

## On Balkanism and Orientalism: Undifferentiated Patterns of Perception in Literary and Critical Representations of Eastern Europe

### Abstract:

This paper explores the extent to which Eastern Europe has been historically subject to a process of 'othering' in the western literary imagination; and how far the western practice of 'Balkanism' can be considered congruous with the wider practice of 'Orientalism' throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and into the twenty-first. Drawing on theoretical work by Vesna Goldsworthy and Mariia Todorova, it shows that both in fiction and literary scholarship western writers have been unable fully to conceptualise Eastern Europe, with the result that their fictional portrayals are evasive and indistinct and their literary analysis unable to define a clear object. Malcolm Bradbury's novel *Rates of Exchange* (1983), Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995) and Jim Crace's *Six* (2003<sup>4</sup>) are explored alongside Edward Said's *Beginnings* and Fredric Jameson's *Political Unconscious* to show that this under-conceptualisation has continued to dominate literary representations of Eastern Europe during the late- and post- Cold War periods, thereby subjecting Said and Jameson to a rigorous critique of their own methods with regards to the western practice of 'Balkanism' of which they are uncritical.

### Keywords:

Eastern Europe (portrayals of)

Balkanism

Malcolm Bradbury

Kazuo Ishiguro

Jim Crace

### Main Text:

### **Introduction: The Undifferentiated Otherness of Eastern Europe**

In a significant study of how South Eastern Europe is represented in the British literary imagination, Vesna Goldsworthy has identified a series of structural blind-spots, or aporia, within and between which the Balkans have been constructed as an ideological trope. She argues that the Balkans did not have the same strategic significance for Britain as other parts of the globe during the nineteenth century, so that the region was invested with neither the same level of political attention nor the same degree of cultural exploration as other territories that were more directly involved in the great imperial game of the period. ~~Similarly, British economic interests in the region were never as extensive as elsewhere, with the result that there developed neither a strong British commercial presence nor an accompanying British community capable of fostering a cultural attachment to the place.~~ On the contrary, the Balkans in the British imagination occupied a profoundly ambiguous role: both literally and metaphorically close enough to home to warrant little specific attention on the one hand; and yet far enough away to remain indistinct on the other.

One of the consequences of the ambivalent attitude towards South Eastern Europe that arose during the nineteenth century, Goldsworthy suggests, is that the geographical region became accessible to the British cultural imagination as a scene or setting that could be made to feel both familiar and estranged. She analyses literary texts with such a setting from the romantic period onwards, and finds a recurring portrayal of many of the mainstays that had already started to dominate literary constructions of Englishness: notably, the adventure plot; the mistaken identity plot; and the property and inheritance plot. As each of these devices became relocated to a Balkan setting from the romantic period onwards, the devices themselves were given fresh impetus in which an exotic setting was provided for the working through of a series of structural mechanisms or cultural concerns that were already familiar to a British readership or audience. Goldsworthy concludes that throughout British representation of the region

during the two centuries, 'precise details of Balkan history and geography are less important than the imaginary or near-imaginary landscapes of the British concepts of the Balkans.'<sup>i</sup>

~~Lack of direct strategic or commercial interest in the region gave rise to a lack of cultural interest which in turn gave rise to a situation where literary representations of the Balkans became increasingly popular but also increasingly indistinct.~~ For this reason, ~~she~~ Goldsworthy describes the imaginative appropriation of the trope of the Balkans as a 'literary colonisation' with Byron 'as its Columbus.'<sup>ii</sup> ~~That colonisation mobilised the classic colonising trope of empty space, so that the literary representations of Eastern Europe that Goldsworthy analyses almost invariably portray fictional — as opposed to real, contemporary — societies, as if the whole region were not already occupied by a complex series of different state formations.~~ From poetic depictions of the grand tour in the romantic period, through Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and the fictionalised Ruritania of Anthony Hope's *Prisoner of Zenda*, into the comic drama of Bernard Shaw, Goldsworthy shows how British writers of the nineteenth century again and again created portrayals of fictional Eastern European states, precisely because the absence of material interests in the region gave rise to a series of blind spots that prevented specificity.

~~In an important study of how the Balkans have consistently been represented in the dominant literary tropes of Western Europe~~ Extending Goldsworthy's work, Mariia Todorova uses the term *Balkanism* to refer to that history of literary appropriation. Todorova's Her contention is that a whole series of mainly negative imaginative and symbolic connotations are associated with the historical and geographical region known as the Balkans in the mind of a Western European reader because the dominant literary history has cultivated such connotations; in effect the Balkans have had their Balkan-ness inflicted on them rather than inhering in the societies in question. In labelling such a discursive practice *Balkanism*, Todorova consciously echoes Edward Said's use of the

term *Orientalism* to refer to the mainly European discursive appropriation of the eastern hemisphere during the period of empire. Todorova herself says of the practice of Orientalism that it provided European 'corporate' institutions a vocabulary and framework for managing the 'Orient.'<sup>iii</sup> As this practice parallels the imaginative take-over to which Eastern Europe has been subject from the west of the continent, the point of departure for Todorova's study is the question: Can *Balkanism* be considered 'a structural variant' of *Orientalism*?<sup>iv</sup>

Alongside the discursive and institutional similarities between the two practices, there are significant differences. Firstly, Todorova points out, that the geographical area referred to by the term 'Balkans' is much narrower in range and provides more concrete a referent than the much larger and more dispersed category of the 'Orient.' In terms of languages, ethnicities, religions, cultural practices, climates (natural and political) as well as physical and human geography, the 'Orient' was always more diverse than what Todorova refers to as the relatively 'specific' idea of the Balkans.<sup>v</sup> This can be seen in Bradbury's *Slava*, where the singularity of natural environment is paralleled by the singularity of political climate that in part it symbolises. In the discursive practice of *Balkanism*, Todorova suggests, the ironic effect of the cultural and geographical specificity of the Balkans has had the effect that the region can be made to seem, in the Western European imagination, relatively 'prosaic'<sup>vi</sup> when compared to the exotic and at times mystical portrayals of the 'Orient.' In other words, the specificity of the term gives rise to a lack of conceptual interest and in the dominant discursive practice the region is emptied of that very specificity so that it can be filled from the outside.

A further difference between the practices of Orientalism and *Balkanism* is related to Todorova's distinction between a mystical global east and a prosaic local, continental east. In the European imaginary, Todorova suggests, the 'Orient', though absolutely other, tended to be portrayed as a whole other world: a world complete in itself. The

Balkans and Eastern Europe in general, by contrast, have tended to be afforded what Todorova calls 'transitional status' in the western European imagination. Images of a bridge, a crossroads and accompanying metaphors for backwards economic and infrastructural development tend to dominate, stripping the region of imaginative development which is assumed in the logic of such metaphors to need insertion from the outside.<sup>vii</sup>

For all of these reasons, although Todorova sees clear areas of overlap between the practice of *Orientalism* as Said expounded it and her own concept of *Balkanism*, she remains reluctant to see one simply as a variation of the other. Instead, she develops the complex idea of *Balkanism* 'circumscribed in the category of orientalism'<sup>viii</sup> while nevertheless remaining distinct. Many of the important practices by which the west of Europe was able to gain ideological hegemony were congruent in both the Orient and the east of the continent, but the specificities were different. Todorova uses the term 'patterns of perception'<sup>ix</sup> to refer to the historical process by which negative connotations of Eastern Europe were cultivated in the western imagination, partly following the congruent practices of *Orientalism* while also allowing for occasional variation in those practices. That lack of specificity persisted into the twentieth century, in thriller writing by John Buchan and Graham Greene; in Agatha Christie's portrayal of the Orient Express and in some of Ian Fleming's spy fiction.

The relative cultural and geographic proximity of Eastern Europe made it amenable as a setting for a literary colonisation in which the dominant images related more to the society in which the imagining was being carried out than to the societies being imagined. As Goldsworthy puts it, the historical development of a particular type of rhetoric, in which British identity is seen as 'different from, and often symbolically superior to the European one' is 'very clearly delineated in British fiction with Balkan settings.'<sup>x</sup> In other words, the persistent fictionalisation of Eastern European societies in

British fiction, and the imaginative take over of the specificities of geography, culture and history, each result in a recurring trope of Eastern Europe. In that trope, the real specificities are eliminated so that ironically, what emerges is a discourse that offers to emphasise similarity and connection, but which in practice delivers otherness and difference. Thus the 'literary colonisation' that Goldsworthy describes, like the other colonisations of the nineteenth century, renders its object fundamentally other.

There are historical reasons for the 'othering' of Eastern Europe in British discourse. One such reason is the cultural distinction, operative from the period of the Holy Roman Empire, between 'eastern Orthodox' Christianity and the mainly Catholic west of Europe. This distinction became reinforced was re-doubled during the great game of the nineteenth century by a deepening division between those states which were (or had been) part of the Ottoman empire, and those which were free of it. Goldsworthy points out that those states under Ottoman influence were also in many cases those of eastern Orthodoxy, so that they could be considered doubly 'eastern and inferior.'<sup>34</sup> The fact that those states which had been mapped along religious lines were not always precisely coterminous with those that had been mapped along imperial lines does not undermine the historical tendency to conflate; it merely reinforces the lack of specificity with which dominant discourses in the west of Europe have tended to appropriate the east. This reinforcement was further strengthened by the separation of Europe during the twentieth century into capitalist and communist states — where again, the otherness of the eastern states can be said to have solidified an already existing otherness defined on alternative lines; and where again, the lack of precise differentiation between the states is part of the general historical trend of towards undifferentiated othering the eastern European objectness.

Recurrence of the negative connotations of Eastern Europe in English writing continued into the period of the Cold War. In a ground-breaking study of literary representations of

the 'literary Cold War'. Adam Piette has suggested that literary criticism has been relatively slow to catch up with historical research in analysing the culture and politics of the Cold War period. An old style historicist approach, he argues, to understanding relations across the Iron Curtain would mainly have been concerned with the 'diplomatic' and governmental matter levels, exploring the politics of international power relations and the rhetoric of security. More recent historical research into the Cold War, he suggests, has moved away from analysing diplomatic and governmental those functions, and has increasingly been concerned with daily life and culture for ordinary people across the different societies in question. A growing body of historical research, he shows, has revealed the extent to which the daily experience for ordinary people throughout the period was an experience of the internalisation of fear, made manifest in local cultural practices. -By contrast, literary critical analysis of representations of the relationships between eEast and wWest in texts during the Cold War have continued to emphasise the power relations existing at mainly government and militaristic levels and how these create a determining backdrop for the kinds of literary production created. The disciplinary shift in historical studies away from the governmental and towards the ordinary, everyday experiences of the Cold War has not been strongly accompanied by a corresponding shift in literary studies. In other words, academic criticism of literary representations of the Cold War have continued to concern itself with statist and governmental rhetoric, even when that concern has been to critique those things.

The discursive practice that Piette identifies in literary representations of the Cold War can properly be situated within the longer historical discourse of otherness identified by Goldsworthy and Todorova. Just as their examples are drawn mainly from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so his are drawn from the 'hHigh' Cold War period of the mid century, including Graham Greene and John Le Carré. Using the examples of

Goldsworthy's examples mainly occupy the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The question that this paper will attempt to answer is: Did the undifferentiated otherness of Eastern Europe persist in the western literary imagination during and after the Cold War? It will do so by exploring how Malcolm Bradbury's novel *Rates of Exchange* (1983), Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995) and Jim Crace's *Six* (2003), this paper will explore how more recent literary practices -construct and mediate changing representations of Eastern Europe in fiction. In keeping with the dominant trajectory Goldsworthy outlines, all three novels are set in fictitious Eastern European countries, and all three have been unable fully to conceptualise Eastern Europe, with the result that the portrayals found in their fiction are evasive and indistinct. The fact that they span three different decades creates an opportunity for mapping how British writers have imagined Eastern Europe during a period of major social and political change both in Britain and in Eastern Europe.

#### Romance and Ideologeme in *Rates of Exchange*

Malcolm Bradbury's satirical novel *Rates of Exchange* (1983) combines elements of both the romance form and the more specialised sub-genre of the campus novel. Literary academic Angus Petworth travels behind the iron curtain to give a series of British Council lectures on 'English as a Medium of International Communication'<sup>xiii</sup> in Slaka, an imagined satellite state of the USSR. Almost from itsthe beginning, Malcolm Bradbury's satirical novel *Rates of Exchange* (1983) therefore, Bradbury's setting performs the double movement identified by Goldsworthy: offering a precise historical and geographical setting on the one hand, while also diverting into abstraction on the other. Literary academic Angus Petworth travels behind the iron curtain to give a series of British Council lectures on 'English as a Medium of International Communication'<sup>xiii</sup> in Slaka, an imagined satellite state of the USSR so that t-so that the Eastern Europe metonymically represented by the state of Slaka is one of undifferentiated otherness. Moreover, just as Goldsworthy suggests that the dominant literary colonisation of



Eastern Europe involved inserting into a conceptually empty imaginative setting a plot that was already familiar to readers ~~within the mainstream~~ of English letters, so too Bradbury appropriates and eliminates the cultural specificities of place in order that they can be overwritten by a genre that had already been established within that mainstream: the romance. That is not to say that the choice of Eastern Europe is arbitrary, however. Arguably Bradbury's choice of an Eastern European setting can be seen both as a direct contrast to the American location of his contemporary David Lodge's 1975 campus novel *Changing Places*. Moreover, it can also be seen as a complement to Bradbury's own work *Stepping Westward* (1965). To read *Rates of Exchange* in the context of these other contemporary academic romances is to gain sense that the discursive polarity between east and west that typified the 'high' Cold War still dominated Bradbury's approach. As Andrew Hammond puts it, 'British writers' participation in the cultural Cold War was no less fervent in the 1980s than in the "red scare" years of the 1950s.'<sup>xiv</sup> ~~(p.48.)~~

Formatted: Font: Franklin Gothic Book

Formatted: Font: Franklin Gothic Book

In *Rates of Exchange*, the combination of academic satire with romance is made possible by the exotic elsewhere to which his protagonist Petworth travels. In other words, it is specifically upon the discursive practice of othering that the success of the romance plot depends. -Petworth gets involved in a number of intrigues and seductions with his secret service guide Marisja Lubijova; the wife of minor British diplomat Felix Steadiman; and most notably the avant-garde novelist Katya Princip. His acquisition of a copy of one of Katya's novels in the Slakan language is tantamount to a challenge to learn more in order to understand her on the one hand, and also to keep the affair hidden from the state authorities on the other.

It is in the Katya plot that Bradbury most clearly signals that he is interested in combining elements of satire with the romance form. Katya tries to send Petworth a copy of her latest novel in unpublished manuscript form via the intermediary Plitplov,

specifically so that he will take the censored manuscript out of Slaka for translation and publication, thereby maintaining his relationship with her from afar. The novel concludes with Petworth hurrying out of the country and with the news that all of his papers have been 'offloaded' by 'mistake' when he changed planes at Frankfurt, with the result that 'their 'security people' blew the manuscript up.<sup>xv</sup> Like *Romeo and Juliet* (and also like A.S. Byatt's later academic romance *Possession*), *Rates of Exchange* draws strongly on one of the most fundamental elements of tragedy in the romance genre: the tragic mis-communication. In this way, Bradbury indicates his alignment with the long and varied history of the romance genre. Yet the conclusion of *Rates of Exchange* does not feel tragic in the way that *Romeo and Juliet* does, because Petworth is escaping to safety. It is therefore valid to ask whether *Rates of Exchange* can really be read as a tragedy at all. What is the reason for this?

In *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Fredric Jameson uses the term 'dialectical use of genre criticism' to refer to a critical practice of assigning particular texts to particular generic categories, at particular times.<sup>xvi</sup> He is interested in how s-object of dialectical study is a text or series of texts, which, in the process of being assigned texts, ed to generic or institutional categories help to constitute or define the categories to which they are assigned. In other words, Jameson's the object of dialectical analysis is not only a given text, but also the concepts and categories by which that text is classified historically. For this reason, Jameson emphasises that the categories are themselves both historical and variable, 'characterised by reflexivity.'<sup>xvii</sup> His argument is that literary texts create the genres to which they are assigned, in this sense, *Rates of Exchange* does not represent the otherness of Slakan culture. It also creates the otherness of an undifferentiated generic Eastern Europe, but he does not explore literary representations of Eastern Europe from the west of the continent or from North America. Goldsworthy's approach is Jamesonian to a degree, exploring the literary colonisation of the Balkans in texts which create imaginative tropes for the portrayal and subordination

of Balkan culture and demonstrating how texts construct the genres and categories that they offer to document. The imaginative take over of Balkan culture that she identifies says little or nothing about the particularities of Balkan societies, but instead appends to an eviscerated version of those societies a literary form—the romance—related to the society performing the take over.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson argues that romance can be afforded the status of an archetype. He demonstrates that the premise out of which a typical romance narrative is constructed is couched in the form of a binary otherness, pitting the generic hero against an equally generic rival or villain, and involving the overcoming of a number of trials or challenges in order to achieve a satisfactory romantic denouement and provide narrative closure. In turn, this individual quest becomes elevated in the structure of the romance form into a wider pitting of good against evil where the adventure moves towards resolution within a background that is apparently natural, or 'naturalized.'<sup>xviii</sup> The forest and the castle are both locations that Jameson suggests form focal points for romance as archetypal quest narrative, because in the collective unconsciousness of European narrative history, both the forest and the castle have very strong implications of authority and danger.

The question that Jameson fails to answer is whether or not there can really be said to be a single collective 'European' unconscious. Both the castle and the forest are important settings for Petworth's adventures in Bradbury's *Slava*, but contribute to the undifferentiated othering to which Goldsworthy suggests Eastern Europe has been subject in the western literary imagination since the romantic period rather than to any straightforward connection or unification.

At Petworth's state reception, for example, Bradbury portrays the dissident novelist Katya as fundamentally unable to converse with Petworth except in a series of riddles

and fables because to discuss her oppositional stance with regard to the Slakan authorities explicitly would be to court political censure. Thus she casts her tale of potential rebellion in the form of an allegorical fable about two people, 'Stupid and the Witch',<sup>xix</sup> where the Witch is Katya's alter ego ~~who~~ and rescues the character of 'Stupid' from the Forest. The fable pre-figures Petworth's own journey directly 'through the forest'<sup>xx</sup> and into the Slakan heartland, which will later take place during a military crackdown on civil liberties across Slaka, when Katya's tale will comfort Petworth by enabling him to 'think I am with you.'<sup>xxi</sup> This is all the consolation she can offer, because a military coup breaks out and she is incarcerated in the castle. ~~As Jameson suggests, the castle and the forest are associated with particular ideological valences. However, rather than a commonality of ideological association across Europe, Bradbury presents the~~ ~~assignment to~~ ~~assigns to~~ the east of the continent ~~of~~ a series of negative presuppositions which are in keeping with the dominant historical ~~trajectory~~ ~~Goldsworthy identifies in the west~~ ~~representations Goldsworthy and Todorova identify in the west.~~ and which Piette associates with the Cold War.

~~One of the main arguments advanced by Piette about Cold War representations of Eastern Europe is that they depend on what he calls a 'sacrificial logic.' By this he means the tendency of literary texts to be emplotted in such a way that requires individual subjectivity be subordinated to matters of statist security and stability. Drawing on René Girard's work on the scapegoat and the pharmakon in western culture, Piette goes as far as to suggest that Girard's work on mimetics 'could not have been conceived outside of the Cold War.'<sup>xxii</sup> In other words, Piette simultaneously uses Girard's concepts but also submits them to a historical critique of Girard's own methods. The same critique with regard to the inability to conceptualise the role played by Eastern Europe in the self-imagining of the west can be made of other theorists including Said and Jameson.~~

An example ~~Piette~~ gives of ~~this~~ sacrificial logic in Cold War fiction is Le Carré's *Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, in which ~~the character~~ Liz Gold's death can be seen as a sacrifice to the needs of state security. Moreover, Piette reads Graham Greene's novel *The Third Man* as an example of a 'political-allegorical' love triangle that crosses both national and psychological borders and that also depends on a logic of sacrifice in order to validate retrospectively the mystery of the plot.

Formatted: Font: English (U.S.)

~~These~~ twin elements ~~of sacrificial logic and political-allegorical romance~~ are both foregrounded in ~~Bradbury's~~ *Rates of Exchange*, suggesting that in 1983 at least the literary Cold War was still alive. The object of the romance plot, Katya, is the important ideological faultline on which the novel is constructed. With regard to the Slakan authorities, Katya is a threat; but with regards to Petworth and Bradbury, this is not so. When her affair with Petworth is brought to an end by Petworth's flight from the country, her feelings and subjectivity are both in effect sacrificed to his safety – elevated onto the level of national security. Thus a western reader will not read the text tragically, but is more likely to feel that it vindicates Petworth's escape from the evils of Communism.

The ~~binary opposition of~~ boundary between good and ~~versus~~ evil is one of the fundamental elements of the romance genre ~~and of the quest narrative~~ ~~more generally~~ because it is a point point of conflict or opposition, or a point at which different ideological values converge. The term Jameson uses for this nexus, or focal point of competing and conflicting strands of ideological investment, is *ideologeme*.<sup>xxiii</sup> An ideologeme is a set of ideas which are presented as a simplistic ethical opposition, which has to be understood as a construct rather than an essence, but which because of the powerful emotional pull of the different valences put into play with each other often feel the other way around. In other words, the categories of good and evil have to be created before different elements in the narrative can be assigned to them on the

one hand; but it is the act of assigning narrative functions to the categories that defines them on the other.

~~Although Jameson's primary example of an ideologeme is Shakespeare's *Othello*, a text in which the latent ideological distinction between Western and Eastern Europe plays a powerful part. Jameson argues that *Othello* should be understood as a tragedy in its totality, and not as the psycho-biography of its putative villain, Iago. Yet the powerful emotional impulse to see the tragedy solely as the product of the villainous Iago underlines the strength of the ideologeme, or ideological opposition of good and evil.<sup>xiv</sup>~~

~~Similarly,~~ it is tempting to read *Rates of Exchange* as the tragedy of two individual lovers, Petworth and Katya. ~~However,~~ the ideologeme of the text, the ideological clash of the Cold War period and an imbrication of Eastern Europe with otherness and hence danger, renders such a reading impossible. Within the parameters of the textual economy in which Bradbury operates, it is necessary that Petworth flies home in order to escape danger and hence confirm the basis of that ideologeme. Petworth's brush with the Slakan authorities and his hasty retreat is tantamount to the symbolic textual resolution of external social contradictions that Jameson suggests is typical of a text's political unconscious. Petworth compares the west favourably to the communist east so that when he flees the military coup and returns home, the conclusion is not made to feel tragic although he is leaving Katya. This is how the ideologeme of the text works. ~~T~~ h the conclusion of the romance plot resolves the ideological contradictions that are activated by it. ~~and~~ this is a particular stage of a long narrative history of appropriating Eastern Europe to achieve such an effect, which in turn is a practice that might be considered congruent with the appropriation of images of the orient throughout the period of empire.

**Negative Hermeneutics in *The Unconsoled***

In an important study of how the Balkans have consistently been represented in the dominant literary tropes of Western Europe, Mariia Todorova uses the term *Balkanism* to refer to that history of literary appropriation. Her contention is that a whole series of mainly negative imaginative and symbolic connotations are associated with the historical and geographical region known as the Balkans in the mind of a Western European reader because the dominant literary history has cultivated such connotations; in effect the Balkans have had their Balkan-ness inflicted on them rather than inhering in the societies in question. In labelling such a discursive practice *Balkanism*, Todorova consciously echoes Edward Said's use of the term *Orientalism* to refer to the mainly European discursive appropriation of the eastern hemisphere during the period of empire. Todorova herself says of the practice of Orientalism that it provided European 'corporate' institutions a vocabulary and framework for managing the 'Orient.'<sup>xxxv</sup> As this practice parallels the imaginative take-over to which Eastern Europe has been subject from the west of the continent, the point of departure for Todorova's study is the question: Can *Balkanism* be considered 'a structural variant' of *Orientalism*?<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Alongside the discursive and institutional similarities between the two practices, there are significant differences. Firstly, Todorova points out, that the geographical area referred to by the term 'Balkans' is much narrower in range and provides more concrete a referent than the much larger and more dispersed category of the 'Orient.' In terms of languages, ethnicities, religions, cultural practices, climates (natural and political) as well as physical and human geography, the 'Orient' was always more diverse than what Todorova refers to as the relatively 'specific' idea of the Balkans.<sup>xxxvii</sup> This can be seen in Bradbury's *Slava*, where the singularity of natural environment is paralleled by the singularity of political climate that in part it symbolises. In the discursive practice of *Balkanism*, Todorova suggests, the ironic effect of the cultural and geographical specificity of the Balkans has had the effect that the region can be made to seem, in the

Western European imagination, relatively 'prosaic'<sup>xxxxiii</sup> when compared to the exotic and at times mystical portrayals of the 'Orient.' In other words, the specificity of the term gives rise to a lack of conceptual interest and in the dominant discursive practice the region is emptied of that very specificity so that it can be filled from the outside.

A further difference between the practices of Orientalism and Balkanism is related to Todorova's distinction between a mystical global east and a prosaic local, continental east. In the European imaginary, Todorova suggests, the 'Orient', though absolutely other, tended to be portrayed as a whole other world: a world complete in itself. The Balkans and Eastern Europe in general, by contrast, have tended to be afforded what Todorova calls 'transitional status' in the western European imagination. Images of a bridge, a crossroads and accompanying metaphors for backwards economic and infrastructural development tend to dominate, stripping the region of imaginative development which is assumed in the logic of such metaphors to need insertion from the outside.<sup>xxxxiv</sup>

For all of these reasons, although Todorova sees clear areas of overlap between the practice of *Orientalism* as Said expounded it and her own concept of *Balkanism*, she remains reluctant to see one simply as a variation of the other. Instead, she develops the complex idea of Balkanism 'circumscribed in the category of orientalism'<sup>xxxxv</sup> while nevertheless remaining distinct. Many of the important practices by which the west of Europe was able to gain ideological hegemony were congruent in both the Orient and the east of the continent, but the specificities were different. Todorova uses the term 'patterns of perception'<sup>xxxxvi</sup> to refer to the historical process by which negative connotations of Eastern Europe were cultivated in the western imagination, partly following the congruent practices of *Orientalism* while also allowing for occasional variation in those practices.



Todorova's insight into how Balkanist discourse is inscribed within Orientalist practices while also remaining distinct from them subtly complicates ~~both Goldsworthy's~~ the idea of literary colonisation ~~and Piette's notion of the literary Cold War~~. Her analysis of the patterns of perception cultivated by Balkanist discourse demonstrates that individual texts might deviate from the overall structure at local level, while still contributing to the ascendancy of that overall structure. This gives rise to an important theoretical question about how far texts are bound by the histories in which they intervene. Jameson uses the term 'negative hermeneutic'<sup>xxxii</sup> to refer to the need to explore a text with regard to its non-identity with prior texts in the same genre on the one hand, while also carrying certain patterns of perception forward within it on the other. In other words, Jameson's theoretical approach to the relationship between literature and historical change can be usefully supplemented in the context of Western European writing about Eastern Europe by Goldsworthy's and Todorova's more detailed literary histories.

Alongside Jameson's *Political Unconscious*, one of the most influential studies of European literature to have appeared during the same three-decade period as the novels under consideration here was Edward Said's *Beginnings*. ~~Just as Jameson theorises the relationship between historical paradigms and their gradual development without rooting his theoretical approach in western portrayals of the east of the continent,~~ Said's focus is ~~also~~ on the dialectical relationship between changing societies and new forms of literary production in Western Europe and North America. Given ~~hi~~Said's interest in exploring the dominant discursive practices that had enabled the west to gain hegemony over the east in a global sense, and given also the congruence Todorova identifies between *Orientalist* and *Balkanist* discourse, this limit to Said's geographical range implies a significant limitation to his theoretical approach.

The only writer ~~analysed by Said in *Beginnings*~~ of an even remotely Eastern European affiliation ~~analysed by Said in *Beginnings*~~ is ~~in this sense particularly instructive~~: the

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

central European Franz Kafka. Todorova ~~refers identifies to a~~ tendency within Balkanist discourse to see central Europe as 'Other' both from the standpoint of the west and that of the Balkans. She refers to this doubled otherness as the 'myth of central Europe.' and provides a detailed cultural history of that othering discourse.<sup>xxxiii</sup> By contrast, Said appears not to consider the differences or connotations between Western, Eastern, Central and Balkan Europe at all. ~~The leading argument presented by Said in *Beginnings* is that one of the main developments in literary production to have occurred in Europe between the nineteenth century and the twentieth was a transition from writing based on a particular vision or 'vocation', to a practice of writing geared towards achieving economic success in a commercial marketplace.~~<sup>xxxiv</sup> ~~He~~Said celebrates Kafka's work as a significant milestone in the economic and professional development of western literature, separates Kafka off from the east of the continent which is otherwise unmentioned in *Beginnings*, and by implication posits the east as representing a prior stage in the economic development of the west.<sup>xxxv</sup> Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* similarly appropriates a 'western' Kafka in this way.<sup>xxxvi</sup> In other words, not only the literature of Western Europe but also some of the important critical and theoretical works can be seen to have participated in the Balkanist discourse that Todorova describes.

Like many of Kafka's secular fables, and like many of the Balkanist texts discussed by Todorova, ~~the central or Eastern European city in which~~ Kazuo Ishiguro's 1995 novel *The Unconsoled* takes place in an s-unnamed and unspecified central or Eastern European city. Its protagonist Ryder has arrived to play a piano concert that will help the disgraced artist Leo Brodsky to rehabilitate himself with the citizens of the city. Ryder's ability to map the social and political terrain is hampered by the different factions that compete for control of the city's cultural life. As with ~~Malcolm~~ Bradbury's *Rates of Exchange*, *The Unconsoled* uses the backdrop of an undifferentiated Eastern Europe to dramatise a series of contemporary ideological conflicts. To Bradbury during the 1980s

those conflicts were political and economic, and related to the confrontation of different power blocs during the Cold War. By the time of *The Unconsoled* in 1995, however, the Cold War context was no longer operative so that the novel in effect presents Eastern Europe as existing at the kind of historical and political crossroads of which Todorova was scornful. The city that Ishiguro portrays retains much of the paraphernalia of dictatorship that was satirised in Bradbury's earlier novel on the one hand, but is populated by a people seeking to generate a greater level of openness in civic life on the other. The novel portrays a society in which the post-Cold War transition from state socialism to free market capitalism is under way, but in which it is by no means clear that such a transition will be painless.

The aim of this paper is to explore how Eastern Europe continues to be represented in the western imagination after the formal periods of imperialism and the Cold War have come to an end. Although this is an area in which as yet little research has been carried out. Nataša Kovačević examines some of the tactics available to writers of Eastern European origin for crossing the imagined frontiers laid down by earlier Balkanist discourse. In *Narrating Post/Communism: Colonial Discourse and Europe's Borderline Civilization* she says of the Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić that Ugrešić has become identified as a 'dissident' writer both in the west and in Croatia. Indeed, Kovačević says, Ugrešić is in the habit of identifying herself as a 'dissident' rather than as an American, or a Croatian. This practice is a correlative of the doubled otherness of central Europe to which Todorova refers, not so much assigning two layers of otherness, but representing two levels of rejection.

The use of a doubled rejection is a way of understanding Ishiguro's use of Eastern Europe in *The Unconsoled* because the two novels that precede *The Unconsoled* in Ishiguro's oeuvre are *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989). In each of these, Ishiguro deftly portrays the turbulent nature of personal history

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Franklin Gothic Book, 11 pt

Formatted: Font: Franklin Gothic Book, 11 pt

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

among human subjects who have devoted their lives to the cause of Fascism, which in turn stands in retrospectively for the trauma of a failed and discredited past. The extent to which the plot of *The Remains of the Day* recreates in an English proto-Fascist setting what Ishiguro had already portrayed in a Japanese imperial setting in *An Artist of the Floating World* is striking, rather as though these represent not only counter-factual histories but alternative versions of Ishiguro's own cultural heritage as both a Japanese and a British writer. In other words, Ishiguro's tactical choice of an Eastern European setting for *The Unconsoled* can be seen as a doubled rejection as it represents him moving consciously away from the twin poles of British and Japanese history that characterise his own earlier output. But where Ugrešić's doubled rejection of east and west enables her to maintain a dissident stance with regard to political hierarchies in both, Ishiguro's doubled rejection is more of an occasion for the novelistic renewal of the authorial self. Just as Bradbury's *Rates of Exchange* consciously 'goes east' as a response both to his earlier *Stepping Westward* and to Lodge's *Small World*, so Ishiguro uses Eastern Europe to signal a change in direction for his work.

In *Rates of Exchange*, the ideologue of Cold War ideology militated against a tragic reading of the sabotaged romance plot. By the time of *The Unconsoled*, a different ideologue ~~has taken hold~~ was starting to develop, no longer relating the narrative closure to the wider conflict of the Cold War, but instead relating the subjective experiences of the protagonist to the gradual ~~expansion~~ incursions of a global capitalist economy. Ryder, like Bradbury's Petworth, is assigned a minder for the duration of his visit. Unlike Bradbury's Marisja, however, Ishiguro's Miss Stratmann is unable to maintain a tight hold over Ryder because the structure of the novel, its novel's portrayal of a society in transition away from socialist dictatorship, requires that its characters' movements are relatively untrammelled. This has important implications for the transformation of the romance genre in *The Unconsoled*.

~~The important point about Jameson's concept of the ideologeme is that, because it represents a focal point for competing or conflicting ideologies, it can be used to analyse literary representations in a negative dialectical sense. That is, it can be used to speculate about why literary tropes cease to emerge just as much as it can be used to explore why things do emerge. For example, at the start of *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson shows that the earlier literary theorists ~~Where~~ Northrop Frye and Vladimir Propp had traced a series of different narrative functions across five centuries of European literature as continuous symbolic structures. ~~Frederic Jameson himself, by contrast,~~ suggests that during periods of historical transition, these figures themselves do not simply recur, but undergo important change.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The helper, or assistant, is one of those figures. Neither Bradbury's Marisja nor Ishiguro's Miss Stratmann can be considered a helper in the most literal sense: they ~~both~~ fail to help ~~Petworth or Ryder~~. Extrapolating Jameson's ideas about the use of negative hermeneutics, the implication of his work is that the non-identity of history is necessary to tell us why these deviations in function occur at different times.~~

~~*The Unconsoled* presents a series of different literary forms co-existing. Its mode of narration is highly subjective and impressionistic, plunging the narrator Ryder into a series of half glimpsed and barely controlled relationships. Neither the time frame nor the narrative structure of the novel can be described as conventionally realist in form, so that the different figures and events encountered by Ryder appear to be manifestations of his own mental processes and attempts to remember earlier experiences.~~

Soon after arriving at his hotel, Ryder is begged by the porter Gustav to go to the Hungarian cafe across the square to talk to his (Gustav's) daughter Sophie about what has recently upset her and her son Boris. 'After all,' Gustav says, 'as Sophie's father and the boy's grandfather, you'd have a natural authority I simply lack.'<sup>xxxviii</sup> From the outset, the relationships into which Ryder is precipitated ~~and the experiences associated with~~

~~them~~ are highly troubling for the reader. For not only has Gustav introduced himself to Ryder as Sophie's father before immediately referring to Ryder himself as her father, but Ryder appears to make manifest a series of memories of his relationship with Sophie wherein she figures as romantic, rather than filial, attachment. Or again, both Gustav and Ryder occupy the role of Boris's grandfather. If Ryder is both Sophie's father and Boris's grandfather, there is a hint at incest here, although as so often with Ishiguro, the theme is delicately implied rather than reductively stated in any simplistic manner. The hint at incest implicitly involves *The Unconsoled* in an intertextual relationship with the most fundamental tragedy in European history, *Oedipus Rex*. This relationship creates a feeling of epicity, which is enhanced by Ishiguro's portrayal of how Brodsky must overcome a horrific leg wound in order to be rehabilitated into civic life and which recalls another foundational text of European literary history, Sophocles's *Philoctetes*.

In *Imagining the Balkans*, ~~Marina~~ Todorova points out that ~~Said's in his~~ studies of orientalist discourse, ~~Edward Said~~ had placed ancient Greek works 'at the beginning of a European imaginative geography articulating the orient.'<sup>xxxix</sup> To Todorova, this is a highly problematic appropriation, leaving Said open to the charge that he was essentialising differences between east and west. Moreover, Todorova suggests, the process whereby the culture of ancient Greece had come to stand for the founding of civilisation in Western Europe was a gradual and controversial one. By contrast, she suggests, Said's emphasis on the long-term separation between the east and west of the continent suggests a 'suspicious' continuity of otherness created by the very theoretical approach that purported to describe it.<sup>xl</sup> Here it is possible to glimpse the imbrication that exists between creative and imaginative works on the one hand, and critical and theoretical works on the other, in establishing the undifferentiated otherness of Eastern Europe.

~~In other words, Ishiguro's incest plot locates *The Unconsoled* within a broader literary history of appropriating Eastern Europe in which Sophocles is often assigned an instigating role, and of which Ishiguro's incest plot is important because it locates *The Unconsoled* within a broader literary history of appropriating Eastern Europe that goes all the way back to Sophocles and of which~~ Said and Jameson were apparently

uncritical. The plot tells us that Ryder both knows and does not know that he has already been in a relationship with Sophie for some time, and that that relationship is both romantic and filial. The narrative unfolds in such a way as to militate against any conventionally realist classification of the relationships, and towards an understanding of some or all of the discordant relationships in which Ryder operates as aspects of his own psyche. For example, on the second day of his visit, Ryder takes Boris out to a different cafe. He has to leave the boy behind, however, when a number of journalists arrive and request ~~his cooperation, as a visiting dignitary, in taking~~ a series of photographic ~~ie portraits~~ portraits of him. This involves him being taken out of the city by bus, car and tram, and then walking for a long time before arriving at the people's Sattler Monument where the photographs ~~are~~ taken. In turn, it is followed by a reception for him that appears both impromptu and yet fully scheduled, in which different figures talk about the factions competing for control of the city's cultural life.

After a lengthy journey and debate, Ryder recalls leaving the boy in the cafe and asks to be taken back to him – only to discover that the venue for the impromptu reception 'and the one in which I had left Boris were in fact parts of the same building.'<sup>xli</sup> The Sattler Monument is presented as being both a whole day's journey away from Boris, and in the same place as him. As with Sophie, therefore, the activities associated with Ryder's ~~particular~~ relationships cannot be understood as conventionally realistic in any critical sense. In the manner of a medieval dream poem, Ishiguro is able to present a landscape and a journey into that landscape that is at once both familiar and deeply estranged. It appears that Ishiguro has designed the structure of the novel in such a way

as to convert each character into a psychic projection and alienation of Ryder's own mental processes. Friends from his childhood in England, his parents, disgraced musicians all pop up and disappear in a constant and disorientating kaleidoscope before Sophie, Boris and everyone else disappear at the conclusion. It is another -example of Piette's 'sacrificial logic.' In other words, how Eastern Europe is conceptualised in fiction even after the fall of the Berlin Wall had already been cultivated by the logic and rhetoric of the Cold War, which could in turn be seen as a more recent stage of a much longer history of 'Balkanist' discourse. As Kovačević suggests, post-1989 English writing 'continues to intellectually master eastern Europe.'<sup>xlii</sup>

Formatted: Font: Franklin Gothic Book, 11 pt

Formatted: Font: Franklin Gothic Book, 11 pt

Formatted: Font: Franklin Gothic Book, 11 pt

Because it participates in the discourse of Balkanism, Jameson suggests that literary texts do not necessarily fit perfectly into the generic categories to which they are assigned and which they help construct. This potential non-identity of a text with its genre is a necessary factor in our understanding of how a text relates to society dialectically, and implies that a text is necessarily multi-faceted and combines numerous different overlapping genres. This is precisely what we find in *The Unconsoled*. The specific unity created by the text can perhaps be understood with regard to the precise historical situation in which it was produced and thwhose precise historical contradictions it offers to resolve symbolically. That is a historical situation in which it was by no means clear if the political affiliations of Eastern Europe had a long-term future with the capitalist west or the putatively socialist east; in which it was by no means clear that capitalism would gain a strong preponderance in the formerly communist states; and in which as a result of this historical lack of clarity, the whole society being portrayed is one which lacks precise definition. Ishiguro portrays *The Unconsoled* as existing at a series of historical crossroads for Eastern Europe thus contributing to the transitional status and undifferentiated process of othering to which EEastern Europe has been subject in the western literary imagination for a much longer



period. As a result of this cultural limit to how Eastern Europe can be conceived, the text is constructed out of a series of discontinuous, overlapping and uncertain fragments. These fragments in turn open onto a wider generic disparity within the text: part ancient epic; part medieval dream narrative and part modernist psycho-biography. Whereas the ideologeme of the Cold War in *Rates of Exchange* prevented the short-circuiting of the romance plot from feeling tragic, the ideologeme of uncertainty derived from the portrayal of incest in *The Unconsoled* makes it necessary to ask whether or not the romance plot was ever really active at all.

### History as Absent Cause in *Six*

To read *The Unconsoled* alongside *Rates of Exchange* is to sense a certain continuity, both at the level of Piette's 'sacrificial logic' and in the lack of concrete geo-political specificity in how Eastern Europe is conceived in English writing. With the dismantling of the Iron Curtain, English writers might have been expected to start finding a greater degree of commonality in their portrayal of the east of the continent, but that is precisely what failed to happen. This surprising continuity in the face of historical change can perhaps be explained using Analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Unconsoled* reveals that it is a multi faceted novel, combining different genres and forms. Fredric Jameson takes the capacity to integrate and combine different generic and formal elements to be typical of the novel form in general. Jameson's emphasis on the capacity of the romance genre to recur with variation gives rise to his negative hermeneutical approach to the relationship between writing and history, where the extent of a text's departure from a known generic pattern tells him as much about the society in which it was produced as its conformity to that same generic structure. As Todorova suggests, a text can help to cultivate certain patterns of perception on the one hand, while not always conforming to those patterns in every case, on the other. Existing elements of the quest narrative become redeployed, redefined and recombined at different historical moments giving rise to precise and different kinds of narrative in different periods.

~~After ideologeme and negative hermeneutics, the sense of a world in flux causes Jameson to propose~~ a third term proposed by Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* the practice of genre analysis: history itself as absent cause. ~~Only history, he suggests,~~ ~~'allows us to read the articulate relationships that make up the whole system.'~~<sup>xiii</sup> ~~That is,~~ History, he argues, itself is necessary to tell us what precise changes in society lead to a change of the general balance of forces which are then articulated in ~~a new written form~~ writing. This is a three-way dialectic involving text, society and history, where history is not assigned causal power, but is seen as the 'limit'<sup>xiv</sup> of what can be imagined in each form and hence contributing to certain ongoing patterns of perception. Thus the Cold War era gave rise to a certain ideologeme in *Rates of Exchange*, portraying the conflict between different political systems because Bradbury was unable to stand outside the strain in political history that was dominant at the time. ~~At a slightly later period,~~ *The Unconsoled* portrays a society in transition, again because it was impossible for Ishiguro to separate his portrayal from the dominant historical portrayals of those societies that already existed in Balkanist discourse.

~~By the time of~~ Jim Crace's 2003 novel *Six* is another example of that surprising continuity. By 2003, the countries and societies of Eastern Europe has undergone a much fuller transition to a global market economy than was the case in 1995, and many of the nations were preparing for entry to the European Union. Cultural representations of these neighbours who were soon to be fellow members might therefore have been expected to explore commonality and connection, but this again failed to happen.

Six mobilises the combination of sacrificial logic and geographical abstraction that characterise earlier representations of Eastern European, suggesting that despite

historical change, there is a historical limit to what Crace can imagine. ~~history as absent cause set quite different limits to how Eastern Europe could be portrayed to those of the late Cold War era in the 1980s or the period of transition in the 1990s. By 2003, the transition to a market economy was clear, so that where Malcolm Bradbury in 1983 was unable to stand outside the overall ideological clash between capitalism and communism, Crace in 2003 was caught up in a social structure which had become thoroughly saturated with capitalist relationships. Crace's protagonist Felix Dern fathers six children by six different women between the years 1979 and 2001 which are also the years of transition from communism, through uncertainty to the onset of a capitalist economy. Indeed, Felix's short term relationships with the mothers of his children suggest that in the new market structure being portrayed, human beings themselves have become converted into so much raw material to be consumed and then discarded. History sets new kinds of limits rendering Crace unable to stand outside a history and social structure based on consumption and financial transactions, so that he uses this historical structure to open a new portrayal of both Eastern Europe and the British imagination of it.~~

~~Six~~ opens on the night when an ageing actor Felix Dern conceives his final child by his lover Mouetta. The novel therefore mobilises a retrospective mode of narration that

~~Daniel Grausam suggests is typical of the Cold War because. Grausam argues, the Cold War threat of nuclear annihilation placed the basic concept of futurity in doubt, ushering in a literary practice in which no future could be imagined.<sup>xlv</sup> It is perhaps ironic therefore that Crace sets out enables Crace to portray changes in social structure across the 1980s, 1990s and into the twenty-first century, but does so in a way that invokes the logic and practice of earlier literary and discursive representations of the east.~~

-For example, Felix's first real lover (but mother of his second child) is Freda, an idealistic student and anti-capitalist protestor whom he had attempted to seduce by helping her in a plot to kidnap a prominent industrialist, Marin Scholia. Scholia in turn had come to their university to open a new faculty sponsored by his multinational corporation, the MeisterCorps Creative Centre for the Arts, or 'MeCCA.'<sup>xlvi</sup> ~~Bradbury's *Rates of Exchange* portrayed a visiting lecturer to an Eastern European university having to contend with the possibility that the state authorities might 'shut the place down'<sup>xlvii</sup> in order to curtail student demonstrations against communism. Grace's *Six*, by contrast, portrays a world in which the university might be shut down by the students themselves, protesting against the perceived iniquities of capitalism. History as absent cause gives rise to a distinct and different ideologeme in each case. As Grace portrays a period of transition in Eastern Europe between the births of Felix's first and last children, they are brought into conflict with the new Mecca of free-enterprise capitalism. The poetic language and techniques used in the narrative combine with the mythical and meta-realist plot lines to enable Grace to create a modern fable in which personal decision is always also historical action. In *Six* Grace combines an ideologeme of the free market economy with the negative hermeneutics of a changing society to give a new sense of history as absent cause.~~

It is ~~therefore~~ highly significant that Scholia's visit to the university is dated at the very end of 1981, in a period described by Grace as the 'Laxity'<sup>xlviii</sup> – which can be seen as his caricature of the Solidarity movement in Poland in the early 1980s. Yet the nation in which the action of the novel takes place is clearly not Poland: Freda's co-conspirator (and another of Felix's subsequent wives) Alicja Lesniak is 'Polish by descent'<sup>xlix</sup> and joins a group of demonstrators 'who gathered every afternoon outside the Polish Trade Mission opposite the campus gate to protest against their country's martial law.'<sup>l</sup> In other words, rather than being set in Poland in the concrete, the novel is set in Eastern Europe in the abstract – somewhere adjacent to, and culturally and politically proximate

with Poland, but not Poland. This sense of proximity and of abstraction is deepened when the student protest against Scholia's visit is put down ~~by force and his visit is postponed for a more peaceful occasion~~ – thus directly recalling the martial law in Poland while nevertheless telling us that the country being portrayed is somewhere else.

The triangular relationship between Felix, Alicja and Freda can be seen as Crace's attempt to allegorise in personal conflict the historical transition being portrayed. ~~It too draws on the sacrificial logic and rhetoric of otherness that existed in much earlier representations of Eastern Europe and suggests continuity with them.~~ For this reason, Crace ~~s~~ makes Freda perceive Alicja ~~as to be~~ a rival for ~~Felix's~~ the affections of Felix, ~~blame her for the failure of the anti-Scholia protest and seeks~~ revenge ~~on her, which.~~ This revenge is ~~again~~ cast as ~~part of~~ a wider historical and political allegory: in her dealings with Alicja, Freda does not want the political thaws of the 1980s, she 'wanted' the political tumult of '1968.'<sup>ii</sup> When read alongside the abstraction concerning which country the action is taking place in, this blending of the different political moments of 1968 and 1981 has a highly de-stabilising effect. As we have seen, the portrayal of the Laxity appears to allude to the Solidarity movement, and therefore primarily to Poland. At the same time, it might refer to the movement of *Glasnost* which was primarily associated with the Soviet Union. Moreover, by cultivating a symbolic association between events of 1981 and 1968, Crace invites readers to think of the Prague spring that took place that year – in Czechoslovakia. And once we read of the militaristic suppression of demonstration with all of this in mind, we might also think of the suppression of the Hungarian revolt of 1956 ~~– depicted in tragi-comic form in Tibor Fisher's 1993 novel Under the Frog. In Six a~~All of these suggestions are implied because rather than being specified in a concrete sense, the society in which Six takes place is left indeterminate. Instead, it takes place in a generic 'Eastern Europe' in an abstract location which is proximate to – but which is not – Poland; and which contrasts

strikingly with the specificity associated with western places in the novel: the Rome to which Scholia flies off, the Hollywood of which Felix dreams and so on.

Perhaps for this reason, the textual poetics mobilised by *Six* are historically evasive so that the sense of historical and especially geographical location at its heart is characterised by absence. For all its liberal scattering of dates, the text is one in which historical chronology has become unfixed from a geo-political conception of space and place. Without these, the dates in turn lose their frames of reference and become free-floating, unattached to precise historical occurrences in precise places. The novel begins and ends in the present, with an emphasis on how the society being portrayed has become a fully operative part of the western capitalist market economy. However, despite this emphasis on connection to the economy of the west, the lack of spatial specificity has the effect of subsuming the society in question within an undifferentiated

Eastern Europe that recalls ~~Malcolm~~ Bradbury's Slakan no-place and ~~Kazuo~~ Ishiguro's transitional no-where. ~~As with earlier Balkanist portrayals, the east of Crace's capacity to portray an east in which all are European and all are capitalist is that~~ a concrete sense of space and precise differentials between different Eastern European ~~societi~~places—~~and all their cultures, histories, language and politics~~—are gradually eliminated. ~~Within the logic of Crace's portrayal, the western societies of Britain, America, Italy, Holland and Sweden are all distinct and different. Eastern European societies, by contrast, are interchangeable. In other words,~~ just as Eastern Europe had been subjected to an undifferentiated othering within the 'western' literary imagination throughout the nineteenth century and twentieth centuries, throughout the Cold War, and throughout the period of transition to a global economy, so too and paradoxically it is subject to a continued process of othering in a period when literary representations of the Eastern Europe might have been expected to that othering supposedly affirms the connections of Eastern Europe to the cultures and economies of the west – both in the global economy and the expanding European Union.

Formatted: Footer, Line spacing: Double

That this commonality has not started to be portrayed perhaps reflects a new and different set of anxieties about the west's relations with Eastern Europe – anxieties surrounding competition in a world export market; or immigration and employment, especially as the borders of the European Union continue to expand. This latter set of anxieties, for example, is clearly represented in novels such as Rose Tremain's *The Road Home* (2008), Sebastian Faulks's *A Week in December* (2009) and John Lanchester's *Capital* (2012). As Hammond puts it, '[i]nstead of championing a united, egalitarian continent, novelists placed much of eastern Europe on the other side... portraying its civilians as an even greater threat to western security than its state systems.' He goes on to say that many novelists resolve this threat by symbolically representing in fiction a 'repatriation of eastern bloc characters.'<sup>iii</sup> Hammond cites Bruce Chatwin's *Utz* (1988) as an example of a 'repatriation' novel that reinforces the binary otherness of east and west. Amanda Craig's *Hearts and Minds* (2009) is a more recent example.

Formatted: Font: 11 pt

Formatted: Font: 11 pt

Formatted: Font: 11 pt

Formatted: Font: Franklin Gothic Book, 11 pt

Formatted: Font: Franklin Gothic Book, 11 pt

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

### Conclusion: Patterns of Perception and the 'Otherness' of Eastern Europe

Fredric Jameson's *Political Unconscious* and Edward Said's *Beginnings* made significant contributions to the study of the European novel during the late and post Cold War periods. The theoretical insight propounded in each case was that texts cannot simply be assigned to particular generic classifications without contributing to the construction and development of those categories of classification in the process. Neither Jameson nor Said succeeded in addressing ways in which the otherness of Eastern Europe was constituted in literary texts that purported to portray it as if in an objectively neutral manner. On the contrary, their theoretical works co-opt a number of central or Eastern European writers for a putative western literary tradition and implicitly assign to Eastern Europe the status of under development and hence of inferiority.

Mariia Todorova's emphasis on particular patterns of perception within historical discourse draws attention to how the symbolic inferiority of the east was both constructed and articulated in that discourse. Vesna Goldsworthy's study shows that this critical tendency towards the undifferentiated otherness of Eastern Europe is part of a much longer historical trajectory. She argues that the dominant imagining of the Balkans and Eastern Europe more generally between the early nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries was tantamount to a literary colonisation, fictively emptying the region of precise content so that it became amenable to the transplantation of forms, genres and modes reflecting the dominant tradition. To read her work alongside that of Jameson and Said implicitly subjects them to a critique of their own methods, demonstrating how texts including their own help to constitute the categories into which they are classified.

This paper set out to explore how far the undifferentiated otherness of Eastern Europe identified portrayed in the Balkanist discourse of the literary imaginings of nineteenth and early to mid twentieth centuries persisted during and especially after the Cold War period. Just as Goldsworthy argues that both imaginative and non-fictional writing contributes to the Balkanist discourse of the earlier period, so too this paper has explored the extent to which both fictional and non-fictional writing continues to contribute to that discourse.

It has argued that two of the paradigmatic texts of literary criticism during the period under consideration, Said's *Beginnings* and Jameson's *Political Unconscious* put forward a number of theoretical concepts for the useful analysis of Balkanist discourse. At the same time, however, those same theorists contribute uncritically to a discursive separation of Europe into east and west and therefore help to constitute a series of essentialist categories they might otherwise be expected to deconstruct. In starting to



perform such a deconstruction, it could be argued that the paper has in effect submitted Jameson and Said to a critique of their own methods.

With regard to fictional texts, it has been argued that the end of the Cold War, the expansion of a global economy and the prospect of an expanded European Union might have been expected to be accompanied by a shift in discursive representations of the cultures and societies of Eastern Europe. However, detailed analysis of Bradbury's *Rates of Exchange*, Ishiguro's *Unconsoled* and Crace's *Six* has shown that each novel mobilises variations on the romance plot that Jameson suggests is archetypal to western literature. They ~~to~~ portray a series of Eastern European societies that are emptied of content ~~and which hence reflect historical transitions taking place in the society in which the novels were produced~~ rather than addressing the specificities of actually existing Eastern European societies. This represents a continuity of what Piette calls the sacrificial logic of Cold War rhetoric which was itself rooted in the earlier Balkanist discourse and literary colonisation of Eastern Europe identified by Goldsworthy and Todorova.

The paper has begun to suggest other novels that might be explored in more detail in order to ascertain how far the continued portrayal of Eastern Europe as 'other' is typical of contemporary literary representations of Eastern Europe more generally. There have been some areas into which the paper has not ventured at all. One of these is the growing body of work by English writers of Eastern European provenance, whose part fictional and part biographical accounts often provide a stronger sense of concrete history than is typically found in Balkanist discourse. This might be said of Goldsworthy's *Chernobyl Strawberries* (2005) or Marina Lewycka's *Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* (2005).

The other area that lies beyond the scope of this paper is the 'canon' of Eastern European works in English translation, in which a diversity of Eastern European writers might be said to represent their own cultures in a way that departs from dominant Balkanist representations in the west. The Czech writers Milan Kundera and Bohumil Hrabal, the Polish poet Wisława Szymborska, Albania's Ismail Kadare and the Hungarians Imre Kertész and Árpád Göncz were hailed in the west for their dissident activities in opposition to the dictatorships of the late Cold War period, so that ironically their high place in the canon of works in English translation might actually repeat and recast the assumptions and rhetoric of otherness that characterises literary representations of Eastern Europe. But as Lawrence Venuti points out, the cultural and institutional politics of translation are complex so that it would take much more analysis to make this point in full.<sup>lvi</sup> Meanwhile, Julian Barnes's novel *The Porcupine* (1992), written in English with the specific intention of being translated into Bulgarian and allegorising the end of Bulgaria's Communist leaders, could be seen as a special case which nevertheless also maintains the dichotomy of free west versus 'othered' east, and therefore conforms to the overall trajectory.

The variations in the romance genre mobilised in the different representations of Eastern Europe explored here can be approached historically not only by measuring their conformity to known generic and formal structures, but also through their precise local complication and variation on those structures. That is to say, history as absent cause sets limits to what can and cannot be imagined at particular times, so that individual texts have the capacity to carry forward the imaginative take-over of Eastern Europe in perhaps surprising ways. The way in which the east of the continent has been imagined during the decades since the end of the Cold War remains circumscribed by the dominant images of undifferentiated otherness in the western literary imagination with regard to Eastern Europe, so that for all the historic variation that they portray, they contribute also to the patterns by which that otherness is perceived.~~The similarities and~~

continuities between the three novels and periods can be characterised in the following way: Eastern Europe was rendered *other* by Bradbury's portrayal of its communist state structure during the Cold War; *other* by its transitional status in Ishiguro's *Unconsoled* during the period immediate after the fall of the Berlin Wall; and *other* by the militant extremes of a new capitalist formation at the start of the twenty first century in Grace's *Six*. In each case, the undifferentiated othering of Eastern Europe repeats and recasts the literary colonisation and imaginative take over of the region that Goldsworthy relates to a much longer set of dominant/ subordinate relationships and to the discursive practices that augment them.

At the same time, the variations in the romance genre mobilised by each writer demonstrates that the each text can be approached historically not only by measuring its conformity to known generic and formal structures, but also through its precise local complication and variation on those structures. That is to say, history as absent cause sets limits to what can and cannot be imagined at particular times, so that individual texts have the capacity both to carry forward the imaginative take over of Eastern Europe and to portray historical changes in how mainstream literary culture has imagined it. In the last instance, the way in which the east of the continent is imagined in these three novels during the decades since the end of the Cold War remains circumscribed by the dominant images of undifferentiated otherness in the western literary imagination with regard to Eastern Europe, so that for all the historic variation that they portray, they contribute also to the patterns by which that otherness is perceived.

---

<sup>i</sup> Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1998) p.3.

<sup>ii</sup> Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, p.2.

<sup>iii</sup> Mariia Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.7.

<sup>iv</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p.11.

<sup>v</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p.7.

Formatted: Font: +Body (Calibri)

Formatted: Font: 11 pt

Formatted: Font: +Body (Calibri)

Formatted: Font: 11 pt

Formatted: Font: 11 pt

Formatted: Font: 11 pt

