the familiar twittering of birds that greeted every new morning, he heard the black croaking of hundreds of ravens."

“Some nocturnal bird shrieked. The bats rustled. The dogs howled.”

Brina says

DNF-- subject matter is slow and boring to me. It is regarded as a modern classic but this is a book that I would slog through and would take away from other books on my tbr. I hope the others participating in the buddy read I was in enjoy it better than I did.

Sara says

The first thing I did before starting this book was go online and listen to the Vienna Philharmonic playing the Radetzky March. It was exactly the right background music for this turbulent tale of three generations of the Trotta family, part of the failing Austro-Hungarian Empire. Roth's descriptions of these men and their lives was fascinating, the details exquisite.

The military and its draconian codes of honor were an everyday part of so many lives. Death was a harpy waiting in the wings always. But there was also the genuine devotion and friendship, particularly that exhibited by the servants, Jacques and Onufri, that served as a testimony to how much this society order meant to those who lived within it.

“There were no bears or wolves in the border region. There was just the end of the world!” reflects the District Commissioner on visiting his son, Carl Joseph, at his outpost near the Russian border. It sums up the book in many ways. These people are all witnessing the end of their world, and it is rotting away slowly and painfully, but there are no obvious predators that they can fight off to save it.

The book is about the end of a way of life, but it is also about the end of a family and the uneasy love of a father and son, in fact of several generations of fathers and sons, who do not truly understand one another. It has the heaviness of a Doctor Zhivago, and that same sense of larger world events overwhelming people and sweeping them along until they disappear into the masses of an unfortunate humanity.

“Yes, it even looks as if God doesn’t want to be responsible for the world anymore. It was easier then! Every stone was in its place. The roads of life were properly paved. There were stout roofs on the walls of the houses. Whereas today, District Commissioner, today the stones are lying all over the roads, and in dangerous heaps some of them, and the roofs are full of holes, and the rain falls into the houses, and it is up to the individual what road he walks, and what house he lives in.”

The world has proceeded from one of order and certainty to one of chaos and questions, and few of those who have position in this society know how to deal with what they are facing. Even the young are bemused and frightened.

I admit to knowing very little of life before World War I in the Austrian Empire. I have always wondered why the assassination of one member of the royal family sparked so much carnage and bloodshed. This book has helped me to see all the pieces of the puzzle and that the assassination itself was just a match set to a fuse that was ready and waiting.

This is a brilliant piece of writing, and while it starts a bit slow, if you slow your mind down to match its pace, it is a worthy endeavor. I can see why it is regarded as a modern classic--it is going to outlast some of its more popular contemporaries.

Jill says

...

So..I mean...

I'm as surprised as you are.

My particular edition of this book, a 1974-yellowed Penguin Modern Classics edition with pages falling out, boasts what is perhaps the most boring back summary ever written:

Grandfather, son and grandson are equally dependent on the [Austro-Hungarian] empire, it begins, the first for his ennoblement; the second for the civil virtues that make him a meticulous servant of admini...oh wait....did everyone STOP READING??! Well I DON'T FRICKIN BLAME YOU this sounds SO BORING. ~Old Europeans fighting wars. The struggle of one generation pushing back at the next. WHITE DUDES. Who cares.

Yeah, well -- and all the better because I picked it up expecting unrelinquishing tedium -- this is one of the best books I have ever read in my goddamn life.

It shows. It does not tell. It is a book that must be read carefully, with attention to detail and gesture, because if you expect obvious expression of anything, you will find none. The power of voice, of character, of shifting narrators and narrative, explodes off the pages. What is magic to one character is hell to another, and in that oh so stereotypically Austrian way, they can never explain what they really mean.

But between the lines, everything bleeds.

You could write a PhD thesis on this book, I thought breathlessly as I rushed to finish it -- you could write so much. You could write about the allegory of the end of empires, the generation gap, the press of progress, the absurdity of war, about death and dignity and honour and antiquated ideals and traditions ----- and you would never even touch all there is. Because this book bleeds. Not because it is pierced with war stories ---- because the emotion -- in a carefully-constructed chapter, a perfectly-placed sentence, a stunning gesture -- will make your heart race. And all that blood has to go somewhere.

I finished this book and I threw it across the room and I cried for ten minutes. My mom laughed at me for the duration as I snapped things like: "FUCK this stupid book it was supposed to be BORING" and "GODDAMN THESE OLD AUSTRIAN MEN" through tears. There is allegory; there is brilliance -- and there is the fire of sobs building at the back of your throat as you finish a book that's wrenched your heart new.

I mean I don't know. What the hell. I am cradling this book in my lap. There is no accounting for expectations.

Diane S ? says

The slow disintegration of an empire, told through the lives of three generations of the Trotta family. All serve the empire in various ways. Narrowly focused lives, regimented, narrow, depending on routine, thrown if anything is out of order. Unemotional, lives dedicated to duty, , and I still something unexpected happens that forces them to change focus, they are very seldom introspective.

All events happening are seen through the eyes of this family. When the second Trotta visits his son at the border, he realizes the empire is diminishing, "Now returning home alone, from a lonesome son and from this borderland, where the collapse of the world could already be seen as one sees a thunderstorm on the edge of the city, whose streets lie still unaware and blissful under a blue sky." Hose posted on the border, wait for a battle that never comes. It is a life of boredom, gambling, drinking and visits to houses of ill repute. They are all just waiting for the end to come, which of course it eventually does with an assassination.

This is a wonderful rendering of a sociological novel. I didn't expect to enjoy this as much as I did. The prose is wonderful, yes sometimes repetitive in thoughts but such is the nature of the men who they belong to. These are men who have a very small imagination, though as the novel goes on one see them change in slow ways, displaying more feelings, but never acting without thinking something through over and over again. Excess feelings are squelched, they have no place in regimented lives. There is humor of an ironic nature, observations that fit the man but struck me as amusing. Of course the Radetzky March is played at various points and even when it seems pointless, the men like the March continue on.

knig says

Well. What can I say? If the world were split into meat and two veg on the one hand, and love pudding on the other, you'd need to be of the former, dangling garden variety to appreciate the Radetzky March, fully: with a Virginia sticking out of your mouth, perhaps.

Barracks, guns, uniforms, wars, duels of honour, brothels, male on male love- ins (true friendship, people, only that!), absence of any female characters (unless they are the wives of Colonels looking for a little diversion during the long afternoons whilst their husbands are practicing drills), and army life exposes, coupled with the main protag's disillusionment with the 'war establishment' makes this the perfect , and topical Christmas gift for a loved man in your life. (Enough with the socks and shirts already) And I'm not even being sarcastic.

Its a perfectly decent book: for a man. Doesn't even have to be a manly man, just as long as hes got his meat and veg he'll do – any man. In fact, all the laudatory blurbs on the inside cover of my edition (written by, ahem, men), call it a masterpiece of 20 c literature. So there you go, a masterpiece, and a perfect present all rolled into one: what more could you want? But, will your man like it? Absolutely! Just look at these testimonials of satisfied users:

<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

I personally ordered ten copies tonight. Don't leave it too late people, you know how xmas has a way of just creeping up.

Steven Godin says

'The world was no longer the old world. It was about to end'

Joseph Roth dazzles with irony and pathos looking at the dying Austro-Hungarian Empire through the eyes of three generations of the Trotta family, a once proud dynasty devoted to King and Country that had total faith in military life, which slowly starts to disintegrate as times change heading towards the Great War. This had both elements of a sweeping grand epic albeit on a smaller scale that galloped along in tune with its characters, and a sad intimate account of how living in the shadows of past close family can have an effect of trying to leave an important legacy of ones own.

The Radetzky March (Johann Strauss), is used as the dedicated piece of music for the war-horse of the Empire, and is seen as a symbol of greatness within the regiments. The story predominantly looks at the youngest and last member of the Trotta family, Carl Joseph, which he lives paralleled with the glory of his Grandfather, the hero of Solferino, Joseph Trotta, who famously saved the life of the Emperor. After his promotion and ennoblement, Baron Joseph von Trotta degrades into rural obscurity, and stubbornly opposes his son, Franz', who has aspirations to a military career, thus following in fathers footsteps. Franz is a conservative man and pillar to the nation, who takes to his son Carl Joseph better in terms of a military career. The grandson, Carl Joseph, has a character that is very different from his forefathers, that lands himself in bother throughout, consistently with disastrous results.

The life of Carl Joseph is not a happy one, he stands bitterly with a frivolous and doomed generation, where the temptations of the flesh, heavy drinking, dangerous gambling and debts are all to often difficult to stay away from, a relationship with the wife of a police commander would leave him in turmoil, along with an affair with the wife of his best friend, resulting in a senseless duel. It seems as if everything Carl Joseph does, crumbles expeditiously in his hands. He sinks into despondency, becoming old and melancholic before his time, living mostly in an alcoholic daze, burdened with having let his forefathers down. Ending up in a remote military outpost near the border with Russia, Carl Joseph is thrust into action as the Great War breaks out, with the proud Trotta name heading towards triviality.

Roth has clearly put so much effort into The Austro-Hungarian Empire way of life, a world with a clear order, clear rules and tight regulations, and he uses historical persons and events in a most imaginative way with a voice that is always full of compassion, he treats the death of a small thing like a canary with as much feeling as he does with man. I am not entirely sure it worked as the novel I was hoping for, but he puts his heart and soul into writing this, that's definitive.

The fact that those bloody evil Nazis had to prohibit Roth's work because he was of Jewish ancestry is a travesty, and after remained long in obscurity, taking far too long for him to be rehabilitated, I am happy to have finally read what is regarded as his best work.

A vigorous and deep-rooted piece of writing, but layered with a sadness of Roth's own problematic life.

Jan says

Joseph Roth is not as well-known as his Mitteleuropa contemporaries Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig or Robert Musil, but his gem, *The Radetzky March*, is a true masterpiece.

The novel is a beautiful elegy to the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Brodsky said there is a poem on his every page. Roth describes the fall through detailed set pieces of three generations of von Trotta men. There is a dreamlike and sometimes even humorous quality to his compassionate and straight forward descriptions of his characters' lives. He is the kind of writer you can take the time to enjoy every sentence.

Roth, a Ukrainian Jew born near Lvov, grieved the loss of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Empire covered 17 nationalities, the German of the court was spoken by less than a quarter of the population – it was really an early mini-UN. Roth referred to Emperor Franz Josef as a secular pope. There were 200,000 Jews living in Vienna, one minority among many and they were free to enter businesses, government and climb to whatever success they could achieve.

The theme of this novel is the end of an era as it delivers a picture of the death of nineteen century Europe. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had many flaws but it helped to bring Europe 100 years of relative peace following the Napoleonic Wars. Roth had a strong premonition of what was to follow.

He wrote to his friend Zweig and told him:

‘It will have become clear to you now that we are heading for a great catastrophe. Quite apart from our personal situations—our literary and material existence has been wrecked—we are headed for a new war. I wouldn’t give a heller (penny) for our prospects. The barbarians have taken over. Do not deceive yourself. Hell reigns.’

Roth tells us the Hapsburgs outlived the times and the new god was nationalism. When you think about it, the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire unleashed forces that resulted in WWII, concentration camps, the Iron Curtain, and even Sarajevo.

It is hard for us today to imagine what it must have been like in the 1930 in Europe. Roth moved to Paris, maintained friendships with other writers (he himself wrote 13 novels) and drank. He was offered opportunities to leave, but he would not leave his beloved Europe. His wife was institutionalized, he drank himself to death by age 44, and many of his close friends committed suicide.

What relevance does Roth have to us today? In *The Radetzky March*, nearly everyone thought the Empire, their way of life, would go on forever without change. They didn’t notice the threats growing around them, they didn’t adjust.

I think most of us like to believe there is a general trend of ever increasing understanding and tolerance that will naturally continue. Our international organizations and commitment to diplomacy has brought Europe 75 years of relative peace. However, politicians like Trump are able to tap into hidden resentments from those who feel the new world is passing them by and exploit it as a path to power.

Just two weeks ago Viktor Orban, the Hungarian Prime Minister announced 'The era of liberal democracy is over.' Freedom House, an organization that tracks these things, said 2017 marked the 12 consecutive year of decline in global freedom.

Roth is not a philosopher and he offers no solutions, but he warns us that times are always changing, and we need new solutions to the problems that change creates. Especially now that we are linked globally and that technology is driving change ever faster. It is natural for us, like members of the 19th Century Empire, to take present situation for granted and assume we will always have this uneasy peace and this path of increasing tolerance.

Fionnuala says

When my children were very little, one of their favourite games involved sitting on the foam-filled back of the family sofa pretending to be on horseback. They'd perch in a row, one leg on each side and bounce up and down to the rhythm of what they called 'the horsey music'. Whenever I hear The Radetzky March by Johann Strauss, that gorgeous memory comes back in a flash!

My kids were right. That nineteenth century military tune is definitely 'horsey' music! Listen to it yourself. You can hear the high stepping cavalry launching from a trot to a gallop, hooves thundering, nostrils snorting, then wheeling around to gallop back to the starting point before beginning all over again. And you can hear foot soldiers too, standing to attention, clipping their heels, marching forward, swords jangling, sabres rattling, marching, marching, marching.

But for all that it is full of crashing and booming, the clanging and banging, the ringing and jingling of the battle field, it is uplifting music too. You smile, though you are anti-war, you clap your hands and tap your feet, though you think boys should never be sacrificed to meaningless causes.

As I read Joseph Roth's book, I reacted as I react to the Strauss music, uplifted by the spirit of it but downcast by the waste of lives in the service of a monstrous military machine. And Roth's tone throughout the book seems equally ambivalent. He holds the military machine that was the Austro-Hungarian Empire in fierce affection, but at the same time he is absolutely in favour of the ending of the tight control of peoples' minds and lives that such empires were built upon. His nostalgia battles with his humanity, and we hear the sound of that battle right through the book. Rainstorms thunder, train carriages smash and crash against each other, bells peal, bugles blare, the drumbeats of the Radetsky March boom out at regular intervals. And all the while, innumerable clocks count the story down towards the Serbian gunman whose ringing shot will mark the ending of an era.

As I turned the pages, I was reminded of the title of a book I read some years ago, coincidentally by an author whose later books I've been reading recently: Julian Barnes. *The Sense of an Ending* begins with a reference to that same Serbian gunman, and I kept thinking that Barnes' title encapsulates Roth's book perfectly; there is the sense of an ending right from the beginning. Roth never allows us to forget that the book is about 'ending', the ending of a way of thinking, the ending of a way of living, and the ending of millions of lives in a meaningless war.

That Roth conveys all of that while simultaneously offering the reader exuberance, uplifted feelings, and enormous hope in humanity, is the achievement of this incredible book.

I'm very glad to have finally discovered Joseph Roth

Eric says

One of many endorsements that lured me to this, Brodsky's remark that "there is a poem on every page of Roth's" has the ironic effect of making Roth sound like a prose writer prone to elaborate poetic digressions, though, at least in this novel, he's relentlessly focused and economical. By 'poems' Brodsky means imagery whose sharp cut and compression, whose organic and abrupt strangeness ideally fits the swiftness of Roth's narration:

The officers went about like incomprehensible worshippers of some remote and pitiless deity, but also like its gaudily clad and splendidly adorned sacrificial animals.

Further riders vaulted across a line of twenty beer kegs placed bottom to bottom. The horse always neighed as it prepared to jump. The rider came bounding from infinitely faraway; at first a tiny dot, he grew at breakneck speed into a stroke, a body, a rider, became a gigantic mythical bird, half man, half horse, a winged centaur who then, after a successful leap, halted, stock-still, a hundred yards beyond the kegs--a statue, a monument of lifeless matter.

...a reddish stubble stood out on his chin, a small lavish field of tiny lances.

Trotta watches Kapturak pull out a virgin deck of glossy cards from his pocket and place it on the table gingerly, as if to avoid hurting the colorful face of the bottom card.

The oath he had perfunctorily sworn a few times came alive. It rose up, word for word, each word a banner..

The huge golden sun of the Hapsburgs was setting for him, shattered on the ultimate bottom of the universe, splintering into several tiny solar balls that had to shine as independent stars on independent nations.

Being so swift and focused means that Roth could produce a three-generation family novel that clocks in at only 331 pages. A less elegant or disciplined a writer could not have kept a handle on a subject that presents so many opportunities for prolixity. I think Roth could offer an excellent model for contemporary writers who are attracted to the big 19th century saga-subjects--the fate of families, as they change over time and mirror or defy an historical environment--but are pledged to a leaner, more oblique ideal of novelistic form.

Roth's economy obviously leaves out a lot: the three generations of the Trotta men are seen principally through the prism of their military careers, and the vicissitudes of morale and patriotic commitment, rather

than through, say, that of their sexual or religious disposition. Captain Joseph Trotta von Sipolje accidentally finds the dynasty by saving the Kaiser's life in battle, and is knighted into a world he never quite understands for feels at ease in; his son Franz is the short dynasty's apex, a high official who lives and breathes imperial service, whose entire cosmology is the Hapsburg imperial edifice; and then his son, Carl Joseph, a bored young officer whose torpid garrison postings in the long peacetime before WWI make his life nothing but a depressed and disillusioned round of adultery, drinking, and gambling, not to mention romantic nostalgia for the unknown peasants from which his grandfather sprang. There is more to these characters than I've sketched here--but not much more; they are not intricately conflicted people. Fortunately the narrow set of themes that Roth threads through their lives happen to be richly suggestive ones: the sudden mutations of ambition and expectation a family undergoes when its status is raised (or lowered); the persistence, nonetheless, of certain vestigial manners and traits into the new social sphere; and state service as an assimilative engine, a leveller and neutralizer, of contrasting ethnicities. Each Trotta is heavily symbolic, but symbolic of very interesting things.

Oh, and the translation: Carl Joseph's fellow officers often speak with a twangy, folksy belligerence that reminded me of old gunslinger movies, and his orderly, written by Roth as a Ukrainian peasant, occasionally breaks his servile silence with pure Cockney expressions.

Lobstergirl says

When I picked this up at a sidewalk sale, I'd heard of it, and its author, but several novelists named Roth were swirling around in my head (not Philip, I know him well). For example, I didn't know Henry from Joseph. Maybe those were the only two swirling.

Joseph Roth was a Jewish Austrian, born in East Galicia in 1894. He served in the Habsburg army in the First World War; who knows, perhaps that's why he already looked like an old man at age 26:

He lived and worked in Vienna and Berlin, and when Hitler took over in 1933, presciently fled to Paris, where his alcoholism took over. I was reading *The Habsburgs: Embodying Empire* at the same time as *The Radetzky March*, and its author cites a story in which Roth's friends, desperately worried about his alcohol intake and knowing how he revered the Austrian emperors, obtained an audience for him with Otto, son of Karl (the last Emperor of Austria). "In his best Franz Joseph manner, Otto barked, "Roth, I, as your emperor, order you to cease drinking." The author, standing at attention was shocked, but stammered his agreement and left the room." Roth couldn't keep his promise and died in 1939. His wife, who had been mentally ill and hospitalized, was euthanized by the Nazis.

The Radetzky March tells the story of the Trotta family, whose grandfather saves the life of the Emperor Franz Joseph at the Battle of Solferino. This is an honor that the family will carry for the next three generations, passed down to the severely disciplined Franz Trotta, a District Commissioner, and his dissolute son Carl Joseph, who serves first in the cavalry and then in the infantry. Interestingly (I always find these serendipitous connections interesting), earlier this month I read another novel (view spoiler), *One of Ours* by Willa Cather. The Emperor is a character (albeit a minor one) in the novel, and all three male Trottas will

meet him. The lives of the Trottas mirror the life of the Austrian empire. The tone of the novel becomes increasingly elegiac. When (view spoiler)

The Radetzky March, a rousing number by Johann Strauss Sr., is played every morning by a military band outside District Commissioner Trotta's house in his small Moravian town. (Field Marshal Radetzky was an Austrian general and military hero of the Napoleonic Wars and the Italian campaigns.)

Here's an interesting thing: a novel by a Jewish author in which the protagonists are not Jewish. (There is a Jewish character, the regimental surgeon, Dr. Max Demant, who becomes Carl Joseph's best friend before a bad thing happens.) Also of note: the relative lack of women in the novel. There are no Trotta women; at least, they die young. There are no daughters or sisters. The novel's only females are the married Frauen Carl Joseph has affairs with, and the District Commissioner's housekeeper, whom he can't stand.

Roth's style is unobtrusive but can also be poignant:

In those days before the Great War when the events narrated in this book took place, it had not yet become a matter of indifference whether a man lived or died. When one of the living had been extinguished another did not at once take his place in order to obliterate him: there was a gap where he had been, and both close and distant witnesses of his demise fell silent whenever they became aware of his gap. When fire had eaten away a house from the row of others in a street, the burnt-out space remained long empty. Masons worked slowly and cautiously. Close neighbors and casual passers-by alike, when they saw the empty space, remembered the aspect and walls of the vanished house. That was how things were then. Everything that grew took its time in growing and everything that was destroyed took a long time to be forgotten. And everything that had once existed left its traces so that in those days people lived on memories, just as now they live by the capacity to forget quickly and completely.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 4* of five

The Publisher Says: The book description from Amazon is unusually cryptic. It says:

The Radetzky March, Joseph Roth's classic saga of the privileged von Trotta family, encompasses the entire social fabric of the Austro-Hungarian Empire just before World War I. The author's greatest achievement, *The Radetzky March* is an unparalleled portrait of a civilization in decline, and as such, a universal story for our times.

My Review: The Trotta family, beneficiaries of the gratitude of the most inept politician and soldier ever to lead an empire, rise to dizzying social heights based on a misunderstanding of an actual brave and generous act. The First Baron saves the Emperor's life by knocking the fool off of his horse in the course of losing a battle. The Emperor's gift of a title to his Slovenian savior sets in motion a long, slow decline and fall, paralleling the Empire's own fate.

The Second Baron, excited by Papa's rep as a war hero and having no other information about the subject than other peoples' gossip, wants to be a cavalry officer like his papa. Papa, who was actually an infantry lieutenant and who is revolted by the gossipy fate of his deed, refuses either to discuss the matter or to allow his son into the military. So the second baron becomes a bureaucrat ruling the lives of people he feels superior to. He and the rest of the Trotta family are firmly convinced they are to the manor born. Papa sighs

to himself, keeps his lip zipped, and dies.

The Baron-in-waiting becomes the cavalry officer his papa wanted to be. What a complete wastrel this goofball is. He truly buys in heavily to the privilege and prerogatives of being titled and in the Army. YUCKAPOOVICH. And then, in the course of duty, the scales fall from Lieutenant Trotta's eyes. The story of how that happens is a spoiler, so I have to leave it out of this review, except to say that it was at this point that my flagging interest in finishing this tome woke right back up and I wanted to read more.

I read the ending of the book in a rush, saddened and hurting for the Second Baron whose life was ending as his world was too. It was 1916, the Empire's effective end, and it is told in the simplest and most moving terms, in a scene of touching misdirected loyalty and typically unanswered love.

Joachim Neugroschel translated the edition I read. It was a pleasure to read...when the story could be bothered to perform its parlor tricks to keep me interested. There are stretches of the Second Baron's life that made me want to scrub my eyelids with witch hazel to tighten them into the open position. But as I read on, lulled by the gentle rocking of the style-train Roth sent me to war aboard, I realized that this, the warm velour first-class seat in the wood-lined first-class compartment, was a comfortable place to be, and I was content to trust the train's course would end in a place I'd want to be.

It did. It's a pleasure to have taken the journey at last.

Candi says

4.5 stars

This classic tale of the end of an era, the decline of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the start of the Great War, is one that deserves a time of reflection after reading the last page. It's not a tome by any means, coming in at less than 400 pages, but it is nearly epic in scope when one considers that it seems to take in the entirety of a way of life, a civilization that is doomed. Like a fine red wine, I needed to leave this book to sit for a while, and it has indeed grown markedly more satisfying. The writing is excellent and Joseph Roth bares the souls of his protagonists, namely the district captain Herr von Trotta and his son, Carl Joseph.

Descendants of the Hero of Solferino, a Slovenian peasant knighted for saving the life of the Kaiser during the Battle of Solferino, the Trottas are now an aristocratic family. Upon the insistence of the Hero himself, the son Franz von Trotta obtains a political office as a district commissioner. Likewise, district captain Franz von Trotta chooses the career for his own son; therefore young Carl Joseph attends military school and is awarded with a lieutenant's commission, despite the fact he 'distinguished' himself as perhaps mediocre at best. The district captain's life is steeped in tradition. He follows the same routine each day, he is waited on by the devoted servant, Jacques, he wears his whiskers *"as proof of his dynastic conviction"*, and he does not exhibit outward signs of affection towards his son either in public or in private. The 'Radetzky March', a march composed by Johann Strauss Sr. and well-known among the Austrian regiments, features prominently in both the father and son's lives as a symbol of the era in which they were born.

"The rugged drums rolled, the sweet flutes piped, and the lovely cymbals shattered. The faces of all the spectators lit up with pleasant and pensive smiles, and the blood tingled in their legs. Though standing, they thought they were already marching. The younger girls held their breath and opened their lips. The more mature men hung their heads and recalled their maneuvers. The elderly ladies sat in the neighboring park,

their small gray heads trembling. And it was summer."

As he sits on his balcony listening to Kapellmeister Nechwal's band perform the famous march week after week, the district captain fails to recognize the whisper of things to come in the empire. Only when his own regulated life starts to slowly deteriorate in parallel with the gradual decay of his homeland does Herr von Trotta begin to perceive changes on the horizon. Lieutenant Carl Joseph von Trotta, with the portrait of his grandfather the Hero of Solferino always in his mind and the sounds of The Radetzky March lingering in his ears, suffers from a different sort of foreboding. A young man completely out of his element as a soldier, Carl Joseph yearns for friendship, love and freedom to do as he pleases, not as his father commands. And yet, his sense of duty to father and grandfather compels him to remain in a position that leads him to unhappiness and one disaster on the heels of another. When he is forced to transfer to a remote outpost near the Russian border, the young lieutenant is pursued by his fate and the destiny of the crumbling Austro-Hungarian Empire.

"Any stranger coming into 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, not only because they were used to sensing future things but also because they could see the omens of doom every day with their own eyes."

There is so much more that could be said about this brilliant novel, but there is no way I could succinctly or eloquently express all that Joseph Roth managed to convey within these pages. It is not an easy read, but a highly rewarding one. If you are at all inclined to invest some additional time and contemplation to learning about a period that seemed to simultaneously stand still and yet in the blink of an eye hurl the world into one of the greatest wars of all time, then I would recommend you grab a copy of this. Reminiscent in tone to some of the great Russian classics, **The Radetzky March** will likewise endure the test of time.

"So strange, so mutable, and so confused is the human soul."
