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The Cliché of the Melancholy East-Central European in Postmodern British Literature

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Abstract. Postmodern British novels about East-Central Europe use the cliché of a melancholy Easterner to characterize this geocultural zone. This literary cliché dates back to Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Among many others, the melancholy cliché reveals the in-betweenness of East-Central Europe which can be understood both on a cultural and on a racial level. The figure of the lonely monster also suggests an objectified existence which is perceived as falling out of the space of linear modern time. Rose Tremain's *The Road Home* (2007) and Bruce Chatwin's *Utz* (1989) contain melancholy East-Central Europe representations which investigate post-socialist concerns, such as economic migration or troubled cultural memory. Melancholy is

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inherent in the creation of a modern self both as a mental state accompanying solitary thinking and as a subversive force denying fundamental meaning. The mapping of this cliché has a meta-cultural relevance, since both melancholy and the category of cliché represent anti-Modern forces thus characterizing the literary East-Central Europe image.

Key Words. Melancholy, literary representation of East-Central Europe, Postmodern British novels, Modernity, cliché, cultural identity

"In Europe, happiness stops at Vienna. Beyond, misery upon misery, since the beginning"
(Emile Cioran, 2012: 118)

The shadow of a melancholy East-Central European figure was first conjured in British literature in the figure of Bram Stoker's Count Dracula. He was the first lonely and sad character who represented the cliché which continues to have an impression on British literary depictions of East-Central Europe. Dracula's figure had a long-lasting impact on the structural melancholy deeply ingrained in the historical and cultural identity of the countries of this area. Certainly, the figure of the lonely vampire coming from the fringes of civilization, sad and fearful at the same time underwent the process of becoming a cliché during the past century not only in literature but also in films and popular culture. Loneliness, sadness, vampirism as well as contact with Britain took on new meanings in contemporary fiction. Postmodern British novels present new forms and contexts in which this cliché of a melancholy East-Central Europe can appear.

Since its origins, deeply rooted in blocks of words used in early printing technique, clichés are bound to Modernity, and can be said to be the product of Modernity. Zijderveld claims, clichés are symptoms of Modernity (1979: 15). If this is so, they are rather symptoms of the crisis of Modernity, just as repetition of the same signals the crisis of originality. Ever since then, intellectuals have waged a war against clichés wanting to eliminate them by the power of critique. However, it is not an easy task, as clichés tend to resist theorization in philosophy as well as in literary theory. There is certainly a general consensus in critical literature that clichés mark bad quality in literature, lack of thoughts in discourse, and dead metaphors in texts. The concept of cliché tends to refer to verbal output more than its synonym, the stereotype which is a standardized mental picture. However, there is talk about mental

clichés as well. Martin Amis dissolves this clash by suggesting that "cliché spreads inwards from the language of the book to its heart" (Amis 2014: 223). Thus, he claims that clichés could be formal elements behind which blocks of thinking, such as stereotypes or tropes, might hide.

Decolonial literary criticism adapted from postcolonialist theories which deals with contemporary East-Central European discursive representations is aware of such blocks of thoughts in literary renderings of the European East. The cliché about East-Central Europeans that their general melancholy demeanour is often coupled with self-afflicted misery and inferiority complex prevails in British East-Central Europe novel genre. These novels I intend to analyse in the framework of the Postmodern Baroque theory. This theory describes the British literary depictions of East-Central Europe as Baroque and Postmodern referring to a general cultural condition of the region. I call this cultural image of East-Central Europe the 'Postmodern Baroque.' A fundamental feature of this Postmodern Baroque image is the portrayal of East-Central Europe as a functional heterotopia and a Lacanian Other to the Western, English identity discursively appearing as the view of the narrators or the onlookers in these fictional accounts. In this duality of the West and the Central European, the West, represented by mostly the discourse of the narrators appearing both on intra- and extra-diegetic levels, have a tendency to occupy the position of the rational onlooker, heir to Enlightenment Modernity. As opposed to this, East-Central Europe often occupies the position of the dark, Jungian shadow-side of Modernity in British literary discourses. These two positions both appear as heirs to the same Modernity, however, Western Europe occupies its optimistic and progressive tradition, whereas, East-Central Europe is aligned with the subversive, less positivistic, and much less explicable undercurrent of Modernity, which also came into light in aesthetic qualities such as the Postmodern and the Baroque. It seems that Postmodern English literature depicts East-Central Europe as the locus where the subversion of Modernity happens.

The cliché of the melancholy Easterner and a bleak East-Central Europe is presented in British East-Central Europe novel genre as a feature which strengthens the image of a subverted dark Modernity ruling East-Central Europe. The sad, introvert, and slightly mysterious figure of the Easterner haunts this novel genre as a mental cliché picturing a type of person and culture which is either overdoing Modernity, or suffering from a serious lack of its forward-moving energy. Analysing Holbein's painting *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb,* Julia Kristeva

realized that there is a natural (not pathological) melancholy to it which is a generic part of human existence (1989: 132-133). She claims that depression, "as the hidden face of Narcissus" is there at the core of how a modern personality is built up in moments of lonely thoughts. Still, she binds melancholy to imagination much more than to thinking. She argues: "if there is no writing other than amorous, there is no imagination that is not, overtly or secretly, melancholy" (5-6). This human melancholy, however, is not generic *ab ovo*, but it is part of the new episteme which took over the world in Modernity. According to Buci-Glucksman, this melancholy is expressed by the Baroque. It is the Baroque, the dark side of Enlightened rationalism, which expresses the ruined nature of Modernity: the "artificial, socially constructed nature of reality and the catastrophic, uncertain […] nature of all human existence" (Buci-Glucksmann 1994: 8). It is a melancholy demeanour that lies at the very heart of the rupture of Modernity which confounds coherence and creates madness out of reasonably ordered discourses, worlds, and even subjects.

Referring to Walter Benjamin's concept of the loss of aura in the art produced in Modernity, Grimwood claims that clichés are quickly reproducible shortcuts to the auratic effect. Moreover, he also calls attention to the usage of clichés in the archival practices of Modernity. The time of Modernity, he argues, can be conceived as an unending archive of documents of immanent reality where one document passes to the next. It all maintains the cliché as part of knowledge production and circulation (2021: 18). Following Benjamin and Grimwood, it can be established that clichés are closely linked to Modernity and its ways of knowledge production in an era of mechanical reproduction of texts and images.

The fact that clichés are deeply rooted in Modernity and its archival practices is also strengthened by Orwell's idea Grimwood refers to, namely, that clichés mark a dead space where meaning and representation were replaced by repetition (35). This dead space of immobile meanings, the space of clichés, is anti-Modernity itself, because it is a space where signification doesn't work, as cliché is only a façade of signification. When using clichés, we give up on representing, we succumb to recreation of long-dead meanings. This is a point when the dead space of clichés share a feature with melancholy. Kristeva argues that melancholy is not only a generic part of human existence, but it can also be linked to understanding symbolic signification. She argues that it is a stage necessary for children to pass through in order to gain

access into the realm of symbols, and linguistic signs. This is the state of the melancholy which fills us due to meaninglessness (1989: 132). Consequently, if melancholy shares the dead space of temporary meaninglessness with clichés, the cliché of the melancholy East-Central European in British novels can also be viewed as a meta-cultural moment where a cliché, that is, a meaningless image, reveals an adherence to meaninglessness in a specific cultural milieu.

In the genre of the British East-Central Europe novel, the cliché of the melancholy Eastern European is linked to the position of subversive Modernity or even anti-Modernity East-Central Europe as a cultural zone occupies in these literary representations. The exact nature of this anti-Modernity should be mapped. As Kyra Giorgi claims, melancholy cannot be perceived as positive by Modernity, which fetishizes personal development, originality, and invention. In such thinking, sadness is a kind of parasite (Giorgi 2014: 13). However, it is undoubtable that melancholy fits into modern consciousness as it is an affect of the solitary mind, and individualism can be traced back to the very origins of Modernity. The reason why melancholy can still be seen as an anti-Modern force as well lies in its active refusal to take part in the other fetish of Modernity: personal development and progress. The melancholy mind refuses to change. It only embraces escape. This escape is the evasion from the urge to act upon reality in order to improve its circumstances. Rei Terada argues that clichés are used as tools of protection against reality (Terada 2004: 849). Certainly, it is only the reality of Modernity that sadness is a parasite to. Carrying on the parallel previously established between melancholy and the use of clichés as both subversive, anti-modern forces, it seems logical to suppose that both are parasitic to the meanings, and the possibly metaphoric space Modernity creates. Both mark an unwillingness to come to terms with and engage in Modernity, both its space and reality. As Boris Groys suggests, Modernity creates a "universal, neutral, and homogeneous" space. Such a space creates a good atmosphere for the production of categories, differentiated topics which, in due time, can find themselves functioning as clichés (Grimwood 2021: 19).

It could then be supposed that the melancholy mind wants to get rid of the universalized existence of Modernity and wants to get immersed in individuality, unique thoughts; after all, melancholy is claimed to be "the hidden face of Narcissus" (Kristeva 1989: 5). In the following, I wish to investigate this narcissistic aspect of the cliché of the melancholy East-Central European which places it on the same platform as the concept of cliché itself, the platform

where East-Central Europe represents a criticism, an evasion, or a blind spot in Modernity. In order to map this cultural trope, I wish to scrutinize Postmodern British novels, especially Rose Tremain's *The Road Home* (2007), Bruce Chatwin's *Utz* (1989), and also put them in the context of the genre conventions dating back to Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). I would like to map the figure of the sad East-Central European (Czech, Hungarian, or Romanian) in its refusal to come to terms with the rupture of Modernity, which broke away from earlier modes of representation and urged for progression, originality and meaning. These literary texts reveal a cliché about a geocultural sphere which, ever since the arrival of Modernity, steadily found itself on the darker side of progress and rational meanings and, therefore, deliberately chose the meaninglessness of melancholy.

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Bram Stoker's novel can be argued to mark the starting point to the genre of the British East-Central Europe novel. It stands on the threshold of two distinct genres; on the one hand, with its diary entries and depictions of train rides and travels, *Dracula* pays homage to the British travelogue tradition, on the other hand, with its fictionalized story, it already foreshadows novels written about East-Central Europe which avowedly aim to depict this geocultural zone via the means of literary representation. The character of Count Dracula in Stoker's novel was first and foremost mysterious and fearsome. He embodies the unknown, the subhuman, and the dubious evil of the semi-alterity.

As Michael Kane argues, this novel can be categorized as part of the invasion literature which preceded the First World War in Britain (1997: 8). As such, it conveys the fear British society used to harbour from future immigrants embodied in the character of Dracula. As Count Dracula's eeriness can be accounted to his blood and his physical existence, this embodiment contained a considerable amount of racial fear. It is pivotal to note that Dracula's abnormality, although he was a truly solitary character, is generalized to a whole nation or group of people, the kind of whom is represented by Dracula's savagery. In the scene when the count's strange behaviour first becomes obvious, this generalization is established by the count after he saw Harker cutting himself during shaving:

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> […] the blood was trickling over my chin. I laid down the razor, turning as I did so halfround to look for some sticking-plaster. When the Count saw my face, his eyes blazed with a sort of demoniac fury, and he suddenly made a grab at my throat. I drew away, and his hand touched the string of beads which held the crucifix. It made an instant change in him, for the fury passed so quickly that I could hardly believe that it was ever there. 'Take care,' he said, 'take care how you cut yourself. It is more dangerous than you think in this country.' (Stoker 1986: 28)

Dracula's uncanny nature is shared by his country and its dwellers. This British fear Dracula embodies was a fear from the nation's degeneration by mingling with these half-savage, half-European, but at all costs uncivilized people (Kane 1997: 10).

Apart from the mystical element of the monstrous race, the vampires, the depiction of Count Dracula and his otherness abounds in well-known cultural allusions which shed light upon what historical sources these fears can rely on inside the boundaries of discursive British identity. At first, Dracula is depicted as a fierce warrior who derived from a race fighting the religious other of Europe, the Muslim Turks. Louis Warren analyses this issue in his study, "Buffalo Bill Meets Dracula: William F. Cody, Bram Stoker, and the Frontiers of Racial Decay". He claims that Dracula, as a "centuries-old warrior hero in the East, defending Western civilization's first frontier […] embodies the entire history of his people. His insatiable appetite for blood mimicks the bloodthirst and stagnation of the Balkan frontier." (2002: 1151). If representing the dreadfully bloody and bypassed world of frontiers were not enough, Stoker's monster also wants to transform the effeminate Western capital, London, into his own degenerate world. This degeneration makes him the melancholy Easterner which is also an element of Dracula's figure Warren calls attention to. He argues that the late nineteenth century which was well aware of the world of the American frontier, created a context for Stoker's Eastern monster which made it analogously the world of eternal watchfulness where "constant vigilance is the price of existence". In Dracula's characterization, this appears as a curse: "constant vigilance is the essence of Dracula's curse, for as the centuries-old border guardian, he himself has become an eternal sentry, unable to sleep, to rest, to die" (1153). It turns out that

the fearful monster is fundamentally a lonely victim of the frontiers long gone which are best to leave behind at last.

The idea that Dracula is a sad remnant from the past is also strengthened by his characterization, which reminds us of a close enemy of the English. Dracula, who was a specimen of a fairly unknown Other for the Brits, is depicted in colours much alike those used when describing the Irish, who definitely were the known Other for the English. Raphael Ingelbien argues that the myth of Dracula is enriched with characteristics taken from the Irish and already established as qualities of the Other. Among these, we can find decaying aristocracy, Catholicism, and rural lifestyle. These qualities are those that posit Dracula and the Irish on the same platform, at least from the British viewpoint. Ingelbien cites contemporary journalistic and literary sources to prove that some of Dracula's features are taken from the polemics of Stoker's days directed against the Irish. Examples of this include characterizing Transylvania as a land of superstition, the description of his castle as that of a Catholic aristocrat, or his humanist pride in his library. Ireland with its backward society, full of Catholic aristocrats, superstitious peasants and the humanist culture of Irish upper-class, detectable from Yeats's writings, definitely served as an inspiration for such a picture of the monstrous land (2003: 1094-1097). It is striking how decline and a deplorable state of being stuck in the past are parts of both the elements of a frontier warrior and those of the Catholic aristocrat.

By investigating these fearsome qualities of the Count in Stoker's work, we can see where the boundaries of British identity lie with relation to the Eastern European reality. These qualities already draw the outlines of an anti-modern territory, where there is a retrograde lifestyle, at once immobile, fierce, and unnatural. The idea of frozen time as an attribute to the non-, or rather half-European Other is as old as postcolonial criticism. Johannes Fabian describes the image of time travel experience faced on peripheral territories appearing in colonial discourses as the 'denial of coevalness'. He argues that anthropology presupposes a spatialized time which makes it possible to regard culturally peripheral areas as locations of another era, if measured by the 'subjective' time of the centre. The time of Modernity is marked by the Enlightenment idea of continuously progressing towards an ever-enlightened state. Therefore, this "evolutionist time" conception perceives the locus of the savage as one existing in another time, that is, lagging behind in their development to become more and more rational

and modern (2002: 25-27). Stoker's novel presents its own version of the East-Central European as somebody who is unnaturally stuck in an atavistic time, marked out by the lack of modern qualities, most importantly, the intention and capability to participate in progression.

Historical immobility, decay, and atavistic savagery all make the Count a sad figure as well as frightening. This sadness infiltrates everywhere and everyone he touches. His first victim, Lucy, started to display signs of her ailment by becoming more melancholy and brooding to the distant horizon. Mina, too, when she starts to be vamped by Dracula, is shown as an entirely new person, with "a far-away look in her eyes, and her voice having a sad dreaminess" (Stoker 1986: 338). This sadness seems to be a factor in the vampire's evilness. The demonic possession he sheds over his victims is in connection to this sad turning inwards which can be seen as a crisis of individuality, of modern existence. Irving Massey categorized this state of vampirism as a transitionary state preceding categories of good and bad. In his view, the vampire represents a third self that is beneath the doubleness of good and evil. Vampirism is the primordial state before language, which is illustrated by how Dracula is much less involved in language than the letter and diary writing Westerners. Vampirism is also before choice, as Dracula doesn't seem to have a civilization where he would be able to make moral choices. Dracula's vampirism is also before representation, a metonymic signification of this is the fact that he casts no mirror reflection (1973: 58, 64). Dracula is somehow closer to an original reality, the vampires represent an original experience which we all forget, but what is embedded in the horror of all facts.

This atavistic figure, the half-Romanian, half-Hungarian figure of Count Dracula, seems to arrive in Britain from times before representation and language. This makes his figure a signpost for the boundaries of British identity, which is characterized by the epistemological rule of Western Modernity, which hails language as a form of expression and representation as a form of knowledge production. The final lesson Harker and Mina, the English couple, can learn from their adventures with Doctor Van Helsing is that Count Dracula is dangerous, because he is reluctant to come to terms with Modernity. He refuses to be integrated into the world of representation, he refuses the feats of the Enlightenment, such as language and writing. But, first and foremost, he refuses to take part in Modernity's linear time scheme, and brings back atavistic times of savage wars. He repeats the same behaviour over and over again through

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centuries, and refuses to change or mean anything. By this, he is similar to the workings of clichés which are also undead in the sense that once they were original and meant something, but their existence continued long after their originality. This undead existence is definitely displayed by Count Dracula, who was once an honourable human being defending Christianity, but his existence continued into an unnatural degeneracy. The count's pre-Modern and uncanny life, marked by a repetition of meaningless gestures instead of progressive development, is part of his atavistic evil. The fact that he is frozen as a cliché of a monster makes him appear as deplorable and lonely in the eyes of the Western characters.

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Melancholy, which lurks in Stoker's representation of the threatening East-Central European in the nineteenth century, seems to hold onto British literary view of this geocultural territory well into the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The sadness of the post-1989 literary East-Central Europeans can, on the one hand, be attributed to their origin from a lagging behind periphery. They can similarly be described by Fabian's 'denial of coevalness' trope. An example for such a form of melancholy can be seen in Rose Tremain's *The Road Home*.

Lev, the protagonist in *The Road Home*, is an economic migrant from an unspecified Eastern or East-Central European country. The names of his fellow-countrymen suggest a Slavic people and the post-socialist surrounding is definitely detectable. Lev is a middle-aged widower who lives with his mother and daughter in a bleak post-socialist town where job opportunities are scarce. The *récit* of the narrative starts with Lev already sitting on a long-distance bus travelling to London to work there in order to provide for his family at home. However, when later on, when we get an insight into his *histoire*, we witness the reasons behind his decision to become an economic migrant. His actual story starts with a happy marriage sadly ending with the precocious death of his beloved wife. After this period, his life is described in terms of bleak hopelessness. Although the death of his wife is provided as a rational reason for melancholy, there is definitely more to the described scene than that. Lev's life seems to reek of inert melancholy in its own right, even without sad life events. We first get a glimpse into where Lev is from in a flashback moment where he compares a street view in London to one at home:

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At Lev's back, joggers kept passing, and the scuff and squeak of their trainers,
their rapid breathing, were like a reproach to Lev, who stood without moving,
bathing his teeth in cola, devoid of pain, while these runners had a purpose and
strength and a tenacious goal of self-improvement. (Tremain 2007: 25)

Self-improvement is something deeply rooted in the idea of the modern self. It is one of the most striking culture shocks Lev faces very early in Britain. He muses over his own home and sees it as significantly lacking in such progressive zeal. "He was sure his 'self' needed improving, too. For a long time now, he'd been moody, melancholy, and short-tempered. […] For days on end, he'd sat on Ina's porch without moving, […] smoking and staring at the sky" (25).

Lev's East-Central Europe is an immobilized space where time practically stopped. It is true for every other character from East-Central Europe in the novel, they only show vitality that derives from the West. Lev's friend, Rudi, attempts to boost up his taxi company by buying an American Chevrolet, and Lev, in the end, starts a Western-style gourmand restaurant in his hometown. As opposed to them, the older generation represents the world from where it is necessary to flee, or which should be reformed by Western ways. Lev's mother is reluctant to face change and has to accept the newly built dam flooding her old home. Lev's father metaphorically embodies this motionless undead existence. He is described as

[s]itting on his hard chair at Baryn, with his half-eaten heel of salami […]. And he
[Lev] knew that Stefan was part of the reason he was here in London, that he'd
had to defy in himself that longing of his father's to resist change, and he thought,
I should feel grateful that the sawmill closed, or I'd be exactly where he was,
immortal on a chair. (29)

Stefan is described as an undead and motionless figure. Even the word "immortal" suggest that he is metaphorically having an uncanny existence representing the motionlessness, the hopelessness, and the unnaturalness of life in East-Central Europe. These countries are frozen even when they work.

This uncanny existence is not entirely identical to the fierce frontier warrior nature of Dracula. However, it reverberates with his timeless life and his sad inability to die, that is, to

move on. As Dracula was unable to carry on with phases of his existence and was stuck in an unnatural living, Tremain's East-Central Europeans seem to spend too much time thinking on a porch or a chair, neglecting activities. Post-socialist uncanniness is connected to a melancholy escape from the busy teeming of life. Melancholy feeling, or rather lack of activity often swirls up in Lev while in the bustling metropolis. Getting immersed in imaginary pictures or daydreaming is an activity portrayed as alien in London. The following excerpt highlights how the specifically East-Central European melancholy is linked to the dreamy nature of thinking.

> Lev picked up his bag and heard the bottles clank. He cursed himself for day-dreaming. Day-dreaming may have been all right during the lunch hour at the Baryn lumber yard, but you couldn't day-dream and survive in cities like Glic or Jor, let alone in London. 'Cities are fucking circuses,' Rudi once remarked, 'and people like you and me are the dancing bears. So dance on, comrade, dance on, and feel the whip.' (35)

Motionless and silent brooding goes against forces of life; however, this anti-life depression is at the heart of thinking. In her book, *The Black Sun, Depression and Melancolia,* Kristeva establishes a connection between melancholy and thinking as a source of creating your self and your meaning. She argues that life and meaning is closely linked: "for the speaking being, life is a meaningful life; life is even the apogee of meaning. Hence if the meaning of life is lost, life can easily be lost: when meaning shatters, life no longer matters" (1989: 6). That is, if you speechlessly look wistfully and engage in melancholy, you escape meaning. This is very similar to the origin of the melancholy Easterner cliché, Count Dracula, who actually escaped representation by not reflecting any image in mirrors. Certainly, this meaning is defined by modern episteme.

Remarkably, the quoted text cites urban centres of East-Central Europe besides London as examples of places where daydreaming does not work. It is precisely urbanized Modernity that Tremain's melancholy Easterner is at odds with. The sad daydreaming figure appears as a bear in a circus, which is a metaphoric image of how Lev is dragged along in the swirl of urban Modernity, probably unconsciously and unwillingly. Apart from this excerpt, Lev is also depicted as "an animal spent and dying" (Tremain 2007: 193) in other instances of the text. A circus bear or a dying animal is much less wildly threatening than a vampire, but they still carry

the imagery of a radical and racial Otherness. The Otherness of a silent creature, naturally belonging to another world, but dragged along among human beings. Moreover, this Otherness is connected to the loneliness of melancholy thinking as opposed to teeming urban activities. The British narrative view expresses a certain racial or bodily recoil at East-Central Europeans. Another moment in *The Road Home* proves this when an Eastern conductor who is invited to a glamorous London concert hall is afraid to ask an English person for medication, because, as he argues, "we, as a people, are a mystery to them: a mystery and a terror" (96).

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Another British East-Central Europe novel, Bruce Chatwin's *Utz,* also depicts a sad and lonely character who, similarly to Dracula and Lev, symbolizes his whole cultural milieu. Utz, the title character of the novel, is a lonely Prague art collector who is obsessed with his collection of Rococo Meissen statuettes. Similarly to his country and Central Europe as a whole, he seems to be stuck in an in-between position. He never takes on fierce ideologies, which is a means to survive in the twentieth century, and he is also dubious in his personality, the description of which wavers between a moustached womanizer and an unmoustached shy scholar. This middle status is appealing to East-Central Europe. Its historical tendency to fall between two deadly totalitarian powers, two antagonistic lifestyles and cultures, developed the archetypal small-nation attitude, which cannot hope for more than survival. A narrative device to express the experience of an 'everyman trying to survive cataclysmic times' could be demonstrated in Utz's obsession as a collector dominating his perception of history around him:

> Wars, pogroms and revolutions,' he used to say, 'offer excellent opportunities for
> the collector.' The Stock Market Crash had been one such opportunity.
> Kristallnacht was another. In the same week he hastened to Berlin to buy
> porcelains, in U.S. dollars, from Jewish connoisseurs who wished to emigrate. At
> the end of the War he would offer a similar service to aristocrats fleeing from the
> Soviet Army. (1989: 6)

Utz's is an attitude which never falls for overarching ideologies. This attitude prevents Utz from becoming an overenthusiastic promoter of anti-Communist ideals, too. He, part of a rising half-German, half-Jew aristocratic class, is politically as far from anti-Communist conservative

discourse as from the doublespeak of Communist phrases. Utz has an instinct to posit himself in the middle: "He was not going to join the flow of exiles. He would not sit complaining in rented rooms. He knew that anti-Communist rhetoric was as deadly as its Communist counterpart. He would not give up his country. Not for them!" (29). Utz seems to fall between categories.

This in-betweenness of Utz's character is emblematic in view of his Czech nationality, too. He represents the historical nowhereland of East-Central Europe, always the victim of stronger powers. When showing sights of Prague to the English narrator, Utz sarcastically refers to the national self-pity of his own people:

> 'This city wears a tragic mask.'
> It was also a city of giants: giants in stone, in stucco or marble; naked giants;
> blackamoor giants; giants dressed as if for a hurricane, not one of them in repose,
> struggling with some unseen force, or heaving under the weight of architraves.
> 'The suffering giant,' he added without conviction, 'is the emblem of our
> persecuted people.'
> I commented facetiously that a taste for giants was usually a symptom of decline:
> an age that took the Farnese Hercules for an ideal was bound to end in trouble.
> (12)

These are the words of the English narrator, for whom the overabundance of the city with images of giants ironically alludes to the 'dwarfs' of Utz's Meissen collection. He and the narrator then conclude that giants are expressions of the nostalgic megalomania small nations in East-Central Europe tend to display. Giants express the glory of the past, but their display all around Prague is symptomatic of the Czech 'lítost,' the feeling that the present remains below par in comparison to the past.

The notion of '*lítost*' was suggested by Milan Kundera to describe the specific self-pitying and melancholy vengeance typical of the Czechs. The origin of the concept dates back to his novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1978), but he also uses it in his essay "Czech Destiny" (1968). 'Lítost,' is endowed with a composite meaning explained by Kundera as "torment, immaturity, vengefulness, bitterness, frustration, spite, rejecting compromise, self-

destruction, rancour and, finally, as a more precise mode of frustration, 'the terrible lítost that comes from not getting enough ass'" (Kundera 1978: 152). This specific Czech national melancholy and self-pity appears in Utz's life who is so attached to his objectified collection that he embodies their frivolous, Rococo lifestyle in his own life. He chooses not to live but repeat the living style of the bygone Baroque era, represented by his porcelains. He gradually turns himself to an antiquarian figure who lives the life of his bucolic Meissen shepherds and court ladies. In his 1970s Prague flat, he creates an atmosphere of the court of a seventeenth-century Habsburg Prince. He "came close to believing in his fantasy: that this was the 'porcelain palace' and that he himself was Augustus reincarnate" (Chatwin 1989: 21). He keeps a maid in the person of Martha, an ignorant village girl from their family estate, and he continues to have sexual affairs solely with opera singers for decades. By secret compromises to the totalitarian state, he is able to uphold an aristocratic lifestyle and regularly travel to Vichy for cure. There is something sad in such a simulacrum life where he can never be self-identical, he is a mere copy of a past figure and a past time.

Clearly, this life fails to satisfy him, but his East-Central European melancholy long prevents him from action. In the 1960s, Utz takes yearly journeys to France where he keeps pondering over his chances of emigration, which he keeps refusing all the time:

Not that he would be happy in Czechoslovakia. He would be harassed, menaced, insulted. He would have to grovel. He would have to agree with every word they said. He would mouth their meaningless, ungrammatical formulae. He would learn to 'live within the lie'.
But Prague was a city that suited his melancholic temperament. A state of tranquil melancholy was all one could aspire to these days! (27)

The expression "live within the lie" entails the mendacious discourse of the state socialist ideology as well as his own simulacrum reality where he behaved as a Baroque prince.

Chatwin's character performs another instance of the cliché of the melancholy East-Central European, and this instance is less a beastly pre-Modern figure, but more a dusty antiquarian stuck motionless among his antique pieces and the self-pitying identity of his nation. This melancholy is a deliberate escape from the meanings of Modernity. The falling in-

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betweenness is also important in *Utz*, as this exemplifies a motion of melancholy, too. Kristeva's conceptualization of melancholy defines this state as a hiatus between the after and the beyond (1989: 113). Motionlessness is seen as a moment of escape from the coercion of the present, of the progression, and of the need to stand up after historical traumas.

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British novels on East-Central Europe have a long tradition to describe people and nations of this area by the cliché of the melancholy Easterner. This genre trope delineates the discursive identity of the British or the West in harmony with Modernity, whereas, East-Central Europe as a potentially subversive anti-Modern force. The melancholy of sad characters is structural, as it is generalized from this cultural background. This cultural background is depicted as backward, unnatural, and of lower level than that of the British characters or narrators. Stoker's *Dracula* laid the foundation of this cliché in the title character, who is anti-Modernity himself. He represents the pre-Modern bloodthirsty frontier, he also stands for the frozen time of a cyclical rebirth aligned with an uncanny life. After all, Dracula is the sad and lonely monster among the humans of progression, peaceful, and rational life. The analysed Postmodern novels continued to use the melancholy cliché and shed light on some of the identity factors of post-socialist countries as seen by English literary discourse. Tremain's *The Road Home* carried on using the aspect of this cliché which highlights the figure of the Easterner as belonging to another species. The protagonist is described as a speechless animal, with its motionless existence distinct from the people of a teeming urban centre. The unnatural life of an East-Central European stuck in the past is also demonstrated in Chatwin's *Utz*. The antiquarian collector fails to step out of the traumatized state the cultural memory of his nation's historical traumas put him to. He flees into the safety of melancholy time-travel existence, a simulacrum of life, rather imaginary than actual.

Imaginary and motionless, uncanny and separate bred, these novels tend to describe East-Central Europe as a space of anti-Modernity, where everything dear to Enlightenment West is shaken. Time does not progress but stands still, the value of human blood is not respected but is wasted as in an atavistic and savage war, sign is not representational but repetitive, as a cliché. As well as melancholy occupying a void between meaningful life activities, East-Central Europeans are shown in English fiction as falling between the state of

savagery and respectable human existence. Melancholy East-Central Europe is a cliché, that is, a block of thought, and as long as it is repeated in British novels continuously, it means that the cliché of a British identity rational and Enlightened remains intact. Ironically, anything that is clichégenic and repeated in a meaningless way takes on an uncanny and undead life, not unlike that of Count Dracula.

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