Utz Study Guide

Utz by Bruce Chatwin

Contents

Plot Summary

Utz keeps a fabulous collection of Meissen porcelain crammed into a tiny two-room flat. He is the perfect source for a story about the psychology of the collector. Through the Nazis and the communists, Utz has sacrificed to hold onto his porcelains because life is what he feels in their company, not what he does to keep them. His collection disappears after his death. The ensuing search illuminates Utz in a more revealing light, without solving the mystery. Did Utz's collection give him wisdom and long life, like porcelain gave Chinese emperors? Did he give life to his porcelains, like Rabbi Loew to his golem? Where is his collection?

The story begins with Utz's funeral, a spectacle from anticommunist farce, with a cleaning lady in the aisle who refuses to stop scrubbing so the casket can pass. There are only two mourners, Utz's friend Dr. Orlik and his devoted servant Marta. They attend a funeral breakfast afterward, the only two at a breakfast prepaid by Utz for twenty.

The narrator is in Prague to research a book about the psychology - or psychopathology - of collectors, and he meets with Utz, a man of encyclopedic knowledge of his subject and a collection of one thousand Meissen porcelains, all crammed into his tiny, two-room apartment. Utz is with Orlik when they meet the narrator for lunch, and then the narrator and Utz walk and converse. Utz is forgettable and nondescript. He wears spectacles and, perhaps, a moustache, or perhaps not. The narrator cannot remember. Utz is German, possibly a baron descended from minor nobility, raised in Dresden with a month each summer at the castle of his grandmother, near Prague. She was Jewish, a convert to Catholicism and an heiress whose global investments sustain Utz, her only grandchild, his whole life.

Among Utz's grandmother's treasures one summer, Utz discovers a particular porcelain Harlequin. Four years later, she sends the Harlequin to comfort him when his father is killed. Utz finds his vocation in his love of the Harlequin, and he devotes himself to porcelain, its scholarship and collection. He crates his collection and sends it to Ceske Krizove, his grandmother's castle, at the beginning of the war. He gives the castle and the estates to the government after the war and gets a Czech passport and an apartment in Prague. His collection is his abiding passion, and it makes him impervious to the many depredations he suffers from the somber century in which he lives. He is unsuccessful in love, but his life is full and has meaning because of the life, elegance, courtliness and passion conferred by his porcelains.

Utz tells this story to the narrator, in which the folly of life in a totalitarian regime is a constant theme, addressing life's concessions and compromises, the bullies the government creates and the tricks by which pleasure is snatched. While Utz and the narrator sit for a time at the Old Jewish Cemetery, the conversation turns to golems, automatons that mystical Jews were thought to create from mud, as God created Adam by shaping him in mud - like a golem or a porcelain - and breathing life into him. Utz's collection gives him life, and he gives life to them. Utz believes that museums are the enemies of collected objects, which only come to life in collectors' hands. Later, at his

apartment, he talks about alchemy. He thinks alchemy was a quest, not for gold, but for immortality, whether as a substance to ingest or the substance of the vessel - perhaps porcelain - that holds what is ingested. The narrator leaves Utz at the end of that day, not returning to Prague for twenty years, after Utz is long dead and his collection has vanished.

As the narrator searches for clues to Utz's collection, a new portrait emerges of Utz, assembled from the stories of people who knew him. His dealer in New York says Utz did, indeed, have a moustache, and it is the key to the man. The Utz that is revealed has more life, more depth and much more love. His life and his bed are filled by a procession of light-opera sopranos. His trips to Europe allow him to sell off the state's porcelain to bring them hard currency. Marta is his wife, at first just to fool the bureaucrats and keep Utz in his flat, until 1967, when she comes to his bed. After a stroke in 1973, he signs a paper that bequeaths his porcelains to the state museum, in exchange for an end to the museum staff's visits to check on them. When he dies of a second stroke in 1974, Marta keeps a vigil over his coffin and lies about the next day's itinerary to Utz's many grieving sopranos and the museum staff. They all go to the wrong church and the wrong cemetery, and then to the funeral breakfast at the wrong time, so that as they arrive, Marta is departing for her sister's, taking with her all knowledge of the porcelains that have vanished from Utz's apartment.

The narrator follows some clues while in Prague. He imagines that when Utz and Marta leave the church, husband and wife, Utz finally knows that he holds a real life and real love in his arms. He has no more need of his collection, recognizing it for the mere crockery it has always been, and, with Marta, destroys it. The narrator cannot convince even himself, however, and the story ends with an old peasant woman answering her door, saying that yes, she is the Baroness Utz.

Section 1 (through page 27)

Section 1 (through page 27) Summary

On March 7, 1974, Kaspar Joachim Utz dies of a second stroke in his apartment at No. 5 Siroka Street, overlooking the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Three days later, early in the morning, his friend Dr. Vaclav Orlik is outside the Church of Sigismund, waiting for the hearse. The hearse arrives at 8 a.m. In order to divert the people's attention from retrograde Christian rituals, those rituals must be over by 8:30. Utz planned his own funeral with care. White carnations cover the coffin, over which a wreath of Bolshevik vulgarity with red flowers and ribbons has been placed, with a condolence card from the Director of the Rudolfine Museum and his staff, to which Orlik adds pink carnations. The hearse carries pallbearers - night-shift employees of a rubber factory who work for the undertaker by day - and a woman shaking with grief. She is Utz's faithful servant Marta. Orlik rushes up to her, as the pallbearers have left her. The procession advances up the main aisle and then stops halfway to ask the cleaning lady, who is on hands and knees scrubbing the floor, to please let them pass. She ignores them, so they must sidle along one pew, down the side aisle and then back over again to get around her. Orlik and Marta are the only mourners. After the graveside service, the two go to a breakfast at the Hotel Bristol for which Utz has already paid for twenty, having expected some cousins and some staff from the museum to show. Marta and Orlik sit alone, side by side. At the far end of the table stands a huge stuffed bear, placed there to remind the clientele of their country's fraternal protector. A brass plaque says that it was shot, not in the Tatras or the Carpathians, but in the Yukon. It is not a black bear at all. It is a grizzly bear. After a glass or two of tokay, Marta appears less mournful. After four, she is grinning and toasting the bear at the top of her voice.

The narrator goes to Prague for historical research in the summer of 1967, one year before tanks overrun Czechoslovakia. He is writing an article, part of a book he plans on the psychology - or psychopathology - of the collector. He has asked a friend to suggest someone whom he can see while there. The friend replies that Prague is the most mysterious of European cities, where the supernatural is always possible. He could send the narrator to artists he knows, although they will all whine about the role of the artist in a totalitarian state. The narrator explains more clearly his need, and his friend sends him to Utz. Utz owns a spectacular collection of Meissen porcelain, over a thousand pieces, all crammed into his tiny, two-room flat, which he has preserved through World War II, Stalin and the current regime.

Utz visits his maternal grandmother for one month each summer as a child at Ceske Krizove, her neo-medieval castle in Czechoslovakia. She is a Jew who converts to Catholicism. Utz is her only grandson and heir, a boy in whom she sees the pallor of the ghetto, and she loves him. On one visit, he is bewitched by a Meissen figurine of a Harlequin. His grandmother will not part with it then, but she sends it to him in Dresden to console him after his father's death. In that figurine, he finds his vocation, and he devotes his life to collecting - which he calls "rescuing" - Meissen porcelain. He neglects

his schoolwork, learning everything he can about porcelain. He buys and sells pieces. By nineteen, he has been published in a respected journal. He spends hours in Dresden museums, examining pieces from royal collections. His next publication develops his theory that art should belong to private collectors who touch, hold and love it, and that museums should be looted every fifty years and their collections returned to collectors.

Utz is politically neutral, since upheaval is good for collectors. He does well after the stock market crash and after Kristallnacht pays U.S. dollars to Jewish connoisseurs desperate to emigrate. At the end of the war, he does the same for aristocrats fleeing the Soviet army. He is a citizen of the Reich, but he knows war is coming when Prague is occupied and knows Hitler will lose, because invaders usually come to grief. Although his mother's mother was born a Jew, his father died a hero on the Somme in 1916. When Utz's racial purity is questioned, he slams his father's medal onto the desk and shouts at his examiners, asking how they dare to insult the son of a great German soldier. It works. They do not bother him again. He crates his porcelains and ships them to Ceske Krizove in thirty-seven crates, where he lays low and keeps the crates packed. A month after the surrender, Utz disavows his German passport and obtains Czech nationality. He is a collaborator, giving the Germans a trickle of information about works of art while protecting and hiding many Jewish friends. When the communists come, he gives his lands to a farming collective and the castle for use as a mental asylum, moving to a tiny apartment. He takes up Hebrew studies - pictures of Marx and Lenin hang in Israeli kibbutzim at the time - and goes twice a week to watch Soviet films. When his friend Orlik suggests they flee to the West, Utz refuses, unable to leave his porcelains.

The narrator asks how Utz was able to keep the porcelains. His friend answers that he made a deal, which was possible because the revolution called for the abolition of private property without ever defining the difference between property (bad for society) and household possessions (not bad). The communist authorities photographed and numbered the collection, and Utz implied it would be given to the state museum at his death.

Section 1 (through page 27) Analysis

The funeral is a perfect farce of a totalitarian regime, cinematic in its evocation of physical detail, where the objective of anyone in a position to help is to hinder. Utz is dead, and the funeral suggests that he was a small man who lived a small, probably sad life. There are only two people to mourn him, and no young people or children, suggesting there is no family. His taste was not bad, as one can judge from the flowers. He had some association with a museum. It was thoughtful of him to arrange his funeral breakfast before his death and a little pathetic that he imagined so many more people in attendance, although even twenty is few. It is very pathetic that the person described as his "devoted servant" seems to run out of grief so quickly. This introduction to Utz will be reinterpreted throughout the book, as further information is revealed.

The narrator describes the prevailing mood of Prague's citizenry, suggesting a sense of deep frustration. Utz is introduced and his life summarized up to the present. This view of Utz's life is based on Utz's own story of his life, as told to the narrator.

Section 2 (page 27 to page 58)

Section 2 (page 27 to page 58) Summary

Utz finally agrees to meet the narrator the day before his departure, but at a restaurant rather than his apartment, to the narrator's great disappointment. The narrator describes Utz's face as immediately forgettable, set with narrow eyes behind steel-framed spectacles. He cannot remember if Utz has a moustache. "Add a moustache, subtract a moustache: nothing would alter his utterly nondescript appearance." If he does have a moustache, however, it is precise and bristly, to go with the precise, toy-soldierish gestures, which are the only evidence of his Teutonic ancestry, but he probably does not have a moustache. The narrator joins Utz and Dr. Orlik at the restaurant, Pstruh, at which they have met for Thursday lunch since 1946. "Pstruh" is Czech for "trout," but no trout are available today because they are all reserved for the four fat communist party members at another table. Dr. Orlik is a paleontologist. He studied wooly mammoths for thirty years, culminating in a "magisterial" paper, after which he desired to study a lowlier creature. His specialty since is the common housefly within metropolitan Prague. Among entomologists, insects with rigid social structures are popular, but Orlik prefers the individualistic, anarchic fly. When a fly lands on their table, he traps it, transfers it to a killing-jar from his pocket and examines it, speculating learnedly on its place of origin, the restaurant kitchen.

Utz and the narrator spend the afternoon strolling through Mala Strana, discussing giants, dwarfs and collections of both, until by early evening they are sitting on a bench in the Old Jewish Cemetery. A group of young Americans, Hasids, lays stones on the tomb of the great Rabbi Loew. Utz describes how the synagogue, the cemetery and the Old Town Hall were spared by the Nazis for a proposed Museum of Jewry, where Aryan tourists could see the relics of a lost people, like the Aztecs or the Inca. Rabbi Loew was the leader of Prague Jewry during the reign of Emperor Rudolf, when Jews were esteemed and privileged. The Rabbi was credited with supernatural powers after his death, although none of the tales date from his lifetime. He was a scholar whose writings were absorbed into the teachings of Hasidim, but much of his fame derives from the legend that he created Yossel the Golem from the mud of the River Vltava.

All golem legends derive from an ancient Jewish belief that any righteous man can create the world by repeating, in the order prescribed by the Kabbalah, the letters of the secret name of God. *Golem* means "unformed" in Hebrew. Adam was a golem, a mass of clay modeled by the God that breathed life into him. Not only was Adam the first human, Utz says, but he was also the first ceramic sculpture. Utz continues telling golem stories. A golem was said to have a strip of metal in its mouth or across its forehead, inscribed with the Hebrew word *emet*, which means "truth." To destroy a golem, a rabbi had only to remove the first letter. Then, *emet* would read *met*, which is the Hebrew for "death."

According to the story, Rabbi Loew's golem is named Yossel. On weekdays he does the menial tasks Rabbi Loew assigns him. On the Sabbath, when all God's creatures must rest, his master removes the strip of metal from his forehead, and Yossel is rendered lifeless for the day. One Sabbath, the Rabbi forgets to do this, and Yossel runs amok. In the midst of his prayers, the Rabbi is reminded, and he runs into the street to snatch the strip from the golem's forehead. The golem stories all suggest that a man-made figure is blasphemy.

The narrator asks Utz if art collecting is idolatry. "Ja! Ja!" Utz says. "That is why we Jews...and in this matter I consider myself a Jew...are so *good* at it! Because it is forbidden...! Because it is sinful...! Because it is dangerous...!" As to whether the porcelains demand their own deaths, Utz thinks it a problematical question. He invites the narrator to his apartment.

The apartment is a tiny, two-room flat up four flights of stairs. The main room is narrow, made narrower by a double bank of plate-glass, mirror-backed shelves crammed with porcelains, and there are white porcelain statues on the gray carpet. There is little furniture, and the furniture that is there is surprisingly modern - a daybed, a glass-topped table and a pair of Barcelona chairs in dark green leather, rescued from a house in Dresden built by Mies van der Rohe. The narrator describes the categories of porcelains he sees, figurines, serving pieces and a profusion of animals and characters from theater and literature, as Utz points out this or that and describes its origins. The narrator gasps, smiles, oohs and ahs, knowing the way to endear oneself with a collector. Marta is there, in maid's attire, offering snacks on a fine porcelain tray. Utz pulls out the Harlequin his grandmother gave him and turns it upside down to reveal an inventory label in code, the label that earmarks the piece for the museum. "But those persons," Utz whispers, "have made a mistake."

One morning in 1952, a curator from the museum, a photographer and a pimpled lout whom Utz correctly guesses is a member of the secret police demand entry to his flat. For two weeks they photograph and label, trampling dirt onto his carpet, demonstrating their clumsiness, and not allowing Utz to help. Finally, inevitably, the photographer drops a piece, and Utz loses his temper. When they are finished and gone, Utz feels violated and vaguely suicidal. He still has money in Switzerland. He decides that if he can get out of Czechoslovakia he will.

Section 2 (page 27 to page 58) Analysis

The scene in the restaurant extends the farce from the funeral and elaborates on the folly of totalitarian regimes, under which even scholarship must serve the needs of the state. During the lunch and later during their conversation, while Utz expounds he also listens. He and the narrator, neither one explicitly, are interviewing each other. The narrator gathers information about the psychology of the collector, for all of Utz's conversation is ultimately about his collection, and every tangent can be tied to it. Utz gathers information, too, about whether he can let this person into his life, his apartment and his collection - his very heart - which he must be cautious about revealing. The

individual is always vulnerable under a totalitarian regime, and Utz has much more to lose than most.

The conversation turns to golems as Utz and the narrator sit in the cemetery. It serves the author that Utz be nondescript and forgettable because Utz is not yet the story. The story at this moment is the connection between an owner and the art he owns, the extent to which the collector gives life to the object by adoring it and the extent to which the object gives life to the collector by being adored. The image of the golem is explored in this connection because it is a vessel that is inert until it is filled by its maker with life. It is compared to the object that is filled by its owner with adoration. The analogy goes further. The golem is filled with life by its maker as the object is filled with *life* by its owner. The object also gives *life* to its owner. Then is the golem alive? Is the object alive? Is the object dead? Is the golem dead? All there are here are questions. Do the questions even make sense? How can it make sense to use words like dead and alive to talk about collectible objects? There is one last question: What is the mistake they make, the people who catalogue his collection, about his grandmother's Harlequin?

Section 3 (page 59 to page 95)

Section 3 (page 59 to page 95) Summary

The most reliable way to get an exit visa is on grounds of ill health. Utz obtains a note from his doctor, prescribing the spa at Vichy. He takes leave of Marta the night before, not telling her his plans but inviting her to be the guest at the dinner she has just prepared for two. Marta is devoted to Utz; she entered his service when he rescued her from a mob. She is the only person Utz both trusts and can use. The customs men frisk Utz at the frontier, taking his small change, the picnic Marta prepared and *The Magic Mountain* he brought to read on the train. He shares the compartment with a young couple. The woman is pregnant, with unshaved legs and blond hair with dark roots. The boy is as disgusted with her as Utz. He looks ill at ease and shudders when she touches him. She unpacks the hamper she has brought and feasts. The boy eats little, but she eats and eats and eats. The boy tries to offer Utz a chicken leg, but she does not allow it. When she is finished, she takes the one sandwich that remains, lurches to her feet and throws it out the window, the inevitable conclusion to the drama. Utz mumbles in German, loud enough for her to hear, "It could never have happened in Czechoslovakia."

Utz is met in Geneva by a man from his bank, from whom he receives an envelope of money. He told the authorities he was bound for Vichy, and he can think of no place else to go. At Vichy, the hotel has been redecorated since the war. Utz's room is furnished in gray-painted Louis Seize [Louis Sixteenth], with light blue walls and carpet. It demonstrates to Utz that the French have lost their taste. Utz says to himself that he is not enjoying this, nor does he enjoy the doctor he visits, the mud baths, massage and other spa treatments. Judging from the drawn, morose people he sees, he cannot believe the celebrated waters are beneficial to anyone. He does not enjoy the staff at the spa or the abrasive sound of English voices. He grows paranoid, sure that he is being followed. He does not enjoy the antique shops, the races or the floor shows, until after the intermission at one show, a soprano takes the stage. Utz's pupils dilate as he gazes through opera glasses at her quivering throat.

Utz developed a fantasy about his trip, that he would meet a lovely, lonely middle-aged woman who would love him. It is too late for her to love him for his looks, but he has other qualities. The women all prove disappointments. He turns his attention to food. At a beautiful restaurant on a beautiful day, he looks at the menu, remembering all the times, especially during the war, when memories of past meals sustained him. His meal is disappointing. The food lacks taste. He sees a woman with her young son, picnicking across the river, and he longs to be with them, sharing their simple but, he imagines, tasty food. He concludes that luxury is only luxurious under adverse conditions.

"Why, he asked himself, when he had steeled himself to the horrors of war and revolution, should the free world present so frightening an abyss?" He sleeps soundly in Prague, but here he is tormented through the night worrying about his money

diminishing, what country he would like to live in (what country would make him the least unhappy) and why he is so homesick for the country where he is harassed, menaced and insulted. Prague suits his melancholic temperament. He does not think of his collection. He can think only of Marta, alone in the apartment. He remembers times she brought back a treasure for him from market - a pheasant or a hare - hidden under dirty potatoes that no prying policeman would want to touch. Their happiest times were in mushroom season, when they would go back to Ceske Krizove, avoiding the big house, and go into the woods, back to scenes from his childhood. One day, on their way back to Prague, they stop in the town square at Tabor, where local mushroom fanciers had set up stalls. They saw his old doctor and his old laundrywoman. Everyone was laughing and haggling, making it clear that "the business of trade is one of life's pleasures, no more to be abolished than falling in love."

Throughout the Cold War, Utz has his feet on both sides of the Iron Curtain because of his investments in the West and his powers of persuasion at home. Each year, he leaves in April, sick of winter and sick of the regime, and each year he intends never to return while making arrangements to return. Local officials never understand why he comes back, nor do the Swiss and French consuls whose visas allow him into their countries. He confesses to the narrator that he has a secret cache of Meissen, stored in a vault at a Swiss bank in Geneva. One year, Utz's New York dealer, Dr. Frankfurter, meets him in Vichy with an extraordinary porcelain, completely outside Utz's range, made not in Meissen but in CapodiMonte. It is a figure of Pulchinella being fed spaghetti from a chamber pot by a Neapolitan boy. Utz feels he must have it, although the price is shocking. Frankfurter keeps telling him that this is his friend price, and none of Utz's feints is rewarded with a discount. They both know he will buy, however, no matter the price, when the dealer relates its provenance back to the granddaughter of Augustus the Strong. It was Augustus whose patronage led to the development of porcelain in Dresden. He is a hero to Utz, and his granddaughter is the woman who founded the CapodiMonte factory in Naples. Utz eventually relents and pays the asking price. He finds himself unable to leave the lustrous, fabulous Spaghetti Eater behind at the bank.

Section 3 (page 59 to page 95) Analysis

The ease with which Utz travels is surprising given the restrictions of the state. That is not explained until much later, although it is clear that must be very wealthy. He displays unexpected inertia in going to Vichy, however, and a complete failure of imagination in not going someplace else when Vichy fails him. He has been other places, to London and Paris before the war, but he has not traveled extensively and does not really know all the places he rejects. He believes there is no place that will make him less unhappy than Prague, and he considers a degree of unhappiness inevitable and satisfactory. The reader must suppose that nothing can be right for Utz. Everything must be tainted, with his collection so far away, but he says he does not miss his collection. He misses Marta, his servant. The only simple pleasures in his life are the pleasures he mentions now as he thinks of her, such as her pulling a surprise from under dirty potatoes and her going with him to hunt for mushrooms. When he does return to Prague, his displeasure at the barbed wire and sentry boxes seems to be balanced perfectly with his pleasure at the

absence of billboards. This is a man of great intellectual capacity and curiosity. In coming pages, he is shown so capable of rapture from his porcelains that his life is what he lives among them, and even now he risks everything to smuggle one back home. Yet, his soul seems as nondescript as his face as he returns.

Section 4 (page 96 to page 115)

Section 4 (page 96 to page 115) Summary

Utz whispers to the narrator that he smuggled it in. Marta comes in, sees how they look and withdraws to the kitchen to bang pots together. This is how they foil the bugs that Utz says are planted in his apartment. They talk about porcelain prices at auction, about which the narrator can only speculate, having no market knowledge. Utz is moved to little cries of joy at the prices the narrator names, and he is filled with glee that he is a porcelain millionaire. He invites the narrator to dinner. The narrator accepts, asking first to use the bathroom. Utz is distressed and even disturbed by the request. He pretends he has not heard and has to be asked again. Utz leads him through the bedroom into the bathroom. Behind the bathroom door, the narrator sees a quilted, peach silk robe with applique roses on the shoulders and a collar of pink ostrich plumes. He knows Utz waits for him, but he lingers to study the bedroom as he passes back through. The room holds a frilly lace lampshade, flounced pink curtains and a pink satin eiderdown. He sees also a rosary, a crucifix and a scapular of the Infant of Prague. The narrator wonders what to make of this all and whether perhaps Utz has a wig hidden behind the skirt of the dressing table. Utz cannot meet his eyes when the narrator comes into the main room. Marta reappears and sets two places on the glass-topped table, banging down the silverware in a show of temper, and Utz cringes each time he looks at her face. Utz and the narrator eat, and Utz gradually starts to relax. On his second helping, Utz lifts his fork with a piece of pork, asking the narrator if he knows that "pork" and "porcelain" are the same word.

Marco Polo thought that cowrie beads, used as currency in Africa and Asia, looked like pigs' backs and called them "porcelain shells," *porcella* being the Italian word for "little sow." The glaze on the translucent white porcelain from Kublai Khan's epoch resembled cowrie beads, hence the name "porcelain." Chinese porcelain was one of those legendary substances, like unicorn horn or alchemical gold, from which men hoped to drink immortality. From the seventeenth century, the Emperors of China had a huge impact on the European imagination. They were thought to be very wise and to live to a very great age. Porcelain was their material, as smooth and unwrinkled as their faces were smooth and unwrinkled, in the same way that gold was the material of Europe. Utz shows the narrator a pair of identical statuettes of Augustus the Strong, one made of red Bottger ware, also called jasper-porcelain, and the other of white. He tells the narrator about Bottger, the grandson of a goldsmith and a talented chemist who developed the red porcelain in 1708 and the white in 1709, which allowed Augustus the Strong to open the first commercial porcelain factory in Dresden in 1710. During the German inflation of 1923, the Dresden banks issued emergency money, in red and white Bottger porcelain, samples of which Utz pours into the narrator's hands.

Most porcelain experts, Utz says, consider Bottger's discovery to be a mere byproduct of alchemy. Utz disagrees. He thinks it foolish "to attribute to former ages the materialist concerns of this one." He does not believe that alchemy was ever a technique simply to

make gold. It was a mystical exercise. The search for gold and the search for porcelain were aspects of the same quest, the quest for immortality. Utz took up alchemical studies, both for the sake of the knowledge and as a way to elevate his mania for porcelain to a more metaphysical plane, so if the communists took his collection he would continue to, in a different way, possess it. The Chinese once taught that gold was the body of the gods, and Christians equated gold with the body of Christ, the perfect, untarnishable substance, an elixir that could save one from death. Was this gold as we know it or an *aurum potabile* to be drunk? Jewels and metals were thought to mature in the earth, like a baby in a womb. Crystals turned into rubies, and silver turned into gold. An alchemist believes he can speed up the process with the White Stone, to convert base metal into silver, and with the Red Stone, to convert the silver to gold.

The narrator asks if Utz thinks early porcelains correspond to the red and white tinctures of the alchemists. Utz answers that Nebuchadnezzar had the fiery furnace heated to seven times its normal temperature when he put in Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Again, the narrator questions him. Is Utz suggesting that they were ceramic? They could have been, Utz answers, because they survived the fire. The narrator asks if Utz believes that porcelains are alive. Utz believes they are and are not. They die in the fire and are born again. The narrator tries to tie together all the threads Utz has laid out. If the eighteenth-century imagined porcelain as a magical, talismanic substance, then it is easier to understand why the king would keep forty thousand pieces or why Utz would keep his. Utz concludes that porcelain is the antidote to decay.

The room is almost in darkness when Marta brings a Meissen candlestick. Innumerable points of flame are reflected in the walls as she lights it. The narrator looks at Utz's face. His face seemed waxy in texture before, but now it looks like melted wax, especially compared to the porcelain. Things are tougher than people. Utz lifts the characters of the Commedia dell'Arte and places them in the pool of light. They appear to skate over the glass of the table, as if they would forever go on laughing and whirling. The narrator realizes, "...as Utz pivoted the figure in the candlelight, that [he] had misjudged him; that he, too, was dancing; that, for him, this world of the little figures was the real world. And that, compared to them, the Gestapo, the Secret Police and other hooligans were creatures of tinsel. And the events of this sombre century - the bombardments, blitzkriegs, putsches, purges - were, so far as he was concerned, so many 'noises off.'"

Utz suggests a walk. He and the narrator stroll back outside towards Old Town Square. Prague Spring is almost a year away, and the narrator feels optimism in the young people they pass. He is taken aback when Utz turns on him and says that he hates this city. The narrator says that things will get better, but Utz insists that things will never get better. Utz leaves him then; he is going to the brothel.

Section 4 (page 96 to page 115) Analysis

Utz's bedroom speaks strongly of femininity and Catholic devotion, prompting the narrator to wonder if Utz has a wig hidden somewhere. The bedroom is an aspect of Utz's life he would never have revealed, but why is his servant so angry about it?

Alchemy is not a large conceptual leap from golems, and the narrator is not surprised when Utz's discussion of alchemy circles back. Both are mystical, mysterious ways of transmuting one thing into another. Alchemy is another appropriate image in an investigation of the psychology of the collector. Utz believes that alchemy is not so much about turning lead to gold as it is about finding the stuff of immortality, whether in the form of the beverage to consume or the vessel to use. Utz offers evidence from history and philosophy and concludes that porcelain prevents decay. Earlier, Utz made an analogy between golems and collecting porcelain, suggesting that the life he gives to his porcelains and the life they give to him could be, literally, life. Now he makes an analogy between alchemy and collecting porcelain, suggesting that the immortality conferred on him by his collection could be, literally, immortality. When Marta lights the room with the flame, Utz displays rapture in the midst of his collection. His failure of imagination in Europe seems unfathomable.

Section 5 (page 116 to end)

Section 5 (page 116 to end) Summary

Twenty years have past the day the narrator spent with Utz. Dr. Orlik sent him a card in 1974 to inform him of Utz's death. The narrator happens to pass through Prague on his way back from the Soviet Union, where he finds the mood buoyant. This is a consequence of Soviet education working too well, he thinks, producing a generation of highly intelligent and literate young people who are more or less immune to the totalitarian message. Prague seems mournful to him in comparison. Then he thinks himself unfair. He sees signs everywhere that the Czechs are uncrushable.

The author goes to No. 5 Siroka Street and rings the bell of the soprano who lived below Utz. The profusion of faded pink satin reminds him of Utz's bedroom. He asks her what happened to the porcelains. She knows but will not say, and she gives him the name of a curator at the Rudolfine Museum. The museum is still shut, as it was in 1967, but for one exhibit, called "The Modern Chair." The curator suggests they take a walk. She asks if pieces from the Utz Collection have been sold in the West, thinking he's a collector, looking to buy, who has followed a lead to her. Actually, he called recently on Utz's New York dealer, Dr. Frankfurter, who promised to make him rich if he finds the collection. The curator is very disappointed. She tells him that all the pieces have vanished.

Until 1973, the year of Utz's first stroke, museum officials stop by routinely to check that the collection is intact. In July of that year, he agrees to sign a document promising the collection to the state after his death. He also agrees to import the pieces from Switzerland if they will leave him in peace. The director, a compassionate man, agrees, and two hundred and sixty-seven pieces are given special clearance, shipped and delivered to Utz's apartment. There is some confusion over the time of the funeral, and the director and three of his staff miss the funeral and the interment and are late for the breakfast. Two days later, when they keep their appointment at Utz's apartment, they call for a man to pick the lock because no one answers. The furniture is there, but not a single piece of porcelain can be found. The narrator suggests the servant must know where they are and asks what she says. The curator agrees that the servant must know, but he does not believe her story.

The next morning, the narrator calls the National Museum. Dr. Orlik is retired but works there mornings. On his way to the museum, the narrator makes a reservation at the Restaurant Pstruh, to which they return together for lunch. In a lowered voice, he asks Orlik what happened to the porcelains. Orlik says that Utz broke some of them, and the baroness broke others. The narrator is surprised that Utz was married and asks who his wife was. Orlik toys and teases, just as he had with Utz when they ate here together with the narrator. He tells the narrator that he has met the baroness. He teases more, before finally telling him that Utz was married to Marta, who has gone back to Southern Bohemia, if she is even still alive.

Utz marries Marta at a civil ceremony in 1952, six weeks after that first trip to Vichy. It is a dangerous time in Czechoslovakia, a time, Utz knows, to be invisible. One morning, a man comes by to tell him that he cannot continue to live alone in his apartment. It is an apartment for two. They marry and put on a show of drooling affection for the bureaucrat in charge, and she moves into the apartment with Utz.

After seeing Dr. Frankfurter's apartment in New York, crammed with Meissen and other fine porcelain, the narrator no longer believes that Utz's trips to the West were so innocent. He suspects the Swiss bank in Geneva was, for Utz, a shop through which he sold confiscated works of art for the state. He is certain now that Utz did, indeed, have a moustache. Dr. Frankfurter tells the narrator that of course Utz had a moustache. It was a clue to his personality.

Utz is not the ineffectual lover the narrator pictures in Vichy. His life is a successful pursuit of voluminous operatic divas, although singers of high opera are too dramatic and demanding, so he tends to settle for stars of operetta. The site of their lower larynxes, exposed as they throw back their heads to sing a high note, drives him wild. He applies the stiff bristles of his moustache to that part of their throats so that, for them, the crescendo of lovemaking is as ecstatic as the final note of an aria. This is all very sad for Marta, who has adored Utz from the moment he rescued her in his car and yet is obliged to prepare the bedroom for the ladies. The number of ladies only increases over the years, as does the number of nights Marta sleeps out on the floor in the hallway. Utz's downstairs neighbor, the soprano, imports the pink satin from Italy and decorates her lover's bedroom to her own taste. She then moves herself in downstairs, making for open hostilities between her and Marta. After the soprano pilfers some perfume from the bedroom, Marta swears she will never cook for her again, and she is never again invited.

Sometime in the mid-sixties Utz is rebuffed by a young singer. When this happens, he knows his soprano days have ended, and Marta sleeps with him in his bed thereafter. In her mumbled conversations with the Infant of Prague, she confesses her cardinal sin, not being married in the sight of God. One day in April, while spring cleaning, she finds a box containing the white lace veil worn by Utz brides since the eighteenth century. They are married in the Church of Saint Nikolaus during the Prague Spring. The cleaning lady is scrubbing in the middle of the aisle, but this time she cheerfully moves out of their way. Marta's bridal kiss hits his forehead, since she is so much taller than he is. The couple waiting behind them to be married invites Utz and Marta to their wedding reception. It is at the Hotel Bristol, where, drunk on tokay, the couples toast the grizzly bear.

The narrator can now add to his account of the funeral. After Utz dies in 1974, Marta and Orlik sit vigil until the coffin is taken away. Women from all over Prague (and surrounding cities) who detest each other are united in their hatred of Marta for denying them a final glimpse of the moustache. The night before the funeral, she holds a conference with the grieving women on the stairwell to give them the next day's itinerary. "With inspired malice, she told them the service would be held in the Church of Saint Jakob instead of Saint Sigismund; the burial at the VySehrad Cemetery instead of

the Vinohrady; and that breakfast at the Hotel Bristol - 'to which my beloved husband bade you all attend' - would begin at 9:45 a.m. instead of 9:15." Two more limousines cross paths the next morning, one of retired operatic divas and another of officials from the Rudolfine Museum. The parties all meet at the Hotel Bristol, as Marta, having toasted the bear, is making her exit. She changes in the ladies' room out of black and into a brown suit and goes to stay with her sister who still lives in their native village.

Acting on a tip from the soprano in the apartment below Utz's about racket from upstairs, the narrator speaks with the man who collects trash at No. 5 Siroka Street. He is invited to join him and his colleagues on Saturday to drink at a village near the dump. The trash man is a writer, and his colleagues are writers, poets and actors. The narrator meets them there. The narrator worries that he will shoehorn any fact to fit his theory, but they agree that ten or twelve years ago, maybe more, a taxi would bring an elderly couple to the village for a Sunday afternoon stroll. The man was shorter than the woman, shuffled his feet and supported himself on her arm. They would walk along the lane, as far as the wire fence surrounding the dump and then walk back to the taxi.

The narrator walks along the lane, considering possibilities. Had Utz smuggled the collection out? No. Had the museum officials smuggled it abroad? No. Did Utz destroy his porcelains? No. He *was* a joker, though. His porcelain ending up on a trash heap might have appealed to him. Could Marta have destroyed them, associating them with all the opera singers? No. "[His] impression is that none of these theories will work. [The narrator believes] that, in reviewing his life during those final months, he regretted having always played the trickster. He regretted having wheedled himself and the collection out of every tight corner. He had tried to preserve in microcosm the elegance of European court life. But the price was too high. He hated the grovelling and the compromise - and in the end the porcelains disgusted him." The narrator believes that, on the night after their church wedding, Marta embraced Utz as a true wife, and they passed their days adoring each other, resenting anything that came between them. The porcelains had to go.

The narrator makes one last trip for this story, to the village of Marta's sister. A storm has just passed, and thunderheads roll away. A rainbow arches over the meadows as the sun lights all the flowers in the garden he approaches. He unlatches a gate, and a snow-white gander flaps towards him, craning his neck and hissing. An old peasant woman comes to the door, her eyes on the rainbow as she answers his question. She says in German that yes, she is the Baroness von Utz.

Section 5 (page 116 to end) Analysis

The narrator returns to Prague on his way back from the USSR, where the regime's success will soon bring about its end, as he anticipates. He suggests that the machinery of repression vanishes not with war or revolution but with a puff, and it will, soon after the events of this story.

These are the pages in which Utz comes to life, when he is described by those who knew him and not by himself. The portrait that Utz paints of himself on that day in Prague is a successful attempt to obscure himself, to remain unknown and unseen. It can be fatal to be noticed by a totalitarian regime, even if one is selling its porcelains to bring it hard currency.

The narrator restores the moustache he gave and then took away from Utz in his recollection. With the moustache comes the detail and the color, and especially, the imagination that was conspicuous in its absence. Utz is a collector, but that is not the sum of the man. It is impossible to know the sum of the man, of any man, but especially a man whose collection of porcelain has vanished. Is this what Utz means when he reveals the sticker on the bottom of the Harlequin and says that "those persons" from the museum have made a mistake?

The reader is left to solve the mystery according to his or her taste. The narrator speculates. Eventually he imagines the psychology of the collector transformed by the love of a good woman, but he does not even convince himself. The narrator will ask Marta when she looks down from the rainbow. The reader knows that, whatever she tells him, there will be much more to the story.

Characters

The Narrator

The unnamed narrator is an outsider, and the reader sees Utz's story through the narrator's eyes. The narrator initially meets with Utz to gain insight into the psychology of a collector for his writings. Later, when the narrator is promised wealth if he finds Utz's porcelains, he goes in search of the missing collection. The narrator finds a depth to Utz's life that he hadn't imagined and uncovers more questions than answers.

Kaspar Joachim Utz

Utz's face is forgettable, round and waxy, with narrow eyes behind steel-framed spectacles that do not hint at the man's passion. The narrator cannot remember whether Utz has a moustache, although he cannot imagine its presence or absence affecting how very forgettable and nondescript the face is. Maybe, the narrator thinks, he does have a moustache - a precise, bristly moustache to go with the precise, toy-soldierish gestures that are the only evidence of his Teutonic ancestry. Then again, he probably does not. His hair is combed in greasy snakes across his scalp. He is German and grows up in Dresden. Throughout the war he wears a brown tweed jacket purchased on a trip to England in his sixteenth year. The purpose of the trip is for him to learn English, and he returns an anglophile. He gives the jacket away when Dresden is bombed in February 1945, after which his love of England vanishes completely. As a boy, he visits his maternal grandmother at her castle near Prague. She is a convert from Judaism to Catholicism, who sees the pallor of the ghetto in her grandson and none of his father's high color. One summer, Utz sees a porcelain Harlequin among her treasures, and he wants it. It is one of the few things she ever denies him, but she sends it to him four years later, after his father dies on the Somme in 1916, having won Germany's highest military honor. His grandmother is rich. Her investments are globally diverse, and Utz is her only grandchild and heir.

Utz takes his vocation from the Harlequin, and he devotes himself to porcelain, especially Meissen, its scholarship and collection. He crates his collection and sends it to Ceske Krizove, his grandmother's castle, at the beginning of the war. He rescues Marta while he is at the castle, and she becomes his devoted servant and stays with him until he dies. When the communists take over afterwards, he gives up the estate and the castle, and he acquires a Czech passport and a tiny apartment in Prague, into which he crams his porcelains. He is able to keep his collection by promising it to the state museum when he dies. He considers fleeing to the West and takes a trip to the spa at Vichy in 1952, with a stop in Geneva to see his banker, for Utz is rich. His fantasies of love with a shy European woman are unfulfilled, and Vichy disappoints him. He cannot enjoy luxury without adversity and will never leave Prague because in no other place could he be less unhappy. He negotiates better than most a life on both sides of the Iron Curtain, however, and goes to Europe each year thereafter in April,

which allows him to build a second collection of porcelains that he keeps at a Swiss bank's vault. The barbed wire and sentry boxes depress him on each return, to the same extent as he is elevated by the absence of billboards. His collection is his abiding passion, and it makes him impervious to the many depredations he suffers from the "sombre century" in which he lives. He is unsuccessful in love, but his life is full and has meaning because of the life, elegance, courtliness and passion conferred by his porcelains. He is mourned only by Marta and his dear friend, Dr. Orlik, the only attendees at his prepaid funeral breakfast for twenty, although there are flowers and a card on his coffin from the museum.

The narrator paints this portrait of Utz after they spend a day together in 1967. Twenty years later, the narrator learns more. Utz was much more interesting than he appeared, with much more love and adventure in his life and much more life besides what he took from his porcelains. Utz sells porcelain for the state on his annual stops in Geneva, whatever else he also does. All his life, he adores and pursues the light-opera sopranos who adore him and pass through his bed in long procession. He marries Marta in 1952 in order to hold onto his little apartment. When he entertains sopranos, she sleeps on the floor in the hall. When young sopranos stop taking him seriously, he moves Marta into his bed, and they marry in the Church in 1968. After a stroke in 1973 that leaves him partly paralyzed on one side, he signs a paper that bequeaths his porcelains to the state, in exchange for which he asks them to stop coming around to check on them. When he dies of a second stroke in 1974, Marta keeps a vigil over his coffin and lies about the next day's itinerary to Utz's many grieving sopranos and the museum staff. They all go to the wrong church and the wrong cemetery and they arrive at the funeral breakfast at the wrong time, so that as they arrive Marta is departing for her sister's, taking with her all knowledge of the porcelains that have vanished from Utz's apartment.

Dr. Vaclav Orlik

A gaunt, bearded man with a mop of wiry salt-and-pepper hair, his forehead scoured with deep furrows, Orlik is Utz's dear friend. He is a paleontologist who studies aspects of wooly mammoths for thirty years and has been to the Siberian tundra where they are found in permafrost. The culmination of that work is his paper, "The Mammoth and His Parasites." After its publication, he feels the need to study a lower creature and devotes himself to the common housefly within the Prague metropolitan area. He is enchanted by the vitality, anarchism and individualism of the fly, especially in light of the tendency among his fellow entomologists to applaud the behavior of insects like ants and bees that organize themselves into regimented communities. In 1946, he suggests to Utz that they escape to the West, but Utz will not leave his collection.

Orlik corresponds occasionally with the narrator for a few years, making outlandish demands and requests for money and socks. He sends him a card when Utz dies. Orlik is still alive twenty years after the narrator first meets him. He has retired from the museum, although he comes in each morning, and the narrator finds him there.

Utz's Grandmother

Utz's maternal grandmother is a Jewish heiress whose fortune comes from railway shares. She lives at Ceske Krizove, the castle near Prague where Utz visits her one month each summer when he is a boy. He knows her as a wasted old woman whose sallow skin does not wrinkle and whose hair does not turn gray. She is crippled with arthritis. She is a convert to Catholicism and surrounds herself with priests who hope for money from her. Her neighbors are affronted that a woman of her "race" would affect the trappings of an aristocrat. She displays suits of armor on the stairway and keeps a bear in a walled-off section of the moat. She foresaw the coming of socialism to Europe far in advance, and her investments are diversified all over the world, with a copper mine in Chile, cotton in Egypt, a cannery in Australia and gold in South Africa. It pleases her that her fortune will grow after her death, while theirs will vanish - in war or revolution, on horses, women and the gaming tables. Utz is her only grandchild. She recognizes in him the pallor of the ghetto. He is dark-haired and introspective, with none of his father's coloring, and she adores him.

Marta

Marta is Utz's faithful servant, a solid woman with glowing cheeks and sandy hair flecked with gray. When the narrator meets her in Utz's apartment, she is dressed awkwardly in a maid's uniform, wearing black hose with "potatoes" at the knee (holes that reveal the skin beneath). Marta is the child of a village carpenter in Southern Bohemia. When his wife dies, he sends his two older daughters to live with an aunt and takes the youngest along on his travels. He finds work on the Utz estate at Ceske Krizove. When he dies, the bailiff evicts the girl from their cottage. She earns pennies doing chores and then goes to live on a farm where she sleeps on a straw-filled pallet and looks after geese. She is thought to be simple, especially when she falls in love with a big and beautiful white gander she has raised from a gosling, an object of terror to children, foxes and dogs. Some mornings, early when no one is around, she swims with the bird. Utz is driving from the castle to catch a train one morning when he sees a girl in dripping clothes being chased down the road by a mob. He stops his car, invites her in and takes her back to the castle.

Marta has been with Utz ever since. She adores him. Servants over whom she had charge spread rumors that she shared his bed. She is the only person he really trusts and can also use. In Prague, she sleeps in a leaky attic room a few doors down Siroka Street. When interrogated about her employment, she insists that she looks after Utz merely as a friend. The night before Utz leaves for France - possibly permanently, although she does not know this - he asks Marta to cook for two, and she prepares the souffle that he has taught her. He asks her to join him. She says she is unworthy and then accepts with delight. He misses her while he is gone, and he marries her upon his return in order to qualify to keep his apartment, into which she moves. She sleeps on the floor in the hall for many years and displays professional skill at preparing his room

for the succession of sopranos who sleep there. In 1967, she moves into his bed, although, a devout woman, she suffers from her mortal sin.

While spring housecleaning, Marta find a box with the white veil that Utz women have worn when wed since the eighteenth century, and she and Utz marry again, in the Church, during Prague Spring. When he dies, she keeps vigil over his coffin through the night, allowing access to none of his sopranos. She assembles them in the stairwell to give them the funeral itinerary. She lies to them and to the museum staff. By the time they show up at the Hotel Bristol for the funeral breakfast, late, she is on her way out the door and to the home of her sister, who still lives in their native village. She takes with her all knowledge about the porcelains that have disappeared from the apartment. The story ends as she opens the door, now an old peasant, as she is telling the narrator that, yes, she is the Baroness Utz.

Dr. Frankfurter

Dr. Frankfurter is Utz's dealer in New York. His apartment is crammed with Meissen and other German porcelain, which the narrator believes obviously belonged to aristocratic families in Czechoslovakia and was sold off, recently, by the state. The narrator visits him before the narrator's second trip to Prague. Dr. Frankfurter meets Utz annually when Utz travels to Europe.

Ada Krasova

Ada Krasova lives on the third floor of Utz's building, in the apartment beneath his. She is a past lover of his, one of Utz's sopranos. She uses her opera singer's privileges to import a bale of pink satin from Italy, and she decorates his apartment in the taste of a demi-mondaine. She then installs herself on the floor below. She believes she can outwit Marta, and she pinches a bottle of Chanel No.5 from Marta. Marta retaliates by telling Utz that she shall never again cook for the singer again. Utz never invites the lady again. The narrator sees Ada first when Utz leads him to his apartment. She is the woman on the third floor who opens the door to see who is passing. Her face is hysterical under a heap of auburn curls. Utz says she was a famous soprano and is now mad. When the narrator returns twenty years later, on the trail of the Utz Collection, he rings her bell. She is still alive. She does not answer him when he asks if she knows what became of the porcelains, but she does seem to know. She gives him the name of the curator at the Rudolfine Museum.

Reinhold Utz

Reinhold is Utz's redheaded second cousin. He visits Utz during the summer of 1940, shortly after the Blitzkrieg. He expounds to Utz his views of racial biology with analogies culled from dog breeding. He suggests that an Utz should immediately assume the uniform of the Wehrmacht. He prophesies over dinner that the Germans will occupy Buckingham Palace before the end of the year. Utz is still an anglophile at this time, and

he tells his cousin that he underestimates the English. Soon after this dinner, Utz is called to defend his racial purity.

Rabbi Loew (1525-1609)

Rabbi Loew was a Kabbalist and a scholar whose writings are integrated into Hasidic doctrine. The Hasidim (or Hasids) are a sect of very observant Jews, identifiable by the traditional Eastern European garb and long, curled side locks of the men. The Kabbalah is the collected teachings of Jewish mysticism. Utz and the narrator see a group of American Hasidim putting stones on his grave, which is the way Jews commemorate the dead.

Legends about Rabbi Loew's supernatural powers began after his death. He is most widely known for one of these legends, in which he is described as the maker of Yossel the Golem. He fashioned Yossel from the mud of the River Vltava. A golem was said to have a strip of metal in its mouth or across its forehead, inscribed with the Hebrew word *emet*, which means "truth." To destroy a golem, a rabbi had only to remove the first letter. Then, *emet* would read *met*, Hebrew for "death." According to the story, on weekdays, Yossel does the menial tasks Rabbi Loew assigns him. On the Sabbath, when all God's creatures must rest, Yossel's master removes the strip of metal from his forehead, and Yossel is rendered lifeless for the day. One Sabbath, the Rabbi forgets to do this, and Yossel runs amok. In the midst of his prayers, the Rabbi is reminded, and he runs into the street to snatch the strip from the golem's forehead.

Emperor Rudolf II (1552-1612)

Rudolf II was Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire from 1576. He moved the Court from Vienna to a castle in Prague, where he was absorbed in studies of science and the mystical arts.

Johannes Bottger (1682-1719)

After a childhood in the workshop of his grandfather, a goldsmith, Bottger is apprenticed to a Berlin apothecary named Zorn. He studies books on alchemy. Among the apothecary's customers is a monk from whom Bottger obtains a phial of a substance reputed to transmute lead into gold. King Frederick William obtains a specimen of the gold from Frau Zorn and issues a warrant for Bottger's arrest. Bottger escapes to Wittenberg, a dependency of Augustus the Strong. Augustus finds Bottger in 1701 and imprisons him in Dresden to make gold. By 1706, Augustus' treasury is empty, and he threatens to send Bottger to the torture chamber. Bottger meets Ehrenfried Walther, Graf von Tschirnhaus. He is an outstanding chemist and a friend of Leibniz, who is on the verge of discovering the secret of porcelain but cannot devise a kiln sufficiently hot to fuse the glaze and the body. He asks Bottger to help, and Bottger agrees, hoping it will save his life. In 1708, Bottger delivers to Augustus the first specimens of red porcelain, and the next year he delivers the white. In 1710, the Royal Saxon Porcelain

Manufactory is founded at Meissen and begins commercial production. Almost at once, the secret is betrayed by Bottger's assistant and sold to Vienna. Bottger dies in 1719, partly from chemical poisoning.

Objects/Places

Prague

Prague is the city to which the narrator comes to research collectors, and where, in 1967, he first meets Utz, who has lived there since after World War II and who dies there in 1974. The narrator senses hope in Czechoslovakia when he meets Utz there. The country experiences a brief period of political liberalization at that time, especially from the beginning of 1968. The period is called "Prague Spring" after it comes to an abrupt end on August twentieth, when the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries invade Czechoslovakia, rendering assistance against "counter-revolutionary" elements, and tanks roll into Prague. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, after the writing of this book. Czechoslovakia split peacefully into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, both parliamentary democracies, in early 1993.

The Utz Collection of Porcelain

Meissen is the first European porcelain, invented in 1708 by Johann Friedrich Bottger on behalf of the Elector of Saxony, Augustus the Strong. Utz has been collecting Meissen porcelain since childhood, buying and selling pieces over the years, keeping the good and turning over the less good. It takes thirty-seven crates to hold his collection when he packs it up and sends it to Ceske Krizove before World War II. It fills his tiny apartment on Siroka Street in Prague. Utz uses, and does not simply display, the serving pieces in his collection, which he is able to keep under the communists by allowing them to photograph and label his pieces and think he will leave them to the state museum after his death. Furthermore, there is no consensus as to whether porcelain is property, and therefore bad for the state, or household goods, therefore not bad for the state.

The collection the narrator sees displayed in Utz's apartment includes white porcelain statues on the carpet - a bear, a pelican, a turkey-cock, a lynx and a rhino - modeled for the Japanese Palace in Dresden, all scarred with fissures caused by faults in firing. On the shelves are plates, vases, flagons and tureens, tea-caddies, tankards and teapots. He has a multitude of eighteenth-century figurines, characters of Commedia dell'Arte - Harlequin and Columbine, Brighella and Pantaloon, Scaramouche and Truffaldino, the Doctor and the Captain. He has the Personifications of the Continents. Africa is in a leopard skin. America is in feathers. Asia is in a pagoda hat, and Europa is astride a horse. There are ladies of the court in different poses, craftsmen, shepherds, pilgrims, a Party of Freemasons Scrutinizing a Globe, Turks, Tartars, Malabars, Circassians and Chinese sages with songbirds. There are animals and birds, clowns and sopranos and the monkey musicians made in mockery of Count Br'hl's private orchestra. Utz is the only private collector to own the whole set of these.

Utz has another collection of porcelain, two hundred and sixty-seven pieces in a bank vault in Geneva, that he has purchased to be the core of a new collection if he leaves Prague for the West and also because he simply cannot refrain from buying. These are shipped to his apartment with special visas to speed their handling as part of a deal he makes when he signs a document in 1967, after his first stroke, that officially leaves the collection to the museum upon his death. In exchange for his signature, the museum director promises that museum staff will stop its occasional visits to examine the collection. When the museum staff comes to the apartment two days after Utz's death, as previously arranged, the Utz Collection has vanished with no trace.

No. 5 Siroka Street

No. 5 Siroka Street is the address of Utz's apartment, a tiny two-room flat that is a fourth-floor walk-up. It has the stale smell of rooms where art is kept and dusting is dangerous. The main room has one tiny window that overlooks the Old Jewish Cemetery. It is furnished with a daybed, a glass-topped table and a pair of Barcelona chairs upholstered in dark green leather. The chairs were rescued from a Mies van der Rohe house in Monrovia. The room is narrow, lined with a double bank of plate-glass shelves backed with mirrors. The shelves are crammed with porcelains. There are white porcelain sculptures arranged on the gray carpet, as well. The neighbor below is a retired soprano who bangs on her ceiling when Utz's apartment is noisy, especially when he and Marta bang pots so the listening devices that are planted in his apartment cannot overhear them speak.

Ceske Krizove

Ceske Krizove is a neo-medieval castle between Prague and Tabor, with a view from the conservatory of a magnificent sweep of the Central Bohemian countryside. It is the home of Utz's grandmother, where he spends a month each summer of his childhood. He sends thirty-seven crates of porcelain there in the summer of 1939 to protect them from the war he knows is coming, and he goes there to live soon after. He stays until he knows that the BeneS Government will fall to the communists, when he gives his lands to a farming collective and the castle for use as a mental asylum. Utz returns to the grounds each year with Marta during mushroom season.

The Rudolfine Museum

The Rudolfine Museum is the museum to which Utz bequeaths the Utz Collection after his death. It is a grand old edifice from the days of Franz Josef and was named after the Emperor Rudolf to commemorate his passion for the decorative arts. At the front facade, there are sculptured bas-reliefs representing various crafts including gem-cutting, weaving and glass-blowing. A pair of grimy sphinxes sits guard over the entrance. The museum is shut on both occasions the narrator is in Prague. The second time, however, one room is open on the ground floor for a temporary exhibition. It is called "The Modern

Chair," and features student copies after Rietveld and Mondrian and a display of stacking chairs in fiberglass.

Mala Strana

Mala Strana is the "Lesser Town" or the "Little Quarter," across the river from the Old Town. It is the scenic area of Prague where Utz and the narrator stroll after lunch.

Vichy

Vichy is a city in central France on the Allier River, one of the most renowned spas in Europe. Utz returns there on his annual flight from Prague that commences in 1952. It is the source of bottled Vichy water. Historically, Vichy was the seat of the notorious Vichy government, established in July 1940 after the Franco-German armistice was signed, as the seat of an illegitimate French government that was a puppet of the Nazis. Hitler annulled the armistice in 1942, and Nazi forces occupied all of France.

The Iron Curtain

The Iron Curtain is the imaginary border that separates the free world from countries under the political influence of the Soviet Union during the time of the book, beginning at the end of World War II. In Berlin, the Iron Curtain is made solid in the Berlin Wall. Behind the Iron Curtain, in the "Eastern Bloc," the government - and sometimes the Soviet Union itself - controls the flow of information, money and people. The Berlin Wall came down in late 1989, and the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Czechoslovakia split peacefully into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, both parliamentary democracies, in early 1993.

Pstruh

Pstruh is Czech for "trout," and it is the name of the restaurant where Utz and Dr. Orlik meet every Thursday for lunch from 1946. The narrator joins them on the day they all meet, and he returns there with Orlik upon his return to Prague twenty years later. They cannot order trout the first time because the trout are all reserved for the four fat communist party members at another table.

Kostelec

Kostelec is a village in Southern Bohemia. It is Marta's native village, the place to which she returns to join her sister after Utz dies. The narrator travels there at the very end of the story, in the hope that Marta is still alive and that he will find her there.

Themes

The Folly of Totalitarian Regimes

By virtue of being about Utz, this story is also about the totalitarian regimes under which he lives his adult life. Utz does not take the political realities of his world lightly, and yet almost each time a regime is mentioned - it hardly matters which regime - it is scorned and mocked. The folly of totalitarianism is a theme of this story, as are the inescapable ironies of survival. This tone is struck at the very beginning of the story, which opens on Utz's funeral. The state has decreed that Christian rituals be completed before 8:30 a.m. The cleaning woman, scrubbing the center aisle on her hands and knees, refuses to move for the procession carrying the coffin, which must then detour around her by cutting over one row and then back over another. The pallbearers are moonlighting from a night job at a rubber factory. They stroll off to get breakfast, not returning until the priest and the guests have sat for ten minutes, just awaiting their return, to complete the funeral at the graveside. The big bear, symbol of the strength and power of the USSR, stuffed and mounted at the Hotel Bristol, is not, the plaque explains, from the Tatras or the Carpathians, places where the big, strong, Soviet bear lives. It is from the Yukon, Canada, and was shot by a Bohemian baron. It is not a black bear at all; it is a grizzly bear.

None of these details is ominous or frightening. All together, the events are farcical. Each image is visual, even cinematic, with the pallbearers sidling over one row and back another. The accretion of detail suggests how ridiculous the posturing of the regime is, how petty it makes its people, what bullies it makes of them and how the quality of each individual life is eroded to no purpose. This is fiction, not reportage, but its details are familiar from the descriptions written, over and over, in fiction by the people who live these lives.

The theme recurs throughout, not always in farce, but always with a sense of the folly of the regime. The narrator's historian friend observes, of the people who live under oppressive regimes, that they pretend it does not exist with their silence. He thinks that by trying to stamp out individualism, these regimes give their brightest unlimited time to dream their private and heretical thoughts. Utz is able to keep his collection in Prague because no one in power has yet decided if owning a work of art damns its owner in the eyes of the Proletariat. Utz observes of a market scene that its participants prove beyond all doubt, whatever the zealots have to say, that the business of trade is one of life's most natural and enjoyable pleasures, no more to be abolished than the act of falling in love. The narrator stops in Prague, twenty years after his day with Utz, on his way back from the USSR. The mood there feels particularly buoyant to him. The Soviet education system, he thinks, has worked all too well, producing well-educated young people who are immune to the totalitarian message. When he is back in Prague, he writes in his journal that "...in the end, the machinery of repression is more likely to vanish, not with war or revolution, but with a puff, or the voice of falling leaves...." His words are prescient, as are his observations about the well-educated Soviet youth. The

whole Iron Curtain was falling as Chatwin was dying, and it was not ripped down through war or revolution. It fell down, with a puff.

The Psychology - or Psychopathology - of the Collector

The narrator offers this theme explicitly. It is the subject of a story, possibly a book that he considers writing, and the reason for his visit with Utz. As the tale of Utz is told, the notion emerges that the porcelains' vitality increases as Utz's vitality is sucked out by the perversities and petty indignities of the regime. The porcelains do not take from him, but the greater his need is, the greater their gift. At the end of their day together, the narrator says that for Utz:

"...this world of the little figures was the real world. And that, compared to them, the Gestapo, the Secret Police and other hooligans were creatures of tinsel. And the events of this sombre century - the bombardments, blitzkriegs, putsches, purges - were, so far as he was concerned, so many 'noises off.'"

Utz contends that he cannot experience luxury without adversity, but Utz's own account dispels the notion that he requires adversity to love his collection. This implies that Utz's collection is not a luxury. It is, to Utz, the greatest necessity. Utz partakes of his grandmother's wealth and her treasures throughout his childhood. One of her beautiful things, the Harlequin shapes Utz's future. Utz discovers this great love of his during comfortable times. He loves the Harlequin before he needs it. His scholarship and his early shaping of what will be his collection take place when there is no political or economic threat in his world. Many years before the Nazis arise or Utz moves to his tiny apartment overlooking the golem-maker's grave, Utz conceives the notion that a life force is exchanged between the collector and the collected. In his second scholarly publication, "The Private Collector," he writes:

"In any museum the object dies - of suffocation and the public gaze...the passionate collector, his eye in harmony with his hand, restores to the object the life-giving touch of its maker."

Adam was not only the first human, Utz explains. He was first the first ceramic sculpture, then the first golem and finally the first human. Utz describes the porcelains he collects as alive and dead, like a golem. The theme of the golem is strangely appropriate to a discussion of the collector, recurring and echoing through the story of Utz's various preoccupations. The porcelains are, to Utz, the essence of humanity, if still primordial. They represent individuality, creativity and passion, and so in a soulless political world, the porcelains are the soul of humanity that Utz keeps alive. In refusing to turn over the soul of humanity to the museum, he upholds individuality against a dehumanizing communism. Appropriately, the narrator investigates the psychology of the collector in Prague, which, he is told, is still the most mysterious of cities, where the supernatural is always a possibility. Golems and alchemy are part of the landscape, and the collector's obsessions cannot hide.

Appearance and Reality

Appearance and reality can exist in opposition, as if appearance is a disguise meant to obscure or divert attention from reality. In Utz, they are melded together and inseparable, like the glaze and the clay of porcelain. The clay gives the porcelain an unchanging form, but it can only be seen through the glaze. This particular relationship between appearance and reality is a theme throughout *Utz*. Most of *Utz* is the story that Utz chooses to tell about himself. The facts of his life, places and dates, are like clay. They are indisputable facts, the unchanging shape of his life. If the glaze Utz paints on the clay is gray, if it appears that Utz lives his real life through the porcelains crammed onto their shelves, who can blame the narrator for his conclusions? Could the reader's conclusions be different?

The moustache really is the key to the man, as Frankfurter says, and it is the central motif of his love life. Utz's moustache is the fulcrum on which his appearance pivots (and the bit the grieving sopranos want to see one last time). The narrator eventually learns that Utz is a lover and a rake, whose women pass through his bed in a procession. He is a sly little man who deals porcelain out of a bank vault, who has a wife and who hoodwinks the museum. The light is turned on by the stories other people have to tell about Utz, and more colors and textures are discernable. Utz appears at first to be a certain man living a certain life, and then, seen through different eyes, he appears to be a different man living a different life. There is probably much more to know about Utz than can be seen. When the widow tells her story, the narrator may find out yet another layer of knowledge about Utz and another interpretation of his life. Utz is like the Harlequin that first catches his eye. He is a trickster made of clay, fired with layers of glaze that change the way the clay is viewed.

Style

Points of View

The story is told by the narrator, whom readers may assume is the author but is unnamed. He uses the first person to describe events in which he participates, especially conversations. He uses the third person to describe events that are told to him by other people. There is nothing in this story that is not observed by or told to the narrator. The narrator does not know what characters think about things unless they have told him directly or told someone else who has told him. The reader participates fully in the narrator's experience as he unfolds the story. The movement of the story in place and time is at the narrator's discretion.

The reader can easily guess at the source of the events recounted in the third person. Utz's history leading up to 1967 is provided via the narrator's friend, the historian of Iron Curtain countries who sends him to Utz. Utz is the source of much of his own story. From rap on the door and the entry of the curator, photographer and policeman to everything that follows about Utz in Vichy and his annual travels thereafter, the story is Utz's own. He is the source of information about the incredulity of officials at his perpetual return to Prague, as well as Marta's life before the narrator meets her. The curator tells the story about the arrangements between the museum and Utz. Dr. Frankfurter, Utz's dealer in New York, is the source of Utz's romantic history and Marta's role in it. Dr. Orlik relates the events pertaining to Utz and Marta's living arrangements and marriages, the relationship between the downstairs neighbor and the pink satin in Utz's bedroom and the narrator's update on Utz's funeral. Only Dr. Orlik could be the source of the first description of Utz's funeral. He must have written to the narrator about it, among his requests for money and socks, before their correspondence dissolved.

Setting

The story is set in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Utz is from Dresden, a German, but he has spent one month of each boyhood summer at his grandmother's castle, Ceske Krizove. It is a large estate near the village that supplies most of its laborers. His grandmother is a Jew who has converted to Catholicism. Her home contains over-varnished paintings of the Virgin and "unctuous and genuflecting priests." In Utz, nevertheless, "a dark-haired, introspective boy with none of his father's high complexion, she recognised the pallor of the ghetto - and adored him." Her conversion notwithstanding, she is the source of whatever Jewish identity Utz has, and with regard to his porcelains, he thinks himself Jewish. Utz is his grandmother's only grandchild, so he inherits the castle, along with her globally distributed investments, when she dies. He spends most of World War II at the castle, trying to stay out of sight to protect his collection.

Utz lives most of his adult life, and all his life after the war, in a tiny apartment in Prague. He gives his grandmother's land to the peasants and the house to the government for a

mental institution, but he goes back most years, during mushroom season, with Marta. They play in the woods while hunting mushrooms and visit places he knew as a child where no one else goes. This is the only part of his life that he talks about with light-heartedness. He loves his porcelains, but his relationship with them is not light-hearted. He loves Prague most when he leaves it. Vichy is a terrific disappointment to him. Ultimately, he cannot conceive of a place in the world where he could be less unhappy than in Prague. To what more can one aspire, he thinks, than a state of tranquil melancholy? The barbed wire and sentry boxes at the crossing depress him, to precisely the same degree that he is buoyed by the absence of billboards. Prague is his home.

The narrator and Utz meet in 1967, twenty years before he tells us this story. By 1967, Czechoslovakia, and Prague even more so, are starting to experience some relief from the iron grip of Stalinism and communism. This culminates in the first half of 1968, after which the USSR and the Warsaw Pact countries clamp back down. Chatwin writes from the perspective of 1988.

Language and Meaning

The narrator tells the story, even when he seems to use the words of the people telling the story to him. The language reflects that consistency throughout. Many sentences are long, but the clauses within are short. The spelling is characteristic of England, apparent in the quotations. The final L is doubled before a suffix (travelled, modelled), where in American English it is not (traveled, modeled), and in some words the last consonant in the root word is an s (civilise, notarise, civilisation), where in Americans English it would be a z (civilize, notarize, civilization). There are other British spellings, as well. Chatwin's use of colons and semi-colons is eccentric, as is his use of ellipses, but it is no obstacle to meaning.

This language is direct and rarely poetic. The most poetic language in the story is in the listing of Utz's porcelains, and there it is achieved by the assonance of some of the groupings. "There were Tartars, Malabars, Circassians and Chinese sages with wispy beards and songbirds perched on their fingers." To read the words silently is to hear them aloud. The language never stands in the way of meaning, and even in the passages where Utz is most scholarly and philosophical, discussing golems or alchemy, the sentences are clear and direct. Any difficulty in following his reasoning has to do with the intricacies of his reasoning, not the language in which it is couched.

Structure

The book is divided into many sections, from a little over one page to about eleven or twelve. The divisions occur naturally. Consider the way a writer organizes sentences to form paragraphs. If the writer were to organize paragraphs by the same principles, the result might look like the sections into which Chatwin organizes his book. There are no chapters.

The structure is supple, allowing for a change in place, time or voice that is no more formal than a new thread in one of Utz's theses; the eye skips a brief empty space. The story is not linear in time, although it does follow, more or less, the order in which the narrator learns the information he relates. The most obvious exception is that the story opens with Utz's funeral in 1974, followed by the narrator's trip to Prague in 1967.

Quotes

"The Czech's 'propensity to bend' before a superior force was not necessarily a weakness. Rather, their superior metaphysical view of life encouraged them to look at acts of force as ephemera." p. 14

"...In his view, the true heroes of this impossible situation were the people who wouldn't raise a murmur against the Party or State - yet who seemed to carry the sum of Western Civilization in their heads. 'With their silence...they inflict a final insult on the State, by pretending it does not exist.'" p. 15

"He finished by observing that Marx's vision of an age of infinite leisure had, in one sense, come true. The State, in its efforts to wipe out 'traces of individualism,' offered limitless time for the intelligent individual to dream his private and heretical thoughts." p. 15

"An object in a museum case...must suffer the de-natured existence of an animal in the zoo. In any museum the object dies - of suffocation and the public gaze - whereas private ownership confers on the owner the right and the need to touch. As a young child will reach out to handle the thing it names, so the passionate collector, his eye in harmony with his hand, restores to the object the life-giving touch of its maker. The collector's enemy is the museum curator. Ideally, museums should be looted every fifty years, and their collections returned to circulation...." p. 20

"It was fashionable among his fellow entomologists - especially the Party Members - to applaud the behaviour of the social insects: the ants, bees, wasps and other varieties of Hymenoptera which organised themselves into regimented communities. But the fly...is an anarchist...an individualist." p. 35

"He had also come to a depressing conclusion: that luxury is only luxurious under adverse conditions." p. 79

"He was desperately homesick, yet hadn't given a thought to the porcelains. He could only think of Marta, alone, in the apartment." p. 82

"She would stand for hours in a food queue: nothing mattered if the object of her quest would bring him pleasure....Some days, she filled her shopping-bag with muddy potatoes. No one knew better that the type of policeman who would pry among her purchases was the type to mind muddying his hands. And afterwards, when she had dumped the potatoes in the sink, she would pull from the bottom of the bag a pheasant or a hare that someone had brought in from the country." p. 83-4

"Everyone in the market was laughing, haggling, giving, taking, proving beyond all doubt, whatever the zealots had to say, that the business of trade was one of life's most natural and enjoyable pleasures, no more to be abolished than the act of falling in love..." p. 86

"It depressed him, on crossing the Czech frontier, to see the lines of barbed wire and sentry boxes. But he noted, with a certain relief, that there were no more advertising billboards." p. 88

"Things...are tougher than people. Things are the changeless mirror in which we watch ourselves disintegrate. Nothing is more age-ing than a collection of works of art." p. 113

"I realized, as Utz pivoted the figure in the candlelight, that I had misjudged him; that he, too, was dancing; that, for him, this world of the little figures was the real world. And that, compared to them, the Gestapo, the Secret Police and other hooligans were creatures of tinsel. And the events of this sombre century - the bombardments, blitzkriegs, putsches, purges - were, so far as he was concerned, so many 'noises off.'" p. 114

"The Soviet education system, I felt, had worked all too well: having created, on a colossal scale, a generation of highly intelligent, highly literate young people who were more or less immune to the totalitarian message." p. 118

"...I seemed to hear again Utz's nasal whisper: 'They listen, listen, listen to everything but...they hear nothing!' Tyranny sets up its own echo-chamber; a void where confused signals buzz about at random; where a murmur or innuendo causes panic: so, in the end, the machinery of repression is more likely to vanish, not with war or revolution, but with a puff, or the voice of falling leaves..." p. 120

"'Of course he had a moustache!' Dr. Frankfurter shook with smutty laughter. 'The moustache was the key to his personality!'" p. 135

"I believe that, in reviewing his life during those final months, he regretted having always played the trickster. He regretted having wheedled himself and the collection out of every tight corner. He had tried to preserve in microcosm the elegance of European court life. But the price was too high. He hated the grovelling and the compromise - and in the end the porcelains disgusted him....Marta had never given in. She had never once lost her standards, her craving for legitimacy....My revised version of the story is that, on the night of their wedding in church...she embraced him as a true wife. And from that hour, they passed their days in passionate adoration of each other, resenting anything that might come between them. And the porcelain were bits of old crockery that simply had to go." p. 152

Topics for Discussion

Does art have a life independent of its creator or owner? Consider any expression of art, including but not limited to sculpture, painting, porcelain, photography, music, theater and dance. First, discuss a kind of art you can own, with a physical presence. Next, discuss the kind of art you cannot own, art that does not exist unless it is performed.

Does society have any rights with respect to art?

Does the individual - the owner or collector - have any rights with respect to art?

Is there a "common good" with respect to art that supersedes the market?

Utz believes that luxury is only luxury under adverse conditions. Do you agree? Is this true for Utz? Would his porcelains be as beautiful, as clever, as amusing and as courtly to him if his world was not gray?

What happened to Utz's porcelains?

Describe the Utz who lives in Prague today. Is he happy? Is he capable of being happy when he does not feel cornered?

Is the art collector an idolater, someone who worships or fetishizes what he or she collects?