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**Reading the City: Prague in Czech and Czech-German
Narrative Fiction Since 1989**

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Introduction



The fence dividing the remnants of the Old Jewish Cemetery in Žižkov from Mahlerovy sady, the park at the foot of the television tower (public domain).

Jedes Haus, jede Gasse, jeder Platz in Prag rief unaufhörlich die ganze Geschichte entlang: ‘Vergiß nicht das! Vergiß nicht jenes!’, so daß man vor lauter Erinnerung und Vergeltungssucht das gegenwärtige Leben schier darüber vergaß.
– Johannes Urzidil¹

It is early December, and I am walking along a residential street in Prague, some way from the city centre. Brown signs lead visitors to the Žižkov television tower and the Old Jewish Cemetery. The tower hardly needs any signposting: it is 216 metres tall, a constant presence above the rooftops. The foot of the tower is surrounded by a busy area of grass and trees, including a mini-golf course and a café; children are skating on a temporary ice rink. A fence runs diagonally across one corner of this crowded park, cutting off a small section. It consists of brick pillars topped with the star of

¹ Johannes Urzidil, *Prager Triptychon* (Munich: Müller, 1960), p. 17.

David, interspersed with railings. Beyond it, gravestones with Hebrew inscriptions seem to be pressed back against each other, crowding up against the ivy-covered cemetery wall. Rows of windows look down on the cemetery; the inhabitants of the houses which line the square must be able to see a triangular fragment of cemetery followed by the giant trunk of the tower. The diagonal fence resembles a seam joining two eras, two cultural traditions which appear entirely foreign to each other. But the barrier can easily be crossed: on Sundays and weekdays, the cemetery is open to the public.

The line of the fence traces a fracture in the history of Prague which is neither a complete break nor a healed scar. The conversion of the Jewish Cemetery into a park and the process of building the television tower span the years from the 1950s to the 1990s.² The details of this transformation illustrate the character of contemporary Prague as a set of spaces in which many heterogeneous narratives exist simultaneously. These narratives include histories



The Žižkov television tower, with crawling 'babies' (David Bjorgen, CC BY-SA 3.0).

² It is difficult to find reliable information about this process. I am indebted to Jacob Labendz (email conversation, January 2016) and Daniel Mayer (email conversation, March 2016) for details and clarification.

of Prague Jewish culture, of the socialist state and its attempts to reshape the city's past, and of the post-1989 present, in which efforts at painstaking reconstruction of the past can only provide incomplete access to the history of the city.

Traces of Prague's pre-1945 Jewish past remain visible as fragments in the contemporary city. Thus, the graves which can still be seen at the foot of the Žižkov television tower are a tiny remnant of those which could once be found here. The Old Jewish Cemetery in Žižkov used to cover an area of more than 20 000 m²; the fragment which remains has an area of 7515 m². What began as a plague cemetery in 1680 later became the main burial place for Prague Jews, replacing the better known Old Jewish Cemetery in the Old Town. It was closed in 1890, when the New Jewish Cemetery was opened close by, next to the main Christian cemetery in Prague (Olšany). Still, the Old Jewish Cemetery in Žižkov remained a significant location for Prague Jews even after it was no longer in active use. In particular, it became one of the few places in the city where Jews could go for walks when the German occupiers arrived in 1939 and made it illegal for them to use the city's parks.³ The first major transformation of this space took place in 1956, when the Jewish population of the city had been reduced not only by the Second World War and the Holocaust but also by waves of emigration after 1945.⁴ A large part of the cemetery was covered with earth to create a public park named Mahlerovy sady; the graves remained under the park at a depth of about two metres.⁵ This partial dismantling of the cemetery took place at a time when the presence of Jewish culture was vanishing from socialist

³ had, 'Pražané šlapou po židovských náhrobcích', *Česká televize*, 3.3.2012 <<http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/regiony/1187509-prazane-slapou-po-zidovskych-nahrobcich>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

⁴ Martin Wein, *History of the Jews in the Bohemian Lands* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 251-253.

⁵ Martina Schneibergová, 'Begrabene Grabmäler - Jüdischer Friedhof in Žižkov', *Radio Praha*, 19.6.2010 <<http://www.radio.cz/de/rubrik/spazier/begrabene-grabmaeler-juedischer-friedhof-in-zizkov>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

Prague, in the context of institutional antisemitism: the show trials of 1952 were focused on excluding Jews from the leadership of the party.⁶

The history of how the Žižkov television tower came to be built in the location of the old cemetery is surrounded by rumours and controversy. From the 1950s onward, the television transmitter for Prague was located in the Petřín lookout tower, a prominent landmark in the ‘historic’ city.⁷ This could only be a temporary solution, given the expansion of Prague and the increasing importance of television.⁸ A plan emerged to build a new transmitter close by on Petřín hill, provoking resistance from preservationists. Žižkov was chosen instead, and building work began in 1985. The Jewish community stipulated that graves and human remains should be removed carefully rather than with heavy machinery, so that they could be reburied elsewhere.⁹ Despite this, stories abound of mechanical diggers exhuming skeletons and taking them to the municipal dump, and of gravestones becoming paving stones on Na příkopě (Am Graben), the street near Wenceslas Square which was once known as a favourite haunt of German-speaking Praguers.¹⁰

⁶ See Martin Wein, *A History of Czechs and Jews: A Slavic Jerusalem* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 158-164 and Kevin McDermott, ‘A “Polyphony of Voices”? Czech Popular Opinion and the Slánský Affair’, *Slavic Review*, 67, 4 (2008), 840-865, which links the trials with societal antisemitism.

⁷ Raymond Johnston, ‘#ThrowbackThursday: Žižkov Television Tower’, *Prague Post*, 5.11.2015 <<http://www.praguepost.com/142-culture/50545-throwbackthursday-zizkov-television-tower>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

⁸ See Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 112-113.

⁹ The fate of the gravestones and human remains is still disputed. Arno Pařík recalls observing the digging of the foundations from the windows of nearby houses, claiming that the graves were destroyed without supervision or intervention from the Jewish community or preservationists (Arno Pařík, ‘Chmurné výročí’, *Roš chodeš*, 75 (November 2013), 16-17); Daniel Mayer, Rabbi of Prague and Czechoslovakia from 1984 to 1990, insists that he was involved in transferring remains to coffins by hand, for reburial (Daniel Mayer, ‘Ad: Chmurné výročí’, *Roš chodeš*, 75, (December 2013), 22). Česká televize reported that the Jewish community sold the gravestones to the Prague municipality (see had, ‘Pražané šlapou’). This allegation was corroborated by Mayer, who says that he was not aware of the transactions at the time (email conversation, March 2016).

¹⁰ See e.g. Věra Schneider, *Wachposten und Grenzgänger: Deutschsprachige Autoren in Prag und die öffentliche Herstellung von nationaler Identität* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2009), p. 56, and Scott Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka's Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 7.

However, the process of building the Žižkov television tower is not simply a legend belonging to the socialist past. In 1989, the tower was not yet finished, and its associations with the socialist regime, alongside aesthetic objections, led to calls for its demolition. Nevertheless, it was completed in 1991 and was subsequently adorned with a work of art by David Černý: black figures of crawling babies were added to its pillars. It is this artistic addition, alongside the luxury restaurant and ‘one-room hotel’ inside the tower, which most explicitly situates the tower in the post-socialist context of today’s Prague.

David Černý is a rebellious artist who is often described as an ‘enfant terrible’ or ‘bad boy’ – and yet, for all his insistence on provocation, his works have blended remarkably well into the Prague cityscape.¹¹ His sculpture of St Wenceslas riding a dead, inverted horse can be seen inside the Lucerna passage, and his fountain composed of two men urinating onto a map of the Czech Republic was installed in the courtyard which now houses the Kafka museum.¹² He is by far the most visible Czech artist, and yet is still associated with the ‘underground’ by critics.¹³ The incorporation of Černý’s art into the city perhaps demonstrates the particular ability of the mainstream in a capitalist democracy to assimilate any act of rebellion.¹⁴ Many of his works have had a political dimension: he first became famous in 1991 when he was arrested for painting a Soviet tank pink, and more recently hit international headlines for a hoax work of art in honour of the Czech presidency of the EU. His ‘babies’ could be perceived as a means of ridiculing the monumental ugliness of the

¹¹ See e.g. Dan Bilefsky, ‘With Sharp Satire, Enfant Terrible Challenges Czech Identity’, *The New York Times* (4.9.2009) <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/05/world/europe/05cerny.html?_r=0> [accessed 10.6.2016].

¹² See ‘KUN’ [sic] and ‘piss - Hergetova cihelna’ under ‘Artwork’ on David Černý’s webpage <<http://www.davidcerny.cz/start.html>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

¹³ Alfrun Kliems, *Der Underground, die Wende und die Stadt: Poetiken des Urbanen in Ostmitteleuropa* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), p. 361.

¹⁴ Ivan Martin Jirous discusses this tendency in ‘Zpráva o třetím hudebním obrození’, in *Magorův zápisník*, ed. by Michal Špirit (Prague: Torst, 1997), pp. 171-198 (p. 197).

Czechoslovak past. And yet, like many of the authors discussed in this thesis, Černý avoids adopting a single, coherent stance. His addition to the tower could equally be said to legitimise the building, turning it into a post-1989 artwork rather than letting it become a relic of the pre-1989 past.



The Jewish cemetery, viewed from the Žižkov tower (Hynek Moravec, CC BY 2.5).

Walking along beside the diagonal fence which separates the Jewish cemetery from the television tower, we are therefore confronted with the disorientating heterogeneity of the post-1989 city. Accounts of Prague frequently underline how little it was affected physically by the upheavals of the twentieth century.¹⁵ However, such claims reveal that the city is often imagined from a single perspective. The architect Petr Kučera emphasises that the choice of location for the tower meant that ‘the most

¹⁵ E.g. Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest: Writing, Memory, and the City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010) p. 1, and Cynthia Paces, *Prague Panoramas: National Memory and Sacred Space in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), p. 7.

valuable thing' was preserved: the 'panorama of Prague Castle'.¹⁶ The term 'panorama', which Cynthia Paces employs as the central metaphor in her account of twentieth-century sacred spaces, *Prague Panoramas* (2009), implies the choice of a certain standpoint which allows us to see a wide expanse of the city, whilst still ignoring some unwanted elements. If we look across Prague from one perspective, we see the famous, unbroken panorama of the Castle; if we turn and look towards Žižkov, we see the television tower, which marks the location where the fragmented panorama of Prague Jewish history was further dismantled and obscured. Both in the city itself and in its representations in literature, the diagonal wall and the remnant of the cemetery have many counterparts: much as it might seem so on the panorama postcards which Cynthia Paces recalls buying from tourist stalls, the city is not a single entity but an amalgamation of disparate fragments.¹⁷

Moreover, although the tower was interpreted as a reminder of communism by its opponents in the early 1990s, it is hardly an unambiguous relic of the pre-1989 era: rather, it is an emblem of the many continuities between the 1980s and the 1990s, and exemplifies the difficulty of ascribing a single meaning to any location in the city. The enormous Stalin monument which was inserted into the Prague landscape between 1949 and 1955 and remained only until 1962 was the most prominent addition to the city made by the socialist regime.¹⁸ But most urban spaces are not consecrated to a single person or a single cause. As Paulina Bren points out in her study of the culture of normalisation, *The Greengrocer and his TV* (2010), the enormous empty plinth left behind when the monument was destroyed is far more representative of the changing

¹⁶ 'Nenarušuje to nejcennější – panorama Pražského hradu' (see Anna Königsmarková, 'Přesně před 28 lety se začal stavět žižkovský vysílač v Praze', *Český rozhlas* <<http://m.rozhlas.cz/zpravy/regiony/zprava/1264148>> [accessed 10.6.2016]).

¹⁷ Paces includes the 'fracturing' of space in her understanding of the 'panorama', though without exploring the problem of choosing a perspective (Paces, pp. 8-9).

¹⁸ Hana Pichova, 'The Lineup for Meat: The Stalin Statue in Prague', *PMLA*, 123, 3 (2008), 614-631.

meanings which interacted in the spaces of Prague before 1989.¹⁹ The simultaneous presence of pre-1945 Jewish Prague, 1980s communist urban planning, and the shrewdly rebellious ‘underground’ art of David Černý in one Žižkov square encapsulates the unstable, fractured continuities of post-1989 Prague.

The history of the Žižkov television tower raises questions which are central concerns of this thesis. To what extent are the transcultural interactions which shaped pre-1945 Prague still remembered in the present-day city? Has the Jewish and German-speaking past been erased, obscured and forgotten – or if it does still play a role in post-1989 culture, how can that role be characterised? How did the policies of the socialist regime shape the ways in which Prague was imagined? Was 1989 a year of sudden transformation, marking abrupt changes in Czech cultural values and revised approaches to shared memory? Are David Černý’s ‘babies’ representative of the response of today’s artists and writers to the sacred spaces and political transformations of the past? All of these questions relate to the intersections between the city, collective memory and the imagination: the problem of how to interpret the simultaneous presence of the fragmented Jewish cemetery and the television tower relates fundamentally to the question of how Prague is imagined.

Johannes Urzidil’s *Prager Triptychon* (1960) was published soon after the Jewish Cemetery was transformed into a park. It is a collection of five stories, arranged so as to imitate an altarpiece composed of a triptych, predella and superstructure (‘Gesprenge’).²⁰ Urzidil grew up in Prague, at the intersection of several languages and cultural identities; in *Prager Triptychon*, he characterises his position as

¹⁹ Bren, p. 2.

²⁰ On the structure of *Prager Triptychon*, see Anja Kreuzer, ‘Erinnerung als Komposition. Eine Untersuchung des *Prager Triptychon* von Johannes Urzidil’, *brücken: Germanistisches Jahrbuch Tschechien-Slowakei*, n. s., 14 (2006), 215-244.

‘hinternational’.²¹ In 1939, he emigrated, settling in America; his texts approach Prague as ‘ein vielgestaltiges Lebewesen mannigfacher Vergangenheiten.’²² The structure of the altarpiece places his reflections on the city in a sacred framework, imbuing the process of remembering with a suggestion of transcendence.

In the first story, ‘Predella: Relief der Stadt’, the autobiographical narrator looks back on his childhood in Prague, offering a panoramic view of the city as a space of disruption and conflict. He recalls the constant ‘Kampfbereitschaft’ of the German and Czech students, and the monument to Jan Hus which was erected directly opposite the Habsburg ‘Siegesmadonna’ on Old Town Square.²³ These two monuments illustrate how the territorial conflicts of rival religious and national groups have shaped the city: Ladislav Šaloun’s sculpture of Hus and his followers was conceived as ‘a place of pilgrimage for the nation’ and was positioned provocatively close to the baroque Marian Column, which was destroyed by a group of anti-Habsburg Czechs in 1918.²⁴

Urzidil interprets the creation of rival memorials in the city as a continuation of wars and executions stretching back to the seventeenth century, thus intertwining collective memory with the desire for revenge:

Jedes Haus, jede Gasse, jeder Platz in Prag rief unaufhörlich die ganze Geschichte entlang: ‘Vergiß nicht das! Vergiß nicht jenes!’, so daß man vor lauter Erinnerung und Vergeltungssucht das gegenwärtige Leben schier darüber vergaß.²⁵

²¹ Urzidil, *Prager Triptychon*, p. 11.

²² Johannes Urzidil and Anselm Jaenicke, *Prag – Glanz und Mystik einer Stadt* (Krefeld: Scherpe, 1966), p. 9.

²³ Urzidil, *Prager Triptychon*, pp. 15-16.

²⁴ ‘poutním místem národa’ (Zdeněk Hojda and Jiří Pokorný, *Pomníky a zapomněky* (Prague: Paseka, 1996), p. 90; on the Marian Column see pp. 28-33).

²⁵ Urzidil, *Prager Triptychon*, p. 17.

The author gives particular force to the association between memory and revenge by personifying the city, constructing an insistent tricolon crescendo to underline his claim that every location in the city ‘called’ upon Prague’s residents to ‘remember’ something. The city is imagined as a polyphonic chorus of different voices: each location insists on a different memory, as the ‘Habsburg’ Marian column apparently demands that people remember the Battle of White Mountain, whilst the Hus monument recalls the Protestant nobles who were executed on Old Town Square in 1621.²⁶ The trio of ‘Haus’, ‘Gasse’ and ‘Platz’ emphasises that Prague is composed of many heterogeneous spaces which are united not by the fact that they share a certain memory of the past, but by the fact that they all clamour for their individual past to take precedence.

In Urzidil’s story, history itself is represented spatially. The unusual phrase ‘die ganze Geschichte entlang’ evokes an image of history as part of the city, as a street along which the calls to remember echo. The demands of the personified houses, alleys and squares seem capable of bending history to their will, incorporating it into their own topography. The purpose of collective memory here is not so much the preservation of elements which unite a community, but rather the recollection of wrongs done to one group by another. The aggressive coalition of ‘Erinnerung und Vergeltungssucht’ is juxtaposed with the unequal force of personal memory: so dominant are the multiple calls of the city to be remembered that the individual is liable to ‘forget his own life’. The collective and potentially violent force of memory is thus contrasted with individual, everyday forgetting.

In his humorous depiction of violent collective memory, Urzidil plays on one of the most dominant narratives in the network of topoi which constitute the imagined

²⁶ Urzidil highlights the most inflammatory interpretation of each monument, connecting the Marian Column with the Battle of White Mountain rather than the defeat of the Swedes who besieged Prague in 1648, and relating the Hus monument to the 1621 executions of Protestants rather than the fourteenth-century religious leader.

Prague: the narrative of intercultural conflict. However, *Prager Triptychon* does not simply repeat the narratives of conflict. The personification of the streets of Prague draws our attention to the presence of a literary perspective which constructs the city as a discordant chorus of voices. This emphasis on fictionality is also present in the title of the story ‘Predella: Relief der Stadt’, which recalls a relief at St Vitus’ Cathedral showing the flight of the Winter King from Prague in 1620; the narrator used to dream up continuations of its topography.²⁷ Urzidil’s depiction of the city plays with the idea that the houses themselves exert an irresistible force over Prague’s inhabitants, but in fact, the force of the literary imagination is equally the focus of the text. Memory therefore takes on more ambiguous connotations than were initially implied by the tension between collective, aggressive ‘Erinnerung und Vergeltungssucht’ and individual forgetting: the narrator does not simply report on the conflicted history of Prague, but creates his own fictional ‘Relief der Stadt’.

Urzidil’s exploration of Prague is strikingly explicit and insistent in its preoccupation with memory.²⁸ Written from an emigrant perspective at a time when reminders of Prague’s transcultural past were being obscured and – in the case of the Old Jewish Cemetery in Žižkov – literally buried, *Prager Triptychon* confronts the reader with a city which echoes with multiple calls on collective memory. Urzidil implies that the aggression of these calls reflects the volatile nationalist mood which took hold of many groups in interwar Prague and which ultimately became part of the eruption of nationalist hatred precipitating the Second World War. At the same time, his stories are an attempt to bridge the enormous discontinuities created by the war, the Holocaust, and the resulting destruction of Prague’s transnational character.²⁹ He

²⁷ Urzidil, p. 7. On the Winter King (Frederick of the Palatinate), see Hugh Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), pp. 66-69.

²⁸ Kreuzer, p. 218.

²⁹ Giuseppe Farese, ‘Johannes Urzidil – Ein Schriftsteller der Erinnerung’, in *Johannes Urzidil und der Prager Kreis*, ed. by Johann Lachinger, Aldemar Schiffkorn and Walter Zettl (Linz: Landesverlag, 1986), pp. 12-20 (p. 17).

questions whether fiction can play a role in reconstructing an imagined city in which the past is reactivated from a new, retrospective position, or whether the processes of disintegration and collective forgetting are too powerful to be undermined by literary texts.

The possibility of reconstructing the city through fiction remains a central concern for post-1989 authors. In choosing to discuss both Czech and Czech-German authors, this thesis responds to the memory of the multilingual pre-war city. Already in the terms ‘Czech’ and ‘Czech-German’, an asymmetry is present which illustrates the challenge presented by Prague to literary scholars, who often focus on a single ‘national’ literature. ‘Czech literature’ is generally used without further qualification to denote works written in Czech, whereas ‘Czech-German’ refers in this thesis to authors who grew up in a Czech context but who write in German. Although authors whose background encompasses several cultures or several languages have increasingly been adopted into the German literary canon, literary criticism still makes use of concepts which place them in a special category: having generally moved away from the problematic concepts of ‘Betroffenheit’ or ‘Migrationsliteratur’, it conceives of such literature as ‘hybrid’ or ‘intercultural’.³⁰ German-speaking authors who are categorised as something more complex than ‘German’ are therefore still separate:

So wurde neben den Nationalliteraturen beispielsweise eine Sondersparte der hybriden Literaturen aufgemacht, was aber nach sich zieht, daß die dort

³⁰ Renata Cornejo lists terms such as ‘Gastarbeiterliteratur’, ‘deutsche Gastliteratur’, ‘Ausländerliteratur’, ‘Minderheitenliteratur’ and ‘Migrationsliteratur’ and prefers ‘interkulturelle Literatur’. However, although she mentions the problem of creating a special category for such texts, she continues to treat ‘Czech-German’ authors as separate from ‘Czech’ or ‘German’ literature by making them the exclusive focus of her discussion in *Heimat im Wort. Zum Sprachwechsel der deutsch schreibenden tschechischen Autorinnen und Autoren nach 1968* (Praesens: Vienna, 2010), pp. 15-16. Czech-German authors are frequently treated separately: see e.g. Alfrun Kliems, *Im Stummmland: zum Exilwerk von Libuše Moníková, Jiří Gruša und Ota Filip* (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 2002) and Ursula Maria Hanus, *Deutsch-tschechische Migrationsliteratur: Jiří Gruša and Libuše Moníková* (Munich: Iudicium, 2008).

einsortierte Literatur auf diese Eigenschaft festgelegt und gewissermaßen ausgegrenzt wird.³¹

This thesis does not approach certain authors as ‘hybrid’: instead, each text is discussed in the intercultural context of the imagined city of Prague.³² Jan Faktor and Libuše Moníková, who write in German, trace paths through the city which overlap with the routes chosen by Daniela Hodrová, Michal Ajvaz and Jáchym Topol, who write in Czech. Where the possibility of an emigrant perspective is raised in their works, it is connected with a range of Prague identities. Viewing ‘Czech-German’ authors in this way calls the seemingly neutral use of the term ‘Czech authors’ into question.

Conceptualising the imagined city

In my exploration of the ways in which Prague is imagined in post-1989 Czech and Czech-German narrative fiction, I approach the city as a network of topoi, narratives and texts.³³ The imagined city is produced collectively, by the creators and readers of texts in which Prague plays a role. In this process, depictions of the city repeat and rework particular topoi and narratives, adapt earlier texts, and retell familiar stories, whilst also attaching new elements to the imagined city, exploring areas which are not yet well known to the reader, or even contradicting or obscuring earlier narratives.

³¹ Immacolata Amodeo, ‘Betroffenheit und Rhizom, Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft’, *Migrationspolitisches Portal* <http://www.migration-boell.de/web/integration/47_2014.asp> [accessed 10.6.2016].

³² See Wolfgang Welsch’s understanding of culture as hybrid (‘Transculturality - the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today’, in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999), pp. 194-213.

³³ Andrew Webber offers a particularly useful discussion of the city as an imagined space in *Berlin in the Twentieth Century: A Cultural Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), although his emphasis on psychoanalysis differs from my approach. This thesis also takes its cue from other studies of literary cities, including Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), Antje Wischmann, *Verdichtete Stadtwahrnehmung: Untersuchungen zum literarischen und urbanistischen Diskurs in Skandinavien 1955-1995* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2003), Julie A. Buckler, *Mapping St. Petersburg: imperial text and cityshape* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), and Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de siècle Vienna: politics and culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Intertextual references are involved in this process, but where intertextuality usually implies allusions to specific literary texts, the construction of the imagined city depends equally on the borrowing and reshaping of recurring structures and topoi which are not specific to a single text.³⁴

The imagined city, like the real city, is constantly changing: it is always expanding and being rebuilt, and areas are destroyed to make way for new structures, or rediscovered as ruins beneath more recent additions.³⁵ It is never finished, and no single authority can decide what belongs in it or what is typical of it; instead, this is a matter for debate between competing voices and discourses.³⁶ Like the real city, the imagined city is connected with other cities: sometimes the Prague-Paris route dominates, whilst at others, ‘imaginary geographies’ link Prague with Vienna or Berlin.³⁷ Furthermore, the imagined city is shaped not only by responses to other cities, but also by notions of ‘the city’ in general, by the shifting cultural significance of the metropolis.³⁸

This concept of the imagined city allows us to remain aware of the materiality of the real city and the complex dynamic between the city’s physical form and its imagined

³⁴ On the conceptual complexity of intertextuality, see Renate Lachmann, *Memory and Literature: Intertextuality in Russian Modernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 25-35.

³⁵ See Daniela Hodrová, *citlivé město* (Prague: Acropolis, 2006), p. 115.

³⁶ Here my approach contrasts with that of Alexander Bobrakov-Timoškin, who sees the ‘Prague text’ as a closed whole, from which he excludes the Prague-related fiction of Jáchym Topol, Michal Ajvaz and Miloš Urban (‘Proměny pražského textu v české literatuře 20. století’, in *Otázky českého kánonu*, ed. by Stanislava Fedrová (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2006), pp. 549-561).

³⁷ Katherine David-Fox, ‘Prague-Vienna, Prague-Berlin: The Hidden Geography of Czech Modernism’, *Slavic Review*, 59, 4 (2000), 735-760. Derek Sayer explores the Prague-Paris connection in *Prague: Capital of the Twentieth Century: A Surrealist History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

³⁸ See Václav Cílek’s comment that Prague is only a ‘metropolis’ on Wenceslas Square: on Old Town Square the city is itself (‘sama sebou’), whilst everywhere else it is a small town (*Prohlédni si tu zemi* (Prague: Dokořán, 2012), p. 102).

counterpart.³⁹ Julie Buckler takes an analogous approach in her recent exploration of St. Petersburg, in which she considers the city as ‘a cultural network that cannot be reduced to a single textual structure, as a body of texts that collectively provides a structural analogue for the material city’.⁴⁰ Buckler’s emphasis on the inadequacy of a ‘single textual structure’ as a conceptualisation of the city is a response to the influential work of the Tartu-Moscow School on the subject of St. Petersburg as a semiotic phenomenon.⁴¹ The concept of the ‘Petersburg Text’ was developed by semioticians such as Vladimir Toporov and Yuri Lotman, who identified recurring topoi which dominated the literary image of the city. As Buckler points out, even if we define ‘text’ quite broadly, this model has disadvantages: it encourages a focus on canonical texts and the prioritisation of oft-repeated narratives, and it departs from the shifting structures of the real city, even though these structures and their interactions with the imagined city often offer a framework for understanding why the city takes on particular roles in literature.⁴²

In her account of St. Petersburg, Buckler combines discussions of the city’s physical form, including topics such as eclecticism in architecture, or the changing faces of the city’s graveyards, with analysis of the ways in which literary texts interact with these physical phenomena. Her use of the metaphor of mapping, and of the concept of the ‘cultural network’, give her the flexibility to shift between the real city and the imagined city, even as she points out that written texts are often the most lasting

³⁹ On the shifting relationship between the ‘real’ city and its fictional counterpart, see Wischmann, pp. 9-27.

⁴⁰ Buckler, p. 5.

⁴¹ See e.g. Vladimir Nikolajevič Toporov, ‘Petrohrad a petrohradský text ruské literatury (Úvod do tématu)’, in *Exotika. Výbor z prací tartuské školy*, ed. by T. Glanc (Brno: Host, 2003), pp. 7-35, and Hodrová, *citlivé město*, pp. 112-113. On the city as a text, see also Andreas Huyssen, ‘The Voids of Berlin’, *Critical Inquiry*, 24, 1 (1997), 57-81 (pp. 57-59).

⁴² Buckler, pp. 24-26.

evidence of the city's past.⁴³ The work of Lotman and Toporov remains a point of reference, but Buckler avoids using the term 'text' as an all-encompassing metaphor.

As well as incorporating the ambiguous links between the real and the imagined Prague, the concept of the city as a cultural network draws attention to its constantly changing shape. The Czech author and literary theorist Daniela Hodrová, whose fiction is discussed in this thesis, underlines this point in her analysis of Prague as a literary construct in *citlivé město* (2006, 'sensitive city'). Like Buckler, she questions the concept of the 'Petersburg Text' and prefers the term 'sít' ('net' or 'network'):

Sít [...] implikuje dynamické napětí – vlnění, napínání a uvolňování (v částech i v celku), zahušťování a řidnutí, splétání, rozplétání, párání, trhání.⁴⁴

[Network [...] implies dynamic tension – vibration, tightening and loosening (in parts and in the whole), thickening and thinning, tangling and untangling, unravelling, tearing.]⁴⁵

The long list of verbal nouns underlines the many ways in which the imagined city shifts and changes. In her choice of wording, Hodrová alludes to the connections between writing and weaving; the imagined city is a fabric which can be stretched, unravelled and torn.⁴⁶ Although she never entirely departs from the notion that the city is composed of legible signs, her concern with the materiality of the city and its resistance to 'reading' can be observed both in her theoretical work and in her fiction, where it becomes a central theme.

This thesis traces the shifting connections which shape the imagined city – connections between individual texts, between the physical spaces of the city and

⁴³ Buckler, p. 219.

⁴⁴ Hodrová, *citlivé město*, p. 114.

⁴⁵ All translations of Czech are by Lucy Duggan, unless otherwise noted.

⁴⁶ On the etymological and metaphorical connections between 'texts' and 'weaving', see Erika Greber, *Textile Texte: poetologische Metaphorik und Literaturtheorie: Studien zur Tradition des Wortflechtens und der Kombinatorik* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2002).

their representation in fiction, and between the narratives of collective memory and the texts which rework those narratives. The challenges of such a project are exemplified by Alfred Thomas' recent exploration of Prague literature, *Prague Palimpsest: Writing, Memory, and the City* (2010). Thomas approaches Prague as a 'palimpsest', 'a multilayered manuscript on which numerous writers have left their trace without completely effacing the presence of their predecessors'.⁴⁷ He frequently evokes the dichotomy between 'memory' and 'forgetting', between 'effacement' and 'the city's demand to be constantly "rewritten"'.⁴⁸ This conceptualisation of the city as a 'palimpsest' has several advantages. It reflects the fact that any text in which Prague plays a role inscribes a new literary image of the city without erasing previous images. Furthermore, it suggests that the processes of rewriting and partial erasure are continuous, and implies heterogeneity: the texts which are overlaid in the palimpsest might contrast strongly with one another.

However, there are difficulties with Thomas' metaphor which become particularly noticeable when he turns his attention to the contemporary imagined city. Here, Thomas briefly considers films by Jan Švankmajer and Ole Christian Madsen, alongside novels by Michal Ajvaz and Sylvie Germain, and argues that contemporary texts show 'a tendency to recycle literary motifs' which make them a 'continuation' of earlier Prague literature, 'repeating' and 'reprising' patterns identified in previous chapters.⁴⁹ Even if all of these instances of repetition were as substantial as Thomas claims, they would raise the question of whether the most we can say about post-1989 Prague literature is that it repeats earlier models.

⁴⁷ Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, p. 10.

⁴⁹ Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, p. 14 and pp. 168-176.

Despite its apparent emphasis on heterogeneity, Thomas' 'palimpsest' has the effect of flattening difference: it does not account for distinctions between different areas or types of space (private, public), but instead totalises Prague as one layered text of monumental proportions. The nature and complexity of the relationships between texts are often disregarded, too. In a real palimpsest, there is not necessarily any connection between texts in terms of their content or authorship: they are linked only by the fact that they have been written down on the same wax tablet or piece of parchment.

The 'palimpsest' emphasises writing to the detriment of reading and imagining: the imagined city is shaped by a process of collective imagination, which involves shifting interpretations of texts. Thomas frequently subsumes the process of constructing the imagined city either into the general theme of 'erasure' or into the tendency to 'continue' or 'rewrite' the same story, without exploring the links and tensions between these processes. Thus, despite its potential, the 'palimpsest' becomes homogeneous and monolithic. The example of the Old Jewish Cemetery in Žižkov illustrates the problem of conceptualising the imagined city: the two contrasting spaces appear emphatically separate, and yet are literally joined together; they recall different periods and therefore suggest the metaphor of 'layers', and yet neither is obscured by the other.

Memory and fiction in the imagined city

Any approach to the cultural history of Prague has to respond to the ways in which the imagined city has been dominated by particular narratives about the past – narratives

of Czech greatness and of intercultural identities, as well as of mystery and magic.⁵⁰ The variety of responses here is exemplified by two classic works which contrast with one another: Peter Demetz's *Prague in Black and Gold* (1997) and Angelo Maria Ripellino's *Magic Prague* (published in Italian as *Praga Magica*, 1973). Demetz mainly proceeds chronologically and focuses on providing a carefully researched account of the city's cultural and political development over the centuries. He complains:

International tourists arrive with images in their minds of the golem, of Franz Kafka (rather simplified), and of alchemists, but they hear little and know less about the mathematicians at the court of Rudolf II, the pedagogical reforms of the stern moralist Rabbi Loew, or the sober philosophy of T. G. Masaryk [...].⁵¹

Demetz tries to take his readers on a different path round the city from the one taken by 'international tourists'. He endeavours to demystify figures such as Rabbi Löw and separate 'fact' from 'fiction'. Ripellino, meanwhile, skips between an enormous range of literary texts, weaving them together to create a new literary image of the city, a 'capricious book' for which historical chronologies are relevant mainly as a source of fragments and anecdotes rather than as an explanatory framework.⁵²

In Czech scholarship, the challenge of navigating the dominant Prague narratives has been further complicated by the limitations enforced by socialism. Karel Krejčí's *Praha legend a skutečnosti* (1981, 'The legends and realities of Prague') offers a wide-ranging thematic discussion of the ways in which Prague was imagined in the

⁵⁰ On the history of Prague, see Peter Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), and Bernard Michel, *Histoire de Prague* (Paris: Fayard, 1998). For historical accounts of Bohemia in English, see *Bohemia in History*, ed. by Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); *A History of the Czech Lands*, ed. by Jaroslav Pánek and Oldřich Tůma (Prague : Karolinum, 2009); Agnew, *The Czechs*. For a comprehensive account of Prague's history in Czech, see *Dějiny Prahy*, ed. by Jan Vlk, 2 vols (Prague: Paseka, 1997-8).

⁵¹ Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold*, p. xiii.

⁵² Angelo Maria Ripellino, *Magic Prague* (London: Picador, 1995), p. 18.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, despite being unable to discuss German-speaking authors such as Franz Kafka in any detail.⁵³ Krejčí's approach distinguishes, at least in theory, between different forms of more or less fictional narrative which are projected back onto history, but does not necessarily confront these narratives with 'fact'; instead, it balances many different traditions 'in lebhafter Pluralität'.⁵⁴ More recent Czech discussions of Prague include the work of Daniela Hodrová and Vladimír Macura, who share an interest in semiotic 'readings' of the city. Macura teases apart the elements of shared memory, political rhetoric and poetic licence which contribute to shaping the imagined city.⁵⁵ His approach responds particularly to the image of Prague as a quintessentially 'Czech' city, and reveals the intricate constructions of national culture on which this notion rests.⁵⁶

Recent research focusing on the role of Prague in collective memory has often drawn attention to the built environment of the city and how this can be interpreted in relation to conflicts over shared identity and the 'national' past. Historians including Cynthia Paces in *Prague Panoramas*, and Zdeněk Hojda and Jiří Pokorný in *Pomníky a zapomníky* (1996), have analysed the monuments of Prague and the discourse surrounding them, in order to map the shifting image of the Czech past in cultural memory. The title of Hojda and Pokorný's book plays on the notion that monuments and memorials can become sites of forgetting just as much as memory; 'zapomníky' is

⁵³ The sanctioned approach to German-speaking authors shifted over the course of the socialist period and varied according to the context (for instance, editors would take into account the fact that *Praha legend a skutečností* would be widely available to the general reader). Several Prague German authors are included in Krejčí's book, but whereas Egon Erwin Kisch, Rainer Maria Rilke and Gustav Meyrink are discussed in some detail, Kafka is only mentioned in passing, without further elaboration (though his name does appear several times: see e.g. Karel Krejčí, *Praha legend a skutečností* (Prague: Panorama, 1981) p. 126, p. 246, p. 248). Max Brod appears briefly in connection with his novel *Tycho Brahes Weg zu Gott* (p. 129). Similar gaps are found in Vladimír Kovařík, *Literární toulky Prahou* (Prague: Albatros, 1988).

⁵⁴ Peter Demetz, *Böhmische Sonne, Mährischer Mond: Essays und Erinnerungen* (Vienna: Deuticke, 1996), p. 143.

⁵⁵ Vladimír Macura, *Znamení zrodu a české sny (Vybrané spisy Vladimíra Macury vol. I)*, ed. by Kateřina Piorecká and Milena Vojtová (Prague: Academia, 2015).

⁵⁶ Vladimír Macura, 'Praha', in *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, pp. 200-211.

a neologism turning ‘memorials’ (‘pomníky’) into ‘forgettorials’ or ‘unmemorials’. Paces, meanwhile, is particularly interested in religious identities in the Czech context, and investigates ‘attempts throughout the twentieth century to mark the landscape of Prague with “sacred spaces”’.⁵⁷ She emphasises the continued importance of religious symbolism in the secular context of socialist Czechoslovakia and the post-1989 Czech Republic.

My discussion of post-1989 Prague literature will build on these earlier approaches to the city and address an area which has been neglected so far, by exploring the triangle of relationships between memory, literature and the city. Interactions between collective memory and fiction have often been sidelined both in discussions of Prague and in theoretical approaches to memory culture.⁵⁸ My approach is informed by Jan Assmann’s discussions of collective memory, in which he develops Maurice Halbwachs’ claim that memory always takes place collectively. Halbwachs states:

La société, suivant les circonstances, et suivant les temps, se représente de diverses manières le passé: elle modifie ses conventions.⁵⁹

Halbwachs’ use of the verb ‘se représenter’ suggests that collective memory is an imaginative process: the past is malleable, shaped and reshaped by the collective imagination of the present. Jan Assmann develops the notion of collective memory into two distinct concepts: communicative memory, which presupposes a group of people or a society which passes on accounts of the past orally, and cultural memory, which emerges when memories are recorded as written texts or other cultural objects.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Paces, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Hayden White approaches historiography as fiction in *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), but is not so concerned with the roles played by literary texts.

⁵⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Alcan, 1925), p. 279.

⁶⁰ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 2007), pp. 50-56.

Assmann only partially adopts Halbwachs' suggestion that collective memory is imaginative. His account of cultural memory emphasises the role of written texts, including some which are now usually regarded as literature, such as Homer's *Odyssey*, and others which are generally considered religious texts, such as the Torah. Assmann's analysis of their function does not pay attention to the qualities of 'literariness' or 'fictionality' or ask whether it matters that successive audiences of the *Odyssey* have understood Odysseus as a fictional character, whilst the audience of the Torah would not usually class Moses as 'fictional'.⁶¹ Indeed, such texts are often discussed either as literature, as they are in Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1946), or as fundamental components of cultural memory, as they are in Aleida Assmann's essay on 'cultural texts', which claims that canonical literary texts are not analysed sufficiently in terms of their role in collective memory.⁶²

The specific relationships between memory, literature and place are the subject of Aleida Assmann's *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (2010), which discusses a wide range of examples of the interaction between memory and fiction in relation to 'lieux de mémoire' or 'Erinnerungsorte'.⁶³ Aleida Assmann's approach to memory, literature and place offers individual insights which are immediately applicable to post-1989 Prague literature. She argues that contemporary artists offer 'simulations' of memory when confronting the discontinuities of the past; this observation exemplifies the subtle role played by

⁶¹ It is difficult to say whether the earliest audiences of the *Odyssey* regarded it as fiction. Within the poem, fictionality and story-telling are thematised at many points, and narration is presented as a defence against the danger of forgetting (see Italo Calvino, 'The Odysseys within *The Odyssey*', in *Why Read the Classics?*, trans. by Martin McLaughlin (Boston: Mariner Books, 2000), pp. 11-17).

⁶² Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 3-23. Aleida Assmann, 'Was sind kulturelle Texte?', in *Literaturkanon – Medienereignis – Kultureller Text: Formen interkultureller Kommunikation und Übersetzung*, ed. by Andreas Poltermann (Berlin: Schmidt, 1995), pp. 232-244.

⁶³ Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: Beck, 2010).

literature between ‘history’ and ‘fiction’.⁶⁴ However, her diffuse approach and her unsystematic use of terminology make it difficult to draw general conclusions from her work.⁶⁵ Astrid Erll takes the opposite approach to the problems of terminology and clarity in *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen* (2005), which offers a survey of memory theory and pays particular attention to the role of literature. However, Erll’s model of the relationship between literature and memory, which is based on Paul Ricœur’s concept of mimesis in narrative, does not take account of the wide variety of roles which literature can assume in the context of memory, and how these roles change over time as both memory and literature shift their function in society.⁶⁶

Given the problems with both Assmann’s exploration of many examples and Erll’s systematic categorisation, it seems that seeking a theoretical model may be the wrong approach. Instead, we could map the ways in which particular literary texts in a certain period and culture interact with collective memory, and gradually relate this to other mappings of other moments. Specific studies of literature and memory could therefore be drawn together to chart the complexities of literature’s reciprocal relationship with collective memory, rather than reducing them to a single model. The connections between literature and collective memory have recently begun to attract more attention in the Czech context, due to the work of historians such as Kamil Činátl, who explores post-1989 Czech memory culture in *Naše české minulosti* (2014, ‘Our Czech pasts’). Činátl’s study of the historian František Palacký and his influence on Czech art and literature, *Dějiny a vyprávění* (2011, ‘History and narration’), demonstrates the potential of highly focused studies to transgress disciplinary

⁶⁴ Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, p. 22.

⁶⁵ See e.g. her unclear use of the terms ‘sGedenkort’, ‘Erinnerungsort’ and ‘Gedächtnisort’ in Chapter V, ‘Orte’: towards the end of the chapter, she suggests a contrast between ‘Gedenkort’ and ‘Erinnerungsort’ (pp. 337-338) which does not correspond to her use of the terms earlier on.

⁶⁶ Astrid Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005), pp. 150-153.

boundaries and trace the intersections of written history, literary narration and the collective imagination.

Intercultural Prague

In one area of Prague-related scholarship, the relationships between memory, literature and the city have played a central role, even if they have not always been discussed explicitly. This is the growing field of enquiry into intercultural communities in Prague and the Czech lands, especially in the period from the 1890s to 1945.⁶⁷ It was an era which saw increasingly fixed notions of Czech, German and Jewish identity in Bohemia, as well as the emergence of a large number of well-known Prague authors.⁶⁸ The shifting academic approaches to this period are themselves an illustration of the changing shape of the imagined city.

⁶⁷ Historical work on national identities in Bohemia includes Gary Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Hillel J. Kieval, *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Berkeley: University of California, 2000); Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Nancy M. Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Kateřina Čapková, *Czechs, Germans, Jews? National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); Ines Koeltzsch, *Geteilte Kulturen: eine Geschichte der tschechisch-jüdisch-deutschen Beziehungen in Prag (1918-1938)* (Munich: Collegium Carolinum, 2012). See also Wein, *History of the Jews*, and Paces, mentioned above.

⁶⁸ Recent literary research discussing Prague identities includes Spector, Schneider, Mark Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); *Brücken nach Prag: Deutschsprachige Literatur im kulturellen Kontext der Donaumonarchie und der Tschechoslowakei*, ed. by Klaas-Heinrich Ehlers and others (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 2000); Susanne Fritz, *Die Entstehung des "Prager Textes". Prager deutschsprachige Literatur von 1895 bis 1934* (Dresden: Thelem, 2005); *Prag – Literaturstadt zweier Sprachen*, ed. by Peter Becher and Anna Knechtel (Passau: Stutz, 2010); *Prag als Topos in der Literatur*, ed. by Manfred Weinberg and Almut Todorow (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2011); Jörg Krappmann, *Allerhand Übergänge: Interkulturelle Analysen der regionalen Literatur in Böhmen und Mähren sowie der deutschen Literatur in Prag (1890-1918)* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013); Kristina Lahl, *Das Individuum im transkulturellen Raum: Identitätswürfe in der deutschsprachigen Literatur Böhmens und Mährens 1918-1938* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014); Marek Nekula, *Franz Kafka and his Prague Contexts* (Carolinum: Prague, 2016).

Since 1945, scholarship on intercultural Prague in the early twentieth century has included an enormous range of publications and has been shaped by differing attitudes to underlying questions relating to the definition of national identity, the parameters of intercultural exchange in Bohemia, and the significance of cultural context to the work of individual writers. In the immediate post-war decades, authors who had been part of the pre-war Prague community published memoirs, literature and literary criticism: images of pre-war Prague have been shaped by Paul/Pavel Eisner's research on Kafka, Max Brod's *Der Prager Kreis* (1966) and his autobiography *Streitbares Leben* (1960), the autobiographical fiction of authors such as Egon Erwin Kisch, Johannes Urzidil, and Lenka Reinerová, and Gustav Janouch's mainly fictional *Gespräche mit Kafka* (1951), which were long regarded as genuine, as well as publications of Kafka's work and other literature written before 1945 but not published until later.⁶⁹ From then on, the 'relentless torrent of Kafka research', as well as the less numerous studies of other German-speaking Prague writers, overlapped and interacted with research into the broader context of Czech-German-Jewish life in Prague.⁷⁰

In Czechoslovakia, such research was made almost impossible until the early 1960s by the fact that German-speaking writers from the Czech lands were frequently marginalised or excluded from publication and many aspects of the intercultural past were taboo. The small number of Germanists at Czech universities often published on

⁶⁹ See e.g. Pavel Eisner, *Kafka and Prague*, trans. by Lowry Nelson and René Wellek (New York: Arts, Inc., 1950); Max Brod, *Streitbares Leben* (Munich: Kindler, 1960); Max Brod, *Der Prager Kreis* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1966); Egon Erwin Kisch, *Marktplatz der Sensationen* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1948); Johannes Urzidil, *Da geht Kafka* (Zürich: Artemis, 1965); Lenka Reinerová, *Das Traumcafé einer Pragerin* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1996); Gustav Janouch, *Gespräche mit Kafka: Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1951); Willy Haas, *Die Literarische Welt: Lebenserinnerungen* (Munich: Paul List, 1957).

⁷⁰ See Ritchie Robertson, 'Myth versus enlightenment in Kafka's *Das Schloss*', *Monatshefte*, 103, 3 (2011), 385-395 (p. 388). Discussions of Kafka which are particularly pertinent to perceptions of pre-war Prague include Klaus Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka. Eine Biographie seiner Jugend, 1883-1912* (Bern: Francke, 1958); Hartmut Binder, *Franz Kafka. Leben und Persönlichkeit* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1983); and Heinz Politzer, *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966). Hartmut Binder also drew attention to other German-speaking Prague authors in *Prager Profile: Vergessene Autoren im Schatten Kafkas*, ed. by Hartmut Binder (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1991).

linguistic topics or wrote about pre-modern German texts.⁷¹ This changed in the 1960s, with two international conferences in the Czech town of Liblice, ‘Franz Kafka aus Prager Sicht’ in 1963, and ‘Weltfreunde. Konferenz über die Prager deutsche Literatur’ in 1965. The first of these achieved the partial rehabilitation of Kafka in Czechoslovak German studies, and at the second, the Czech Germanist Eduard Goldstücker argued that Prague German authors such as Kafka should be viewed in a separate light from other German-speaking authors in Bohemia, as an isolated community producing world literature.⁷²

The image of the Prague German authors as an isolated group, along with similar concepts of ghettoisation proposed by Paul/Pavel Eisner and by Heinz Politzer, was extremely influential not only in relation to Kafka’s work but also in the wider context of research into this period of Czech-German-Jewish history.⁷³ It produced a dominant notion of Kafka and his contemporaries as inhabitants of a cultural enclave, disconnected from the surrounding Czech culture and from other German-speaking communities in the Czech lands: Goldstücker’s approach located the Prague Germans within a defined area of the capital city, and the ‘fascist’ Germans in the borderlands. This model has had a lasting effect, not only on university teaching in the Czech Republic, but also in such seemingly distant texts as Gilles Deleuze and Félix

⁷¹ See e.g. the journal *Germanistica Pragensia*, which includes discussions of Prague German authors during the 1960s, but which focuses on other subjects both in the years up to 1960 and in the period from 1969 to 1989.

⁷² In 1963, Ernst Fischer and Roger Garaudy joined Goldstücker in arguing that Marxist literary criticism should concern itself with Kafka, whilst many of the Czech and East German contributors insisted that the ‘alienation’ he described was only relevant to capitalist societies (see *Franz Kafka aus Prager Sicht 1963*, ed. by Eduard Goldstücker, František Kautman and Paul Reimann (Prague: Verlag der tschechoslowakischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1965)). In 1965, Goldstücker contrived to emphasise both the isolation of the Prague German community and the notion that the authors surrounding Kafka succeeded in overcoming that isolation and acting as mediators between Czech and German culture (‘Die Prager deutsche Literatur als historisches Phänomen’, in *Weltfreunde. Konferenz über die Prager deutsche Literatur*, ed. by Eduard Goldstücker and Elemír Terray (Prague: Academia, 1967), pp. 21- 45).

⁷³ See Pavel Eisner, ‘Franz Kafka a Praha’, in *Z dějin českého myšlení o literatuře 1: 1945-1948*, ed. by Michal Příbáň (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2001), pp. 455-473 (p. 458), and Heinz Politzer, *Franz Kafka*, p. 9.

Guattari's *Kafka: Pour une Littérature Mineure* (1975), which proceeds from the assumption that Kafka was not integrated in the heterogeneous society of pre-war Prague.⁷⁴ Such approaches do not reflect the complexities of cultural life in Bohemia, as expressed in historical documents and in the literature of the time.⁷⁵

Recent research has introduced new models of cultural exchange and has paid more attention to the nuances of Czech-German-Jewish Prague. Already in the context of the Liblice conferences, Kurt Krolop meticulously traced the cross-cultural intersections of the expressionist generation in an article with 236 footnotes: the ratio of footnotes to the main text indicates his careful evasion of generalisations.⁷⁶ New studies have demonstrated increasing interest in mapping pre-war Prague as an intercultural space, analysing individual interactions and texts within a conception of cultural identity as mutable and hybrid.

Accounts of pre-1945 Prague face the challenge of assessing the level of homogeneity within 'German identity' or 'Czech identity'. Kateřina Čapková responds by approaching identity as 'negotiable and flexible', and emphasises the notion of plurality: one individual could shift their preferences or express their complex

⁷⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka. Für eine kleine Literatur*, trans. by Burkhard Kroeber (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1976), p. 24. The emphasis on isolation is also echoed e.g. in Pavel Kosatík, *Menší knížka o německých spisovatelích z Čech a Moravy* (Prague: Nakladatelství Franze Kafky, 2001), pp. 72-73, and *Prager deutsche Erzählungen*, ed. by Dieter Sudhoff and Michael M. Schardt (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1992) p. 9. The contradictions between isolation and mediation are underlined by Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 1-2.

⁷⁵ See Jörg Krappmann and Manfred Weinberg, 'Region – Provinz. Die deutsche Literatur Prags, Böhmens, Mährens und Sudetenschlesiens jenseits von Liblice. Mit Anmerkungen zu Franz Kafka als Autor einer Regionalliteratur', in *Prag – Provinz. Wechselwirkungen und Gegensätze in der deutschsprachigen Regionalliteratur Böhmens, Mährens und Sudetenschlesiens*, ed. by Peter Becher, Jozo Džambo and Anna Knechtel (Wuppertal: Arco, 2014), pp. 17-52.

⁷⁶ Kurt Krolop, 'Zur Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der Prager deutschen Literatur des "expressionistischen Jahrzehnts"', in Eduard Goldstücker and Elemír Terray (eds.), pp. 47-96. The founding of the Kurt Krolop Research Centre in Prague (May 2015) recalled this intricate work and promised its continuation (see Manfred Weinberg, 'Arbeitsprogramm der Kurt Krolop-Forschungsstelle zur deutsch-böhmischen Literatur an der Karls-Universität Prag', *brücken: Germanistisches Jahrbuch Tschechien-Slowakei*, n. s., 20 (2012), 169-85.

allegiances by ‘joining associations of different national orientations’, for example.⁷⁷ Čapková focuses on the dominant narratives of the Jews in Bohemia as ‘Germans, Jews or Czechs’ and on the organised movements of Zionists and assimilationist ‘Czech-Jews’, but underlines the parallels and overlaps between their narratives, as well as the fact that a large proportion of Bohemian Jews were indifferent to such movements. The homogeneity of cultural identity is further undermined by the work of Ines Koeltzsch (*Geteilte Kulturen*, 2012) and Kristina Lahl (*Das Individuum im transkulturellen Raum*, 2014). Lahl’s discussion of Bohemian German novels not only challenges the canon of ‘Prague German literature’ but also explores the possible constructions of identity in the ‘transcultural space’ of pre-1938 Prague. Koeltzsch emphasises that cultural identity is constantly renegotiated in the changing spaces of the city:

[Die Stadt ist] eine Wirklichkeit [...], die durch Interaktionen, Erfahrungen, Erzählungen, Bilder und Darstellungen verschiedener Gruppen aktiv hervorgebracht und verändert wird.⁷⁸

Through such projects, the concept of ‘Prague literature’ has shifted, encompassing a far more nuanced notion of heterogeneity than older models of the ‘city of three peoples’ suggest.⁷⁹

My project focuses on the post-1989 decades, in which the memory of pre-war Prague as a transcultural space has been obscured, in the Czech context, by decades in which the role of cultural heterogeneity was reduced and distorted by official accounts of the

⁷⁷ Čapková, pp. 6-7. Her description of identity as ‘negotiable and flexible’ quotes Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 19. Čapková’s book was first published as *Češi, Němci, Židé? Národní identita Židů v Čechách, 1918-1938* (Prague: Paseka, 2005).

⁷⁸ Koeltzsch, *Geteilte Kulturen*, p. 17; she is quoting Mike Featherstone, ‘Globale Stadt, Informationstechnologie und Öffentlichkeit’, in *Spiel ohne Grenzen?*, ed. by Claudia Rademacher, Markus Schroer and Peter Wiechens (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999), pp. 169-201 (p. 182), and applying his insights (‘daß Orte Prozesse sind’) to pre-war Prague.

⁷⁹ See Hans Tramer, ‘Prague – City of Three Peoples’, *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 9, 1 (1964), 305-339. This remains an influential topos; see e.g. *Tripolis Praga. Die Prager Moderne um 1900*, ed. by Walter Schmitz and Ludger Udolph (Dresden: Thelem, 2001).

past. Discussions of ‘multiculturalism’ in a Czech context are only just beginning to take on an important role in post-1989 public discourse.⁸⁰ Over the last few years, questions about shared identity have been raised at irregular intervals, precipitated by individual controversies.⁸¹ However, what was once an occasional subject of debate has lately become a constant presence in the Czech media: in the context of migration from Syria and North Africa to Europe, the threat posed by ‘other’ cultures has barely left the pages of the newspapers.⁸² Some of those arguing that the Czechs should welcome refugees have drawn controversial parallels with the antisemitic treatment of Jewish refugees by Czechs during and after the Second World War.⁸³ The anger which such parallels provoke raises the question of whether studies of the pre-1945 period can indeed shed light on today’s Czech society, and vice versa. The expanding discussion of pre-war Prague as a transcultural space offers a possible discursive framework for approaches to post-1989 literature with regard to the construction of identity, the role of literature in processes of interaction between contrasting or conflicting groups, and the shifting parameters of nationalism. This thesis places contemporary Prague in the tradition – however fragmented and unstable – of the pre-war Czech-German-Jewish city, by focusing on both Czech and Czech-German authors and by tracing their approaches to heterogeneous urban identities.

⁸⁰ See e.g. Cílek’s inventive explorations of the intersections between Czech culture, geography and natural history, and Jan Lukavec, *Od českého Tokia k exotické Praze* (Prague: Malvern, 2013).

⁸¹ See e.g. the debate over Tereza Boučková’s experience of adopting Roma children (Tereza Boučková, *Rok kohouta* (Prague: Odeon, 2013), and *V obecném zájmu: Cenzura a sociální regulace literatury v moderní české kultuře 1749-2014*, ed. by Pavel Janáček and others, 2 vols (Prague: Academia, 2015), II, p. 1441), the questions which were raised about the marginalisation of Vietnamese people after the publication of the prizewinning novel *Bílej kůň, žlutý drak* (2009), written by a white man masquerading as a Czech-Vietnamese woman (Zdenko Pavelka, ‘Česká mystifikace’, *Materiály o Vung Biên Giói od Rimini Protokoll*, 15.3.2010 <<http://www.rimini-protokoll.de/materialbox/vung-bien-gioi/64-1-esk+mystifikace.html>> [accessed 10.6.2016]), and the furore caused by the Slovak artist Tomáš Rafa, who created a multicultural Czech flag including Roma symbols (Janáček and others (eds), II, p. 1389).

⁸² For an impression of the discussion, see *Média o islámu* <<https://www.mediaoislamu.cz/>> [accessed 10.6.2016], a platform which collects articles about Islam from across the Czech and Slovak press.

⁸³ Anna Hájková and Martin Šmok, ‘Hlavně aby nám tu nezůstali. Uprchlíků se děsili už naši dědové’, *iDnes*, 28.9.2015 <http://zpravy.idnes.cz/glosa-hajkova-smok-uprchlici-winton-d7e-/domaci.aspx?c=A150928_134837_domaci_aha> [accessed 10.6.2016].

1989: a boundary?

The texts discussed in this thesis were all written and published after 1989. This choice of focus might suggest that the collapse of socialism brought about an abrupt shift in the imagined city, but in fact, as my emphasis on pre-1945 Prague implies, there are so many continuities between earlier Czech literature and that of the 1990s that the status of 1989 as a caesura in literary history is far from clear.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, there are several reasons to see it as an intuitive starting point for analysis.

The collapse of the socialist regime in 1989 meant that the conditions of writing and publication in Czechoslovakia changed fundamentally, as did the conditions of reading. 1989 marked the end of the complex system of restrictions placed on publishing by the socialist government.⁸⁵ Writers who until then had published only in an underground, unofficial context (like Jáchym Topol), had written privately without attempting to publish (Daniela Hodrová, Michal Ajvaz), or had lived in emigration and published there (Libuše Moníková, Jan Faktor) now had the possibility of positioning themselves in a new realm, shaped by market forces.⁸⁶ The socialist system had limited the number of titles which would appear in a year (though some appeared in very large print runs) and had ensured that those who did not conform politically had trouble publishing their work, whilst also suppressing the popular

⁸⁴ Thus, Rajendra Chitnis avoids treating 1989 as an abrupt transformation in *Literature in Post-Communist Russia and Eastern Europe: The Russian, Czech and Slovak Fiction of the Changes, 1988-1998* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 8-15. Other authors and editors emphasise discontinuity; see e.g. the use of the image of 'ruins' in David Williams, *Writing Postcommunism: Towards a Literature of the East European Ruins* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and *The Inhabited Ruins of Central Europe: Re-imagining Space, History and Memory*, ed. by Dariusz Gafijczuk and Derek Sayer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), and Andrew Baruch Wachtel's insistence on the gulf between the pre- and post-1989 literary scenes (*Remaining Relevant after Communism: The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006)).

⁸⁵ On the workings of these restrictions and the complex status of 1989, see Jiřina Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books in the "Other" Europe and What Came After* (Leiden: Brill, 2011) and 'Censors and Their Readers: Selling, Silencing, and Reading Czech Books', *Libraries & Culture*, 36, 1 (2001), 87-103.

⁸⁶ Janáček and others (eds), II, pp. 1366-1379.

literature which it regarded as ‘trash’ (‘brak’).⁸⁷ The period following 1989 saw not only the publication of writers whose work had been suppressed before, but also an influx of foreign literature and popular fiction. In addition, other media became independent of state control, and therefore television and film were often a more attractive alternative to reading than they had been previously.

All of these changes had a complex effect on the perceived role of the writer in Czech society.⁸⁸ The very restrictions which were placed on writers by the socialist regime were capable of turning books (and samizdat texts) into cult objects, imbuing them with great subversive power, and encouraging the reader to interpret texts according to a shared political code, seeking a dissident subtext in every sentence.⁸⁹ The figure of the writer was associated with moral obligations and responsibilities towards the nation. This interpretation of the role of literature was important not only to official discourse, which celebrated the politically conformist writer who interpreted the world within a socialist framework, but also to proponents of dissidence, who praised those writers who took on the moral responsibility to criticise society.⁹⁰ The tradition of the responsible Czech writer stretches back to the nineteenth century, when literature played the role of reinforcing Czech national identity.⁹¹

The real influence of literature before 1989 did not necessarily correspond to the ideal of the Czech author: despite the prominent example of Václav Havel, the ‘poet president’, and statistics suggesting that Czechs did spend a lot of time reading before

⁸⁷ See Pavel Janáček, *Literární brak* (Brno: Host, 2004).

⁸⁸ Jiří Holý, *Česká literatura 4: Od roku 1945 do současnosti (2. polovina 20. století)* (Prague: Český spisovatel, 1996), pp. 259-265. See also Chitnis, *Literature*, pp. 8-15.

⁸⁹ See Robert Darnton’s discussion of this dynamic in the East German context (‘Censorship. A Comparative View: France 1789- East Germany 1989’, *Representations*, 49 (1995), pp. 40-60). On the experience of reading samizdat texts, see Bolton, pp. 104-105.

⁹⁰ See Jiří Kratochvíl, ‘Obnovení chaosu v české literatuře’, *Literární noviny*, 3, 47 (1992), 5, and Chitnis, *Literature*, pp. 10-11.

⁹¹ See Macura, *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, pp. 215-224.

1989, Havel's texts were not widely known before the political changes, and many dissident works only reached a very small audience.⁹² In any case, this image of the Czech writer played an important role in the collective imagination, but was destabilised after 1989: in a society where the practices of censorship had been abolished, books no longer had the same subversive connotations, the shared code which readers had used began to vanish, and neither the roles of 'official author' nor 'dissident' retained the same relevance. Writers had more freedom to publish, but whether and why readers would choose to read their books was uncertain.⁹³

The works which provide the focus here were therefore written, published and read under a new set of circumstances, and Prague itself was also shaped by the broader changes of 1989. The significance of the city in collective memory shifted to encompass new interpretations of the Czech past which superseded the socialist interpretation, as well as incorporating recent events such as the protests on Národní třída ('National Street'), which were violently suppressed by police, and the arrival of crowds of East Germans at the German Embassy. The shifting role of Prague in contemporary literature has not yet received much attention: Alfred Thomas devotes only a brief chapter to post-1989 literature and film in *Prague Palimpsest*, and Derek Sayer's *Prague: Capital of the Twentieth Century* (2013) concentrates on pre-1945 cultural history rather than discussing the whole century, despite its title.⁹⁴ The post-1989 period has so far appeared only as a postscript in most studies of Prague.

⁹² Šmejkalová (p. 88) refers to statistics published by Vladimír Hepner in 1975 which suggest that one third of adults in the early 1970s spent 1-3 hours per week reading books. On the audience for dissident writing, see Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012) p. 33 and pp. 201-238.

⁹³ The 'total lack of interest' ('totální nezájem') in literature in the early 1990s led the former samizdat publisher Pražská imaginace to organise a symbolic funeral for Czech literature (see *Hlučná samota*, ed. by Petr Kotyk, Světlana Kotyková and Tomáš Pavlíček (Prague: Mladá Fronta, 2014), p. 220).

⁹⁴ There are a few exceptions: see Todorow and Weinberg (eds); Hodrová, *citlivé město*; Derdowska; Bobrakov-Timoškin.

Nevertheless, 1989 was not a boundary between two eras.⁹⁵ Narratives presenting it as a time of transformation in literary history and collective memory risk overlooking the many significant continuities. Some of the shifts in the conditions for publishing had already begun to take place before 1989, under the influence of *glasnost*, although new approaches to publication only began to be perceptible to readers in 1988.⁹⁶ More importantly, 1989 did not cause an abrupt transformation in the nature of the texts being produced: for the writers discussed here, the process of exploring and questioning Prague and the role of the author is closely connected with the literary tendencies of the 1980s. Similarly, the ways in which the cultural significance of Prague and its spaces shifted after 1989 can be traced back to earlier decades: in the thaw of the 1960s, a range of views of the Czech past could be expressed more openly, and in unofficial circles, this plurality of approaches continued through the 1970s and 1980s.

Approaching post-1989 Prague fiction

This thesis begins by asking how Prague has been imagined in past centuries, before undertaking close readings of eight post-1989 texts. Close reading has a key advantage in the context of most previous scholarship regarding the cultural significance of Prague: it allows us to explore in depth the inner structures of each text and develop an impression of the contemporary imagined city which emerges from the texts themselves rather than being preconceived. In this, it contrasts with approaches such as that of Daniela Hodrová in *citlivé město*, or Joanna Derdowska in *Kmitavá mozaika: Městský prostor a literární dílo* (2011, 'Glittering mosaic: Urban space and the literary work'), which involve picking out motifs found in a series of texts, rather than looking at any single work in depth. Hodrová bases her

⁹⁵ On the problems of narrating the history of the changes and the dominance of binaries in this area, see Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, pp. 1-9.

⁹⁶ Chitnis, *Literature*, pp. 9-10.

interpretation of the imagined city on readings of a wide range of Czech fiction, but takes a piecemeal approach to the texts, focusing on motifs which allow her to trace the general patterns of ‘her Prague network’.

The patterns which Hodrová discovers provide insights both into the changing narratives surrounding Prague and into her own novels, but her approach has drawbacks, particularly when a text is subordinated to her expectations of the imagined city. In her brief discussion of Jáchym Topol’s novel *Sestra*, she isolates the motif of the ‘Sister’, interpreting it as a version of the ‘femme fatale’ and of the Jungian ‘anima’. This leads her to list Jungian ‘depictions of wholeness’ which she cannot find in the text, including ‘Christ, the king, the horse, the bull, the white or black bird, the fish, the snail, the spider.’⁹⁷ The list serves the purpose of offering the reader examples of Jungian symbolism rather than suggesting that Hodrová did look for references to each of these beings in *Sestra*.⁹⁸

However, would searching for Jungian symbols be the most productive way to read the novel? Topol constructs his own complex ‘symbolic’ systems in *Sestra* – as Hodrová does in her fictional texts. He plays with references to sources ranging from comics to tribal mythology, and not much is gained by listing motifs: if the ‘sister’ resembles the Jungian ‘anima’ as well as recalling the motif of the ‘černá dáma’ (‘black lady’), as Hodrová claims, then the next question which arises is not whether she appears alongside the symbol of the spider, but how Topol specifically employs these motifs. How does his ‘černá dáma’ differ from Vilém Mrštík’s description of Prague as a ‘black temptress’ (‘svůdnice černá’) in his novel of

⁹⁷ ‘Kristus, král, kůň, býk, bílý a černý pták, ryba, hlemýžď, pavouk’ (Hodrová, *citlivé město*, p. 310).

⁹⁸ In fact, both the Messiah and the spider do play a role in the novel; the description of the protagonist and his ‘sister’ as a ‘naked spider’ (‘nahej pavouk’) could almost be a parody of ‘wholeness’ (Jáchym Topol, *Sestra* (Brno: Atlantis, 1994), p. 276).

disillusionment, *Santa Lucia* (1893)?⁹⁹ The imagined city may be dominated by particular topoi, but each new text is a potential challenge to that dominance, and the ways in which it departs from the characteristic structures of the imagined city are at least as significant as its repetitions of established motifs.

Arrows pointing to the television tower and the Jewish cemetery are arranged one above the other on lampposts in the surrounding area, one pointing to a location which can be seen from miles around, the other to a space which appears hidden, overshadowed even when we are close by. Perhaps because it is slightly below the ground level of the adjoining paths, the cemetery resembles an archaeological dig. And yet, it has not been buried beneath the tower: it remains surprisingly visible, equally as real and tangible as the mini-golf course. Each night, the television tower is lit up in the colours of the Czech flag, making it appear to be a symbol of unambiguous 'Czechness' – a homogeneous Czech identity which has replaced the multiplicity of the past. And yet, this 'sign' is deceptive. With its controversial past, the television tower is hardly an accepted post-1989 symbol of the Czechs or of Prague. Even if it were, the Jewish past has not been erased: it remains, in its fragmentary form, calling the bold contours of the tower into question, throwing doubt on its permanence, and ensuring that the tallest building in the city can still not be entirely dominant.

⁹⁹ Vilém Mrštík, *Santa Lucia* (Prague: Kuncíř, 1948), p. 39.

I

Imagining Prague



The curtain at the National Theatre in Prague, painted by Vojtěch Hynais in 1883. It shows Slavia mourning the destruction of the theatre and receiving gifts from the Czech people, while the angelic 'genius of the nation' blesses the people (Lehotsky, CC BY-SA 3.0).

Where is Prague? It exists not only as a geographical location, a growing collection of streets somewhere in Central Europe, but also as an imagined space. Here, historical narratives about Prague mingle with literary portrayals, rumours, legends, songs and speeches, all of which trace images of the city. A complex dynamic exists between the empirical presence of the city and its imagined dimensions, in that each shapes the other and they cannot be entirely separated. Statements which locate Prague in 'Central Europe' or in the 'Czech Republic' might appear to be neutral, but are in fact

references to spaces which are imbued with cultural meaning and shaped by the imagination.¹⁰⁰

At the same time, descriptions of Prague which seemingly belong to the realm of the imaginary still relate to the real city in significant ways: the stories about the Golem which are set in the Jewish quarter in Prague would not have the same cultural implications if they mentioned only fictional locations.¹⁰¹ When we imagine Prague, we are engaging more or less directly with the concrete presence of the city, interpreting it and imbuing it with cultural meanings.

The processes by which the imagined city takes shape, and its relationship with the physical city, can be traced in a canonical text for Prague and for Czech literature, the *Chronica Boemorum* of Cosmas Pragensis. Cosmas lived from about 1045 to 1125, and was dean of the cathedral chapter of St. Vitus in Prague; his chronicle is thought to have been written between 1119 and 1125.¹⁰² Early in his account of the history of the Bohemians, Cosmas describes the origins of the Czech capital city: the prophetess Libuše announces to her husband, the ruler Přemysl, and a group of elders, that she is having a vision. Her prophecy begins with what has become one of the most famous statements in Czech literature: ‘Urbem conspicio, fama que sydera tanget’ (‘I see a city whose fame will touch the stars’).¹⁰³ She directs her audience to find a place in the middle of the forest, on a hill above the Vltava river, where a man will be building a threshold for a house. It is here that the city of Prague (‘Praha’ in Czech) should be

¹⁰⁰ See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006).

¹⁰¹ On the ‘meandering evolution’ of the Golem motif, see Hillel J. Kieval, ‘Pursuing the Golem of Prague: Jewish Culture and the Invention of a Tradition’, *Modern Judaism*, 17, 1 (1997), 1-23 (p. 2).

¹⁰² Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle of the Czechs*, trans. by Lisa Wolverson (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), p. 3.

¹⁰³ Cosmas of Prague, *Die Chronik der Böhmen des Cosmas von Prag*, ed. by Berthold Bretholz (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1923), p. 18. Wolverson comments that ‘urbs’ refers particularly to Prague Castle (Cosmas of Prague, *The Chronicle*, p. 49).

founded: ‘prah’ in Czech means ‘threshold’.¹⁰⁴ The Czechs follow Libuše’s instructions, find the place in the forest, and it is there that they found Prague. This narrative has appeared many times at the beginning of Czech history books: it allows the historical Přemyslid dynasty to be traced back beyond the reaches of historical evidence to the legendary figures of Libuše and Přemysl, and it shapes the founding of Prague into a decisive and fateful moment.

The prophecy legend exemplifies the process of constructing an ‘imagined city’ in a literary text. Cosmas relates his version of the prophecy quite closely to the real topography of the Prague area. However, the space which we enter when we read Cosmas’ *Chronica Boemorum* also differs from that of physical reality: it is a historical space, a space of memory, and a literary space.

Like any historian, Cosmas only has limited access to the historical reality of the Prague area before the city was founded. His version of the founding of Prague is based partly on earlier chronicles, such as the far less detailed description in the *Legenda Christiani*.¹⁰⁵ He constructs a pre-Prague space without Prague Castle and without the houses and streets of Hradčany which appeared below the castle before his time. The forest-covered hill where a man is building a doorway might be understood as a symbol of the absence of Prague, rather than as a literal landmark in a past topography of the city. It is part of a historical space which is shaped retrospectively by the later appearance of Prague.

¹⁰⁴ Cosmas is primarily referring to the lintel rather than the threshold; Libuše points out that the ‘limen’ requires even great people to bend their heads. There is probably no genuine etymological link between ‘Praha’ and ‘prah’ (Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold*, p. 13).

¹⁰⁵ The Latin chronicle known as the *Legenda Christiani* (probably written before 994) refers briefly to an unnamed ‘prophetess’ (‘phitonissa’) whose advice causes the Czechs to found a city. See *Kristiánova legenda: život a umučení svatého Václava a jeho báby svaté Ludmily*, ed. by Jaroslav Ludvíkovský (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1978), pp. 16-18.

However, Cosmas is not only trying to portray the historical development of Prague. Through his depiction of Libuše's prophecy, he demonstrates how he thinks his audience should remember the founding of the city: as a momentous event marked by a supernatural sign (Libuše's vision), as the point at which the Czechs transformed an area characterised by forests and an eddying river into a settlement, and as the beginning of a glorious story with the city at its centre. The chronicle establishes a set of meanings for Prague in Czech collective memory.

The *Chronica Boemorum* thus raises a question which will remain important throughout this thesis: how do literary texts interact with collective memory? Cosmas treats Prague Castle as a 'lieu de mémoire', a location which reminds us of the past. In his definition of 'lieux de mémoire', Pierre Nora emphasises the transition from the living, continuous 'real environments of memory' or 'milieux de mémoire' to the truncated 'lieux de mémoire' which exist as signs of discontinuity and absence.¹⁰⁶ Aleida Assmann describes the way in which we try to relate to such emblems of discontinuity as follows:

Ein Gedenkort ist das, was übrigbleibt von dem, was nicht mehr besteht und gilt. Um dennoch fortbestehen und weitergelten zu können, muß eine Geschichte erzählt werden, die das verlorene Milieu supplementär ersetzt.¹⁰⁷

Assmann suggests that if 'lieux de mémoire' are fragments of 'milieux de mémoire', then these fragments can become elements of narratives which in turn create a framework for cultural memory.

Cosmas' treatment of Libuše's prophecy lends weight to the argument that 'lieux de mémoire' are not exclusively a recent phenomenon (contrary to Nora and Assmann's claims), and that communities have long sought to deal with the discontinuities

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7-24 (p. 7).

¹⁰⁷ Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, p. 309.

between past and present by connecting narratives to remnants of the past.¹⁰⁸ In Cosmas' time, the foundation of Prague belonged to a distant past which had only left ambiguous traces in the present. Prague Castle already included several buildings, including the churches of St George and St Vitus.¹⁰⁹ The castle was both a part of the everyday life of the city, and a sign of that which was by now absent: the people who founded the city, their reasons for doing so, and the pre-Christian places of worship which may have preceded the churches. Cosmas' narrative explores these discontinuities and partially bridges the gap between present and past.

The *Chronica Boemorum* demonstrates the reciprocal dynamic between literature and memory. In nineteenth-century Czech literature, Cosmas' chronicle itself became a 'lieu de mémoire': it was a remnant of early medieval culture in the Czech lands, and modern writers found ways of connecting new narratives to it, reinterpreting it and combining it with the chronicles of Dalimil (c. 1320) and Václav Hájek z Libočan (1541) as they embarked on new searches for identity.¹¹⁰ Libuše's significance as a patriotic figure and as the mother of the Czech nation was explored by authors such as Alois Jirásek in his *Staré pověsti české* (1894 'Old Czech legends'), which became a classic, and by Bedřich Smetana in his opera, *Libuše* (premiered in 1881). Meanwhile, German-speaking dramatists made use of the Libuše story to explore 'the gendered relations between men and women and the colonial relations between Germans and Slavs.'¹¹¹ In Franz Grillparzer's *Libussa*, Primislaus represents the irreversible march of human progress, whilst Libussa embodies the transcendental powers which are shut

¹⁰⁸ Nora, p. 8; Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, p. 339.

¹⁰⁹ Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold*, p. 30-31.

¹¹⁰ *Staročeská kronika tak řečeného Dalimila*, ed. by Jiří Daňhelka and others, 3 vols (Prague: Academia, 1988); Václav Hájek z Libočan, *Kronika česká*, ed. by Jan Linka (Prague: Academia, 2013).

¹¹¹ Ritchie Robertson, 'On the threshold of patriarchy: Brentano, Grillparzer, and the Bohemian Amazons', *German Life and Letters*, 46 (1993), 203-219 (p. 219).

out by the city walls – that is, by modern civilisation.¹¹² Primislaus has already decided to build Prague when he asks Libussa to perform a ceremony which will make the city appear to be the will of the gods.¹¹³

Cosmas therefore not only constructed Prague as a space of memory within his chronicle, but also created a text which has itself become a point of departure for many later interpretations of the city's past. In Aleida Assmann's terms, the *Chronica Boemorum* has become a 'cultural text', forming a basis for collective identity. Assmann defines 'cultural texts' in opposition to 'literary texts', arguing that literary scholars have tended to ignore the role played by literature in shaping collective memory, in favour of analysing each text as an autonomous work of art addressing an individual reader.¹¹⁴ Cosmas' construction of Prague in the *Chronica Boemorum* shows that the 'literary' and the 'cultural' roles of a text are interconnected. He emphasises the status of his chronicle as literary text, interweaving Libuše's prophecy with a network of classical and biblical allusions. The vision of a 'city whose fame will touch the stars' echoes Jupiter's speech to Venus in the *Aeneid*, in which he describes the future glory of Rome: Prague is portrayed as an inheritor of Rome's illustrious past, and Cosmas thus emphasises his own authorial legitimacy as a successor of Virgil.¹¹⁵

¹¹² *Libussa* was finished in 1848 but first published in 1872. See Franz Grillparzer, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Peter Frank and Karl Pörnbacher, 4 vols (Munich: Hanser, 1961) II, pp. 257-343.

¹¹³ On the role of the Libuše narrative in literature through the centuries, see František Graus, 'Kněžna Libuše – od postavy báje k národnímu symbolu', *Československý časopis historický*, 17 (1969), 817-844; Vladimír Macura, 'Sen o Libuši', in *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, pp. 319-325; Peter Demetz, 'Zdeněk Fibichs "Šárka" und die böhmischen Amazonen', in *Böhmen böhmisch* (Vienna: Zsolnay, 2006), pp. 64-82; Thomas proposes an excessively gendered interpretation in *Prague Palimpsest*, pp. 43-76.

¹¹⁴ Aleida Assmann, 'Was sind kulturelle Texte?', pp. 234-235.

¹¹⁵ In the *Aeneid*, the phrase 'famam qui terminet astris' is used with reference to the future ruler – either Caesar Augustus or Julius Caesar or both, in different readings. See Cosmas of Prague (ed. by Bretholz), p. 18, note 3.

Over the centuries, the Prague of Cosmas has lost parts of its shared meaning, as some of the allusions and connotations of the text which would have been understood by his readership at the time will now only be clear to those who pore over the critical edition. However, his imagined city has gained as well as lost: many writers have reimagined Libuše's prophecy, reshaping its meaning in collective memory and giving it new intertextual resonance.

Taking the construction of space in Cosmas' text as a paradigm, this chapter will focus on how Prague came to be imagined in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, thus creating a framework for my discussion of post-1989 literature. The most influential narratives about Prague can become clichés, obscuring the tensions and uncertainties in the city's cultural history with a smooth, homogeneous image. However, the most familiar topoi also have particular potential to be subverted, and the constantly changing contours of the imagined city create rich possibilities for alternative narratives to emerge.

Prague and Czech identity

Over the course of the nineteenth century, a concept of Czech identity developed which remains highly influential today, and which has close connections with the imagined Prague.¹¹⁶ In this context, 'the Czechs' are portrayed as a clearly defined, homogeneous group whose unchanging identity is rooted in history and inseparable from the Czech language. From the early nineteenth century onward, such concepts of national identity became increasingly dominant across Europe in the course of the 'European linguistic revolution'.¹¹⁷ Complexities and uncertainties were integral to

¹¹⁶ On the process of establishing 'Slav' and 'Czech' identities, see Robert Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1994), particularly pp. 43-49.

¹¹⁷ Robert Auty, 'Language and Society in the Czech National Revival', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 35, 84 (1956), 241-248. See also Benedict Anderson, pp. 67-82.

the process of defining Czech identity, including the question of who ‘belonged’ to the Czechs: were Moravians and Slovaks as ‘Czech’ as Bohemians, and how did Jews or Roma people fit into the homogeneous nation?¹¹⁸ Such recurring questions remained as tensions in the newly established Czechoslovakia after 1918.¹¹⁹ Imagining Prague as a stable embodiment of Czech identity was part of the process of attempting to solve, or at least suppress, such uncertainties.

Patriotic writers located Prague at the ‘centre’ of the Czech nation, connected its legends closely with the definition of ‘Czechness’, and rapidly transformed the emergence of Czech-speaking cultural institutions in Prague, such as theatres, into national legends. The process of connecting the imagined city with Czech identity can be observed across nineteenth-century Czech literature and was key to the National Revival (‘národní obrození’), as the movement to assert Czech identity came to be known.¹²⁰

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, various interpretations of ‘Bohemian identity’ retained an influence: in particular, the notion of territorial patriotism claimed that Czechs, Germans and Jews in Bohemia could all possess a Bohemian identity, regardless of language.¹²¹ Support for this shared identity has come to be known in Czech and German as ‘Bohemismus’, though it was never a single

¹¹⁸ See Stanley Kimball, ‘The Austro-Slav Revival: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Literary Foundations’, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 63 (New Series), 4 (1973), 1-83 (p. 32 (on Moravian separatism) and p. 54 (on Czechs and Slovaks)), and Iveta Jusová, ‘Gabriela Preissová’s Women-Centered Texts: Subverting the Myth of the Homogeneous Nation’, *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 49, 1 (2005), 63-78 (pp. 63-64).

¹¹⁹ Agnew, *The Czechs*, pp. 178-180 and pp. 198-202.

¹²⁰ Also translated as ‘National Rebirth’ or ‘National Renascence’. See Hugh Agnew, *Origins of the Czech National Renascence* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), Vladimír Macura, *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, and Miroslav Hroch, *Na prahu národní existence* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1999).

¹²¹ Cohen, p. 26, and King, pp. 1-6.

movement.¹²² At the same time, other shared identities which were not focused on ‘Bohemia’ or ‘Czechness’ played a role in the Czech lands: the Habsburg Empire and the Churches provided supranational frameworks for identity, whilst the contexts of region, city and village shaped local identities. Despite the continued importance of all these forms of shared identity throughout the century, the form of Czech nationalism which became culturally and politically dominant gave paramount importance not to ‘territorial patriotism’, but to the Czech language.

Language, then, became the defining element of the Czech National Revival.¹²³ ‘Revivalist’ intellectuals (‘obrozenci’) such as the linguist Josef Jungmann (1773-1847) were inspired by Johann Gottfried Herder’s philosophy of national identity and by the Romantic enthusiasm for folk culture.¹²⁴ The revivalists promoted the idea of an exclusive Czech identity, defined by the Czech language, by connections with other Slavic cultures, and by differences from the ‘Germans’.¹²⁵

¹²² Steffen Höhne, ‘Böhmische Utopien: Der Bohemismus-Diskurs in der Zeit der Restauration’, in *Deutsche und Tschechen: Geschichte, Kultur, Politik*, ed. by Walter Koschmal, Marek Nekula and Joachim Rogall (Munich: Beck, 2003), pp. 535-542. For examples of ‘Bohemismus’, see Bernard Bolzano, ‘Über die Vaterlandsliebe’, in *Dr. Bernard Bolzano’s Erbauungsreden an die akademische Jugend, herausgegeben von einigen seiner Freunde*, 4 vols (Prague: Heß, 1850) II, pp. 145-156; Siegfried Kapper, *České listy* (Prague: Calveské knihkupectví, 1846); Karl Egon Ebert’s epic poem *Wlasta* (Prague: Calvesche Buchhandlung, 1829), subtitled ‘Böhmisch-nationales Heldengedicht’.

¹²³ This focus on language emerged in the context of a general shift towards a literate culture in the Habsburg Empire. See James Van Horn Melton, ‘From Image to Word: Cultural Reform and the Rise of Literate Culture in Eighteenth-Century Austria’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 58, 1 (1986), 95-124.

¹²⁴ Agnew, *The Czechs*, p. 112. See Herder’s brief but influential chapter on the Slavs in *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Leipzig: Hartknoch, 1812), pp. 287-290. Jungmann, who translated Herder’s text, discusses the importance of the Czech language in ‘O jazyku českém. Rozmlouvání první’, *Hlasatel Český*, 1, 1 (1806), 43-49, and ‘O jazyku českém. Rozmlouvání druhé’, *Hlasatel Český*, 1, 3 (1806), 321-353.

¹²⁵ The dissident philosopher Jan Patočka contrasts Jungmann’s approach to national identity with that of Bolzano in ‘Filosofie českých dějin’, *Sociologický časopis*, 5 (1969), 457-463. On the continued debates over the purpose of the Czech nation, see Aviezer Tucker, ‘Patočka’s Philosophy of Czech History’, *History and Theory*, 35, 2 (1996), 196-216, and Stefan Auer, ‘1938 and 1968, 1939 and 1969, and the Philosophy of Czech History from Karel H. Máchá to Jan Patočka’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60, 10 (2008), 1677-1696. Vladimír Macura reassesses the significance of Czech national identity in ‘Sen o národě’, in *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, pp. 288-295.

The distinctions between ‘Czechs’ and ‘Germans’ crystallised in 1848, when the efforts of revivalists culminated in open political demands and Prague erupted in armed conflict.¹²⁶ Initially, Czech-speakers and German-speakers in Bohemia cooperated, forming a short-lived ‘National Committee’ (‘Národní výbor’) to govern the Bohemian Lands, but the two groups diverged, in what was ‘the first clear sign of a genuine German group consciousness in Prague’.¹²⁷ When the cultural and political restrictions imposed by the Habsburg government in the 1850s began to be relaxed, and the Czechs could once again work openly to promote Czech-speaking culture, Prague’s political life was shaped by the belief that Czech-speakers and German-speakers were essentially different and had conflicting interests. Increasingly, it appeared that neither group could gain without the other losing ground. This is particularly apparent in the partition of the Prague university, which was divided in 1881-1883 into a German and a Czech institution.¹²⁸ The self-confidence of the Czech-speaking middle classes was reflected in a series of grand new public buildings, including the National Theatre (1881-83), the new National Museum (1885-90) and the Rudolfinum concert hall (1884).¹²⁹ By the time Czechoslovakia gained political sovereignty in 1918, Czech-speakers had long been asserting their cultural sovereignty.

The imagined Prague of the nineteenth century was shaped by a historical narrative which presented the National Revival as the culmination of a dramatic struggle.

¹²⁶ Agnew, *The Czechs*, pp. 116-123, and Cohen, pp. 26-34. See also Jiří Přenosil, ‘Pražští univerzitní studenti v revolučním roce 1848’, in *Pražský student: Univerzitní studenti v dějinách Prahy*, ed. by Jana Ratajová (Prague: Archiv hlavního města Prahy and Scriptorium, 2008), pp. 59-68.

¹²⁷ Cohen, p. 31. Nevertheless, as Cohen shows, a German identity only emerged very gradually over the next decades.

¹²⁸ See H. Gordon Skilling, ‘The Partition of the University in Prague’, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 27, 69 (1949), 430-449.

¹²⁹ Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold*, pp. 315-6. The National Museum was founded in 1818 under the name ‘Vlastenecké muzeum v Čechách’, an expression of ‘Bohemismus’ rather than exclusive Czech nationalism. It changed its name, location and political role repeatedly, moving to the representative building at the top of Wenceslas Square at the end of the century.

‘PRAGUE IS TRAGIC’, we are told at the start of Otakar Odložilík’s 1946 article about the history of the city, which goes on to repeat this narrative: how Prague experienced a golden age during the rule of Charles IV in the fourteenth century, when Odložilík notes that the city ‘assumed an exclusively Czech character’, how it played a central role in the Hussite wars, when it was ‘a city of learning, the mother of truth’, how the defeat of the Protestant Czechs at the Battle of the White Mountain (1620) represented a ‘disaster’ for the city, and how Prague ‘revived’ over the course of the nineteenth century to become ‘the focus of national life’ once again.¹³⁰

The structure of this story exerts a powerful attraction: it traces the progress of Prague from a medieval golden age, through a heroic struggle for truth, to a tragic downfall, and finally a miraculous rebirth.¹³¹ In this context, the history of ‘the Czechs’ is imagined as being inseparable from the fate of Prague. In his account of the revolt of the Protestant Czechs in 1618 and their subsequent defeat, Odložilík imagines the movement of the rebels through the city as they converged on the Castle to carry out the Second Defenestration of Prague, as they went into battle at the edge of the city, and as they were executed on Old Town Square. This narrative technique not only encourages us to sympathise with the Protestant Czechs; it also constructs close connections between the topography of the city and the vicissitudes of Czech

¹³⁰ Otakar Odložilík, ‘Slavonic Cities III: Prague’, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 24, 63 (1946), 81-91. Capitalised in the original. The claim ‘Prague is tragic’ quotes the French historian Ernest Denis, who was strongly pro-Czech.

¹³¹ See Robert Pynsent’s comments on ‘degenerationism’ in ‘Resurrections of the Czech National Revival’, *Central Europe*, 1, 1 (2003), 77-95 (pp. 93-94).

history.¹³² Prague embodies the history of the Czechs, a history which follows a pattern of long-ago grandeur, defeat and resurrection.

Within the dramatic structure of Czech history, the National Revival is presented as a collective awakening from a cultural dark age ('doba temna') following the Battle of the White Mountain.¹³³ Seventeenth-century Prague is imagined as a city dominated by German-speaking culture. The concepts of 'rebirth', 'revival' and 'awakening' imply that 'Czechness' was contained within all Czechs and needed to be reactivated, rather than having to be constructed. Moreover, this narrative suggests that the National Revival was the only appropriate response to Habsburg rule, the only alternative to an entirely Germanised Bohemia.¹³⁴

'Střediště' - the centre

As the writers of the nineteenth century began to confront the question of what it meant to be 'Czech', they traced a map which had Prague at its cultural centre.¹³⁵ The city was presented as the scene of the most important events in Czech history, in

¹³² On the Defenestration and the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War, see Agnew, *The Czechs*, pp. 65-67; Charles Ingham, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1618-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 28-31; and *Přehled dějin Československa*, ed. by Jaroslav Purš and Miroslav Kropilák, 2 vols (Prague: Academia, 1982), I, pp. 95-97. On the consequences of the 1620 defeat for the Czechs, see Hans-Wolfgang Bergerhausen, 'Die "Verneuerte Landesordnung" in Böhmen 1627: ein Grunddokument des habsburgischen Absolutismus', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 272, 2 (2001), 327-351. R. J. W. Evans discusses the cultural characteristics of this period in 'Culture and Anarchy in the Empire, 1540-1680', *Central European History*, 18, 1 (1985), 14-30; for a political overview, see Myron P. Gutmann, 'The Origins of the Thirty Years' War', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 18, 4 (1988), 749-770. On the unrest in Prague which preceded the Thirty Years' War, see James R. Palmitessa, 'The Prague Uprising of 1611: Property, Politics, and Catholic Renewal in the Early Years of Habsburg Rule', *Central European History*, 31, 4 (1998), 299-328.

¹³³ On the notion of a Czech 'dark age', see Joachim Bahlcke, 'Země a dynastie: Čechy, Habsburkové a "temno"', in *Češi a Němci: Dějiny – kultura – politika*, ed. by Walter Koschmal, Marek Nekula and Joachim Rogall (Prague: Paseka, 2002), pp. 40-46. The term 'temno' was popularised by Alois Jirásek's historical novel of the same name, published in 1915.

¹³⁴ See Stanley B. Kimball's dismissal of territorial patriotism (Kimball, 'The Austro-Slav Revival', p. 5), Jaroslav Prokeš' criticisms of it in 'National Self-Help under Foreign Rule: I. The Centenary of the Matica Česká', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 10, 29 (1931), 420-427 (p. 423), and Höhne, who portrays it as utopian.

¹³⁵ See David-Fox, p. 737.

contrast with the slow-moving countryside; it was regarded as rivalling other cultural and political centres such as Vienna or Berlin; it was portrayed as a place to which important people – and all true Czechs – were irresistibly attracted. New guides to the city called upon the Czech public to ‘claim Prague for the nation’, ‘codifying’ it as a ‘memory landscape’ imbued with political meaning.¹³⁶ Commonplace phrases such as ‘matička Praha’ (‘dear little mother Prague’), ‘zlatá Praha’ (‘golden/dear Prague’) and ‘Praha stověžatá’ (‘Prague of the hundred towers’) express the attitude of Czech writers to the city.¹³⁷ Of these, ‘matička Praha’ particularly emphasises the status of the capital city as a mother of the nation, and evokes the exclusive blood relationships on which nations claim to be founded.

Defining Prague as a centre of Czech identity offered the possibility of establishing a framework on which an image of the ‘truly Czech’ could be built. Josef Kajetán Tyl (1808-1856), who played a significant role in the National Revival, makes use of this possibility in his autobiographical texts celebrating the city, which were published in the collection *Kusy mého srdce* (1844, ‘Pieces of my heart’). Tyl is best known as a dramatist and as the author of the words to the Czech national anthem, *Kde domov můj?* (‘Where is my home?’).¹³⁸ His celebration of Prague exemplifies the patriotic view of Czech identity which gained currency in the nineteenth century:

A jedno místo viděti je v Čechách – divné, divuplné místo! Od sněhem krytých Krkonošů a z hustokmenné Šumavy, z panského hradu a z chudé chýže otáčejí se po něm oči – oči jaré a zesláblé. Jestli to tajné a nevýslovné kouzlo, jež krev českou k tomu místu vábí, jestli to již při početí v každém Čechu vzniklá touha [...]: *jednou alespoň pokleknouti na hrobě svých králů!* Jednou za živobytí musí Prahu spatřiti každý Čech – jednou musí k hranám jejím putovati jako věřící Moslemín k ostatkům svého proroka. Ubohý, jenž

¹³⁶ Chad Bryant, ‘Zap’s Prague: the city, the nation and Czech elites before 1848’, *Urban History*, 40, 2 (2013), 181-201 (p. 182 and p. 198).

¹³⁷ Macura, *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, p. 203.

¹³⁸ See Vladimír Macura, ‘Sen o vlasti’, in *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, pp. 283-287.

Prahu neviděl a se světem se loučí! [... N]espatřil památník zhynulé slávy, ani kolébku nově se křísícího blaženství [...].¹³⁹

[And there is one place in the Czech lands which has to be seen – a wondrous, a marvellous place! From the Krkonoše Mountains, covered in snow, and from the densely forested Šumava, from the noble castle and from the poor hovel, all eyes turn towards it – old eyes and young. It is a mysterious and indescribable magic which draws Czech blood to that place, it is a longing which stirs in every Czech from the moment of conception [...]: to bow down, at least once, at the grave of his kings!

Once in his life, every Czech must see Prague – once, he must make a pilgrimage to her limits like a devout Muslim journeying to the relics of his prophet. He who bids farewell to this world without seeing Prague is truly to be pitied! [...] He has not seen the memorial of lost glory, or the cradle of newly revived bliss [...].]

Tyl makes use of several rhetorical strategies in order to highlight the centrality of Prague and connect it with the definition of ‘Czech’. He evokes the snowy mountains of Krkonoš and the dense trees of the Šumava forest as images of the northern and southern peripheries of Bohemia, from which everyone looks towards the centre. The appearance of the city is not described in detail: it is characterised instead by its meaning for the Czechs, whose longing to see it is represented as being innate, as the references to ‘Czech blood’ (‘krev českou’) and ‘conception’ (‘početí’) imply. The desire to see Prague is presented as a defining element of Czech identity – and connected closely with the notion of a shared Czech past, as is suggested by the ‘grave of his kings’. Along with the description of Prague as a ‘memorial of lost glory’ (‘památník zhynulé slávy’), this reference to a ‘grave’ presents the shared past as a lost golden age.

Tyl imbues his portrayal of the city’s centrality with spiritual implications, presenting Prague as a place of pilgrimage. At this time, the city is frequently portrayed as a sacred location, ‘where this world connects with another world, reality with a sacred

¹³⁹ Josef Kajetán Tyl, ‘Praha’, in *Spisy Josefa Kajetána Tyla*, ed. by Mojmir Otruba and others, 20 vols (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1952-1989), I: *Kusy mého srdce*, pp. 382-383.

world of patriotic ideas.¹⁴⁰ Implicitly, Tyl is dating the defeat of the Czech nation to Bílá Hora, and casting his own era (that of the National Revival) as the period in which it will rise again: the city is not only a grave and memorial, but also the ‘cradle of newly revived bliss’.

‘Kněžna Libuše’ - Princess Libuše

As the concept of Czech identity gained significance, the legends associated with the origins of Prague took on the role of ‘foundational’ myths for the Czech nation: they were told and retold in order to explain history on the basis of an origin story, and portray the present as ‘sinnvoll, gottgewollt, notwendig und unabänderlich’.¹⁴¹ This is exemplified by the changing significance of Libuše as a literary topos in the nineteenth century: the ambiguous figure portrayed in the chronicles of Cosmas, Dalimil and Hájek became the embodiment of the city and the ‘mother of the nation’.¹⁴²

Libuše was a familiar figure in the literature of the late eighteenth century, without definite national significance: ‘Libussa’ was included in Johann Karl August Musäus’ *Volksmärchen der Deutschen* (1782-1786), as well as becoming the subject of Johann Gottfried Herder’s ballad *Die Fürstentafel* (1779) and of historical novels by Ludwig Schubart and Johann Friedrich Albrecht. These multiple retellings gave the story a cultural currency which could be channelled into later, patriotic adaptations in Czech.

¹⁴⁰ ‘kde se tento svět stýká s “druhým světem”, realita s posvátným světem vlasteneckých idejí’ (Macura, *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, p. 206).

¹⁴¹ Jan Assmann, p. 52 and p. 79.

¹⁴² On feminine embodiments of cities, see Sigrid Weigel, *Topographien der Geschlechter: Kulturgeschichtliche Studien zur Literatur* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1990), pp. 149-179 and pp. 180-203.

Nationalist approaches to Libuše were shaped by the importance which she took on in the *Zelená Hora* manuscript, an artifact ‘discovered’ in 1818 and supposed to come from the late ninth or early tenth century, which was in fact a meticulous forgery.¹⁴³ It contains a retelling of the episode in which Libuše must decide an argument between two brothers, and contrasts the laws and character of the Czechs favourably with those of the Germans.¹⁴⁴ Despite (and partly because of) the long-running controversy over the provenance of the manuscript, it established Libuše as a central ‘national’ figure, who featured in František Palacký’s *Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě* (1848, ‘The History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia’) and in the ballads of Karel Jaromír Erben.¹⁴⁵

The view of Libuše as a symbol of Czech destiny frames Prague as an exclusively Czech city, in which Jews and Germans do not belong. The Jewish writer Salomon Kohn (1825-1904) responded to the Libuše narrative in a text which attempted to incorporate the Jews into the mythology of Prague, by simultaneously underlining Libuše’s authority as a foundational figure and challenging the exclusivity of Czech collective memory. In Kohn’s brief history of the Prague Jews, ‘Die Juden in Böhmens Vorzeit’, which was published in Wolf Pascheles’ collection of Jewish stories, *Sippurim* (1853), Libuše prophesies the arrival of the Jews in Prague on her deathbed. She refers to them as ‘ein fremdes, verstoßenes und bedrängtes Völkchen’, and later appears to her descendent Hostivit in a dream, to ensure that he welcomes

¹⁴³ See Macura, *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, pp. 124-133; Veronika Jičínská, ‘Wer ist der bessere Fälscher: Die gefälschten tschechischen Manuskripte im Nationalitätenkampf um kulturelle Hegemonie’, *Zeitschrift für interkulturelle Germanistik*, 5, 2 (2014) 57-72; Andrew Lass, ‘Romantic Documents and Political Monuments: The Meaning-Fulfillment of History in 19th-Century Czech Nationalism’, *American Ethnologist*, 15, 3 (1988), 456-471.

¹⁴⁴ *Rukopisy Královédvorský a Zelenohorský: dnešní stav poznání*, ed. by Mojmír Otruba, 2 vols (Prague: Academia, 1969), II, pp. 317-320.

¹⁴⁵ Palacký’s history was initially published in German as *Geschichte von Böhmen* (1836-1867). On the implications of the differing titles in Czech and German, see Macura, ‘Sen o národě’, p. 290. On the role of Libuše in Palacký’s history, see Kamil Činátl, *Dějiny a vyprávění* (Prague: Argo, 2011), p. 160. Erben refers to Libuše in ‘Věstkyně’ (‘The Prophetess’) at the end of his collection *Kytice* (1853, *The Bouquet*); see Karel Jaromír Erben, ‘Věstkyně’, in *Básně a překlady* (Prague: Melantrich, 1948), pp. 110-118.

them to the city.¹⁴⁶ Kohn goes on to describe where the Jews lived in Prague, and how they proved themselves loyal citizens. Libuše's prophecy opens a narrative of continuity: it gives weight to the suggestion that the Jews have been present in Prague almost since its beginnings, and implies that it has always been the role of the Czechs to protect them and allow them to live in Prague in peace.¹⁴⁷

Kohn combines his use of a conventional Czech topos and his affirmation of Czech-Jewish harmony with an approach to the physical spaces of the city which subversively underlines the 'Jewishness' of Prague. Before introducing Libuše's prophecy, he mentions another, dimly remembered story claiming that Prague was preceded by a much more ancient city:

Einer alten Ueberlieferung zu Folge, wird in dieser Schrift erzählt, soll schon zur Zeit des zweiten Tempels an der Stelle, wo jetzt Prag steht, eine blühende Stadt gestanden, und sich hier Juden aufgehalten haben. Die Stadt wurde aber später zerstört und die Einwohner vertrieben.¹⁴⁸

Here, Kohn adopts a complex position in relation to Czech mythology, in order to connect the Jews specifically with the location of Prague. After placing himself at several removes from the mythical narrative (he says that he is quoting an old manuscript, which itself refers to an 'old tradition'), he suggests that the Jewish presence in Bohemia could predate Libuše by centuries (the Second Temple period lasted from 516 BC to 70 AD), and thus undermines the status of the Libuše narrative as an origin myth, tracing a faint imprint of an earlier city upon which modern Prague is overlaid.

¹⁴⁶ Salomon Kohn, 'Die Juden in Böhmens Vorzeit', in *Sippurim, eine Sammlung jüdischer Volkssagen, Erzählungen, Mythen, Chroniken, Denkwürdigkeiten und Biographien berühmter Juden aller Jahrhunderte, insbesondere des Mittelalters*, ed. by Wolf Pascheles, 5 vols (Prague: Pascheles, 1853-1870), I, pp. 111-118 (p. 111).

¹⁴⁷ On the use of such narratives of continuity by Jewish historians in Bohemia throughout the nineteenth century, see Louise Hecht, 'Kreative Geschichtsschreibung: Die Ramschak-Chronik und die Geschichte der Juden in Böhmen', in *Zwischen Graetz und Dubnow: Jüdische Historiographie in Ostmitteleuropa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by François Guesnet (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 2009), pp. 33-61.

¹⁴⁸ Kohn, p. 111.

By indicating that the earlier city was destroyed and the inhabitants expelled, Kohn makes use of the dominant themes of Jewish mythology: the destruction of the ‘earlier Prague’ echoes the destructions of the temples, and the expulsion of the inhabitants mirrors the exile of the Jews. The subtlety of Kohn’s account lies in the fact that Czech mythology can still take its course (the destruction allows Libuše to found Prague), whilst taking on a different meaning: the founding becomes closer to a refounding or a rebuilding, and the arrival of the Jews becomes more like a return from exile.

Texts such as Kohn’s ‘Die Juden in Böhmens Vorzeit’ did not have the power to change the tendency of Czech culture to associate Libuše with an exclusively Czech nationalist image of Prague. With the première of Bedřich Smetana’s opera *Libuše* in 1881 and the publication of Alois Jirásek’s *Staré pověsti české* (1893, *Old Czech Legends*), the narratives surrounding Libuše became firmly embedded in Czech cultural memory. The nationalist portrayal of Libuše was characterised by ‘monumental simplicity’ (‘monumentální jednoduchost’), influenced by the fragmentary narrative of the Zelená Hora manuscript, which replaced the ambiguous and sexualised presentation of Libuše by Cosmas and Hájek with the static figure found in the ‘tableaux’ of Smetana’s opera and the stories of Jirásek.¹⁴⁹ However, Kohn’s attempt to rewrite an established Prague narrative and reconfigure the nineteenth-century vision of ‘Czech’ Prague exemplifies the subversive potential of the most familiar topoi, and the heterogeneity which remains present within the dominant landmarks of the imagined city.

‘Zlatá kaplička’ - the little golden chapel

¹⁴⁹ Macura, ‘Sen o Libuši’, p. 323.

Nineteenth-century Czech patriots did not only imagine Prague as a space in which Czech identity could be sought in the distant past: they also depicted the National Revival itself as a heroic story, and thus the process of establishing Czech-speaking cultural institutions in Prague became a key source of shared narratives. In particular, the history of how the National Theatre was built came to represent the founding of the modern nation, with Prague at its centre, and the inaugural performance of Smetana's *Libuše* was remembered as the highpoint in a story of national triumph.¹⁵⁰ The theatre took on a sacralised meaning, described as a 'cathedral of Czech art' ('chrám českého umění') and as the 'little golden chapel on the Vltava' ('zlatá kaplička nad Vltavou').¹⁵¹ Although the role of the National Theatre in Czech society has shifted since the opening night of *Libuše* in 1881, the image of a building sacred to the Czech nation still retains an influence.

The collective narrative of the National Theatre begins long before its foundation stones were laid, and is encapsulated by the title of Karel Krejčí's chapter on the National Revival in Prague, 'Od boudy k zlaté kapličce' ('From the hut to the little golden chapel').¹⁵² 'Bouda', meaning 'hut' or 'shack', was the nickname for what was officially called the Imperial and Royal Patriotic Theatre (c. k. Vlastenecké divadlo), because Emperor Joseph II had allowed it to be built: it was a wooden building on what is now Wenceslas Square, which was dedicated to performances of plays in Czech. The Bouda opened in 1786, and as Krejčí's phrase implies, it symbolises the humble beginnings of a struggle for cultural sovereignty: although plays were performed in Czech in other settings earlier in the century, the Bouda was the first

¹⁵⁰ The introduction to Jarka M. Burian's history of the Czech theatre exemplifies this view; she begins with the Battle of White Mountain and the disappearance of Czech from the public sphere (*Modern Czech Theatre: Reflector and Conscience of a Nation* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), pp. 9-19).

¹⁵¹ Macura, *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, p. 224.

¹⁵² Krejčí, pp. 170-200.

building dedicated to Czech-speaking theatre.¹⁵³ However, it soon succumbed to financial difficulties, and it was not until 1850 that a committee was set up for the purpose of establishing a new Czech-speaking theatre.¹⁵⁴ The activities of the committee were delayed by the tightening of censorship which followed the unrest in 1848, as well as by disagreements about the best way of obtaining funding, but it succeeded in buying land beside the Vltava and opening a ‘provisional theatre’ (Prozatímní divadlo) there in 1862, before finally laying the foundation stones of the National Theatre in 1868.¹⁵⁵

The funding of the theatre and the laying of the foundation stones were both imbued with symbolic power: the theatre was financed by public subscription, and the foundation stones came from all over Bohemia and Moravia, strengthening the implication that the building was an embodiment of the Czech nation. The completed theatre opened in 1881, with Smetana’s opera further underlining its ‘Czechness’, and when the building burned down in that same year and had to be rebuilt (again using donations from the public) this served to heighten its significance in the collective imagination.¹⁵⁶

Literary texts responding to the fire at the theatre, whilst emphasising the loss to the ‘mother nation’, present the disaster as a new basis for shared identity. The well-known poet Jaroslav Vrchlický describes the burning of the theatre in apocalyptic terms in a poem entitled *12. srpen 1881* (‘12th of August 1881’), but goes on to claim that before this event, the Czechs did not know who they were (‘Před požárem tím my jsme nevěděli / kdo vlastně jsme’). As ‘children of the storm’, they will now work

¹⁵³ Hugh Agnew, *Origins of the Czech National Renaissance* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), pp. 135-136.

¹⁵⁴ Stanley Bucholz Kimball, *Czech Nationalism: A Study of the National Theatre Movement, 1845-83* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964), p. 8.

¹⁵⁵ Kimball, *Czech Nationalism*, p. 66 and pp. 80-91.

¹⁵⁶ Kimball, *Czech Nationalism*, pp. 135-150, and Agnew, *The Czechs*, p. 143.

together as ‘brothers’ to rebuild the theatre.¹⁵⁷ Thus, the destruction of the theatre immediately took on a role in the imagined city, as an event which defined the nation.¹⁵⁸

In the imagined Prague of the nineteenth century, narratives about the Czech-speaking theatres construct a sacralised teleology beginning with the romantic efforts of the ‘patriots of the Bouda’ and leading – despite many difficulties – to the triumphant building of the National Theatre, its tragic destruction and the even greater triumph of its rebuilding.¹⁵⁹ In particular, writers retold the story of the playwright and actor Václav Thám, who wrote a large number of plays for the Bouda, but who struggled financially and is thought to have ended his life as an impoverished travelling player.¹⁶⁰ Thám is a central character in Alois Jirásek’s historical novel *F. L. Věk* (published in five volumes, 1891-1906), which unfolds a carefully researched panorama of late eighteenth-century Prague, demonstrating how Jirásek’s generation of intellectuals imagined the Bouda as a forerunner of the National Theatre. In the second of the novel’s five volumes, Thám speaks passionately about the need for a permanent Czech-speaking theatre:

“Říká se, že je divadlo všeobecný pramen, z něhož lidé moudrost váží a čistěji se cítit učí. A je-li to pravda, mohou se naši v divadle učit, a již se učí, česky cítit, vědí, česky, a milovat svou řeč. [...] Co jiného řecký národ ve spolek tak pevný pojilo? [...]”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Jaroslav Vrchlický, *12. srpen 1881* (Plzeň: the author, 1881) <https://cs.wikisource.org/wiki/12._srpen_1881> [accessed 10.6.2016]. See also R. P. (= Rudolf Pokorný), *Nad troskami Národního divadla* (Prague: the author, 1881) <https://cs.wikisource.org/wiki/Nad_troskami_N%C3%A1rodn%C3%ADho_divadla> [accessed 10.6.2016].

¹⁵⁸ This rhetoric is echoed mockingly in Vilém Mrštík’s *Santa Lucia* (1893), in which the naive protagonist is fatally attracted to Prague: ‘Když vyhořelo divadlo, jako by hořela Praha. Slzami ji hasily zarosené jejich oči’ (p. 42, ‘When the theatre burnt down, it was as if Prague itself were burning. They extinguished it with tears from their dewy eyes’).

¹⁵⁹ See e.g. Josef Jirí Stankovský, *Vlastencové z Boudy* (Prague: Mourek, 1877). Such reverent interpretations of the Czech past coexist with mockery and scepticism; see Pynsent, ‘Resurrections’, on Ferdinand Peroutka’s ridicule of Czech ‘wooden huts’ (p. 79).

¹⁶⁰ Miroslav Kačer, *Václav Thám* (Prague: Svobodné slovo, 1965), pp. 10-11.

¹⁶¹ Alois Jirásek, *Sebrané spisy*, 45 vols (Prague: Otto, 1890-1930), XX: *F. L. Věk II*, pp. 162-163.

[“They say the theatre is the universal source from which people gain wisdom and learn to feel more purely. And if that is true, our people can learn at the theatre, and they are already learning, to feel Czech, you know, Czech, and to love their language. [...] What else connected the Greek nation together in such a strong whole? [...]”]

In Thám’s speech, the nationalist narratives of the late nineteenth century are projected back into the past: his motivation for creating plays is entirely aligned with the understanding of ‘Czechness’ which emerged after his death. The role of the theatre is unambiguously didactic: it is to teach people to feel ‘Czech’ and to love their language. Thus, the theatre is to become the basis for the nation, its ‘natural’ authenticity emphasised by the use of the words ‘pramen’ (‘source’) and ‘čistější’ (‘more purely’). The reference to the Greeks is characteristic of Czech nationalist rhetoric, which frequently presents elements of Greek culture as a model, casting the Czech nation in an ancient mould and thus increasing its venerability.¹⁶² Thám’s vision of a ‘permanent’ theatre anticipates the building of the National Theatre and constructs fundamental continuities between the Czechs of the late eighteenth century and later generations of nationalists.

Jirásek’s image of late eighteenth-century Prague, with its nascent Czech-speaking culture, remained influential in the socialist period, when his works were republished in an edition of fifty thousand and the government aimed to make him the most-read Czech author. In fact, in a deliberate echo of the public subscription for the National Theatre, donations were collected for the new edition of his work.¹⁶³ *F. L. Věk* was televised in 1970 – but in an irony which was characteristic of the approach to Czech nationalist narratives in the era of ‘normalisation’, the final part in the series was not broadcast because of potential parallels between the repressive measures of the

¹⁶² Jirásek may also be referring to the revival of the modern Greek nation, although strictly speaking, it would be anachronistic for Thám to mention this.

¹⁶³ Petr Šámal, ‘Znárodněný klasik. Jiráskovská akce jako prostředek legitimizace komunistické vlády’, in *Zrození mýtu. Dva životy husitské epochy. K poctě Petra Čorneje*, ed. by R. Novotný and others (Prague: Paseka, 2011), pp. 457–472.

Habsburg government in the late eighteenth century and the situation in Czechoslovakia following the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops.¹⁶⁴

Prague between the nations

Even when they differed in their political, religious or cultural allegiances, Czech nationalists could agree on ‘one thing – namely, that Czechs [were] not Germans’.¹⁶⁵ The relationship between Czech-speaking and German-speaking Bohemians was shaped by a complex dynamic: on the one hand, Czech nationalist intellectuals rejected all that they associated with German-speaking culture, whilst on the other, they aimed to prove that Czech culture was equal to or better than its German counterpart – that their language was just as expressive, their literature just as rich. Their very rejection of ‘German’ culture made them dependent on it:

Česká kultura je tehdy budována nikoliv prostě jinak, a tedy nezávisle na německé, ale doslova zrcadlově, a proto vlastně závisle na ní.¹⁶⁶

At the same time, as German-speakers in Prague began to develop a German national identity, they imitated the strategies used by Czech patriots to strengthen identification with ‘Czechness’: Cohen quotes a German journalist in 1861 as saying:

We will learn to attack them with their own weapons. The Czechs above all have shown us what purposes seemingly harmless associations serve and what can be made of anniversaries and similar observances. Fine, now we can have our own associations and our own celebrations too.¹⁶⁷

Thus, a further element of mirroring became part of the Czech-German dynamic.

¹⁶⁴ Jana Dudková, ‘F. L. Věk’, <<http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/899202-f-l-vek/177-o-serialu/>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

¹⁶⁵ Čapková, p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Czech culture at that time is not simply constructed differently from German culture, and therefore independently, but instead literally mirrors German culture, and is therefore dependent on it’ (Macura, *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, p. 42).

¹⁶⁷ Cohen, p. 51 (quotation translated by Cohen). The writer is probably Theophil Pislung.

This contradictory relationship can be traced in the contested spaces of the imagined city, along with the shifting status of a third group: the Jews, who occupied an ambiguous position, frequently marginalised and attacked, even though (and sometimes *because*) their identity and allegiances overlapped with those of the Czechs and Germans.

The identities of ‘Czechs’, ‘Germans’ and ‘Jews’ changed over time and were defined in an increasingly explicit and exclusive manner. In the same period which saw the development of a ‘Czech identity’ with specific characteristics, ‘Germanness’ and ‘Jewishness’ in Prague and Bohemia were shaped by questions of language, of religion, and of loyalty to the Slavic world, to the Habsburg rulers and Austria, and gradually also to the German Reich.¹⁶⁸ Interactions between people in Prague took place in a complex intercultural framework, in which identity was not a static category: instead, ‘Czechness’, ‘Germanness’ and ‘Jewishness’ were hybrid identities, constantly shifting and overlapping, interpreted and reinterpreted by individuals.¹⁶⁹ However, they were frequently imagined in essentialist terms, and their interactions were often viewed simplistically as a conflict or competition between rigidly defined groups, or idealised as a process of mutual enrichment.¹⁷⁰

‘Jazyk’ - tongue, language, nation

¹⁶⁸ On German identities in Bohemia, see Cohen, King, and Judson. On multiple Jewish allegiances, see Čapková, pp. 243-244.

¹⁶⁹ See Lahl, p. 9 and p. 14.

¹⁷⁰ Cohen points out that even when the memoirs of German-speaking Praguers emphasise ‘segregation’ or claim that Prague Germans had nothing to do with Czechs, this is a reflection of ‘the general tendency of politics and organized social life’, but not evidence that Czechs and Germans did not ‘mingle extensively in the private matters of bread-winning, consumption of goods and services, and domestic life’ (Cohen, pp. 123-124).

From the early nineteenth century onward, the imagined Prague was increasingly mapped out according to language differences and presented as a cultural battleground where Czech and German struggled against each other. Czech portrayals of Prague often drew on the complexities of the city's Czech-German-Jewish past in order to tell a story of German encroachment: the writings of Czech revivalists emphasise the difficulty of finding 'pure' Czech being spoken in the city, whereas the provinces are presented as a space in which the language has been preserved, untainted by German influence. Meanwhile, as Czech culture began to dominate in the late nineteenth century and more Czech-speakers moved to the suburbs of the city, German-speaking Praguers increasingly presented the city as a shrinking island of familiarity in a sea of Czechness.¹⁷¹

Such narratives reduce the complex interactions between Czech-speakers and German-speakers over many centuries to a single, all-encompassing interpretation. German-speakers and Jews lived in Prague for centuries: Jewish and German neighbourhoods emerged around the Old Town when it was gradually settled in the eleventh century.¹⁷² German-speakers arrived in Bohemia for a variety of reasons: monks and priests took on roles in the emerging Czech church in the process of Christianisation, German-speaking nobles and their servants arrived as a result of marriages with the Czech nobility, and tradespeople and craftsmen were invited by the Czech Přemyslid rulers.¹⁷³ Both Germans and Jews played a central role in shaping the history of Prague. Yet the texts which dominated Czech collective memory often portrayed the long-established presence of German-speakers in the city not as evidence that they 'belonged', but as proof that the Czechs had always had to assert themselves against them: in his poetic magnum opus in praise of the Slavs, *Slávy*

¹⁷¹ Spector, p. 3.

¹⁷² Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold*, pp. 32-34 and pp. 40-48.

¹⁷³ Joachim Rogall, 'Přemyslovci a německá kolonizace', in *Češi a Němci: Dějiny – kultura – politika*, ed. by Walter Koschmal, Marek Nekula and Joachim Rogall (Prague: Paseka, 2002), pp. 24-26.

dcera (*Daughter of Sláva*, 1824-1852) Ján Kollár describes Prague as an ‘eternal cathedral’ which will oppose the Germans and win even when outnumbered.¹⁷⁴

In imagining Prague as the setting of endless Czech-German conflict, Czech writers could draw on much earlier literary texts: already in the medieval period, the threat of foreign interlopers was a theme of Czech literature. The author of the *Alexandreis* (c. 1300) suggests that soon there will not be a single Czech to be seen on the ‘Bridge in Prague’, a concern which is echoed in *Dalimilova kronika* (the *Chronicle of Dalimil*), around twenty years later.¹⁷⁵ *Dalimilova kronika* makes particular use of the word ‘jazyk’, which in modern Czech means ‘language’ or ‘tongue’. Here ‘jazyk’ refers not only to the language spoken by a group but also to the group itself and the area it inhabits; this aspect of its meaning is close to modern usage of the word ‘nation’. It is likely that Dalimil played on the ambiguity of the word, sometimes letting the connotation of ‘language’ move into the foreground, and at other times emphasising the implication of a homogeneous group of ‘Czechs’ inhabiting Bohemian territory, driving out ‘Germans’ and foreigners.¹⁷⁶ The *Chronicle* took on a ‘mythical function’ for Czech patriots: it was first printed in 1620, at the time of the Habsburg victory, and was then banned, before being reprinted in 1786, at the beginning of the National Revival.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ ‘předce věčným Slávy budeš chrámem / pěknobřehá Němců sokyně / zvítězví v přemožení samém’ (Ján Kollár, *Slávy dcera*, ed. by Martin C. Putna (Prague: Academia, 2014), p. 139).

¹⁷⁵ *Staročeská Alexandreida*, ed. by Václav Vážný (Prague: ELK, 1949), p. 118; *Staročeská kronika tak řečeného Dalimila*, ed. by Jiří Daňhelka and others, 3 vols (Academia: Prague, 1988), II, p. 405. The author is known conventionally as Dalimil, although it is not known who wrote the text.

¹⁷⁶ Robert B. Pynsent, ‘Die Dalimil-Chronik als polymythischer Text’, in *Geschichtliche Mythen in den Literaturen und Kulturen Ostmittel- und Südosteuropas*, ed. by Eva Behring, Ludwig Richter and Wolfgang Friedrich Schwarz (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999), pp. 199-232 (pp. 204-205). On the implications of the anti-German statements in the text, see Robert B. Pynsent, ‘Misoteutonic myths: Lopping noses in Hussite nationalism and love’s sweet cure’, in *Democracy and Myth in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Alexander Wöll and Harald Wydra (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), pp. 98-121.

¹⁷⁷ Pynsent, ‘Die Dalimil-Chronik’, pp. 200-201.

Nineteenth-century writers picked up on the theme of language and conflict in earlier Czech literature, and described Prague as a city where everyday life was shaped by the implications of choosing to speak Czech or German. Josef Kajetan Tyl's story, 'Pomněnky z hrobu nejstaršího Čecha' (1847, 'Forget-me-nots from the grave of the oldest Czech'), contains a scene in which the young patriot Jan Nejedlý (1776-1834) meets a friend in a Malá Strana pub. They get into an argument, because Nejedlý's friend is embarrassed to be greeted in Czech: he objects in German, 'Die Leute sehen Einen [sic] an, als wenn man vom Dorfe käme.'¹⁷⁸ Tyl uses this scene to indicate the significance of the changes which patriotic writers brought about: the Prague of his story is a German-speaking city, and the Czech language itself connotes, for many educated Czechs, the very opposite of urban sophistication. Czech is excluded from the public sphere, and – as Nejedlý's friend implies with his comment – has no place in the city at all, being a language of the villages.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the cityscape of Prague was increasingly shaped by the territorialisation of language differences: 'time and space were reinterpreted to fit the story of an "arch-enmity"'.¹⁷⁹ Across Bohemia and Moravia, physical borders marked out what German Liberal politicians called 'Nationalbesitzstand', referring to 'the territory inhabited by German speakers and their property'.¹⁸⁰ Nationalist groups (both Czech and German) watched these borders carefully and reacted loudly when German-language schools were founded or

¹⁷⁸ Josef Kajetan Tyl, 'Pomněnky z hrobu nejstaršího Čecha', in *Spisy Josefa Kajetána Tyla*, ed. by Mojmír Otruba and others, 20 vols (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1952-1989), X: *Historické povídky IV*, pp. 131-167 (p. 145)

¹⁷⁹ Martin J. Wein, 'Chosen peoples, holy tongues: religion, language, nationalism and politics in Bohemia and Moravia in the seventeenth to twentieth centuries', *Past and Present*, 202 (2009), 37-81 (p. 58).

¹⁸⁰ Pieter M. Judson, "'Not Another Square Foot!'" German Liberalism and the Rhetoric of National Ownership in Nineteenth-Century Austria', *Austrian History Yearbook*, 26 (1995), 83-97 (p. 83).

abolished in ‘border areas’ or on ‘language islands’: the term ‘Sprachgrenzschulen’ was used to refer territorially to such schools.¹⁸¹

In Prague, this process of territorialisation was visible in the division of cultural institutions such as theatres, in the partition of the University in 1881-3, and in the replacement of bilingual street-signs showing the German name first and the Czech name second with monolingual Czech signs in 1892.¹⁸² As the Czech population of the city grew and the German minority shrank, the relative numbers of each were publicly displayed, as encouragement to the Czechs.¹⁸³ In 1897, the city was wracked by riotous protests and violent parliamentary debates, resulting from the proposed Badeni Language Ordinances, which would have given Czech an equal status to German as an administrative language in Bohemia.¹⁸⁴

Language-related protests continued into the era of Czechoslovak independence, and were frequently accompanied by antisemitic violence. In December 1918, following attacks on Germans and Jews, the Czech press claimed that speaking German in public was a provocation.¹⁸⁵ In November 1920, Czech nationalists occupied the German theatre (Königliches Deutsches Landestheater), and actors from the Czech National Theatre performed Smetana’s *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*): the long struggle for Czech-speaking theatre had become a pretext for violence.¹⁸⁶ Further

¹⁸¹ Spector, p. 73.

¹⁸² Cohen, p. 148.

¹⁸³ Ritchie Robertson, ‘Zum deutschen Slawenbild von Herder bis Musil’, in *Das Eigene und das Fremde: Festschrift Urs Bitterli*, ed. by Urs Faes and Béatrice Ziegler (Zürich: NZZ-Verlag, 2000), pp. 116-144 (p. 136).

¹⁸⁴ See Wingfield, p. 49, and Adéla Hall, *Deutsch und Tschechisch im sprachpolitischen Konflikt: Eine vergleichende diskursanalytische Untersuchung zu den Sprachenverordnungen Badenis von 1897* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2008).

¹⁸⁵ Ines Koeltzsch, ‘Antijüdische Straßengewalt und die semantische Konstruktion des “Anderen” im Prag der Ersten Republik’, *Judaica Bohemiae*, 46, 1 (2011), 73-99 (p. 79).

¹⁸⁶ On the history of this theatre, see Markéta Bartos Tautmanová, *Eine Arena deutsch-tschechischer Kultur: Das Prager Ständetheater 1846-1862* (Berlin: Hopf, 2012). In 1920, there were two theatres in Prague dedicated to German-speaking productions, a circumstance which Czech nationalists criticised.

unrest followed in 1930, with protests against films in German. The rhetoric which characterised these events typically pitted ‘Slavic Prague’, the ‘mother of the Czechoslovak towns’ against an enemy which was Jewish, rich and ‘ostentatiously spoke German’.¹⁸⁷ The imagined city was now shaped by exclusive, language-based identities: even though Prague had long been characterised by bilingualism, code-switching and intercultural complexity, it no longer seemed acceptable for Czech and German identities to overlap, and in this context, the position of the Jews was particularly vulnerable.

‘City of three peoples’

In 1897, Theodor Herzl described the position of the Jews in Bohemia, referring to the antisemitic attacks which took place during the unrest caused by the Badeni language ordinances:

In Prag warf man ihnen vor, daß sie keine Tschechen, in Saaz und Eger, daß sie keine Deutschen seien. [...] Es gab welche, die sich tschechisch zu sein bemühten; da bekamen sie es von den Deutschen. Es gab welche, die deutsch sein wollten, da fielen die Tschechen über sie her – und Deutsche auch.¹⁸⁸

Although Herzl’s analysis stylised the Prague Jews as ‘klein’, ‘brav’ and ‘friedlich’, it was found to be convincing enough by the editors of the Jewish magazine *Selbstwehr* that they reprinted it in their 1917 special edition, *Das jüdische Prag*. In Herzl’s image of Prague, the Jews find themselves ‘between’ the nations, not only because they are neither Czech nor German, but because they try to integrate themselves with one group or the other.¹⁸⁹ According to Herzl, the Bohemian Jews who tried to identify themselves as German had to exaggerate their German nationalism in order to

¹⁸⁷ Koeltzsch, ‘Antijüdische Straßengewalt’, p. 85 and p. 91.

¹⁸⁸ Theodor Herzl, ‘Die Juden Prags zwischen den Nationen’, in *Das jüdische Prag: eine Sammelschrift* (Prague: Verlag der “Selbstwehr”, 1917), 7.

¹⁸⁹ On Herzl’s shifting view of assimilation, see Ritchie Robertson, ‘The Problem of “Jewish Self-Hatred” in Herzl, Kraus and Kafka’, *Oxford German Studies*, 16, 1 (1985), 81-102 (pp. 86-92).

be believed – and even then, they only succeeded in provoking the hatred of the Czechs. To him, the answer seemed clear: ‘Die Juden mußten sich einfach auf ihre jüdische Nationalität berufen’.¹⁹⁰ However, this might not have been as simple as he implied: as Ines Koeltzsch has shown, Jews were regarded by Czech and German nationalists not just as an enemy, but as a force disrupting the very distinctions between nations. Their lack of a nation, and especially their use of more than one language, was perceived as ambiguous and devious – and therefore as a particular kind of threat.¹⁹¹

The position of the Jews in Prague therefore became increasingly complex as nationalist concepts of identity came to dominate. Their history in the city was turbulent, but up until the 1780s, their identity as a community was at least defined fairly clearly both from without and from within: on the one hand, the rulers of Bohemia placed limitations on the occupations which Jews could pursue, the education they could obtain, and their rights with regard to marriage, inheritance and residence, whilst on the other, Jews regulated their communities relatively autonomously according to religious and cultural tradition.¹⁹² Over the centuries, the Jews in Prague were often at the mercies of power struggles between the crown, for whom they were a source of income, and the local government and inhabitants, who regularly called for their expulsion. Thus, periods of growth and stability – such as the reigns of the emperors Maximilian II (r. 1564-1576) and Rudolf II (r. 1576-1612) – alternated with eras of oppression and violence.¹⁹³ The reign of Charles VI (r. 1711-1740) was one such difficult period: it was he who introduced the Familiants Laws of 1726 and 1727 to limit the number of Jewish families which could live in

¹⁹⁰ Herzl, p. 7.

¹⁹¹ Koeltzsch, ‘Antijüdische Straßengewalt’, pp. 76-77.

¹⁹² On the history of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia, see Kieval, *Languages of Community*, Wein, *History of the Jews*, and Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein, *Neuere Geschichte der Juden in den böhmischen Ländern* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1969).

¹⁹³ Kieval, *Languages of Community*, pp. 15-23.

Bohemia and Moravia by allowing only one son from any family to marry.¹⁹⁴ Further oppression followed from Maria Theresa (r. 1740-1780), who expelled the Jews from Prague in 1745 as a punishment for their alleged betrayal of the city to the Prussians, allowing them back only after diplomatic interventions.¹⁹⁵

The parameters of the Jewish community in Prague and its relationship with the city's non-Jewish inhabitants began to shift dramatically with the reforms of Joseph II (r. 1765-1790) and the spread of Enlightenment ideas, which shaped the Haskalah movement among the Jews. Joseph II's 'Toleranzpatent' of 1781 included a range of reforms which undermined local hierarchies, introduced new economic and cultural structures and aimed for centralisation and uniformity across the Habsburg empire; this included 'making Jews useful to the state'.¹⁹⁶ The Prague Jewish community became less autonomous, and was gradually Germanised. Jews were encouraged to work in a greater range of professions, and were to attend government-supervised German-speaking schools, and take Germanised names. Until the late nineteenth century, the majority of Prague Jews identified with German culture, not only as a result of such centralising policies, but also because Czech nationalism often encompassed antisemitism, whereas German liberal society was broadly welcoming towards Jews.¹⁹⁷ It was the radicalisation of German and Czech nationalism at the end of the century which brought the uncertainties which Herzl captures in his image of the Prague Jews 'between' the nations.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ On the effects of this on the overcrowded Prague Jewish quarter, see Ruth Kestenbergl-Gladstein, 'A Voice from the Prague Enlightenment', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 9, 1 (1964), 295-304 (p. 296).

¹⁹⁵ Kieval, *Languages of Community*, p. 22; Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold*, pp. 242-247.

¹⁹⁶ 'dem Staate nützlich zu machen' (see Joseph's memorandum (drafted 1.10.1781), in *Urkunden und Akten zur Geschichte der Juden in Wien*, ed. by Alfred Francis Příbram, 2 vols (Vienna: Braumüller, 1918), I, p. 476). See also Kieval, *Languages of Community*, p. 27.

¹⁹⁷ Cohen, pp. 76-83.

¹⁹⁸ Cohen, pp. 235-263.

In the imagined city, the complex status of the Jews is often portrayed in a manner which reduces the ambiguities of intercultural identities and subsumes them in an explanatory framework or all-encompassing metaphor.¹⁹⁹ Rather than reflecting the shifting relationships between religious, linguistic, political, national and ethnic allegiances, the narratives which dominate collective memory seek to stabilise the mutability of identity. This is reflected in Hans Tramer's description of the relationship between 'three peoples':

Prague was a special case. It can in truth be called a city of three peoples. It lay from the first at a crossroads of Europe, forming a barrier between east and west. In 1900 its population consisted of 415,000 Czechs, 25,000 Jews and about 10,000 Germans, i.e. non-Jewish, German-speaking subjects of the Habsburgs. This juxtaposition of peoples determined the character of the city [...].²⁰⁰

Tramer's writes of the 'juxtaposition' of three groups, implying that they did not overlap, even though his listing of 'Czechs', 'Jews' and 'Germans' immediately raises questions about the source of these numbers and the implications of these labels. He makes use of the topos of 'centrality', combining the metaphor of the 'crossroads' with that of a 'barrier', and giving the city a contradictory status as a site of exchange as well as the prevention of exchange. Thus, although the description suggests simplicity and harmony, the tensions inherent in the city's intercultural character emerge implicitly in the conflicting metaphors.

Tramer's description of Prague exemplifies the tendency to present the 'Jewishness' of the city as an essential element, obscuring the individuality of the Jews in the process. He lists a large number of Jewish writers and artists working in Prague in the early twentieth century, but gives little impression of the differences between them – for instance, he mentions the writer Paul Kisch (1883-1944) as well as his better

¹⁹⁹ Čapková, p. 241.

²⁰⁰ Tramer, p. 305.

known younger brother, Egon Erwin Kisch (1885-1948), but since he does not discuss the nature of Paul's writings (which were often aligned with chauvinistic German nationalism), we are left with a sense of undifferentiated collective genius, rather than the shifting specificities of many 'Jewish' identities. The celebration of diversity paradoxically flattens the individual specificities of pre-war Prague.

The role of the 'city of three peoples' in the imagined Prague has been shaped by nostalgia for a bygone era: post-1945 Prague was no longer defined by its position as a 'Grenzstadt', because it no longer had significant Jewish or German-speaking minorities.²⁰¹ The vast majority of Bohemian Jews had either fled or become victims of the Holocaust, and few survivors remained or returned.²⁰² Non-Jewish German-speakers were expelled from the country in 1945-6, and Jewish returnees frequently had trouble reclaiming their property.²⁰³

'Mütterchen'

The imagined Czech-German-Jewish Prague has been shaped most enduringly by an author who barely mentions the city in his work: Franz Kafka. 'Kafka's Prague' plays

²⁰¹ 'Grenzstadt' is the term used by Claudio Magris, who idealises pre-1939 Prague's contradictory status in 'Prag als Oxymoron', *Neohelicon*, 7, 2 (1979), 11-65 (p. 13).

²⁰² For approximate numbers, see Wein, *History of the Jews*, pp. 251-253.

²⁰³ Since 1989, Czech scholars have begun to examine the expulsion of the Germans, which had been a taboo topic (see e.g. Tomáš Staněk, *Odsun Němců z Československa 1945-1947* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1991); Antikomplex and others, *Zmizelé Sudety / Das verschwundene Sudetenland* (Domažlice: Český les, 2004); Matěj Spurný, *Flucht und Vertreibung: Das Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges in Niederschlesien, Sachsen und Nordböhmen* (Dresden: Sächsische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2008); *Vysídlení Němců a proměny českého pohraničí 1945-1951*, ed. by Adrian von Arburg and Tomáš Staněk (Středokluky: SUSA, 2010). The Czech silence about the 'odsun' ('transfer' of Germans) corresponds to comparable omissions in German-speaking historiography: Friedrich Prinz's 543-page history of German-speaking Bohemia and Moravia ends with the expulsion of the Germans but never explicitly discusses Theresienstadt (*Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas: Böhmen und Mähren* (Berlin: Seidler, 1993)). On the expulsions, see also Agnew, *The Czechs*, p. 224; Bryant, *Prague in Black*; Eagle Glassheim, 'National Mythologies and Ethnic Cleansing: The Expulsion of Czechoslovak Germans in 1945', *Central European History* 33, 4 (2000), 463-486. Pierre George's 1947 article repeats the conventional Czech narrative in which the expulsions were the inevitable culmination of Czech-German conflict ('The New Settlement Policy in Czechoslovakia', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 26, 66 (1947), 60-68).

a significant role in guidebooks and scholarly works alike, and remains an influence on contemporary literature about the city.²⁰⁴ It is an imagined space in which Kafka's direct references to Prague and his depictions of space in general are combined with descriptions of his biography by his contemporaries, and with interpretations of his life and works by literary critics and historians.

Kafka's few explicit references to Prague exemplify the ambivalent roles played by language and location in the intercultural spaces of the city before 1945.²⁰⁵ They have become key elements of the image of 'Kafka's Prague' as an unstable space provoking a sense of alienation. Thus, a passage from a letter written in 1902 to Oskar Pollak has become a famous example of Kafka's ambivalence towards the city:

Prag läßt nicht los. Uns beide nicht. Dieses Mütterchen hat Krallen. Da muß man sich fügen oder –. An zwei Seiten müßten wir es anzünden, am Vyšehrad und am Hradschin, dann wäre es möglich, daß wir loskommen.²⁰⁶

Here Kafka expresses his connection with Prague in terms of a power relationship. 'Mütterchen' translates the common Czech description of Prague as a 'little mother' ('mamička'); in the Czech context, 'mamička' is above all an affectionate diminutive which suggests that the city is the 'mother' of the Czechs, as well as the mother of all other cities. The emphasis of 'Mütterchen' in German is different; it refers more obviously to an old woman. The 'little mother' is someone for whom Kafka ought to have affection as a Prague resident, but the very translation of the Czech epithet into German lends this relationship a sense of alienation.

²⁰⁴ Scholarly approaches to Kafka's Prague are often self-contradictory; see e.g. Robert Alter's claim that the setting of *Der Process* is a 'pure fictional construct assembled from bits and pieces of the Prague Kafka knew' (*Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 155), or Alfred Thomas's suggestion that 'Beschreibung eines Kampfes' is the only one of Kafka's works in which Prague is visible, which precedes a discussion of the ways in which the city is perceptible in his later texts (*Prague Palimpsest*, p. 85).

²⁰⁵ See Spector, particularly pp. 4-6 and pp. 22-25.

²⁰⁶ Franz Kafka, *Briefe 1900-1912*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1999), p. 17.

In suggesting that he and Pollak set fire to Vyšehrad and Hradčany, Kafka chooses the two places which are most steeped in significance for Czech identity: Vyšehrad is the ancestral fortress of the Czech kings, where Libuše is supposed to have prophesied Prague's future glory, and Hradčany is the location of Prague Castle, as well as St Vitus' Cathedral.²⁰⁷ The Prague which holds Kafka in its clutches is therefore a city in which Czech-speaking, German-speaking and Jewish identities coexist uneasily; his suggestion that the city possesses too much power over him is bound up with the sense that on the one hand, Prague provides the basis for a collective identity, with its ancient castles and its 'motherly' personification, whilst on the other, German-speaking Prague Jews are excluded from such an identity.

In 'Kafka's Prague' as it is collectively imagined, the author's infrequent direct references to the city combine with narratives created in the process of interpreting his life and work. Gustav Janouch's *Gespräche mit Kafka* (1951), which was published as an authentic account of conversations with the author, exemplifies the manner in which such narratives have been constructed.²⁰⁸ Janouch's *Gespräche* continue to be cited as a historical source on Kafka's life, even though they are now regarded as

²⁰⁷ See Marek Nekula's interpretation in 'The Divided City: Prague's Public Space and Franz Kafka's Readings of Prague', in *Franz Kafka im sprachnationalen Kontext seiner Zeit*, ed. by Marek Nekula, Ingrid Fleischmann and Albrecht Greule (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), pp. 87-108 (pp. 99-101). Nekula argues that Prague Castle had associations of 'Germanness', because it no longer contained a Czech king, but was the residence of the Emperor whenever he visited. This is debatable, given the depiction of an axis of 'Czechness' between Vyšehrad, the National Theatre, the Vltava and Prague Castle exemplified in Karel Sladkovský's speech at the laying of the foundation stones for the theatre (Karel Sladkovský, 'Řeč dra Karla Sladkovského při slavném položení základního kamene Národního divadla v Praze dne 16. května 1868' <<http://kramerius.mlp.cz/kramerius/MShowMonograph.do?id=2485>> [accessed 10.6.2016]).

²⁰⁸ On the complex history of this text, see Veronika Tuckerová, 'Reading Kafka in Prague: The Reception of Franz Kafka between the East and the West during the Cold War' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 2012), pp. 79-136. The *Gespräche* were declared authentic by Max Brod and Dora Diamant, but were discredited by Eduard Goldstücker and Josef Čermák, among others.

being mainly fictional.²⁰⁹ Janouch ‘quotes’ Kafka’s comments on the enduring significance of the ghetto for Jewish writers in Prague:

In uns leben noch immer die dunklen Winkel, geheimnisvollen Gänge, blinden Fenster, schmutzigen Höfe, lärmenden Kneipen und verschlossenen Gasthäuser. Wir gehen durch die breiten Straßen der neuerbauten Stadt. Doch unsere Schritte und Blicke sind unsicher.²¹⁰

By Kafka’s time, the ghetto had been demolished – but here he suggests that the collective memory of its presence lives on in the Prague Jews, affecting the way they move through the modern city. Janouch’s narrative is one of several influential memoirs which have played a part in constructing ‘Kafka’s Prague’; others include Max Brod’s *Der Prager Kreis* (1966) and *Streitbares Leben* (1960), and Willy Haas’ *Die Literarische Welt: Erinnerungen* (1957). In each text, memory, fiction and history combine to create a particular image of Kafka’s connection with the city. In his analysis of Kafka’s cultural context, Scott Spector describes Brod’s ‘Prague circle’ as ‘a constellation of great writers revolving around and agreeing with the “central” figure of Brod himself’, arguing that ‘the author’s ideological and personal agendas in historicizing the notion are transparent’, and that ‘there were many “circles,” many orbits in which Prague German-speaking Jews of this generation came into contact with one another, influenced or disagreed with one another, and contributed to each other’s work’.²¹¹

‘Kafka’s Prague’ stretches from the pages of scholarly works to the streets of the contemporary city. In the Czech context, Kafka remained part of an ‘underground’ literary canon during the socialist period: his works were mainly out of print, but he

²⁰⁹ Their influence is exemplified by works such as Emanuel Frynta’s *Franz Kafka lebte in Prag* (Prague: Artia, 1960) and Sabine Rothemann’s *“Kleine Mutter mit Krallen”*: *Franz Kafka und das alte Prag* (Bonn: Bernstein, 2008), which quote Janouch uncritically and draw direct connections between his portrayal of Prague and the settings of Kafka’s works. They are also quoted in the exhibition at the Kafka Museum in Prague (Tuckerová, p. 46).

²¹⁰ Janouch, p. 42.

²¹¹ Spector, p. 17.

shaped the writings of many dissident and underground authors.²¹² The spaces of Kafka's city took on a new role in Ivan Martin Jirous' concept of the 'merry ghetto': this term implied that underground writers were successors of the Prague German authors.²¹³

From 1988 onward, Kafka's works began to be officially available again, and he became a tourist attraction: there are now several Kafka museums and Kafka monuments in Prague, along with the tiny house on Zlatá ulička (Golden Lane) where he is imagined to have lived. Jáchym Topol mocks the commodification of Kafka in his novel *Chladnou zemí* (2009, 'Through a Cold Land', translated as *The Devil's Workshop*): when the protagonist's friend is trying to draw tourists to Terezín (Theresienstadt), she buys large numbers of Kafka t-shirts in Prague, and adds the slogan 'Theresienstadt – Kdyby Franz Kafka přežil svou smrt, zabili by ho tady...' ('Theresienstadt – If Franz Kafka had survived his death, they would have killed him here...').²¹⁴ In their attempt to make use of his fame, Topol's protagonists try to 'relocate' Kafka to Theresienstadt and use an explicitly fictional memory of the writer to shape the camp's future as a site of commemoration. The dark humour of this detail rests partly on the fact that many of the 'memories' of Kafka which are associated with Prague are equally fictional – this circumstance, though, is usually obscured, rather than flaunted in the form of a slogan. The narratives of 'Kafka's Prague' demonstrate the complex dynamic between literature and the imagined city: in Kafka's work, Prague is more of an absence than a presence, but in the imagined city, he is a central figure. Prague creates an explanatory framework for the ambiguities of Kafka's work, and Kafka in turn has become a synecdoche of the tensions present in early twentieth-century Prague.

²¹² Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 84.

²¹³ Tuckerová, pp. 235-242.

²¹⁴ Jáchym Topol, *Chladnou zemí* (Prague: Torst, 2009), p. 37.

Magic Prague

So far, this chapter has focussed on aspects of the imagined city which are particularly connected with shared identities – with notions of Czech identity, and with portrayals of the interactions between Czechs, Germans and Jews. Images of ‘magic Prague’ often have a different emphasis. They cast the city as a labyrinth of mysteries, as a place of madness, magic and alchemy, a network of illusions – and in doing so, they not only work with a specific set of Prague topoi, but also take an approach to the city which gives fictionality a central role rather than foregrounding history or truth.

The theme of ‘magic Prague’ was established partly by writers who were neither Czech nor German, nor originally from Prague.²¹⁵ The image of the city as a place of magic was influenced by nineteenth-century British and American authors such as George Eliot, Anthony Trollope and Francis Marion Crawford, and was adopted by French poets such as Guillaume Apollinaire and André Breton.²¹⁶ During his only visit to Prague, in 1935, Breton made a speech at the Mánes Gallery, which had recently hosted the first Czech exhibition of surrealist art; he called Prague ‘the magic capital of old Europe’, with the implication that ‘new’ Europe was to be found elsewhere, in Paris.²¹⁷ Angelo Maria Ripellino’s exploration of Prague, *Praga Magica* (1973, *Magic Prague*, 1994), both investigates the ways in which the city has been

²¹⁵ See Demetz, *Böhmische Sonne*, pp. 160-164.

²¹⁶ See George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil* (1859), Anthony Trollope, *Nina Balatka* (1866-7), and Francis Marion Crawford, *The Witch of Prague* (1891). On Eliot’s visit to Prague, see Jindřich Toman, ‘Making sense of a ruin: nineteenth-century gentile images of the old Jewish cemetery in Prague’, *Bohemia*, 52, 1 (2012) 108-122 (p. 120).

²¹⁷ André Breton, ‘Situation surréaliste de l’objet’, in *Œuvres complètes*, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), II, pp. 472-496 (p. 472). See Derek Sayer, ‘André Breton and the Magic Capital: An Agony in Six Fits’, *Bohemia*, 52, 1 (2012), 55-75.

imagined as ‘magic’, and itself contributes to the significance of this theme, celebrating the ‘magic’ character of the city with lyrical intensity.²¹⁸

Ripellino’s work exemplifies the ahistoricism of the narratives associated with ‘magic Prague’, and their emphasis on fictionality. In the magic city, Rudolf II is still alive, the Golem returns regularly to haunt the Jewish Quarter, and history and fiction merge:

To this day, every evening at five, Franz Kafka returns home to Celetná Street (Zeltnergasse) wearing a bowler hat and black suit. To this day, every evening, Jaroslav Hašek proclaims to his drinking companions in one or another dive that radicalism is harmful and wholesome progress can be achieved only through obedience to authority.

[...]

To this day, every morning, two limping soldiers with fixed bayonets escort Josef Švejk down from the Castle across the Charles Bridge towards the Old Town, and every evening, to this day, [...] two automatons in frock coats and top hats accompany Josef K. across the same bridge in the opposite direction by moonlight to Strahov and his execution.²¹⁹

In Ripellino’s city, all of Prague’s history exists simultaneously (Kafka and Hašek still walk the streets) and is indistinguishable from fiction, which occupies the same space, multiple texts being overlaid so that Švejk and Josef K. are not only equally historical (or equally fictional) as their creators, but are also seen passing each other on the Charles Bridge. Ripellino brings these historical and fictional characters together with the facts and details we would expect in a literary history, but departs from scholarly convention and weaves these details into a new piece of Prague fiction, structured by associations and parallels.

²¹⁸ The ‘magic Prague’ tradition is further exemplified by Joseph Wechsberg, *Prague: The Mystical City* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); Bohumil Vurm, *Praga mystica: Město velké bohyně* (Prague: Praga Mystica, 2006); Alena Ježková, *77 pražských legend* (Prague: Práh, 2006).

²¹⁹ Ripellino, p. 3.

The ahistoricism of the ‘magic Prague’ topos makes it potentially useful to those who prefer not to narrate the city’s history in terms of political struggles for hegemony: the magic of the city is presented as being indestructible, living on in literature and in hidden (perhaps imaginary) corners of the city.²²⁰ In his history of the city, Peter Demetz calls the topos of ‘magic Prague’ ‘self-congratulatory’, implying that it is kept alive by a national interest in celebrating the legends of the city whilst disregarding the unromantic facts and avoiding self-criticism when it comes to the behaviour of the Czechs towards the Germans and Jews, for instance.²²¹ In a view of Prague where historical events are no more important than fictional ones, it is possible to imagine, as Ripellino does, that the city’s German and Jewish inhabitants are still present. Demetz is wary of such a counterfactual stance.²²²

However, in this very approach lies the potential of the narratives of ‘magic Prague’ to reconfigure the reader’s relationship with the past and subvert the dominant ideological views of the city. Ripellino wrote *Magic Prague* at a time when Czechoslovakia was occupied by Warsaw Pact troops, and when the writer himself was unlikely to be allowed to reenter the country. This shapes his portrayal of the city as a fictional space:

Ladies and gentlemen, this is not a Baedeker [...]. This compendium of Prague-related *obiter dicta* is incoherent and confused, written in uncertainty and poor health [...]. Something irreparable befell the Bohemian capital during an August now long past[...]. How then can I write an exhaustive, well-ordered treatise like a detached and haughty scholar[...]? No, I will weave a capricious book, an agglomeration of wonders, anecdotes, eccentric acts, brief intermezzos and mad encores [...].²²³

²²⁰ See the emphasis on survival in Jiří Rulf, ‘Matička má drápy. Jsou mýty obklopující Prahu skutečné?’, *Reflex*, 6, 45 (1995), 30-35.

²²¹ Demetz, p. 351 (on Breton) and pp. xiii-xiv (on Ripellino). He refers particularly to the ‘magic capital’ topos and the misquoting of Breton’s words and does not entirely dismiss Ripellino’s work.

²²² See also Demetz’s reference to the conspiracy theories about the Protocols of the Elders of Zion as ‘eine nicht verwelkende Giftblüte der Prager Magie’ in *Böhmische Sonne*, p. 160.

²²³ Ripellino, p. 18.

In response to the ‘irreparable’ crushing of the Prague Spring in August 1968, Ripellino emphasises that his account of Prague will be characterised by fragmentation. He begins by referring to this as a flaw – a lack of coherence and certainty. However, he then rejects the assumption that he should write about the city in a scholarly style in the wake of the Warsaw Pact invasion, instead celebrating the form he has chosen, which prefers ‘wonders’ to the facts contained in a ‘Baedeker’ and which would rather be a ‘capricious [...] agglomeration’ than a linear account of the city’s past. His preference for the fantastical implies a disregard for the decisive power of historical events, and is therefore a rebellious reaction to the aggression of the Soviet regime. By insisting that the city exists outside of linear time as a complex network of intertextual – and intercultural – ‘magic’, Ripellino denies the Soviet invasion some of its symbolic power.²²⁴

‘Město Rudolfovo’ - ‘Rudolf City’

Although Ripellino’s ‘compendium’ constructs a specific notion of ‘magic Prague’ which did not exist in this form beforehand, its combination of fragments from an enormous number of earlier Prague texts demonstrates that the narratives associated with this topos have long played a role in the imagined city. The image of the ‘magic’ city is connected with the reign of Emperor Rudolf II, the ‘wizard Emperor’, whose court in Prague attracted many artists and scientists, meaning that the period has been viewed as a cultural golden age for the city.²²⁵ However, the enduring image of Rudolf has been that of a strange, weak man whose patronage of the arts had an obsessive tinge to it – an obsessiveness which showed itself particularly in his reported love of

²²⁴ Jiří Stomšík underlines Ripellino’s inherently intercultural approach in ‘Doslov’, in Angelo Maria Ripellino, *Magická Praha*, trans. by Alena Hartmanová (Prague: Odeon, 1992), pp. 419-426.

²²⁵ R. J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and his World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 2.

the occult. Narratives shaped by the ‘magic Prague’ theme imply that Prague has been permanently defined by the ethereal glamour of Rudolf’s reign.²²⁶

Collective memory has woven together many aspects of Rudolf with fantastical potential: he is imagined as a mad, lonely ruler, crippled by paranoia, who tried to surround himself with people who could initiate him into the mysteries of the universe. Thus, the astronomers Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) and Tycho Brahe (1546-1601) were expected to read his future in the stars, whilst alchemists such as the notorious English duo John Dee (1527-1608 or 1609) and Edward Kelley (1555-1597) were to discover for him the secrets of eternal life.²²⁷

The Rudolf of collective memory shunned human company but delighted in his enormous collection of art and curiosities. His life was shaped by superstition: he is supposed to have anxiously watched over his pet lion, whose death would be a prophecy of his own.²²⁸ The topos of Rudolf II encompasses Prague itself, which is portrayed as a city of shadows and superstition, enchanted by the invisible presence of the Emperor, who is hidden in the Castle on the hill, perhaps receiving visitors via the secret tunnels which are rumoured to crisscross the city.²²⁹

At the same time, the memory of Rudolf II is shaped by the events which came after his reign: when he was forced to abdicate in favour of his brother, this heralded the start of the Thirty Years’ War in Bohemia, and thus the weaknesses of Rudolf II are inextricably bound up with the defeat of Bohemia. R. J. W. Evans discusses the

²²⁶ Ripellino, pp. 62-81.

²²⁷ On Kepler’s time in Prague, see Zdeněk Horský, *Kepler v Praze* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1980), and Volker Bialas, *Johannes Kepler* (Munich: Beck, 2004), pp. 28-36. On Tycho Brahe, see Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold*, pp. 187-194.

²²⁸ Peter Marshall, *The Mercurial Emperor: The Magic Circle of Rudolf II in Renaissance Prague* (London: Pimlico, 2007), p. 53.

²²⁹ See Gustav Meyrink, *Der Engel vom Westlichen Fenster* (Leipzig: Grethlein, 1927), p. 261.

different images of Rudolf II in collective memory in *Rudolf II and his World* (1973) and situates the Emperor in the context of his time, demonstrating that his interests in the occult arts, science and painting were intertwined with the broader scientific and aesthetic trends of the period, and showing that these interests formed part of the Renaissance view of the world and of the ‘world order’.²³⁰ In the imagined city, the mysteries of science and magic and the loneliness of the art-collector king have been uncoupled from their historical context, becoming powerful topoi for the authors of self-reflexive texts tracing the boundaries of fiction.

The role of Rudolf II in the imagined city is exemplified by Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic’s play *Král Rudolf* (1915, ‘King Rudolf’). By Karásek’s time, Rudolf was an established subject for drama.²³¹ Karásek returns to many of the oft-repeated aspects of the topos, and characterises Rudolf as a quintessential decadent subject. In the play’s first scene, Rudolf is presented as an embodiment of Prague, and Prague as a reflection of the Emperor: ‘je tak zvláštní a tak kouzelná jako její melancholický král’ (‘it is as strange and as magical as its melancholy king’).²³² However, since these are the words of the treacherous Arthur Dee, son of the famous alchemist, who is plotting to poison Rudolf, the ‘magic’ character of Prague is thrown into an uncertain light. This is compounded later when Rudolf stands at the window of the Dees’ cottage on Golden Lane, looking out at the city and seeing it ‘wrapped in mystery’ (‘zahalený tajemstvím’), wishing that it could be named Rudolf City (‘aby byla městem Rudolfovým’): throughout this soliloquy, we wonder whether Rudolf’s vision of Prague is as much an illusion as his belief in the elixir of life which the Dees have promised him (p. 39).

²³⁰ See especially the chapters ‘Rudolf and the Occult Arts’ and ‘Prague Mannerism and the Magic Universe’ (Evans, *Rudolf II*, pp. 196-274).

²³¹ See e.g. Franz Grillparzer, *Ein Bruderzwist in Habsburg* (1872); Josef Jiří Kolár, *Magelóna*, (1852); Vítězslav Hálek, *Král Rudolf* (1862); Jaroslav Vrchlický, *Rabínská moudrost* (1886).

²³² Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, *Král Rudolf* (Prague: Thyrus, 1916), p. 11. Future references are given in the text.

Rudolf's interpretation of the city as a space of magic and mystery gradually disintegrates and is replaced by crushing disillusionment. Yet Karásek does not present the magic city purely as an illusion: when Rudolf is finally deposed, he makes a final speech in which he evokes Prague once again:

[...] Nikdy nebyl jsem
Tak králem jako teď, a nikdy neviděl
Jsem Prahy sobě blíž, se všemi věžemi,
Se všemi zahradami, s řekou, s paláci
A s tichem zadumaným v úzkých ulicích
[...]. (p. 70)

[[...]]Never have I been
so much a king as I am now, and never have I seen
Prague so close to me, with all its towers,
With all its gardens, with the river, with the palace
and with the dreaming quiet of its narrow streets [...].]

This could be interpreted as a deluded refusal to accept the truth, depending partly on the staging, but Karásek's text presents it rather as a dignified statement: Rudolf has been forced to see reality, in all its emptiness, rather than relying on dreams and superstition, and now, as he maps out the city once again before him, he sees his own role as king afresh. Karásek implies that just as Rudolf has lost his throne, Prague has lost its sovereignty, being handed over to Rudolf's brother.

However, *Král Rudolf* is less concerned with the frequently lamented events of the seventeenth century than with the relationship between reality and human consciousness. As king, Rudolf reigned over a dream city, shrouding himself in illusion, and in the process of losing his illusions, he gains a painful knowledge of reality. The tensions which Karásek explores between the illusions of the magic city and the dangers of disillusionment remain a key theme in post-1989 Prague literature, in which new configurations of the fantastical city and the real city emerge.

‘Die Golem-Stadt’

The theme of magic Prague is closely associated with the spaces of the ghetto, also referred to as the ‘Judenstadt’.²³³ The Jewish quarter became an ever more dominant literary topos even as it physically vanished from the city – indeed, the fact that by the early twentieth century, it existed mainly as a space of memory, made it particularly suited to fictional explorations which imagined it as a ghostly, dark realm connected with a fantastical topography of Prague.²³⁴

In the gradual process of emancipation and assimilation, many Prague Jews moved into other areas of the city over the course of the nineteenth century, settling around the New Town, Vrchlického Sady (Stadtpark) and the rich suburb of Bubeneč.²³⁵ By the late nineteenth century, the old Jewish quarter had become increasingly overcrowded with poor residents (who were mainly non-Jewish), and the municipal authorities came to view it as a slum which ought to be ‘cleared’. In the controversial slum clearance (‘asanace’) project of the 1890s, most of the area was razed, including one side of Old Town Square.²³⁶ The area was redeveloped in a style inspired by George-Eugène Haussmann’s transformation of Paris. Although only a few remnants can still be visited, such as the Old New Synagogue, the Spanish Synagogue and the old Jewish cemetery, the Jewish quarter not only remained a significant literary topos

²³³ See Georg Escher, ‘Ghetto und Großstadt. Die Prager Judenstadt als literarischer Topos’, in *Die Besetzung des öffentlichen Raumes. Politische Codierungen von Plätzen, Denkmälern und Straßennamen im europäischen Vergleich*, ed. by R. Jaworski and P. Stachel (Berlin: Timme & Frank, 2007), 353–373.

²³⁴ Klaus Schenk, ‘Prag als Schauplatz und Topos literarischer Phantastik’, in Todorow and Weinberg (eds), pp. 133-154 (pp. 141-142).

²³⁵ Tuckerová, p. 28.

²³⁶ Cathleen Giustino discusses the ‘asanace’ in relation to the Prague Jews in *Tearing Down Prague’s Jewish Town: Ghetto Clearance and the Legacy of Middle-Class Ethnic Politics around 1900* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2003).

but is still referred to in contemporary guidebooks as if it were intact: its absence from the real city contrasts with its dominant textual presence.²³⁷

The imagined Jewish quarter plays a central role in several novels by Gustav Meyrink (1868-1932), whose fantastical fiction was extremely popular in its day.²³⁸ In his most famous work, *Der Golem* (1913-14), he imagines the artificial being created by Rabbi Loew as an embodiment of the Jewish quarter. The narrator describes the houses of the Jewish quarter as living beings who lend their life power to the city's inhabitants during the day, before demanding it back with usurious interest – the houses not only resemble caricatures of Jewish moneylenders, but are also intimately connected with the human beings who live in the area, to whom they 'lend' their breath.²³⁹ The inhabitants of the Jewish quarter resemble monstrous automata, and as the narrator connects their uncanny presence with his memory of the Golem legend, he simultaneously insists on the importance of fantastical narratives as a source of 'dunkle Wahrheiten'. Meyrink's exploration of Prague as a 'demonic' city explicitly prioritises ghostly fantasies over realism.²⁴⁰

Meyrink was neither Jewish nor originally from Prague, and his depiction of the ghetto as an unsettling synecdoche of the 'demonic' city can be situated in a tradition of portrayals of Prague Jewish culture by Gentiles: such texts frequently focused on the 'mysterious' and the 'ghostly' and often exoticised the Jews, when they did not

²³⁷ See e.g. Stanislav Škoda and CzechTourism, *Prague* (Prague: CzechTourism, 2013), p. 1: 'Follow the footsteps of Franz Kafka and Prague's famous rabbis to the narrow lanes of the former Jewish ghetto.'

²³⁸ Hence the ironic reference to Prague as 'die Golem-Stadt' in Urzidil's *Prager Triptychon*, p. 202.

²³⁹ Gustav Meyrink, *Der Golem* (Leipzig: Wolff, 1915), p. 32.

²⁴⁰ See his answer to the survey 'Warum haben Sie Prag verlassen?', which refers to the city's demonic magic (Kurt Krolop, 'Hinweis auf eine verschollene Rundfrage: "Warum haben Sie Prag verlassen?"', *Germanistica Pragensia*, 4 (1966), 47-64).

approach them in an outright antisemitic manner.²⁴¹ The narratives of the Prague Jewish quarter were also shaped by other non-Jewish writers of Meyrink's generation, such as Paul Leppin (1878-1945).²⁴² It would be misleading to draw too clear a boundary between writers such as Meyrink and Leppin and the German-speaking Jewish writers of early-twentieth-century Prague. They inhabited shared cultural worlds: Max Brod recalls encountering Meyrink and his 'Gefolgschaft' at the Café Continental in *Streitbares Leben* (though he uses his description of the café's exotic environment to distance himself from his youthful adoration of the author), and a short text by Leppin is included in the special edition of *Selbstwehr* published in 1917 under the title *Das jüdische Prag*.²⁴³

That special edition of *Selbstwehr* reveals the constellation of meanings which 'Jewish Prague' possessed for German-speaking Prague authors in this period. Some contributions engage with the theme of magic Prague: Oskar Wiener's poem 'Der Judenfriedhof', subtitled 'eine Ballade aus Alt-Prag', returns to the topos of the Jewish cemetery and retells a familiar legend in which Rabbi Loew puts a stop to an outbreak of the Plague.²⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Oscar Baum's story, 'Das junge Geschlecht', presents the one-time ghetto as a point of departure for Palestine: when the young Zionist protagonist looks out of the window of her family's flat, she sees not the streets of Prague, but a vision of her possible future home in the Holy Land.²⁴⁵ Hans Natonek's text, 'Ghetto', presents the old ghetto as a location of lost Jewish identity,

²⁴¹ Jindřich Toman traces these traditions in 'Renarrating the Rabbi and His Golem in Czech', in *Path of life. Rabbi Judah Lewa ben Bazalel, ca 1525-1609*, ed. by Alexandr Putík (Prague: Academia, 2009), pp. 315-342, and in 'Making sense of a ruin'.

²⁴² See e.g. Paul Leppin, 'Das Gespenst der Judenstadt', *Der Sturm*, 5, 2 (1914), 13-14.

²⁴³ Max Brod, *Streitbares Leben*, p. 297.

²⁴⁴ Oskar Wiener, 'Der Judenfriedhof', *Das jüdische Prag*, pp. 24-25. On other versions of the legend, see Toman, 'Renarrating the Rabbi', p. 328.

²⁴⁵ Oscar Baum, 'Das junge Geschlecht', *Das jüdische Prag*, pp. 28-32.

left behind by the assimilationist Jews of the previous generation.²⁴⁶ Thus, the uncanny and ghostly character of the Jewish quarter in the narratives of magic Prague only partly overlaps with the roles it played for Jewish authors.

The magic capital of old Europe

Under the influence of Guillaume Apollinaire, the themes of the magic city became associated with the Czech avant-garde. Apollinaire, who shaped the development of Czech modernist poetry, explored the shadowy streets of Prague in the story 'Le passant de Prague' (1902), in which the 'wandering Jew' walks through the city.²⁴⁷ His poem 'Zone' (1913) traces a path across many spaces, including Paris and Prague, and touches on several Prague topoi, referring to the jewels of Saint Vitus' cathedral, the steps up to the Castle, the sound of Czech songs in the pubs and the hands of the clock on the Jewish Town Hall.²⁴⁸ In the Czech context, 'Zone' inspired a whole poetic form known as 'pásmo' (the Czech for 'zone') – long poems which moved between imaginary spaces by a process of free association, transforming everyday details into dream worlds.

The Prague of the Czech avant-garde is a space dominated by dreams, the irrational surrealist logic of 'hazard objectif', and the priority of the imagination over reality. Vítězslav Nezval (1900-1958) created particularly influential images of the city in which the topoi associated with magic Prague are reworked.²⁴⁹ In the collection *Praha s prsty deště* (1936, *Prague with Fingers of Rain*), Nezval constructs montages of the

²⁴⁶ Hans Natonek, 'Ghetto', *Das jüdische Prag*, pp. 36-38.

²⁴⁷ Guillaume Apollinaire, 'Le Passant de Prague', in *Œuvres en prose*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), I, pp. 83-93.

²⁴⁸ Guillaume Apollinaire, 'Zone', in *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. by Marcel Adéma and Michel Décaudin (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), pp. 39-44.

²⁴⁹ See Anja Tippner, *Die permanente Avantgarde?: Surrealismus in Prag* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2009), pp. 151-169.

city, in which the towers of ‘hundred-towered Prague’ become ‘fingers’ – and the ‘fingers of Hradčany’ can be found among the ‘fingers of thunder and lightning’ and the ‘fingers of the last days of Herculaneum and of crumbling Atlantis’.²⁵⁰ References to real locations in the city create the framework of the collection; most of the poems are named after particular locations in Prague, such as parks and squares, and a series of short poems are dedicated to the signs which mark particular houses (‘Klíč’, ‘Key’; ‘Housle’, ‘Violin’). Such signs are transformed into surrealist flights of fancy, but their connection with the physical world of the city remains significant.

Nezval retained his prominence after 1945, partly because of his outspoken support for communism. His ‘poet-magician’, the persona which ‘[raised] the real Prague from the deadness of convention’, soon became, in turn, a conventional fixture in the collective imagination.²⁵¹ One anthology of literary texts about Prague, *Praha našich snů* (1980, ‘Prague of our dreams’), takes a modified quotation from Nezval’s poem ‘Pražský chodec’ as its title, and gives it a socialist slant. The latest texts in the selection come from the end of the Second World War: ‘our’ refers implicitly to the Czech nation, and the title implies that the advent of socialism was the point at which the Czechs gained the Prague of their dreams. Within this socialist teleology, Nezval is accorded particular authority as a ‘Prague poet’: the otherwise chronological order is broken so as to place an extract from his work at the end of the collection, giving him the last word and canonising his surrealist Prague.²⁵²

The tradition of magic Prague is characterised not just by the recurrence of specific motifs, but also by the ambiguous relationship between the fictional city and the real

²⁵⁰ Vítězslav Nezval, ‘Město věží’, in *Dílo*, ed. by Ladislav Fikar, 38 vols (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1953), VI, pp. 93-95.

²⁵¹ Maria Nemcova Banerjee, ‘Nezval’s *Prague with Fingers of Rain*: A Surrealistic Image’, *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 23, 4 (1979), 505-514 (pp. 507-8).

²⁵² *Praha našich snů*, ed. by Květoslava Neradová (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1980). The title quotation is modified from the phrase ‘Praho našich snů’, in which Prague is the addressee rather than the subject.

city. Motifs such as Rudolf II or the Jewish Quarter act as signs that the writer is drawing our attention to the uncertain definitions of ‘real’ and ‘fictional’. Sometimes the emphasis is on elements of the city which refuse to obey the rules of reality, such as the toppling statue of Charles IV in Kafka’s ‘Beschreibung eines Kampfes’, whilst at others, contrasting details of the city become uncoupled from their ‘real’ context and join to form a new, collage-like picture, as in Nezval’s poems.²⁵³

Not every text evoking magic Prague does so in order to provoke thought about the complexities of fiction: tourist guides usually refer to it as part of a stereotypical image of the city, but even here, the language used encourages us to explore the city as a semi-fictional space, ‘a city shrouded in countless myths and legends’.²⁵⁴ Peter Demetz is justified in pointing out the ‘self-congratulatory’ potential of ‘magic Prague’: images of the magic city allow Prague to position itself in a somewhat exotic position just beyond the familiarity of Western Europe, and to co-opt the Jewish past in the process. But the continued significance of such images rests also on the suggestion that a hidden realm can be uncovered beyond the everyday surface of the city, and that fantastical elements are present just beyond reality – a suggestion which has remained central to post-1989 Prague fiction.

Prague in post-1945 literature

In post-1945 Czechoslovakia, the imagined city was mapped out by official interpretations of Czech cultural memory, which existed alongside and interacted with competing narratives that could not necessarily be voiced in public. The role of Prague in the collective imagination was influenced by the efforts of the socialist regime to decide how history was written, how the past was remembered, and which

²⁵³ Franz Kafka, ‘Beschreibung eines Kampfes’, in *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente I*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1993), pp. 54-171 (p. 69).

²⁵⁴ See ‘Prague’ <<http://www.czechtourism.com/a/prague/>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

literary texts were published – efforts which shifted over the course of the period from 1948 to 1989. Publishing policy was characterised by strict control in the 1950s which relaxed somewhat in the 1960s, allowing a much more pluralist view of the Czech past to be communicated by published literature; after the suppression of the Prague Spring, restrictions once again narrowed the possibilities for officially sanctioned literature. In the decades since 1989, researchers have begun examining the immense quantity of documentation in which the workings of the system can be traced, showing the complexities of review and approval through which individual writers passed, and viewing this in the context of earlier systems of censorship which have shaped Czech literary history.²⁵⁵

Because the post-war socialist regime placed particular value on a canon of Czech classics, many of the topoi which featured in the pre-war imagined Prague were reinforced in the socialist era.²⁵⁶ The works of nineteenth-century authors such as Josef Kajetán Tyl and Alois Jirásek were reprinted in large numbers, and their patriotic narratives remained well-known: Libuše continued to feature prominently in the imagined city, as did the memory of the National Revival.²⁵⁷ Other elements of the city's cultural traditions, such as the German-speaking past, played only a very limited role in the official narratives of post-war Prague – although this, too, was a complex aspect of publishing policy, since some left-wing German-speaking writers such as Egon Erwin Kisch continued to be published in post-war Czechoslovakia.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ See e.g. the wide-ranging history of censorship in Czech culture since 1749 provided by the multi-authored *V obecném zájmu* (ed. by Pavel Janáček and others), Jiřina Šmejkalová's investigation of the socialist publishing landscape in *Cold War Books*, and the recent volume documenting the life and work of Bohumil Hrabal, which gives insights into his interactions with the socialist publishing system (Kotyk, Kotyková and Pavlíček (eds)).

²⁵⁶ See Janáček, who notes that 'trashy' literature was pulped in 1949 so that the paper could be used for Jirásek's collected works (*Literární brak*, p. 209).

²⁵⁷ See Hodrová, *citlivé město*, p. 117.

²⁵⁸ See e.g. the anthology *Praha našich snů*, where authors who wrote primarily in German are absent from the contents page, but Egon Erwin Kisch is quoted many times in the margins (e.g. p. 195, p. 196, p. 204, p. 206).

Pomník Stalinovi - the Stalin Monument

Post-war literature established new narratives which were incorporated into the imagined city and threw a different light on many of its older elements. Significant among these were the memory of the Nazi occupation, the choices facing the Czechs between collaboration and dissent, and especially the days of the Prague Uprising (5th-8th of May 1945), which were remembered as an extraordinary time in which everyday life in Prague was replaced with street battles. However, although this was a new topos, it was incorporated smoothly into existing Prague narratives: the battles were presented as the culmination of the conflict between Czechs and Germans, and the beginning of a new era of socialism. The Uprising seemed to resolve Czech-German tensions by heralding the final expulsion of the Germans and the ‘revolution’.²⁵⁹

In focusing on the importance of defeating the occupying Germans, these narratives avoid discussing the Prague Germans (and German-speaking Jews) who had lived in the city long before 1938.²⁶⁰ By portraying the Uprising as a revolution and emphasising the joyful arrival of the Soviets, meanwhile, these texts imply that Czechoslovakia became a socialist republic immediately in 1945, in spirit if not in fact, and thus downplay the political differences which split the country following the war.²⁶¹ In Marie Majerová’s story, ‘Barikády v předměstí’ (1951, ‘Barricades in the

²⁵⁹ See Pynsent, ‘Die Dalimil-Chronik’, p. 202.

²⁶⁰ The expulsion of the Germans does figure in official 1950s literature, but in the context of the borderlands; here, too, the Germans are often portrayed as Nazis or saboteurs rather than long-time inhabitants. Some texts describe Czechs colonising uninhabited landscapes; there is no sign that Germans have ever been present there. See Rajendra Chitnis, “‘Moral Limits’: The Expression and Suppression of Guilt in Czech Post-War Writing About the Borderlands”, *Central Europe*, 10, 1 (2012), 18-54.

²⁶¹ See Agnew, *The Czechs*, pp. 222-232.

suburbs'), the teenage protagonist, Marie, daydreams about the arrival of the Russians:

Kde jsi, ach, kde jsi, Sovětská armádo, kterou všichni tak nedočkavě vyhlížíme [...] Zdali i ty o nás víš, Staline, otče všech utlačených?²⁶²

[Where are you, oh, where are you, Soviet army, which we are all watching for so impatiently? I wonder whether you, too, know about us, Stalin, father of all the oppressed?]

The story presents Marie as an embodiment of the Czech nation, longing to be liberated by the Soviets. It turns out that Stalin has indeed been thinking about 'the children of Prague', and when his army arrives, Marie dances with a Russian tank-driver. The conflict between Germans and Czechs is therefore replaced with a warm Czech-Russian relationship, portrayed both in familial terms (Stalin as the 'father') and in erotic terms (the Russian tank-driver as Marie's dance partner). In these narratives, the 'German' (and bourgeois) element in Prague's past is forcibly removed, and replaced with a 'Russian' (Stalinist) future.

Although Prague became a battlefield in May 1945, it did not suffer great damage in the Second World War, compared with other Central European cities. Most of the subsequent building work by the socialist regime took place in the suburbs, whilst the most prominent change to the centre of the city was the short-lived Stalin Monument, an enormous construction which was intended to be 'a sovereign element in the panoramic pictures of the city'.²⁶³ Destroyed in 1962, it left behind a giant concrete plinth which still draws attention to its absence.

²⁶² Marie Majerová, 'Barikády v předměstí', in *Cesta blesku* (Prague: Svoboda, 1952), pp. 53-71 (p. 68).

²⁶³ Pichova, p. 617.

However, there were also myriad smaller changes which entered collective memory. Milan Kundera described these as a process of ‘forgetting’ in *Kniha smíchu a zapomnění* (1979, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*):

Ulice, v níž se narodila Tamina, se jmenovala Schwerinova. To bylo za války a Praha byla okupována Němci. Její otec se narodil na třídě Černokostelecké. To bylo za Rakousko-Uherska. Matka se k otci nastěhovala na třídu maršála Foche. To bylo po první světové válce. Tamina prožila své dětství na Stalinově třídě a její manžel si ji odvedl do nového domova z třídy Vinohradské. A přitom to byla pořád jedna a táž ulice, jenom jí měnili jméno, vymývali jí mozek, aby zblbla.²⁶⁴

[The street Tamina was born on was called Schwerin. That was during the war, and Prague was occupied by the Germans. Her father was born on Cernokostelecka Avenue – the Avenue of the Black Church. That was during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. When her mother married her father and moved there, it bore the name of Marshal Foch. That was after World War I. Tamina spent her childhood on Stalin Avenue, and when her husband came to take her away, he went to Vinohrady – that is, Vineyards – Avenue. And all the time it was the same street; they just kept changing its name, they brainwashed it, so it would turn stupid.]²⁶⁵

Kundera’s portrayal of the changing street names as a process of ‘brainwashing’ rejects the official socialist teleology, which traced the progress of the Czech people as they freed themselves from the Habsburg empire, from capitalism and from fascism, until they could finally create the Prague of their ‘dreams’. Instead, he imagines layer after layer of forgetting, culminating in the era of ‘normalisation’ in the 1970s, when even the Stalin Monument had been razed. He personifies the street on which his protagonist, Tamina, was born, presenting it as the passive victim of the regime, unable to fight against ‘her’ growing stupidity: ‘ulice’ (‘street’) is grammatically feminine, so the initial use of feminine pronouns to refer to it is nothing unexpected, but the changing of ‘her’ name, the manipulation of ‘her’ brain and the process of making ‘her’ stupid cast the street as a woman. This personification

²⁶⁴ Milan Kundera, *Kniha smíchu a zapomnění* (Toronto: Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1981), p. 168.

²⁶⁵ Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. by Michael Henry Heim (New York: Knopf, 1980) p. 158. Translation altered.

is at once startling and familiar: it returns to a long tradition in which the grammatically feminine ‘Přaha’ is personified as a mother and a lover.²⁶⁶ The same passage goes on to describe the proliferating statues of Lenin which have replaced all the monuments previously destroyed, referring to them as the ‘melancholy flowers of forgetting’ (‘melancholické květy zapomnění’): for Kundera, the 1970s in Czechoslovakia were characterised by such stagnation that rather than creating new symbols, people made thousands of copies of an old one.

Written in exile, Kundera’s portrayal of socialist Prague exemplifies the way in which some of the texts which rebelled against the official narratives of the city themselves took on almost ‘official’ legitimacy in discourses critical of the socialist regime: particularly in Western Europe, his novels have defined socialist Prague in the collective imagination.²⁶⁷ The claim at the start of *Knihy smíchu a zapomnění* that ‘the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting’ is quoted so often that the binary opposition of ‘memory’ and ‘forgetting’ has become key to the way in which the socialist regime is imagined. In this dichotomy, memory has a high moral value and is associated with dissidence and bravery, whilst forgetting is associated with totalitarianism. This distracts from the fact that the Prague of this era was a complex web of differing narratives about the past. Andrew Webber argues with regard to Berlin that cultural constructions of space involve both ‘official’ narratives of nation, regime and religion, and the ‘more shifting topographies’ which call these into question – but in fact, these two approaches to mapping the city are often

²⁶⁶ See Wechsberg, p. 1: ‘Prague is a feminine city. Not a glamorous young woman, like Paris, but *matička* (little mother) to her troubadours’. Georg Escher has traced the development of this tradition (‘Prager femmes fatales: Stadt, Geschlecht, Identität’, in *Zentren, Peripherien und kollektive Identitäten in Österreich-Ungarn*, Endre Hárs and others (eds) (Tübingen: Francke, 2006), pp. 175-190).

²⁶⁷ On Kundera’s image and self-image as a novelist, see Rajendra Chitnis, ‘Milan Kundera (1929–): The idea of the novel’, in *The Cambridge Companion to European Novelists*, ed. by Michael Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 410-427 (pp. 423-424).

intertwined and intersect within the collective imagination.²⁶⁸ The narratives which the regime attempted to impose – which were, for Kundera, the stagnant narratives of forgetting – were often formed from preexisting topoi and themes and therefore had content of their own. They interacted with alternative strands of memory and imagination which, though not imposed by the regime, cannot all be placed in the single category of a ‘struggle’ against ‘power’.

‘My žijeme v Praze’ - ‘we live in Prague’

In order to trace the ways in which Prague was imagined in the years of the socialist regime without relying on simple binaries of oppression and dissidence, it would be necessary to take the full breadth of Czech literature of this period into account, and map out how Prague figured not only in the shifting context of officially published fiction, but also in the work of the overlapping constellations of dissident, exile and underground writers.²⁶⁹ The later chapters of this thesis will pick up on specific thematic continuities and contrasts between post-1989 Prague literature and the preceding decades. Here, I will focus on a strand of unofficial culture which remains particularly relevant to the post-1989 imagined city: the literary underground.

The Prague underground is often imagined as being separate from Czech society as a whole, or as existing in parallel to society. The poet and art critic Ivan Martin Jirous (1944-2011), whose writings came to be regarded as seminal texts of the 1970s underground, defined the community as a ‘spiritual ghetto’ (‘duchovní ghetto’).²⁷⁰

Underground writers adopted a different stance both from sanctioned authors and

²⁶⁸ Webber, p. 2. He initially suggests that the two are separate, but his later arguments show that they combine.

²⁶⁹ Agata Anna Lisiak argues reductively that Prague should be approached as a ‘(post)colonial space’, shaped by interactions between the Soviet colonisers and the Czech colonised, introducing a further binary into discussions of the imagined city (*Urban Cultures in (Post)Colonial Central Europe* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2010)).

²⁷⁰ Jirous, ‘Zpráva’, p. 195. See also Tuckerová, p. 240.

from dissidents, at least in theory: their role was not defined by the moral obligation either to uphold the regime or to protest against it, but by their determination to remain independent of the authorities.²⁷¹ In his influential ‘Zpráva o třetím hudebním obrození’ (1975, ‘Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival’), Jirous contrasts ‘the underground here’ with its counterpart in ‘the West’, where it has to bring about the destruction of the establishment or risk being subsumed by mainstream culture.²⁷² He emphasises that participating in the Czech underground means resisting the temptations of the establishment and creating a ‘second culture’ which is ‘completely independent’ of the values, communication channels and systems of societal recognition which are upheld by the socialist regime.²⁷³

Jirous’ argument that it is necessary to resist the temptations of the establishment has a strong spiritual element, which is reflected in many underground images of Prague. In their song *Magické noci*, the Plastic People of the Universe sing, ‘My žijeme v Praze to je tam/kde se jednou zjeví Duch sám’ (‘We live in Prague, that’s where/the Spirit itself will appear one day’).²⁷⁴ The song evokes the themes of ‘magic Prague’ and imagines the city as a subversive space, inhabited by the ambiguous ‘we’, a community which stretches to encompass the song’s audience. *Magické noci* is characteristic of the 1970s underground: it underlines a collective identity which took on tribal implications rather than being associated with a political program. The reference to the ‘Duch’ (‘Spirit’) suggests that Prague has spiritual significance: the song gestures towards the tradition of ‘magic Prague’ whilst simultaneously constructing its own apparently transcendental mythology.

²⁷¹ Martin Pilař, *Underground* (Brno: Host, 1999), pp. 25-28.

²⁷² Jirous, ‘Zpráva’, p. 197.

²⁷³ ‘Cílem undergroundu u nás je vytvoření druhé kultury [...], která bude naprosto nezávislá na oficiálních komunikačních kanálech a společenském ocenění a hierarchii hodnot, jak jimi vládne establishment’ (Jirous, ‘Zpráva’, p. 197). See also Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 128.

²⁷⁴ Jirous was artistic director of the band. The lyrics were written by Egon Bondy.

Two writers were especially influential in shaping the literary image of ‘underground Prague’: Egon Bondy (1930-2007) and Bohumil Hrabal (1914-1997). Both were part of the generation of post-war authors who were at first strongly influenced by the pre-war avant-garde, but began to depart from the dreamworlds of Nezval and Seifert, constructing much more brutal montages of everyday details.²⁷⁵ Bondy’s poetry provided the lyrics for many songs by the Plastic People of the Universe, and his novel *Invalidní sourozenci* (1974 in samizdat, ‘Invalid Siblings’) took on the status, alongside Jirous’ articles, of a ‘manifesto’ of the underground.²⁷⁶

In *Invalidní sourozenci*, the community of ‘invalids’ live a joyful, yet precarious life on the margins of a dystopian society which is threatened by a mysterious apocalypse, inhabiting the spaces of the urban periphery in an entirely different manner from the conformist majority.²⁷⁷ The term ‘invalids’ alludes to the fact that some members of the Prague underground succeeded in avoiding employment by claiming disability and going into early retirement. The novel is set far in the future, and irreverently anticipates the significance of the underground in collective memory: Bondy mythologises himself, as an ‘encouragement to the rest of the underground to do the same’.²⁷⁸

Bondy portrays a world which seems to have shrunk to encompass just two very similar cities surrounded by a shrinking island of countryside, gradually being consumed by the rising waters of the sea. To some extent, this underlines the close

²⁷⁵ See the references to the inadequacy of surrealism in Bondy’s programmatic poem cycle, ‘Totální realismus’ (1950) in *Básnické dílo*, ed. by Martin Machovec, 9 vols (Prague: Pražská imaginace, 1992), II, pp. 5-18.

²⁷⁶ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, pp. 124-127.

²⁷⁷ See Jonathan Bolton, ‘Desert Europa and the Sea of Ruins: The Post-Apocalyptic Imagination in Egon Bondy’s *Afghanistan*’, in Gafijczuk and Sayer (eds), pp. 205-226.

²⁷⁸ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 126.

connections between the underground and the city.²⁷⁹ However, the novel also expresses the longing for a space beyond the city: the siblings of the title build a home as far from the city as possible, a *locus amoenus* with cannabis growing on the roof, and views of the distant city painted on the outside of the walls.²⁸⁰ The Czech cultural underground was indeed concentrated particularly in Prague, but the tradition of the rural idyll played a key role in its disruptive response to the regime.

The career of Bohumil Hrabal illustrates the complex relationship between the underground and the realm of official publishing in socialist Czechoslovakia. Hrabal could not publish his work in the 1950s; after a brief interlude in the 1960s, he was again excluded from official publication after 1968. In 1975, he gave an interview to the communist magazine *Tvorba* in which he suggested that he supported the regime, allowing some of his work to appear.²⁸¹ It is unlikely that Hrabal was the author of all the words attributed to him in the interview, but even if it was partly written by the editors of *Tvorba*, it is still an indication of his wish to negotiate with the regime in order to publish his work.²⁸²

Underground artists responded by burning Hrabal's books on Kampa, in the centre of Prague, and Jirous later criticised Hrabal for failing to see that 'secret fame' ('tajná sláva') was more important than printed books.²⁸³ Precisely this question of 'secret

²⁷⁹ Kliems, *Der Underground*, p. 66.

²⁸⁰ Egon Bondy, *Invalidní sourozenci* (Bratislava: Archa, 1991), pp. 110-112.

²⁸¹ 'Rozhovor s Bohumilem Hrabalem', *Tvorba*, LUK supplement 2 (8.1.1975), 13. The interview was unsigned. It was printed on the same page as a short text by Hrabal, 'Rukověť pábitelské učně'. See Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, pp. 220-223, and Kotyk, Kotyková and Pavlíček (eds), p. 155.

²⁸² The probable authors of the interview are the poets Karel Sýs and Jaromír Pelc, although Sýs has claimed that the interview (which he calls 'excellent') was conducted by Jiří Hájek, the editor-in-chief of *Tvorba*. See Karel Sýs, 'Společník s vyběračnou pamětí', *Obrys-Kmen*, 6 (10.2.2006), <<http://www.obrys-kmen.cz/index.php?rok=2006&cis=06&cl=06>> [accessed 10.6.2016]. Susanne Roth notes that the text does not seem authentic in comparison with other interviews by Hrabal (Susanne Rothová, *Hlučná samota a hořké štěstí Bohumila Hrabala* (Prague: Pražská imaginace, 1993), pp. 163-167).

²⁸³ Ivan Martin Jirous, 'Magor Autodafé', *Revolver Revue*, 41 (1999), 223-224. Originally written in 1980. Quoted in Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, p. 220.

fame', so obvious to Jirous, exemplifies the complex distinctions between oppositional stances. The dissident writer Ludvík Vaculík saw Hrabal's return to publishing as a victory for the opposition, and a sign that the regime was being put under pressure by samizdat publishing and thus destabilised.²⁸⁴ Underground writers such as Jirous were not interested in destabilising the regime but in attempting to carve out spaces beyond its reaches.

Throughout the socialist period, Hrabal existed on the shifting boundaries of tolerance and censorship, remaining close friends with many of his 'underground' associates, but also submitting to the difficult process of negotiation with the regime, as each of his texts was passed back and forth between reviewers, who requested alterations. His influence on the imagined city has been correspondingly complex, encompassing widely different readings of his work.

Hrabal's Prague is commonly imagined as a space in which beauty can be found in the most everyday details, and Hrabal himself is remembered sitting in pubs such as the Golden Tiger (*U zlatého tygra*), transcribing the stories told spontaneously by 'ordinary people', which remain intact and authentic in his texts. This image was partly shaped by the way in which his work was presented to the public by official publishers in the 1970s and 1980s, but was also influenced by Hrabal's own seemingly naive style, and by the film versions of his works, some of which are much less provocative than the original texts.

This 'harmless' version of Hrabal presents his writings as spontaneous expressions of 'Czechness' itself, ignoring their often highly allusive experimentation with notions of authenticity, as well as their tendency to focus on the isolation of the human subject. In the story 'Kafkárna' (1965), the protagonist works at a toyshop in the former

²⁸⁴ Šmejkalová, *Cold War Books*, p. 222.

Jewish quarter.²⁸⁵ As he wanders the city, he moves from one fragile identity to another: at the synagogue, he is mistaken for an Eastern European Jew, and in the pub, he is mistaken for a baker. His surname, Kafka, is another of these transitory identities – on the one hand, nothing but a slightly comical echo of a more famous predecessor, but on the other, a significant connection with the city’s literary heritage. At the end of the story, the protagonist makes an impassioned speech about freedom to a policeman on Old Town Square; the policeman does not dignify his outburst with a serious response, but instead threatens him with a fine for being disorderly, described using the colloquial diminutive ‘rámusenka’.²⁸⁶ Scenes such as these can be interpreted as gentle comedy, but their underlying emphasis is on the lack of individual freedom under socialism.

In 1989, the Czech publishing landscape began to undergo fundamental changes: the system of censorship was dismantled, ‘exile’ publishing lost its significance as a route for authors to circumvent the authorities, many dissident writers took on prominent roles in the new establishment, and underground publications were able to appear openly. All the same, in the post-1989 imagined Prague, the influences of pre-1989 literature are visible everywhere, whilst the collapse of socialism in 1989 is often only present by implication.²⁸⁷ Socialist ideology, forms of dissidence and the underground continue to play a role as the protagonists seek to orientate themselves in the city, raising the question of how these political and aesthetic stances have shifted in

²⁸⁵ The title combines the name Kafka with a suffix used in standard Czech to refer to a place or a business (e.g. ‘pekárna’ meaning bakery); colloquially, the suffix refers to places where bad quality products are created, or people behave badly. Sometimes regarded as Hrabal’s neologism, the word ‘kafkárna’ was used by avant-garde artists in the 1930s and 1940s (see Anna Černá, ‘Jazykové zákampí: kafkárna’, *Literární noviny*, 31.5.2014 <<http://www.literarky.cz/offline/200-jazykove-zakampi/17631-jazykove-zakampi-kafkarna>> [accessed 10.6.2016]). It has since passed into general use, referring to absurdity and absurd systems.

²⁸⁶ Bohumil Hrabal, ‘Kafkárna’, in *Chcete vidět zlatou Prahu?* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1989), pp. 135-146 (p.146).

²⁸⁷ See Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 22, Peter Zusi, ‘History’s Loose Ends: Imagining the Velvet Revolution’, in Gafijczuk and Sayer (eds), pp. 227-245 (p. 237), and Tim Beasley-Murray, ‘Ruins and Representations of 1989: Exception, Normality, Revolution’, in Gafijczuk and Sayer (eds), pp. 16-39.

significance since 1989, and how continuity and discontinuity intersect in the imagined city.

II

Seeking the other Prague

Daniela Hodrová's *Perunův den* (1994) and Michal Ajvaz's 'Bílí mravenci' (1997)



A drawing of the world as a city, from the 1623 manuscript of Jan Amos Komenský's *Labyrint světa a raj srdce* (*The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*) (public domain).

In contemporary Czech and Czech-German literature, Prague is frequently conceptualised as two distinct cities: the real city and the 'other' city.²⁸⁸ The topography of the real city relates closely to that of post-1989 Prague, to the extent that we would often be able to follow the movements of the protagonists on a map. By

²⁸⁸ See Hodrová, *citlivé město*, p. 119.

referring to existing locations in Prague, authors suggest that in the real city, language is referential, and that straight-forward continuities exist between the Prague depicted in the text and the Prague which one can visit. The real city is governed by laws of rationality and causality which seem natural to the reader: events which take place there are within the realm of the probable and the explicable.²⁸⁹ The protagonists try to navigate their way around the real city in order to discover the other city which lies beyond.

Unlike the real city, the other Prague is not bounded by the conventions of realism. Its spaces correspond with those of the real city, and could be mapped onto them, but in the realm of the other city, allegorical meaning takes precedence over referentiality, and the logic of dreams and visions replaces the logic of everyday causality.²⁹⁰ Improbable events take place which cannot be explained according to natural laws, but which have symbolic resonance. The search for the other Prague is a complex and uncertain process of interpretation: the protagonists look for signs around them which might guide them towards an understanding of the hidden city. Anything and anyone in the real Prague might be a sign of the other city, and the protagonists' attempts to interpret these signs lead them from one realm to the other. As readers, we are involved in a search for meaning in the text, which has parallels with the process of seeking the other city. The two versions of the city serve not only to suggest ways in which Prague itself can be reshaped in the minds of those who inhabit it, but also to explore the process of reading fiction.

²⁸⁹ See Gerhard Hoffmann, 'The Fantastic in Fiction: Its "Reality" Status, its Historical Development and its Transformation in Postmodern Narration', *REAL (Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature)*, 1 (1982), 267-364, and Magdalena Maczynska, 'This Monstrous City: Urban Visionary Satire in the Fiction of Martin Amis, Will Self, China Miéville, and Maggie Gee', *Contemporary Literature*, 51, 1 (2010), 58-86.

²⁹⁰ In its departure from realism, the other city draws on the traditions of surrealism. See André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)', in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), pp. 1-48, particularly his criticisms of the 'reign of logic' (p. 9) and his wish to resolve 'dream and reality [...] into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*'.

In portraying the search for a hidden city, contemporary Czech and Czech-German authors are working with a narrative structure which has been important to Czech literature since at least the Baroque period, when Jan Amos Komenský (also known as Comenius) published the highly influential allegorical text *Labyrint světa a ráj srdce* (1631, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*).²⁹¹ Komenský's allegory describes the spiritual progress of its narrator as he rejects the sinful world and recognises Christ. This transformation is represented in strikingly spatial terms: the focus of the narrative is on the ability of the protagonist to interpret correctly the people and objects he encounters in the real world, and on his attempts to cross from one world to the other. The text hinges on the contrast between the 'labyrinth of the world' and the 'paradise of the heart'. These two spaces are diametrically opposed to one another in spiritual terms, but are not separated by physical distance: they are overlaid on one another. Leaving the labyrinth to enter the paradise requires the protagonist to interpret the illusions of the world correctly and understand the voice of God.

Komenský represents the world as a walled city with labyrinthine streets, outside of which nothing appears to exist.²⁹² The narrator enters the city with worldly concerns in mind: he hopes to find a profession for himself (p. 275). He is accompanied by two self-professed guides, who try to deceive and delude him at every turn: thus he faces the constant challenge of interpreting the world correctly for himself. He walks from one street to the next, discovering the worst aspects of human nature and concluding that all professions are based on greed, ignorance, aggression and hypocrisy.

²⁹¹ Chitnis underlines the connections between Komenský and Hodrová (*Literature*, pp. 95-96).

²⁹² Jan Amos Komenský, 'Labyrint světa a ráj srdce', in *Dílo Jana Amose Komenského*, ed. by Milan Kopecký, 23 vols (Prague: Academia, 1978), III, pp. 267-397 (p. 276 and p. 279). Future references are given in the text.

At last, when the narrator has been driven to despair, he visits the place at the edge of the city where the souls of the dead are expelled from the world, and here the voice of God tells him to ‘return’; he understands that this means ‘returning’ to his own heart (p. 366). After a dialogue with Christ, he retraces his steps through the city to a church which he had previously seen only as the meeting place of hypocritical Christians, and is able to discover the ‘invisible church’ by passing through a curtain (p. 374). Entering the invisible church means that he continues to live in the same city, but in a parallel, Christian society. Thus Komenský portrays two cities which apparently occupy the same physical space, and demonstrates that the protagonist can only move from one to the other if he interprets the labyrinth of the world correctly, and recognises that it is governed by ‘Dame Fortune’ and ‘Queen Vanity’. In contemporary Prague literature, whilst Komenský’s religious message is generally absent, the fundamental importance of interpretation remains, as does the structure of the two worlds.²⁹³

In Komenský’s construction of the labyrinth and the paradise, the physical movement of the narrator from place to place draws attention to the relationship between the two spaces and to the challenges he has to complete in order to move between them. The narrator takes a circuitous path and is unaware of his true destination until he has almost reached it. Led by his guides, he visits each profession in order of status, before entering the Castle of Fortune, where he witnesses the debauched behaviour of the rich, and then the Palace of Queen Vanity, ruler of the world. However, the hierarchy of worldly status which initially defines his path holds no meaning for his spiritual progress: each place he visits is more spiritually corrupt than the last (pp. 350-351). Rather than taking a linear path, he has to cross and recross the enclosed space of the city in order to enter the realm of the invisible church.

²⁹³ The structure of the two realms mirrors the structure of allegory itself, which has been described as ‘the appearance of two things in the same image, in the same “space” at the same time’ (Brenda Machosky, *Structures of Appearing: Allegory and the Work of Literature* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 1).

The movement of the protagonist around the city can therefore be described best as wandering, as opposed to the purposeful movement which would be implied by terms such as ‘journey’ or ‘quest’.²⁹⁴ Komenský uses a rich selection of expressions to refer to the movements of his narrator, including ‘blouzení’ and ‘bloudit’ (‘straying’, ‘wandering’, ‘getting lost’), ‘cest[y] divn[é]’ (‘strange paths’), ‘okolí a zápolí’ (‘byways and winding ways’), ‘okliky’ (‘detours’), and ‘toula[t]’ (‘to roam’, pp. 369-373). The full title of the text mentions ‘matení a motání, kolotání a lopotování’ (‘confusion and blundering, floundering and toil’, p. 267). Komenský employs such words alongside references to pilgrimage (p. 273; p. 275). He associates wandering with the state of being in the world without yet understanding God – but it is inseparable from the search for salvation, as is shown when Christ explains that he directed the narrator’s wanderings in order to draw him closer (p. 369). The same selection of terms used by Komenský could be applied to the circuitous paths which the protagonists of contemporary Czech and Czech-German literature take through the city.

Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers have explored Prague as a space for wandering and searching. Thus, Jakub Arbes’ story ‘Svatý Xaverius’ (1873, ‘Saint Xavier’) is concerned with a false ‘reading’ of the city, as the narrator’s troubled

²⁹⁴ The treatment of space in Komenský’s text contrasts with the linear movement described by John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*: there, Christian leaves the City of Destruction and finally enters the Celestial City, but the focus is on the difficulty of the journey and the distance covered. The tradition of representing the realm of God as a city reaches back to Augustine (Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *The city of God*, trans. by Marcus Dods, J. J. Shaw and R. S. Pine-Coffin (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990)), and to certain passages in the Bible (e.g. Hebrews 13.14, ‘For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come’). Dmitry Číževsky refers to Augustine as one of Komenský’s many sources in ‘Comenius’ Labyrinth of the World: Its Themes and their sources’, *Harvard Slavic Studies*, 1 (1953), 83-135 (p. 132). On the connections between Plato, Augustine and Bunyan in this context, see Joseph E. Baker, “‘Vanity Fair’ and The Celestial City”, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 10, 2 (1955), 89-98. On the differences between Bunyan and Komenský, see Howard Louthan and Andrea Sterk, ‘Introduction’, in Johann Amos Comenius, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, trans. by Howard Louthan and Andrea Sterk (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), pp. 7-54 (p. 29 and p. 43).

friend attempts to use a painting to trace a path across Prague and discover treasure.²⁹⁵ He believes that he has succeeded in finding points on the painting which join up to create a map of the city. Like Komenský's narrator, he has to find his way to a hidden point in the city, but his meticulous calculations lead him only to worthless stones, and thus he fails to break through the deceptive surface of reality to reach the realm beyond.

In Max Brod's *Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen* (1909), the protagonist cannot perceive the beauty and complexity of Prague until he meets the Czech servant girl of the title, who is strongly associated with nature and folk traditions.²⁹⁶ When she dies, he is again excluded from an understanding of the city. Similarly, the protagonist of Vilém Mrštík's *Santa Lucia* (1893) wanders the city, wondering how to gain entry to it, despite the fact that he is seemingly already within it: he is obsessed by the idea that the 'true' city lies beyond his everyday reality, and as in Brod's novel, the prospect of entering the other city is associated with the elusive figure of a woman.²⁹⁷

Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen also illustrates the fact that in the early twentieth century, the suggestion that Prague was composed of 'two cities' was very often related to the different cultural groups who lived there: Czech-speaking and German-speaking, non-Jewish and Jewish. This 'two-city' model, with its changing cultural and political associations, interacted in literature with the spiritual structure used by Komenský. The image of Prague as a 'city of three peoples' is narrowed down to a relationship between two cultures, either by ignoring one group or by regarding German-speakers as synonymous with Jews. In Brod's novel, the mysterious realm

²⁹⁵ Jakub Arbes, 'Svatý Xaverius', in *Romaneta* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1975), pp. 7-109.

²⁹⁶ Brod, Max, *Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen* (Berlin: Juncker, [1909]). See Robertson, 'Zum deutschen Slawenbild', pp. 137-138, and Spector, pp. 174-177.

²⁹⁷ Tensions between 'rural tradition' and 'urban modernity' are also at play here. See Rajendra Chitnis, 'Putting *Granny* in a Home: Czech Writers and the Village in Kafka's Lifetime', in *Kafka, Prag und der Erste Weltkrieg*, ed. by Manfred Engel and Ritchie Robertson (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012), pp. 107-26 (p. 114).

beyond the surface of the city's topography is synonymous with Czechness and femininity, with which the Viennese German-speaking protagonist is confronted; explicitly Jewish characters are absent.²⁹⁸ However, in other cases, the hidden realm is that of the German-speaking Jews, whom some authors associate with exotic secrets: this can be seen in Gustav Meyrink's portrayal of the Prague ghetto in *Der Golem*, and in Angelo Maria Ripellino's descriptions of the 'black synagogues, the [...] crooked alleys of the *Judenstadt*'.²⁹⁹ These culturally charged images of either Czech-speaking Prague or Jewish Prague as the 'other city' are intertwined with the tradition of the other city as a realm of symbolic meaning beyond everyday reality.

In the work of authors such as Brod, Mrštík and Meyrink, entry into the other city is self-reflexive: its spaces emerge within the subjective perceptions, dreams and memories of the protagonists. This self-reflexive dynamic can already be seen in Komenský's work: the narrator has to enter his own heart in order to discover the way into the invisible church. In early twentieth-century novels, however, the search for the other city takes place without Komenský's faith in the power of God, and thus the process of seeking the other city is fraught with uncertainty.³⁰⁰ Where Komenský's text is motivated by the didactic desire to show the reader the true path, in these later novels, the other city is only temporarily accessible, often when the protagonist is in an altered state caused by love, dreams, or mental disturbance.

In the context of early twentieth-century Prague literature, the tradition of the vain search for the other city culminates in Franz Kafka's *Das Schloss* (1926). Although Kafka does not portray Prague in this novel, his depiction of K.'s struggle to enter the

²⁹⁸ On 'femininity' as an aspect of the Czech stereotype in Prague German fiction, see Ritchie Robertson, 'National Stereotypes' (particularly pp. 131-132), and Tim Beasley-Murray, 'German-language Culture and the Slav Stranger Within', *Central Europe*, 4, 2 (2006), 131-145.

²⁹⁹ Ripellino, p. 28. See also the influential description of the ghetto in Janouch, p. 116.

³⁰⁰ Alfred Thomas takes a different view, arguing that Komenský does not see truth as absolute (*The Labyrinth of the Word: Truth and Representation in Czech Literature* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), p. 69).

castle has taken on a key role in shaping more recent Prague literature.³⁰¹ *Das Schloss* is set in a village, not a city, but has striking similarities to Komenský's allegory. Like Komenský's narrator, K. is already at the location which he knows to be his destination, but he has to wander the confusing streets of the village, trying to find his way into the other reality which he imagines to be located inside the castle.³⁰² His movements are confined to the small area of the village. If other spaces exist, then only to emphasise the fact that K. is a foreigner who has travelled a long way to reach the castle.³⁰³ Kafka does not suggest that the village is encircled by a visible boundary, and yet, leaving is not presented as a viable option. Frieda does suggest twice that the two of them could 'emigrate' ('auswandern'), apparently equating their departure from the village with a journey across national borders.³⁰⁴ However, K. responds paradoxically, 'Was hätte mich denn in dieses öde Land locken können, als das Verlangen hier zu bleiben'.³⁰⁵ The contorted logic of this response mirrors the contortions of K.'s path around the village.³⁰⁶ He struggles to comprehend his

³⁰¹Despite its setting in a nameless village, some critics argue that *Das Schloss* is a portrayal of Prague. See e.g. Josef Kroutvor, 'Kafkas Stadt? Prag im Zyklus der toten Städte', in *Kafka und Prag: Colloquium im Goethe-Institut Prag, 24. - 27. November 1992*, ed. by Kurt Krolop and Hans Dieter Zimmermann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), pp. 83-86; Lydie Parisse, 'Prague présente-absente dans Das Schloss de Kafka', in *Les mondes germaniques et les "villes-mirages" de la fin du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, ed. by Aurélie Choné and Catherine Repussard (Strasbourg: Université du Strasbourg, Service des Publications et Périodiques, 2010), pp. 89-104; Frynta, pp. 141-142; Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, p. 99.

³⁰²On the connections between Komenský and Kafka, see Malcolm Pasley, 'Zur Entstehungsgeschichte von Franz Kafkas Schloß-Bild', in Goldstücker and Terray (eds), pp. 241-251 (pp. 243-244); Hans Dieter Zimmermann, 'Das Labyrinth der Welt: Kafka und Comenius', in Ehlers and others (eds) (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 2000), pp. 309-319; Tibor Komlovszki, 'Kafkas Schloss und das Fortuna-Schloss des Comenius', *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 10 (1968), 83-93. See also František Kautman, 'Franz Kafka und die tschechische Literatur', in Goldstücker, Kautman and Reimann (eds), pp. 44-77 (pp. 56-58), and Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, pp. 92-94.

³⁰³ On the 'radical unrelatedness' of the village and the world outside, see John Winkelman, 'An Interpretation of Kafka's "Das Schloss"', *Monatshefte*, 64, 2 (1972), 115-131 (pp. 121-123).

³⁰⁴ Franz Kafka, *Das Schloss*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1982), p. 148 and p. 215.

³⁰⁵ Kafka, *Das Schloss*, p. 215.

³⁰⁶ On space, paths and teleology in *Das Schloss*, see the essays in "*Schloss*"-*Topographien: Lektüren zu Kafkas Romanfragment*, ed. by Malte Kleinwort and Joseph Vogl (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), particularly Bettine Menke's 'Kafkas Labyrinth' (pp. 32-65).

surroundings and interpret the behaviour of the people he encounters.³⁰⁷ The boundary between the village and the castle seems to be both imperceptible and insuperable, and thus K. is always both outside and inside the castle, wandering along a tortuous path in search of a place which he has already entered.³⁰⁸

The works of Arbes, Brod, Mrštík, Meyrink and Kafka present a fundamental contrast to Komenský's allegory: whilst Komenský's narrator triumphantly enters the paradise of the heart and remains there, the protagonists of these later texts either enter the other city temporarily and in altered mental states, or fail to do so at all. Later writers retain a strong interest in exploring the individual's desire to discover meaning beyond reality, but their texts are shaped by a powerful scepticism towards narrative teleology. As the protagonists of these texts wander the enclosed space of the city (or the village, in Kafka's case), they are troubled by the fact that they do not seem to be progressing towards their goal: tension arises between the purposeful, linear movement for which they strive, and the winding, repetitive paths which they really take.

The socialist realist literature of the 1950s favoured an insistently teleological narrative model which reinstated the clearly demarcated realms found in Komenský's work, but gave them a new ideological resonance: protagonists who interpreted the ills of capitalism correctly and displayed the right socialist virtues succeeded in entering a 'new world'. Socialist realist novels can often be read as secular versions of the Christian pilgrim's search for the realm of God: rather than being transformed spiritually, the protagonists become 'new people' who work to build a socialist world. For instance, Antonín Zápotocký's *Rozbřesk* (1956, 'Day break') depicts the struggle of a young woman to escape bourgeois constraints and enter the Czech workers'

³⁰⁷ See the discussion of perception and disorientation in Emily Troscianko, 'Kafkaesque worlds in real time', *Language and Literature*, 19, 2 (2010), 151-171 (pp. 156-157 and pp. 160-161).

³⁰⁸ See Daniela Hodrová, *Román zasvěcení* (Jinočany: H&H, 1993), p. 121.

movement in its early days. Tereza wanders among the horrors of capitalist Prague, which – not unlike Komenský’s labyrinth of the world – is portrayed as a den of iniquity and sexual exploitation.³⁰⁹ After being educated by one of the leaders of the first Czech socialists, Tereza is able to enter the ranks of those who understand the approaching socialist utopia. Thus, post-war novels guaranteed salvation to those who correctly identified and interpreted the ills of capitalism.

However, socialist realism did not dominate Czech literature for long, and by the late 1950s, authors had begun to react against its depictions of the ‘paradise of communism’, and to create narrative prose which avoided any suggestion of two contrasting realms. The 1960s saw a wave of thematic and formal experimentation: authors discussed aspects of recent history which had previously been surrounded by taboos, such as the Holocaust and the expulsion of the Germans, as well as expressing criticisms of the regime and exploring the possibilities of the literary text to open up new spaces for author and reader to confront their own identities. Many of the most influential writers of this period turn their attention to rural and small-town settings, guided particularly by their wish to explore their own childhoods and those of their protagonists, in the context of socialist realist idealisation of Czech folklore, rural community values, and the heroic role of Czech peasants as partisans. Thus, Josef Škvorecký’s irreverent treatment of Czech heroism, *Zbabělci* (1958, *The Cowards*), Ludvík Vaculík’s exploration of memory and identity, *Sekyra* (1966, *The Axe*), and Milan Kundera’s satirical novel *Žert* (1967, *The Joke*), each find different ways to debunk the myths surrounding the building of socialism in the Czechoslovak countryside. The relative lack of significant ‘Prague prose’ in the 1960s can also be traced to the fact that many writers of the time avoided making use of specific real-world settings. Texts such as Věra Linhartová’s short story ‘Skladatelé’ (1964) are set

³⁰⁹ See e.g. the hellish depiction of the laundry (Antonín Zápotocký, *Rozbřesk* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1984), p. 110).

in shadowy urban spaces, where the connections between signs and meaning are disrupted.³¹⁰

When 1960s narrative prose does explore Prague, it is not concerned with entry into Komenský's paradise: the literature of the 1960s delights in the wanderings of its protagonists, but does not suggest that the process of interpreting the world around us can lead us into another realm. In Bohumil Hrabal's short story 'Legenda o krásné Julince' (1968, 'The Legend of Beautiful Julinka'), Prague does figure as a city with a hidden mystery at its centre, but the discovery of this mystery leads the narrator to embrace the sensual joys of the physical world and seek fragmentary reminders of transcendental beauty in the everyday, rather than enter another realm.³¹¹

The tightening of censorship after 1968 reduced the possibilities of literary experimentation, causing some writers to emigrate, whilst others published for a limited audience in *samizdat* or tried to modify their approach to allow publication – but these upheavals were not accompanied by a return to the utopian writing of the 1950s. The literature of the 1970s reacts to the time in a more or less accommodating manner, but always remains in the 'here and now', even when it appears to make use of a different setting.³¹² Thus, post-1968 novels by dissident writers, such as Ludvík Vaculík's *Morčata* (1970, *The Guinea Pigs*), take place in a fantastical Prague, where the violence which Vaculík saw beneath the surface of Czech society after the Warsaw Pact invasion is embodied by grotesque descriptions of animal experimentation. Such novels take place in a changed Prague, but this does not mean that their protagonists

³¹⁰ Věra Linhartová, 'Skladatelé', in *Prostor k rozlišení* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1992), pp. 9-13.

³¹¹ Here there are similarities with Ritchie Robertson's reading of *Das Schloss* ('Myth versus enlightenment', pp. 392-393); he argues that K. is attempting to transcend 'the everyday world', but finds glimpses of transcendence within the everyday.

³¹² Jiří Brabec, 'Otazníky nad literární historií sedmdesátých a osmdesátých let', in *Život je jinde...? Česká literatura, kultura a společnost v sedmdesátých a osmdesátých letech dvacátého století*, ed. by Jan Matonoha (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2002), pp. 13-18 (p. 13).

have the possibility of moving between two realms: they are trapped in a dystopian city.

A significant shift in narrative models can be observed over the last few decades, as some writers reopen the other realm which was inaccessible or nonexistent in much of twentieth-century Czech literature.³¹³ Contemporary portrayals of Prague as two cities are rooted in developments which took place before the fall of the socialist regime. In the novels of writers such as Daniela Hodrová, Petr Placák and Zuzana Brabcová, who produced texts in the 1980s which could only be published officially at the end of the decade, as well as in works such as Libuše Moníková's *Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin* (1983), we find many of the themes which become significant to literature about Prague after 1989: they experiment with the boundaries between reality and dreams, following the wanderings of their protagonists through two cities, one of which is concrete and realistic, whilst the other is mapped out by complex signs which the protagonists interpret according to their fears, desires and memories. In 'reopening' the other city, contemporary authors also reopen a range of questions surrounding it: in the absence of a code of values such as Komenský's Christian morality, the protagonists' attempts to enter alternative spaces raise the question of how we discover meaning in spaces and in texts. At the same time, these works reconfigure the status of the real city in Prague fiction: concrete details play a special role as possible 'entry points' to the other city.

Daniela Hodrová's novel *Perunův den*

The spaces of Prague are as central to Daniela Hodrová's fiction as they are to her literary theory. Born in Prague in 1946, she studied Russian and Czech literature at the

³¹³ Hodrová touches on this shift when discussing the possible resacralisation of the city (*citlivé město*, p. 174).

Charles University, as well as French and comparative literature.³¹⁴ Her doctoral thesis, which focussed on the ‘novel of initiation’, was rejected by the university; she successfully submitted another on early Russian literature, and went on to work for the publisher Odeon and at the Institute of Czech Literature. Apart from occasional publications in magazines, her fiction did not begin to appear until after 1989, starting with the trilogy *Trýznivé město* (1991-1992, ‘City of Torment’), which she had begun writing in the 1970s. In the three parts of *Trýznivé město*, the spaces of Prague are explored through the increasingly complex layering of multiple stories which echo one another and intertwine: the novels do not connect into a linear plot, but each one introduces new incarnations of earlier characters: ‘identities are constantly acquired and shed’.³¹⁵

Perunův den is the first of Hodrová’s novels to be written and set in post-1989 Prague. It introduces the reader to a complex urban world in which the realm of ordinary life and the dreamlike realm of hidden meaning interact, forming two layers of reality which the characters constantly move between. The four female protagonists all attended the same school; when the novel opens, they are barely in touch, and even in their schooldays they were not close friends, but as the narrative unfolds, they find themselves reentering each other’s lives. The novel is narrated by an anonymous authorial voice, which alternates between the perspectives of the four women, who each become focalisers in turn. This shifting perspective draws our attention to the parallels between the women: as they crisscross the city, all of them are seeking to understand their memories of the past and their desires for physical and spiritual fulfillment, and looking for connections between the banal and the transcendent.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Alice Jedličková, ‘Daniela Hodrová’, *Slovník české literatury po roce 1945* <<http://www.slovníkceskeliteratury.cz/showContent.jsp?docId=1242>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

³¹⁵ Chitnis, *Literature*, p. 105.

³¹⁶ On the mythical dimensions of ordinary, everyday places and objects in Hodrová’s work, see Jan Matonoha, *Psaní vně logocentrismu (Diskurz, gender, text)* (Prague: Academia, 2009), p. 254.

The novel's title reflects the fact that the real city is filled with potential symbols. 'Perun' is a reference to the protagonists' old school on 'Perunova ulice' ('Perun Street'); both the street and the school really exist, and are named after the Slavic god of thunder. Thus, 'Perun's Day' is Thursday (etymologically the 'day of the god of thunder'), the day on which the women's paths often cross. The novel culminates in a school reunion: the plan to stage a pagan ritual at the school, honouring Perun, is interrupted by an apocalyptic storm. Hodrová uses Perun's name as one of many allusions to possible spiritual meaning; she combines pagan mythology eclectically with Biblical references, implying that there is no unified system behind these names. It is the women themselves who have to connect such signs in order to construct an alternative version of Prague.

The reader is involved in an analogous process of interpretation: the protagonists' surnames, Matoušková, Marková, Lukášová and Janů, are based on the names of the four Evangelists, but the women themselves never comment on their significance. The suggestion that they are the 'evangelists' of Prague encapsulates several aspects of their relationship with the city. It connects their movements between the real city and the other city with a search for spiritual truth, and suggests that although they do not narrate the text, they are 'writing' the city as they move around it, preserving the narratives of personal and collective memory and each telling a version of the same story. At the same time, the reference to the Evangelists introduces a theme of martyrdom which gradually becomes central to Hodrová's portrayal of the women's desire to enter the other city. Furthermore, it suggests that just as the four gospels are part of a collective text which has become a basis for shared identity, the women's narratives form part of a collective search for meaning in the city.

The four names also single out Janů as an exception. Three are formed according to the conventional Czech model: the fathers of these women would have the surnames Matoušek, Marek and Lukáš, which are the Czech equivalents for Matthew, Mark and Luke. ‘Janů’, meanwhile, does not end in the usual Czech -ová or -á and is therefore both indeclinable and ungendered. Janů’s former PE teacher expresses the potential of her name to disrupt established systems when she says, ‘Jména končící na ů by neměla existovat, ani se nepozná, jestli patří muži nebo ženě’ (‘Names ending in ů ought not to exist, it’s not even possible to tell whether they belong to a man or a woman’).³¹⁷ Janů is thus an androgynous figure, existing beyond the confines of the gender binary. Moreover, the ‘-ová’ ending on the names of the other women originally implies a possessive relationship between men and women: ‘Matoušková’ meant ‘woman belonging to Matoušek’. The grammatically anomalous nature of Janů’s name implies that she exists outside the norms of everyday life.

In the context of the gospels, Janů’s exceptional position takes on spiritual implications. The Gospel of John, with which Janů’s name is connected, begins with the focus on the ‘word’ as the origin of creation and differs from the other three, which all contain similar material. Analogously, Janů’s wanderings around the city and her interpretations of the people and places she encounters take a different form from those of the other three protagonists. She differs from them physically, as she has a degenerative disease which confines her to a wheelchair, meaning that her movements around the city literally contrast with those of the other women: she relies on someone to push her chair, and can only move independently when her dreams take her into the other city. Janů’s visionary view of Prague is also connected with her name: the book of Revelations has traditionally been ascribed to the same author as the Gospel according to John, and many of the signs of the Apocalypse appear in her descriptions of Prague.

³¹⁷ Daniela Hodrová, *Perunův den* (Prague: Hynek, 1994), p. 221. Future references are given in the text.

The interconnecting paths which the four women take between the real city and the other city reveal a complex dreamworld. Matoušková, Marková and Lukášová resemble one another in such a way that they frequently exchange places and imitate each other.³¹⁸ They each successively become involved in a cult which involves ritualistic sex and arranged marriage, and they each in turn become actors in an allegorical street performance. Janů's involvement interrupts these cycles: the preacher who leads the cult does not dare to confront her, and the street performer who has sexually humiliated each of the other women in turn has no power over her. At the end of the novel, Janů dies and appears to ascend and be unified with a divine being, whilst the other three women are caught in the chaos of the school reunion. Hodrová's portrayal of Prague as a space defined by the wanderings of her protagonists implies that as we do not possess a system of spiritual values like the one discovered by Komenský's narrator, we can only hope to gain access to a higher realm of understanding (or indeed, understand a text) by combing through our memories and finding hints at metaphysical meaning in the everyday.

The two cities in *Perunův den*

The 'real city' in *Perunův den* is a detailed, realistic representation of post-1989 Prague. Hodrová makes frequent use of real street names and descriptions of buildings, often repeating the same names. Her Prague is a paradoxical space in which the lack of a code of meanings creates a proliferation of potential symbols, and thus the seemingly mundane details of the concrete city become otherworldly.

Thus, we are told several times that the theatre where Lukášová is employed used to be called 'Realistické divadlo' ('Realist Theatre' or 'Realistic Theatre') and is now

³¹⁸ Such mirroring is characteristic of Hodrová's work; see Helena Kosková, 'Romány Daniely Hodrové jako hledání tajemství bytí', *Literární archiv*, 35-36 (2004), pp. 231-249 (p. 234)).

called 'Divadlo labyrint' ('Labyrinth Theatre'; e.g. p. 18, p. 28). At one level, this situates the text specifically in post-1989 Prague: the theatre was given the name 'realist' after the Second World War at the behest of the Communist Minister of Culture Zdeněk Nejedlý, who played a significant role in introducing socialist realism to Czechoslovakia, and following the Velvet Revolution it was reopened under the name Divadlo labyrint, in a symbolic rejection of the socialist past. It is through such topographical details that Hodrová establishes the temporal and physical coordinates of post-1989 Prague. However, her repetition of details such as the change of name from 'realist' to 'labyrinth' becomes a clue leading towards the other city. 'Labyrinth' echoes the title of Komenský's *The Labyrinth of the World and The Paradise of the Heart* and also recalling the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, suggesting that for the protagonists of the text, the city will become a labyrinth through which they will have to find a path. The word 'realist' refers us back to the teleological texts of socialist realism, in which the path through the labyrinth must always lead to the foundation of the workers' and peasants' state, which played a part in shaping the anti-teleological approaches of later writers, including Hodrová. Most importantly, the change of name, itself grounded firmly in reality, enacts a shift which takes place repeatedly in Hodrová's text, as realistic references to post-1989 Prague are reinterpreted as clues to the other city.

Memory and the other city

For Hodrová, the process of entering the other city is profoundly contingent on individual and shared memories: the complexities and uncertainties surrounding each woman's memories of the city play an essential part in her search for the other realm. The interplay of several meanings within the same space is exemplified early on in the narrative, when Marková remembers going to an area of Prague called Hagibor as a child:

Hagibor, který byl za matčina dětství ještě mnohem divočejší, dávno zanikl v tenisových kurtech a plaveckém bazénu, divočina byla takřka beze zbytku vymýcena a zcivilizována, zůstal v ní jen dům, v němž prý za války mučili Židy, a to záhadné jméno. [...] Tenkrát pro ni představoval pustinu bez příběhů, či spíš skrytý příběh Hagiboru měl dosud nejasné obrysy, byl spjat s neurčitou hrozbou. (pp. 7-8)

[Hagibor, which was still much wilder in her mother's childhood, vanished long ago under tennis courts and a swimming pool, the wilderness was eradicated almost without a trace and civilised, all that remained was the house in which Jews were apparently tortured during the war, and the mysterious name. [...] In those days it seemed to her a wasteland without a story, or rather, the hidden story of Hagibor only had a vague outline, it was connected with an undefined threat.]

Here Hodrová presents Hagibor as a space of memory, where several different pasts are layered in one location: personal pasts, family pasts, and national pasts. Marková is remembering how visiting Hagibor used to be the 'longest journey' ('nejdelší cesta') of her early childhood: already as a child, she experienced the city as a space for journeys and wandering. And at the same time, she refers to her mother's childhood, when the place was much wilder ('mnohem divočejší').

Hagibor was long associated with the Jewish community in the city; before the Nazi occupation, it was the location of a Jewish sports club, as well as other community buildings, and once restrictions were placed on the use of parks by Jews, it was one of the few public green spaces where they were still permitted to walk around freely.³¹⁹ Finally, however, a work camp was established, where people were sentenced to forced labour: Hodrová refers to 'the house where Jews were apparently tortured'. The use of 'apparently' signals that Marková is not especially knowledgeable about the history of Hagibor – and yet, what she knows about its history has a strong effect on her feelings about the place. When considering this, she at first imagines that Hagibor was a blank space before she knew about its past – 'pustina' here suggests a

³¹⁹ Another recent Prague novel which explores this location in relation to family memory and the Jewish past is Milena Slavická's *Hagibor* (Prague: Torst, 2014).

literal wilderness, but also, more figuratively, a barren area which has not yet been associated with any stories. However, she then comes to the conclusion that even before she knew about it herself, the past of Hagibor was somehow present and threatening.

Hodrová returns throughout the novel to this suggestion that the past of a place remains part of its essence. Her approach to Prague as a city in which the painful events of the past are inscribed recalls Aleida Assmann's discussion of contemporary artists who, faced with a fragmented cultural memory, simulate the process of remembering in their work: 'Künstlerische Erinnerung funktioniert dabei nicht als Speicher, sondern simuliert Speicher, indem sie die Prozesse von Erinnern und Vergessen thematisiert'.³²⁰ This approach can be traced from Hodrová's early fiction to her more recent work both as an author and as a literary theorist, in which she remains fascinated by the hidden pasts of Prague. This lingering past has a mysterious aspect which connects it with the women's search for a spiritual realm: the locations in the novel which seem to be imbued with spiritual power often derive this power from their past.³²¹

The words 'wild', 'wilderness' and 'wasteland' imply that the violent past of Hagibor cannot be 'civilised' into nonexistence. At the same time, as an area with an uncertain status, difficult to define or control, the wilderness of Hagibor is a liminal space between one city and the other, where Marková has to confront the gaps in her memory, as well as her suppressed desires. Hodrová plays on the fact that 'oběť' can mean both 'victim' and 'sacrificial offering':

³²⁰ Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, p. 22.

³²¹ On the link between sacred locations and places of memory, see Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, p. 337.

Ano, bylo to obětiště. Kdyby se tehdy ještě víc přiblížili ke středu toho místa, přitáhl by je Hagibor k sobě, byli by také obětováni. A nejen tehdy, ještě teď, kdyby Marková byť jen v duchu překročila tu neviditelnou hranici, prodrala se dnes už prořídlymi keři k ohni, byla by obětována. (p. 8)

[Yes, it was a place of sacrifice. If they had come even closer to the centre of the place, Hagibor would have drawn them into itself, they would have been sacrificed too. And not only in those days, even now, if Marková, even in her thoughts, were to transgress that invisible boundary and push her way through the now sparse bushes to the fire, she would be sacrificed.]

Describing Hagibor as a ‘place of sacrifice’ (‘obětiště’) connects it with Marková’s wish to enter another realm; the space of memory becomes an space of the imagination. She frequently envisions a scenario in which she is sacrificed on an altar – and in the novel’s final scenes, it appears that she really does become a sacrificial victim, like St Mark (pp. 255-260). The word ‘obětiště’ hints that Hagibor was always a place of sacrifice and continues to be one; its past is also its present, and thus Marková could step into the ‘centre’ (with its associations of transcendent power) and join the victims.

Hodrová’s portrayal of the two spaces of the city is ambiguous: stepping over the border seems to be a necessary part of Marková’s search for the other city, but by associating her with sacrificial victims of the past and particularly with Jewish victims, Hodrová implies that she will be entering a realm of darkness rather than the higher realm sought by Komenský’s narrator. On the other hand, the dance of the Hagibor spirits which Marková imagines here, and which is echoed elsewhere in the novel, also contains a suggestion of liberation from the limits of the women’s ordinary lives. Hodrová plays on this ambiguity throughout the narrative: in the complex process of seeking the other city, violence and victimhood coexist with liberation and empowerment.

Desire and the two cities

In the scene quoted above, Marková shifts between a reflection on Hagibor as a space of memory and a fantasy in which she becomes a sacrificial victim. This unsettling combination of memory and desire is characteristic of the women's search for the other city: their wish to go beyond the spaces of ordinary reality has an erotic dimension which is connected with both pain and liberation.

The body occupies a highly ambivalent position on the threshold between the real city and the other city. When Lukášová rediscovers an old swing in her flat and hangs it up, Hodrová describes how the object lets out a 'groan' of 'pain, or of bliss' (pp. 10-11, 'sten [...] bolestný, nebo blažený'). These sensations mirror the feelings which Lukášová has when she sits on the swing: as her body rises up, she catches a glimpse of a beautiful room with bejewelled walls, before her body falls again ('strhne dolů'). The power of the swing is increased by its connection with Lukášová's childhood and that of her mother, as well as with the advent of adulthood: she originally dismantled it and put it away when she became pregnant and her boyfriend moved into the flat. She is still mourning the baby, which she lost to a miscarriage, and the boyfriend, who left her. When she reinstates the swing, it carries her to the threshold of a space beyond the ordinary world. The highpoint of the swing is both an erotic moment and a spiritual experience, both a reminder of childhood and a leap towards adult sexuality.

Throughout the novel, Hodrová's portrayals of physicality both invite symbolic interpretation and resist it. Lukášová's glimpse of the 'beautiful room' might be linked with her namesake, since the relic thought to be St Luke's skull can be found in a jewelled casket in the treasury of St Vitus' Cathedral. And yet, this detail directs our attention back to the ambivalent status of Lukášová's body: she is a woman with a male namesake, and it is not clear whether she therefore possesses special power to narrate and interpret spiritual experiences, as the Evangelists did, or whether her

femininity denotes passivity, the possessive ‘-ová’ meaning that she is passively ‘possessed’ by her eroticised desire for spiritual understanding.

The women’s complex desires lead them back to the school on Perunova ulice, which plays a role comparable with that of the Invisible Church in Komenský’s allegory, or the castle in Kafka’s *Das Schloss*. The building belongs to the women’s past, and thus their urge to reenter it suggests that their paths are cyclical or spiralling, rather than linear.³²² Hodrová’s portrayal of the school recalls the uncanny spaces of ‘magic Prague’, along with the tropes of a gothic novel. On the highest floor, the biology teacher has his office or ‘kabinet’, containing an anatomical doll – an echo of the puppets and automata which are found in the works of Paul Leppin and Gustav Meyrink. In their school days, the women were attracted to the biology teacher and imagined that the doll was the object of his desire. Marková, in particular, still fantasises about changing places with the doll, which is nicknamed ‘Melicharová’, referring to an actress whom the doll supposedly resembled, but also echoing the name of one of the Magi: ‘Melichar’ is the Czech equivalent of ‘Melchior’. This link with the quest of the three Magi to worship Jesus implies that Melicharová, too, is seeking the other city – but given that she is an inanimate object, it also throws doubt on the idea that the other women can control the outcomes of their journeys.

Hodrová’s portrayal of the doll relates to the connections between sexuality, martyrdom and the ambivalent potential of the female body to enter the other city.³²³ The word ‘panna’ means both ‘virgin’ and ‘mannequin’; the ‘anatomická panna’ Melicharová is a sex object, both unavailable (she will always remain a ‘virgin’) and helpless to evade the violence of human beings. For each of the women, sexual desire

³²² Matonoha, p. 247.

³²³ Elena Sokol discusses Hodrová’s work as ‘écriture féminine’, but unfortunately does not look closely at the ambivalent portrayal of femininity within her texts (‘Feministický (či genderový) pohled na romány Daniely Hodrové’, in *Otázky českého kánonu*, ed. by Stanislava Fedrová (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2006), pp. 605-613.

coincides with the fear of pain and shame, as well as with a masochistic wish to be humiliated. At the end of the novel, when Marková enters the biology teacher's office, blood is seen running out from under the door, and it seems that she has indeed changed places with Melicharová and been 'sacrificed' by the teacher, as she wanted.

The novel's stark ending, in which Janů loses her physical senses and dies, whilst Marková fulfills her physical desires and also dies, points to the body as a problematic and intrusive element in the city. Hodrová tests out the ways in which sexuality can be structured and interpreted in terms of symbolic rituals and repetitions: the women repeatedly have the same sexual dreams and experiences, following patterns in which they are each attracted to the same man in turn. Their sexual experiences are often framed as initiation rituals. However, the women's ambiguous desires resist the patterns of interpretation which the text invokes. The body and its desires disturb the 'text' of the city, because they draw attention to the physicality of the world, to the fact that the text which describes Prague evokes recollections and imagined scenes in which the reader is physically present in the city. Thus, Hodrová confronts the role of desire in the process of reading, and wanders not just the boundaries between the real city and the other city, but also the boundaries between body and text.

Michal Ajvaz's novella 'Bílí mravenci'

Like Hodrová, Michal Ajvaz works both as an author of fiction and as a theorist, and explores the intersections of these two realms. Born in 1949 into a Russian exile family in Prague, he studied Czech literature and aesthetics, before working as a caretaker, a night watchman and a pump-operator.³²⁴ From the mid-1990s onward, he became an editor and writer for publications such as *Literární noviny*, and since 2003

³²⁴ Vladimír Novotný and Klára Kudlová, 'Michal Ajvaz', *Slovník české literatury po roce 1945* <<http://www.slovníkceskeliteratury.cz/showContent.jsp?docId=1204>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

he has been working for several philosophical institutes. He has been publishing his poetry and fiction since 1989.

‘Bílí mravenci’ (‘The White Ants’) is one of several works by Ajvaz which explore the possibilities of shifting between ‘the present every-day city and its fantastic or legendary alter-ego’, including the novel *Druhé město* (2005, *The Other City*), in which a mysterious city can be accessed through a hidden entrance on Petřín Hill.³²⁵ However, *Druhé město* takes us deep into another world beyond Prague, ‘Bílí mravenci’ leads us back and forth across a blurred boundary between the real city and what is hidden beyond its contours.

The novella begins and ends with an ordinary situation which is familiar in the Czech literary canon: the narrator is wandering through Prague.³²⁶ Walking along the riverbank in Smíchov, he hears strange music coming from a houseboat. Soon afterwards, at a riverside restaurant, he is whistling the melody he has just heard when he attracts the attention of the novella’s other central character, an archaeologist. The archaeologist has been searching for this very music in vain, and begins to tell his story: when he and his girlfriend Sylvie were on a research trip to India, she ate an unfamiliar fruit and fell into a deep sleep. When she occasionally wakes, she tells the archaeologist about her dreams, in which she wanders monstrous cities, including nightmarish versions of Prague. For Sylvie, Prague is replaced by a terrifying ‘doppelgänger’ city, whilst for the archaeologist its topography becomes inseparable from his desperate search for the cure.

³²⁵ Christopher Harwood, ‘Writing in the Time since Time Exploded: The Czech Novel, 1990-2002’, *World Literature Today*, 77, 3/4 (2003), 64-68 (p. 66). *Druhé město* is compared with Hodrová’s work by Chitnis, *Literature*, pp. 92-104.

³²⁶ On Ajvaz’s use of the ‘Prague pedestrian’ motif, see Jonathan Bolton, ‘Reading Michal Ajvaz’ <<http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/reading-michal-ajvaz/>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

Gradually, the archaeologist has gathered clues, based on a series of coincidences. The first information came from an ethnographer who had seen a tribal magician at work: he made use of a particular species of white ant which responded to threats by gathering together to form the shape of a white tiger with green eyes. The magician took the ants which formed the eyes and extracted a green juice from them which could cure the illness. Catching the ants was a difficult task, since anyone who touched the white tiger would find that it immediately disintegrated and the ants would scatter. On his next research trip, the ethnographer tried to discover how the ants were caught while in their formation, but found that the last tribe with such a magician had been decimated, and the secret had been lost. However, the ethnographer did bring back the ants, which the archaeologist kept in a terrarium. The archaeologist continued his search, which led him to an arcade game in a village pub just outside Prague. Inside the game, which involved moving through a seemingly endless series of cities, he discovered a German encyclopaedia in which he read a description of an instrument made from amber, armadillo bones and the skin of a monitor lizard, and even the musical notation for the main melody which was played in order to hypnotise the ants and allow the green juice to be extracted. After trying and failing to lull the ants by playing the melody on different instruments, the archaeologist was desperate: in her rare waking moments, Sylvie had begun to stop believing that she was really awake. At last, he came across the final clue: he met a philosopher who had a dream in which he remembered that the mysterious music was mentioned in a footnote to a lecture by Edmund Husserl, whose cousin, an adventurer, was allowed to record the music by a shaman. The archaeologist has discovered that Husserl's cousin's son lives somewhere on a houseboat on the Vltava, but it is the narrator who helps him make the vital discovery, leading him to the houseboat, where Sylvie is cured. Following this resolution, the narrator returns to his wanderings through Prague.³²⁷

³²⁷ The ending of the text was criticised for being too abrupt. See Veronika Košnarová, 'Slast z těla-plamene', *Tvar*, 23, 3 (2012), 2.

The archaeologist's purposeful path

The narrator refers to the archaeologist only by his profession (his name is not revealed), which has symbolic resonance: he has to work to uncover forgotten details. Where Hodrová's characters strive for transcendence and higher understanding, in Ajvaz's text, the search for meaning is a process of excavation which takes the seeker into deeper and darker realms. The movement of the archaeologist around the city recalls the wanderings of Komenský's narrator, or K. in *Das Schloss*, struggling back and forth through the village as he seeks a way of entering the castle.³²⁸ He has an aim, but no clear geographical destination. Despite the exotic origins of Sylvie's illness, he hopes that the final part of the cure is hidden within the city.

At first, it does not seem that the archaeologist is seeking another realm. He is concerned exclusively with curing Sylvie, and when others speculate about the inner workings of reality, he is often too preoccupied by his search to pay attention.³²⁹ However, once he has begun to discover clues beneath the surface of the real city, he must go on seeking them. Hence the narrator's comment, after watching the archaeologist leave with Sylvie, following the success of the cure:

Myslel jsem na to, jestli už konečně budou žít život, o jakém snili za nocí v džungli, anebo jestli archeolog už navždy uvázl v labyrintu, který se otevřel [...]. (p. 72)

[I thought about whether they would now finally live the life they dreamed about at night in the jungle, or whether the archaeologist would now be stuck forever in the labyrinth which had opened up[...].]

³²⁸ Thomas draws a connection between Komenský, Kafka and Ajvaz, though he tenuously relates Komenský's experience of the Battle of White Mountain to the post-1989 invasion of 'foreign speculators and tourists' (Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, pp. 171-2).

³²⁹ Michal Ajvaz, 'Bílí mravenci', in *Tyrkysový orel* (Prague: Hynek, 1997), pp. 5-74 (p. 57; p. 63). Future references are given in the text.

At first sight, the narrator's thoughts seem surprising: now that the archaeologist has completed his quest, why should he not live a happy life with his beloved Sylvie, visiting the Prague cafés which they talked about on their expedition to India (p. 17)? The narrator's doubts imply that he will continue to wander a world of infinite possible clues. The jungle in India was only a precursor of the jungle he finds at home in Prague. The narrator guesses that the archaeologist would always have entered a labyrinth of questions and clues at some point – that it was only by chance that the labyrinth opened in the way that it did, when Sylvie became ill (p. 65). It is therefore not certain that it will close again now.

The archaeologist's potentially never-ending wanderings have ramifications for us as readers.³³⁰ The process of interpretation takes the archaeologist ever deeper into the realm of seeking, rather than raising him to 'higher' understanding – and at the same time, it replaces the dichotomy of confusion and enlightenment, found in Komenský's allegory, with an uncertain promise of successive revelations. In constructing another realm beyond the material city, Ajvaz implies that whenever we begin looking for signs, as we do when we read, we risk entering that realm, propelled by a desire to solve the puzzles of the text – and that once we have entered it, we may never succeed in abandoning our new vocation as archaeologists of meaning.

The narrator's aimless path

The contrasts between the narrator and the archaeologist are crucial to Ajvaz's depiction of the relationship between the two cities. Where the archaeologist is characterised by his symbolic profession, the narrator's occupation goes unmentioned, along with all other details about his life. He does not appear to be driven by love or

³³⁰ See Milan Jankovič, *Dílo v pohybu* (Prague: Academia, 2009), p. 58.

desperation, like the archaeologist.³³¹ When we meet him, he is walking through the city, seemingly without an aim.³³² His perspective is marked by studied neutrality:

Procházel jsem se po navigaci na smíchovském břehu, šel jsem podél zdi z kamenných kvádrů [...] Nade mnou se ozývaly blízké a lhostejné zvuky neviditelných automobilů [...] Pak jsem šel podél nekonečného plotu z vysokých kovových tyčí [...]. (p. 7)

[I was walking along the bank on the Smíchov side of the river, I went along beside a wall made from stone blocks [...] Above me, the close and indifferent sounds of unseen cars could be heard [...] Then I walked along an endless fence of high iron posts [...]]

The narrator describes his surroundings in such detail that it is easy to pinpoint his location on a map of Smíchov. The city he is walking through contrasts with the archaeologist's experience of Prague as a labyrinthine space filled with possible clues. He appears to pay equal attention to all the details of his surroundings, describing the texture of each wall he passes and the sounds and smells he comes across, but without linking these with his past experiences, with his present emotions, or with a possible destination.

The opening hints at the themes of the archaeologist's story: the 'intricate ornamentation creeping round the windows' foreshadows the intricate twists and turns of his journey ('spletitými ornamenty, plazícími se kolem oken'), and the image of plants pushing their way through the fence resurfaces later in Sylvie's dream of a jungle taking over Prague (p. 36), which in turn reflects the archaeologist's sense that hidden meanings are forcing their way up through his familiar reality. Such details imply that the narrator is surrounded by the possible beginnings of exotic narratives,

³³¹ Such anonymous, seemingly neutral narrators are characteristic of Ajvaz's work. See Květoslav Chvatík's discussion of *Druhé město* as a novel which avoids psychological analysis (*Od avantgardy k druhé moderně* (Prague: Torst, 2004), p. 334).

³³² His wanderings along the river recall Alexander Hackenschmied's short film, *Bezúčelná procházka*. See Natascha Drubek's comments on the relationship between 'Old Prague' and the 'outskirts' in "'Bezúčelná procházka'"/"Aimless walk" (1930): Alexander Hackenschmied's "film study" of a tram ride to the outskirts of Prague-Liben', *Bohemia*, 52, 1 (2012), 76-107 (p. 76-77). Alexander Bobrakov-Timoškin emphasises Ajvaz's interest in the periphery (p. 553).

but he simply casts a neutral eye over all of them. Although his wanderings belong to the same literary tradition as Vítězslav Nezval's poetist 'Pražský chodec' ('Prague Pedestrian'), his apparent indifference contrasts with the passion of Nezval's lyric subject:

Tak jsem se naučil milovati Prahu
Tak jsem uslyšel zazpívat ptáka pod secesní římsou jednoho zchátralého
náměstí³³³

The decorated windows which Ajvaz's narrator notices may well be 'secesní', but he hears no birds, only cars, and he does not mention that they teach him to love Prague.

The narrator discovers the other city by chance, when the mysterious music intrudes into his indifference just as he is passing a sign reading 'TJ Blaník'. The reference to Blaník is characteristic of Ajvaz's attitude to symbolism and collective memory: as the hill in which an army of Czech knights are supposed to be sleeping, awaiting their chance to save the nation, Blaník represents the once and future glory of the Czechs, but it is also a motorboating club which really is located in Smíchov (TJ stands for 'Tělocvičná Jednota', or 'Sports Club').³³⁴ Ajvaz touches on this nationalist topos, physically relocated from a hill in Central Bohemia to an obscure area of Prague, before moving swiftly into his description of the music, which seems very distant from all notions of 'Czechness', since it is entirely unfamiliar to the narrator.³³⁵ The music is defined by its lack of connection with cultural categories: the narrator tells us that he cannot tell whether it is contemporary or medieval, whether it was written by a well-known composer or whether it is an anonymous folk tune, whether it is European or from another culture.

³³³ Vítězslav Nezval, 'Pražský chodec', in *Dílo*, VI, pp. 96-99.

³³⁴ See Vladimír Macura, 'Sen o spících rytířích I', in *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, pp. 253-265.

³³⁵ On the connections between music and Czech identity, see Michael Beckerman, 'In Search of Czechness in Music', *19th-Century Music*, 10, 1 (1986), 61-73.

The ambiguity of the music permeates its form and sound: the narrator at first thinks that it has no rhythm, but then perceives a certain regularity, and when he tries to recognise the instrument being played, he is unsure even of whether it is just one instrument or an orchestra. By being different from all known music, it calls the rules of known music into question:

Čas od času jsem dokonce slyšel zvuky, jaké se v hudebních skladbách nevyskytují: kašovité probublávání, olejovité kapání, [...] tiché snové chřestění [...]. Tyto zvuky [...] nevyvolávaly v posluchači ani tak dojem, že do umění pronikly jako vetřelci, jako spíš náhlý pocit nesamozřejmosti a nahodilosti privilegovaných zvuků, z nichž jsou vytvořeny naše hudební skladby. (p. 10)

[From time to time I even heard sounds which are not usually found in musical compositions: squelchy bubbling, oily dripping, [...] quiet dreamy rattling [...] The sounds [...] did not so much awaken the sense that they were trespassers in an artwork where they did not belong, but rather the sudden feeling that the privileged sounds from which our musical pieces are composed are actually neither natural nor inevitable.]

This passage is a celebration of Czech onomatopoeia: the sounds of words such as ‘probublávání’ and ‘chřestění’ enact the unmusicality of the music, suggesting that its strange properties also apply to the literary text.³³⁶ By not obeying familiar cultural rules, the music questions whether those rules make any sense. Given how disturbing the music is, the narrator is particularly interested in the instrument which could be playing it – an instrument which he at first imagines as a ‘labyrinth’ of many complex components, but which he then begins to picture as a formless or half-formed shape, constantly in the process of being created and destroyed. The music is both the sound of creation and the sound of destruction.

When the recording ends, the sounds of the city retain something of the mysterious character of the music:

³³⁶ Ajvaz returns to this motif of unmusical music in *Prázdné ulice* (2004); see Jankovič, *Dílo v pohybu*, p. 49.

[...] v tichu se opět vynořily blízké šelesty a hlasy ztlumené dálkou: šušťení listů smuteční vrby, [...] tiché vrčení automobilů [...], houkání lokomotivy [...]. V těchto hlasech jako by ještě doznávalo tajemství, jež hudba[...] probudila v nitru všech zvuků – neboť úzkost, kterou tato hudba vyvolávala, nebyla děsem z hlasů neznámého světa, tuto úzkost spíše vyvolávalo to, že v nezařaditelných tónech skladby se obnažila znepokojivá materie, z níž jsou vytvořeny i všechny zvuky našeho světa a z níž stoupá jakési podivné a naléhavé sdělení. (p. 12)

[[...] in the silence, I could once again hear close-by murmurings and sounds muffled by distance: the rustling leaves of a weeping willow, [...] the quiet grumble of cars [...], the hooting of trains. In those noises, it was as if I could still hear the reverberations of the mystery which the music [...] awoke within all sounds – for the unease which that music aroused was not horror at the voices of an unknown world, but was rather unease that in the uncategorisable tones of the composition, the disturbing material was exposed, from which all the sounds of our world are created, and from which some strange, insistent message ascends.]

This passage encapsulates the central paradox of Ajvaz's novella. The very unlikely nature of the music, its implausibility and fantastical character, draw attention to the composition of reality, returning our gaze to the precarious contours of the real city. Fantasy, here, is not an escape from the real world, but the start of a search to uncover how reality is put together.³³⁷ Ajvaz explores this search with reference to Husserl's phenomenology of time-consciousness: the archaeologist discovers that Husserl considered the question of whether, when we listen to music, our expectation of the next note is shaped by the one which preceded it.³³⁸ A composition consisting of entirely unexpected transitions exemplifies a situation in which the event which has just happened predicts nothing except the passing of time, and therefore reveals the 'fabric of time' ('tkáň času') which is usually obscured by familiar connections (p. 63).

³³⁷ Alice Stašková argues that Ajvaz's portrayal of Prague becomes less fantastical over the course of his work ('La città invisibile im Erzählwerk von Michal Ajvaz', in Todorow and Weinberg (eds), pp. 185-196). This is rather imprecise: as Jankovič argues (*Dílo v pohybu*, p. 40), in works such as *Druhé město* and *Zlatý věk* (2001), fantastical elements lead us into independent worlds, whereas later, they are embedded in the 'real' world. 'Bílí mravenci' remains on the threshold between the two realms.

³³⁸ See Edmund Husserl, *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, ed. by Martin Heidegger (Halle a.d.S.: Niemeyer, 1928), p. 385.

The whole narrative embodies the same properties as the music: the oddity and seeming exoticism of each element suggests an unknown world, but in fact it uncovers the unsettling randomness of our own world, leading us to fear that everything which seems logical and ordinary is actually as precarious and transitory as the formation of millions of ants into the shape of a tiger. Thus, when the narrator hears about Sylvie's dreams of an apocalyptic Prague, he looks up at Petřín hill and sees it as a theatrical backdrop, 'kulisa z lehkého plátna.' He imagines it falling:

Představoval jsem si, že se za ní objeví poušť, moře, nebo třeba fantastické skalní město s ohni planoucími v jeskyních. (p. 37)

[I imagined a desert appearing behind it, or a sea, or maybe a fantastical city built of rock, with fires blazing in caves.]

As the phrase 'nebo třeba' implies, a whole series of arbitrary, unexpected vistas might reveal themselves beyond the surface of everyday reality; if it turned out that a further, 'fantastical' city was hidden behind the 'backdrop' of Prague, this would be yet another odd coincidence. It is for this reason that the music, and the narrative itself, are both creative and destructive: the text creates an image of the 'real Prague', in all its implausibility and strangeness, but in order to do so, it breaks through all ordinary connections, resulting in the threat of chaos.

Order and chaos in the other city

Ajvaz presents the other Prague as a realm of creativity and of freedom from fixed meanings, but this freedom also implies dangers: chaos and disintegration are always close at hand. The shifting openness of meaning which emerges from the narrative is a threat to order.

This threat is expressed most vividly in Ajvaz's portrayal of Sylvie's agonising nightmares. At first, the short periods when she awakens and talks to the archaeologist offer respite from the horror of her dreams, but one day, she wakes up and is no longer able to trust reality, because she has just had a dream in which she awoke and found that she had been cured. In that dream, she and the archaeologist walked up to Petřín Hill and looked at the view.³³⁹ The view from Petřín is a literary commonplace: in the prologue to *Die Gründung Prags*, Clemens Brentano describes seeing a 'vision' from Petřín, thinking that he was following in Libuše's footsteps, in Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic's *Gotická duše*, the protagonist is roused from his apathy by an encounter with a stranger there, and in Kafka's 'Beschreibung eines Kampfes', the 'Laurenziberg' becomes the end of the protagonist's journey. Ajvaz's use of the topos reminds us emphatically that we are reading 'Prague fiction', and increases the sense of disruption when Sylvie's dream is invaded by chaos.

Sylvie only realises that something is wrong when the enormous, black head of a walrus throws a shadow over the city – and then she is dragged back into her nightmares (p. 60). The next time she wakes up, she can no longer be sure that she is truly back in reality: she may be uncertain forever. Thematically, 'Beschreibung eines Kampfes' and 'Bílí mravenci' are closely linked: both Kafka and Ajvaz are playing with the boundaries between reality and fantasy, and exploring the unsettling consequences of disconnecting words from their meaning. In 'Beschreibung eines Kampfes', the supplicant addresses the moon as 'Mariensäule' and the Marian Column as 'Mond'; he imagines that this reduces their power over him, and is pleased with the effect.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ See Clemens Brentano, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. by Jürgen Behrens, Wolfgang Frühwald and Detlev Lüders, 38 vols (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1980), XIV, pp. 7-8); Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, *Gotická duše* (Prague: Štorch-Marien, 1921), pp. 47-48). See also Hodrová, *citlivé město*, p. 136. According to Chad Bryant, the view from Petřín was already a cliché of guidebooks in the early nineteenth century ('A Tale of One City: Topographies of Prague before 1848', *Bohemia*, 52, 1 (2012), 5-21).

³⁴⁰ Franz Kafka, 'Beschreibung eines Kampfes', in Franz Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente I*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1993), pp. 54-171 (p. 102).

In 'Bílí mravenci', too, the narrator's departure from 'limited paths' is represented partly as a process of liberation, but it also involves an approach to the margins of sense. The walrus which emerges over the city in Sylvie's nightmare is connected with this threat of chaos. It gives the impression of being an animal chosen at random, as opposed to an allegorical animal: it is not an eagle, a lion or a horse, each of which have a range of cultural associations. It is an embodiment of meaningless chaos, heralding the fact that Sylvie can no longer rely on any of the old certainties of reality. The narrator refers to the ancient texts which first drew the archaeologist to set off on his Indian expedition as 'an echo of the dark and tempting voices which sounded from the chaotic margins of order' ('ozvěnou temných a lákavých hlasů ozývajících se z chaotických okrajů řádu' (p. 65)). Following these voices, the archaeologist has entered a liminal space which can always hurl him into the chaos of constantly shifting meanings. The prospect of chaos is both dark and attractive, because it suggests both an ecstatic liberation from the rules of sense, and the destruction of every certainty. By wandering the other city with the narrator and the archaeologist, we gain the chance to explore new, ever-changing realms of meaning, but we also risk slipping beyond such realms, into chaos.

Conclusions

In constructing a double city, Hodrová and Ajvaz make use of the paradigmatic narrative structure found in Komenský's *Labyrint světa a ráj srdce*.³⁴¹ Komenský relied on the notion of a didactic connection between signs and meaning: there had to be a 'correct' interpretation which the protagonist could discover in order to progress. Despite its different code of values, a similar approach to the process of interpretation

³⁴¹ This leads Thomas to claim reductively that Ajvaz's approach to Prague is 'nothing new but reprises a rich metatextual tradition stretching all the way back to Comenius' (*Prague Palimpsest*, p. 172).

can be found in socialist realist literature. Neither Hodrová nor Ajvaz return to the didacticism and teleology of such works. Both authors suggest that the boundaries between the real city and the other city are permeable, and that we can cross and recross them in our search for meaning: rather than leading to a one-way entry into a place where our wanderings end, seeking the other city is a continuous process of uncovering new, uncertain spaces.

To what extent does the reopening of the other city represent a literary response to the political changes of 1989? Given their complex treatment of the notion of reality, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that either Hodrová or Ajvaz are primarily reflecting the political and cultural upheavals which have affected Czech society over the last decades. However, the process of questioning in which their readers are invited to participate does unfold in the context of individual and collective searches for meaning and identity. Neither *Perunův den* nor 'Bílí mravenci' are constructed as allegories of the post-1989 political situation, but the complex forms of freedom sought by their protagonists gain resonance from the context of a newly 'free' Prague.

The apocalyptic imagery which *Perunův den* and 'Bílí mravenci' share with many novels of the late 1980s and 1990s is characteristic of a period which saw the ubiquitous redefinition of identities, in a process which was both liberating and threatening. The collapse of the socialist regimes and the end of the Cold War meant that the Czech nation, the history of Prague and the role of the author were redefined multiple times, as the categorisation of values and opinions in political terms gave way to greater pluralism, but each process of redefinition brought instability. Individuals likewise faced new questions about their identities and values, and about their pasts. The preoccupation of Hodrová's protagonists with their schooldays can thus be read in the contemporary Czech context of the desire for a defined personal and shared identity after 1989. Hodrová addresses the uncertain potential of the

political changes to offer self-realisation when she describes a queue of people hoping to meet Václav Havel at Prague Castle. It is an image of foolish hope: the people themselves are depicted as suffering from psychiatric problems, their expectations of the President are presented as unrealistic, and in fact, even the presence of Havel in the building is uncertain. Thus, Hodrová's image of Prague Castle echoes the images of false enlightenment in Komenský's *Labyrinth*: it recalls the Palace of Queen Vanity and the Castle of Fortune. Like Komenský's protagonist, the post-1989 wanderers must look elsewhere for the entrance to the other city. The Czech fiction of the immediate post-1989 years celebrates the power of literature, which has been 'restored to life' after becoming a 'spent force' in the years of the socialist regime.³⁴² The reopening of the other city is partly an expression of this liberation.

There is an element of paradox both in Hodrová and Ajvaz's approach of reopening the other city without adopting a code of values or teleological structure which would lead to its entrance, and in the suggestion that their depiction of the other city relates to the 'liberation' of literature in 1989. How can we be sure that the other city is accessible if there is no code of meaning which leads to it – and if its borders are so permeable as to be, perhaps, imperceptible? And how can we regard the 'literature of the changes' as being 'liberated' from the demands of ideology if its approach to the city is a direct response to this moment of liberation? The two authors discussed here, although similar in their constructions of the double city, take contrasting approaches to such uncertainties.

For both Hodrová and Ajvaz, the absence of any symbolic code engenders a proliferation of possible signs, changing the status of the real city: any mundane detail can become meaningful. This process is emphasised by such details as the Labyrinth Theatre in *Perunův den* and the Blaník sports club in 'Bílí mravenci': in both cases,

³⁴² Chitnis, *Literature*, p. 114.

the name of a real place contains cultural resonances which suggest the potential of signs to contain meaning, and the fact that this name exists outside the fictional world suggests that ‘otherness’ is located within everyday, ordinary spaces. Where the authors differ most significantly is in their depictions of how the individual can navigate this city of infinite signs.

For Hodrová’s protagonists, personal and collective memory offer an alternative framework for interpretation of the paths they take around the city. Whether by repeating events from their childhoods or by drawing connections between the structure of their dreams and the structures of their relationships with one another, they uncover a logic in their experiences. The numerous references to religious systems and spiritual rituals embed the wanderings of the protagonists not just in one code of symbols but in many. Hodrová therefore shows that the lack or loss of a definite relationship between sign and meaning, between the real city and a specific (perhaps ideological) interpretation of its cultural significance, does not mean that indeterminacy comes to dominate: instead, the heterogeneity of the post-1989 city creates an eclectic richness of meaning, with many details encoded several times over. As the protagonists wander this city and draw on their own memories in order to interpret it, the intersections of their paths trace the network of the collectively imagined city. However, this imagined city is far from harmonious, and nor is it clearly ‘liberated’. The tensions engendered by its heterogeneity, by the weight of its many pasts, and by the mutability of its boundaries, is encapsulated by the painful position of the body in *Perunův den*, suspended on the threshold between the two cities.

Ajvaz takes a different approach to the process of interpretation. Like Hodrová, he makes references to dreams and rituals in order to suggest that the city is a map of possible meanings, but the dimension of memory is mainly absent from his depiction

of Prague. This quality has led Hodrová herself to comment that Ajvaz's Prague is 'devoid of memory' ('zbavené paměti'), and Alfred Thomas to suggest that Ajvaz tries to 'erase' the city.³⁴³ In fact, this is not quite the case. Ajvaz assumes that his reader is familiar with many conventions of the imagined city. Its famous panoramas are missing from the opening of the novella and are later destroyed in the imagination of the narrator and the nightmares of Sylvia. Such destruction would hardly retain its meaning if Ajvaz's Prague were not embedded in its past. Portraying the (partial, and temporary) erasure of the familiar city in a text is not the same as actually attempting to erase it.

Furthermore, the wanderings of Ajvaz's protagonists contain echoes of Prague's literary past, recalling Nezval, Karásek and Kafka. The identification of the narrator's counterpart as an archaeologist invites us to consider the past of the city and to imagine the all-important key to the other city as a familiar Prague artifact. Instead, the interpretation of the city rests on the unexpected and the unfamiliar, on exoticism and the abrupt banality of an arcade machine.³⁴⁴ Ajvaz suggests that only a narrative which does not seek the answers in the hidden chambers of St Vitus' Cathedral or in the collections of Rudolf II, but instead finds them in lost, impossible instruments from India, can reveal a world in which meaning is accessible. It is also for this reason that the narrator and the archaeologist cross paths: unlike Hodrová's protagonists, they are not connected by shared pasts. They are linked by contrast, by their differing paths through the city. Like Hodrová's city, this is a Prague where heterogeneity is central – and here, too, this is a source of danger. Unbound by history, cut loose from the past, Ajvaz's Prague approaches a chaos of meaninglessness. And yet, 'Bílí mravenci'

³⁴³ Hodrová, *citlivé město*, p. 160; Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, p. 172. See also Bobrakov-Timoškin, p. 557.

³⁴⁴ It is this 'abrupt banality' which leads Květoslav Chvatík to characterise Ajvaz's work as 'postmodern' rather than connecting it with surrealism (Chvatík, *Od avantgardy*, p. 336).

remains precariously linked with a cultural past: the unfamiliarity of Ajvaz's music is most audible if we are half-expecting to hear Smetana or Janáček.

III

The author in the city

Jan Faktor's *Georgs Sorgen um die Vergangenheit oder Im Reich des heiligen Hodensack-Bimbams von Prag* (2010) and Jáchym Topol's *Sestra* (1994)



Prague's largest rubbish dump, in the suburb of Ďáblice (Dezidor, CC BY 3.0).

In contemporary Czech and Czech-German fiction, a complex set of connections emerges between the authorial persona and the portrayal of Prague: the authorial subject is located in the city and shaped by its spaces, whilst the city is itself constructed by the author. As we uncover the discontinuities and contradictions which characterise the authorial stance, we come to consider how physical location relates to authorial point of view.

The two authors who form the focus of this chapter, Jan Faktor and Jáchym Topol, take a subversive approach to our expectations regarding authorial stance. They each

engage with authorial identities which have an established connection with the imagined city: Jan Faktor recalls the German-speaking Jewish writers of pre-war Prague, whilst Jáchym Topol plays on the cultural status of the Prague underground authors. Both authors question how such authorial positions are constructed.

Jan Faktor's *Georgs Sorgen um die Vergangenheit oder Im Reich des heiligen Hodensack-Bimbams von Prag* (2010, referred to henceforth as *Georgs Sorgen*) and Jáchym Topol's *Sestra* (1994) each focus on a writer-narrator-protagonist who defines his own voice through his movements around Prague. In their anti-teleological wanderings, these texts show similarities to Daniela Hodrová's *Perunův den* and Michal Ajvaz's 'Bílí mravenci'. However, where the narrators of those texts are generally self-effacing, Faktor and Topol's writer-narrator-protagonists never cease to draw the reader's attention. Thus, where the role of reading is crucial to Hodrová and Ajvaz, the significance of authorship particularly comes to the fore in the fiction of Faktor and Topol.

Jan Faktor's exploration of authorial stance in *Georgs Sorgen* is shaped by the fact that he occupies a point of intersection between Czech and German cultures. Born in Prague in 1951, his native language is Czech; he heard German being spoken by his Jewish mother and other relatives at home, but learnt it as a foreign language at school.³⁴⁵ His first published texts appeared in Czech, in a small samizdat edition.³⁴⁶ He married the German psychoanalyst Annette Simon and emigrated to the GDR in 1978. He has since commented that he found post-1968 Prague difficult to bear: 'Prag war damals furchtbar bedrückend, der kulturelle Zerfall demoralisierend'.³⁴⁷ In Berlin,

³⁴⁵ Cornejo, p. 100.

³⁴⁶ A collection called *Texty 1980-1981* was circulated under the pseudonym Petr Eisler (Cornejo, p. 407).

³⁴⁷ Jan Faktor, 'Meine ganz privaten Ansichten zu Prag 1968', in Annette Simon and Jan Faktor, *Fremd im eigenen Land?* (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2000), pp. 27-36 (p. 34).

he became involved in the Prenzlauer Berg underground scene, writing experimental poetry in his beginner's German, and gradually developing his linguistic skills.³⁴⁸ His first novel, *Schornstein* (2005), gave little indication of his complex cultural background: although it is partly concerned with its protagonist's Jewish identity and his family's experiences in the Holocaust, which echo Faktor's family history, it is only faintly autobiographical and has no Czech elements. *Georgs Sorgen* is his most recent work, and the first to take his readers to Prague and explore the spaces of his childhood and adolescence. It alludes to the teleological model of the Bildungsroman – Faktor refers to it as an 'erotischer Entwicklungsroman' – and presents us with a protagonist who is looking back on his own attempts to find a voice as a writer. However, by eschewing linearity and often focussing on the emotional and physical low-points of his protagonist, Faktor undermines such suggestions of teleology.

Georgs Sorgen is narrated by Georg Schornstein, whose family background and formative experiences closely resemble those of Jan Faktor.³⁴⁹ Born in 1950s Prague, Georg grows up in a household where women predominate: his parents are divorced, and he lives with his mother, aunts and grandmother, who are Jewish. Where temporal continuity and linearity are lacking, the city of Prague provides a structure for Georg's narrative and for his search for identity. Following a multiplicity of paths around Prague and exploring how the stories of the past fail to combine into a coherent narrative, *Georgs Sorgen* suggests that mapping out an authorial identity in the city's fragmented spaces of memory is a process fraught with tension.

Whilst Jan Faktor plays on the shifting position of his protagonist between Czech, German and Jewish Prague, Jáchym Topol experiments with the notions of

³⁴⁸ Cornejo, p. 81.

³⁴⁹ On Faktor's biography, see also the detailed interview in Cornejo, pp. 407-419. The autobiographical aspects of *Georgs Sorgen* are emphasised by Gerhard Trapp ('Jan Faktor: *Georgs Sorgen um die Vergangenheit oder Im Reich des heiligen Hodensack-Bimbams von Prag*', *Stifter-Jahrbuch*, 25 (2011), 253-256).

authenticity and authority associated with the Prague underground.³⁵⁰ Like Faktor, Topol grew up in Prague; he is the grandson of the writer Karel Schulz, whose works were unpopular with the socialist regime, and the son of Josef Topol, a dissident dramatist.³⁵¹ Unable to study at university, he signed Charter 77 and worked on underground magazines such as *Revolver Revue*, as well as collaborating with his brother, Filip Topol, frontman of the underground band Psí vojáci ('Dog Soldiers'), which Ivan Jirous described in 1986 as offering 'a shockingly authentic testimony to our time'.³⁵² After 1989, Topol studied ethnology and worked as a journalist; his journalistic writing included reportages about Vietnamese people living in Czechoslovakia.³⁵³

In Topol's first novel, *Sestra*, the underground becomes a semi-criminal milieu after 1989: the narrator-protagonist, Potok, is a dancer by profession, but in the turmoil of the early 1990s, he and his friends become successful gangsters. Like Faktor's protagonist, Potok wanders the city in search of a language in which to tell his own story. Topol plays with his own authority as a writer with connections to the pre-1989 underground, and with the suggestions of authenticity created by the autobiographical aspects of the novel, and undermines these by constructing a fantastical Prague in which our assumptions about his moral perspective are challenged.

The subversion of authorial stance in *Georgs Sorgen* and *Sestra* raises the question of how an author's ethos relates to the imagined city. The concept of 'ethos' as a mode of

³⁵⁰ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 131.

³⁵¹ Kamila Míková and others, 'Jáchym Topol', *Slovník české literatury po roce 1945* <<http://www.slovníkceskeliteratury.cz/showContent.jsp?docId=881&hl=topol+>> [accessed 10.6.2016]. See also Kamila Černá, 'Josef Topol', *Slovník české literatury po roce 1945* <<http://www.slovníkceskeliteratury.cz/showContent.jsp?docId=1186>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

³⁵² 'Psí vojáci [...] vydávají děsivé autentické svědectví o naší době' (Ivan M. Jirous, 'Psí vojáci', in *otevřený rány: Výbrané studie o díle Jáchyma Topola*, ed. by Ivo Říha (Prague: Torst, 2013), pp. 17-20 (p. 20)). On the lyrics and music of Psí vojáci, see also Kliems, *Der Underground*, pp. 211-234.

³⁵³ See e.g. Jáchym Topol, 'Vietnamci v Československu - konec izolace?', *Přítomnost*, 2, 6 (1991), 16-18.

persuasion can be traced back to classical discussions of rhetoric. It emphasises the location of the author, who occupies a certain geographical, historical and cultural position, and thus always speaks and writes from a particular vantage point. This positioning can change over time and shift its influence over the functions of authorship in a given text.

Aristotle saw ethos as being internal to an orator's discourse, defining it as a sense of the speaker's moral character which is communicated by his demonstration of practical wisdom, virtue and good will; he emphasised that the ideas which the audience might already have about the speaker were not relevant to ethos as he saw it.³⁵⁴ However, some classical rhetoricians stressed the importance of the speaker's 'previous reputation and social status', and as Ruth Amosy has shown, these two approaches to ethos as being either internal or external to the speaker's discourse have continued to develop alongside one another.³⁵⁵

Amosy views ethos as a combination of the speaker's self-presentation within an individual speech, and his or her 'prior ethos', which encompasses the speaker's status in society, media image, and previous speeches.³⁵⁶ When an author writes a text, he or she forms an image of the audience to whom it will be addressed, and constructs a self-image on that basis. The addressee's attitude to the author will depend on his or her 'prior ethos'; the assumptions which the author makes about the views and preferences of the addressee will shape the authorial role which he or she takes on. The author therefore directs his or her words towards an imagined addressee rather than a real one, and the reception of the text will depend partly on whether the

³⁵⁴ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. and ed. by George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 37-38 (book 1, chapter 2).

³⁵⁵ Ruth Amosy, 'Ethos at the Crossroads of Disciplines: Rhetoric, Pragmatics, Sociology', *Poetics Today*, 22, 1 (2001), 1-23 (p. 2).

³⁵⁶ Amosy, p. 7.

real audience differs from the author's imagined version. The relationship between the extratextual ethos of the author and the ethos he or she constructs within the text is far from straightforward: in a particular text, an author may modify his or her existing ethos.³⁵⁷ Faktor and Topol play on the connections and discontinuities between their prior ethos and the ethos constructed in their novels.

The connection between ethos and location is already suggested by the etymology of the Greek word: as Arthur B. Miller has shown, apart from meaning 'character', the word ethos denotes a place to which people are accustomed to return, or a 'habitual gathering place', as S. Michael Halloran puts it.³⁵⁸ The connotations of 'gathering' imply the social construction of character and the emergence of ethos from a negotiation between speaker and audience, whilst the concept of ethos as a 'place' underlines a process of positioning, in which the author's geographical, historical and cultural location is mapped out in relation to that of the addressee. Nedra Reynolds has explored the notion of ethos as a location, emphasising that where authority is conventionally constructed at the 'centre' of political and cultural power, writers can subvert this convention by establishing the authority of marginalised voices, or voices which come from ambiguous, 'in-between' locations.³⁵⁹

Jan Faktor's novel *Georgs Sorgen um die Vergangenheit oder Im Reich des heiligen Hodensack-Bimbams von Prag*

³⁵⁷ Amossy, p. 20.

³⁵⁸ Arthur B. Miller, 'Aristotle on Habit (*nθος*) and Character (*eθος*): Implications for the Rhetoric', *Speech Monographs*, 41 (1974), 309-316 (p. 310); S. Michael Halloran, 'Aristotle's Concept of *Ethos*, Or If Not His, Somebody Else's', *Rhetoric Review*, 1 (1982), 58-63 (p. 60). See also Nedra Reynolds, 'Ethos as Location: New Sites for Understanding Discursive Authority', *Rhetoric Review*, 11, 2 (1993), 325-338 (pp. 327-328).

³⁵⁹ Reynolds, pp. 330-333.

Georg's search for identity is a looping, often repetitive journey around the city, where his home forms the centre to which he always returns. His narrative wanderings through Prague represent a tortuous process of attempting to communicate his feelings about himself, his family's wartime past and the political events of 1968. The novel often suggests a contrast between the idyllic Prague of Georg's pre-1968 childhood and adolescence, and the disintegration of the city after 1968, but this is undermined both by the narrative's fractured chronology and by the fact that already before 1968, Georg is stifled by the love of his mother and aunts and revolted by the aggressive stupidity of his father and uncle. After 1968, he starts work as a delivery man, before escaping to the Tatry mountains. He later returns to Prague and to the unspoken tensions of his relationship with his mother, and travels with her to Christianstadt in Poland, where she was forced to work during the Second World War. Often, an 'iterative' mode of narration is employed, telling us 'what always used to happen' rather than describing a specific moment. The novel does not present the events of Georg's life as part of a chronological development, but rather maps them spatially, connecting them with locations in Prague or with departures from the city.

The interplay between city and author is emphasised already in the title of the novel, which locates the narrator-protagonist in time and space, as well as in relation to Faktor's earlier works, in which 'Georg' is frequently a stand-in for the author.³⁶⁰ The first part of the title, *Georgs Sorgen um die Vergangenheit*, sounds like a sequel to Faktor's poem, 'Georgs Sorgen um die Zukunft' (1982-3), which plays with the possibilities of the German comparative in order to create lists of worrying trends and satirise official socialist discourse.³⁶¹ The return to the name 'Georg' in Faktor's novel blurs the boundaries of the fictional world, recalling Faktor's comment, 'Die Grenzen

³⁶⁰ See e.g. Jan Faktor, *Georgs Versuche an einem Gedicht und andere positive Texte aus dem Dichtergarten des Grauens* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1989).

³⁶¹ Faktor, *Georgs Versuche*, pp. 42-46.

zwischen mir und Georg sind nicht klar und sollen nicht ganz klar sein.³⁶² The shift from ‘Zukunft’ to ‘Vergangenheit’ plays on our expectations that this novel will be a fictionalised memoir, connected with the tradition of ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ in German literature. Yet ‘Sorgen’ lack the implied purposefulness and finality of ‘Bewältigung’: they are open-ended, like Georg’s text.³⁶³

Faktor’s scepticism towards ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ is further emphasised by the second part of the novel’s title, ‘Im Reich des heiligen Hodensack-Bimbams von Prag’.³⁶⁴ With its mock grandiloquence, it parodies the fetishisation of Prague as a beautiful city and aggressively underlines the significance of Georg’s sexual self-discovery to his search for an authorial voice. This is compounded in the opening sentences of the novel, in which Georg tells us, ‘Die ersten Sorgen um meinen Penis machte ich mir schon vor etwa fünfzig Jahren im Kindergarten’.³⁶⁵ This surprising parallel between ‘worrying about the past’ and ‘worrying about one’s penis’ recalls novels such as Thomas Brüssig’s *Helden wie wir* (1995), where moral guilt and sexual awakening are connected. Georg’s construction of an authorial ethos begins with the apparently comic foregrounding of his penis, which is soon related to the context of the kindergarten as a comical microcosm of the authoritarian society, where the teachers strictly supervise the toilets and use masking tape to close Georg’s mouth. Faktor’s introduction of Prague occurs in a syntactically fragmented sentence which is couched as an explanation: ‘Dazu muß man wissen: Wir – die Kleinen wie die Großen

³⁶² Faktor, *Georgs Versuche*, p. 118.

³⁶³ Charel Braconnier suggests a teleological development towards ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’, and underestimates the extent to which the novel concerns processes of remembering which are unproductive, fragmented or impossible to complete (“‘Die Vergangenheit garte und blubberte bei uns hinter jeder Tür und jedem Vorhang.’” Prager Geschichte(n) und Erinnerung in Jan Faktors *Georgs Sorgen um die Vergangenheit*, *Zagreber Germanistische Beiträge*, 21 (2012), 221-243 (p. 222)).

³⁶⁴ Felicitas von Lovenberg criticises the title as infantile and off-putting (‘Als ich lernte, die Bomben zu lieben’, *FAZ* (17.3.2010) <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/jan-faktor-georgs-sorgen-um-die-vergangenheit-als-ich-lernte-die-bomben-zu-lieben-1957855.html>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

³⁶⁵ Jan Faktor, *Georgs Sorgen um die Vergangenheit oder Im Reich des heiligen Hodensack-Bimbams von Prag* (Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 2010), p. 7. Future references are given in the text.

– lebten damals in Prag, ohne darunter sonderlich zu leiden, in einer totalitären Gesellschaft’ (p. 7). The location of Prague verges on the paradoxical: it is a ‘totalitarian society’ which does not cause much suffering. Faktor draws unsettling connections between the body (both innocent and grotesque), the city (both oppressive and harmless) and authorship, as childish chattering and as political resistance.

Repairing the city

As he remembers growing up in Prague, Georg’s approach to the city hovers between the desire to find explanations for his own behaviour and thus avoid taking moral responsibility, and the wish to define the ways in which he ‘belongs’ to the city. He therefore shifts between two attitudes to ethos: on the one hand, he behaves ‘unethically’ by trying to use the city to distance himself from any sense of himself as an ethical being, whilst on the other, he seeks a ‘Prague ethos’ which could form the basis for an identity. This is illustrated by a description of his street:

Wenn ich mir zu böse vorkam [...] suchte ich nach weiteren vergangenen Einflüssen, die mich in Prag eventuell noch im Griff gehabt haben konnten. Ich wollte die Verantwortung dafür, wie ich geworden war, gern etwas breiter gestreut sehen. Ich sammelte diese Erklärungssplitter [...]. Wenn ich auf der Südseite unserer Wohnung aus dem Fenster schaute, sah ich auf eine Einbahnstraße, die geschichtsträchtig nach dem polnischen Dichter, Freiheitskämpfer und Kryptojuden Mickiewicz benannt worden war. Mickiewicz wurde mein Patron [...]. (p. 223)

Georg suggests that the presence of Mickiewicz’s name on the street signs outside his flat may be connected with his own Jewish background; the reference to Mickiewicz as a ‘freedom fighter’ implicitly relates to Georg’s inability to conform to the socialist system, although he does not present himself seriously as a dissident. At the same time, he casts doubt on this possible identity, reflecting self-consciously on how he

used to seek out aspects of the city as explanations for his own personality: the word ‘eventuell’ implies that these explanations are sometimes tenuous.

Throughout the novel, Georg amasses a heterogeneous collection of these ‘explanatory fragments’. In the same chapter, he also mentions a bust of Charlotte Garrigue Masaryk, as well as the propaganda display at the Chinese Embassy, which was on his way to school. Although Georg is now looking back at his search for explanations and seeing them from a distance in time, the tension is not resolved between ‘genuine’ identities and those which he imagined in order to exonerate himself.

As the word ‘Erklärungssplitter’ suggests, Georg responds to Prague as a myriad interconnected fragments. Its fragmentary nature corresponds to his aesthetic approach to reality:

Mein Prag war ein idealer Ort für jemanden, dem das Gefühl für die Greifbarkeit der Realität als der am besten annehmbaren Normalität dauernd entgleiten sollte. [...] Wenn ich draußen herumliefe, war ich dauernd damit beschäftigt, die Umwelt in meiner Phantasie zu reparieren. Im Sozialismus zerbrach, versackte, zersetzte sich sowieso pausenlos etwas oder blätterte dickschichtig ab. (p. 346)

The constant disintegration of the very substance of the city during the socialist period – for which Faktor uses a climactic series of verbs expressing decay and dilapidation – influences Georg’s relationship with reality.³⁶⁶ He argues that humans have evolved to see the world around us as ‘normality’ and as the best ‘deliverable’ reality (p. 344): this tendency helps us to survive and reduces our ‘Verzweiflungsanfälligkeit’. Georg himself does not share this way of seeing reality. The mocking phrase ‘die in jeder Hinsicht beste aller lieferbaren’ recalls Voltaire’s attitude to Leibniz’ theory regarding the ‘best of all possible worlds’. Where Voltaire used the hardships of the protagonist

³⁶⁶ Braconnier connects these descriptions with the literature of the 1970s underground (p. 236).

in *Candide* to illustrate what he saw as the folly of Leibniz' approach, Faktor suggests here that the shortcomings of the socialist system, exemplified by the physical disintegration of Prague, made it impossible for Georg to accept reality as 'normal'.

Georg compares his images of the world around him with the socialist realist mosaics which he sees all over Prague, but which always quickly disintegrate. The slogans and mosaics of the socialist regime were filled with relentless optimism, but reality fell short in obvious ways, leaving Georg floundering in his attempts to grasp the world around him. His response is to 'repair' the world constantly in his imagination – that is, he begins to behave like a novelist, creating a fictional version of the world.

However, Georg is overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task: in socialist Prague, there is too much to 'repair'. He resorts to concentrating on individual scraps of beauty which offer respite from the ugliness:

In manchen Realitätsbrocken steckte erstaunlich viel Seele [...] Ich fokussierte die leuchtend polierten Erhebungen von Gullydeckeln, fand eingemeißelte Geheimzeichen auf den Bordsteinen, feierte widerstandsfähige Muttermale der vielen großflächig befallenen Häuserwände [...]. (pp. 348-349)

The city cannot be 'repaired' in its entirety; Georg is unable to create it afresh in his imagination. So instead, he works with fragments. He seeks out 'crumbs of reality' which have retained their 'soul': he imagines these details of the city as if they were animate. They have aesthetic worth beyond their apparent mundanity, as is suggested by the phrase 'die leuchtend polierten Erhebungen', which leads us to expect a description of sculptures rather than manhole covers. The aestheticisation of these 'Realitätsbrocken' is continued by the reference to 'Geheimzeichen', which implies that the surfaces of the city can be read and interpreted like texts. At the same time, such details have a political significance too, as the word 'widerstandsfähig' implies: they have survived the impact of the socialist regime on the city.

Georg's attempts to 'repair' reality and therefore erase its shortcomings are impossible to sustain – and would ultimately resemble the 'socialist realist' approach exemplified by the ubiquitous mosaics which attempt to obscure the system's brutality. Therefore, Faktor assembles a huge array of details and anecdotes from Georg's life in Prague, joining them loosely and often associatively, allowing them to contradict and relativise one another. The greater the proliferation of details, the clearer it becomes that this image of Prague will never be complete.

The construction of ethos in the fragile spaces of Faktor's Prague is a process of shifting between stances: Georg uses elements of the city to shift responsibility for his own behaviour and as building blocks for his own identity, he takes up the task of 'repairing' the city, and he embraces its fragmentation by celebrating individual details. Just as the city is composed of heterogeneous fragments, Georg's ethos is a collection of experiments rather than a single position. The disintegration of the city, ostensibly an effect of socialism, therefore becomes a defining element of Georg's narrative stance(s): if ethos is closely related to location, his ethos is located in a space which is constantly falling apart.

Czech-German-Jewish ethos

In his approach to authorial ethos in *Georgs Sorgen*, Faktor plays on our expectations of an author who grew up in a Jewish family in Prague, speaking Czech, but who emigrated from Czechoslovakia and now publishes his novels in German.³⁶⁷ The text reflects on this multiplicity of identities and on the combination of intimacy and distance in an emigrant's perspective on Prague – but it does so as much through

³⁶⁷ The novel has now been translated into Czech and has been described by critics as a 'milestone in the field of Czech literature' ('milník na poli české literatury'); see Jakub Ehrenberger, 'Faktor, Jan: Jiříkovy starosti o minulost', *iLiteratura* <<http://www.iliteratura.cz/Clanek/35505/>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

striking omissions as through explicit engagement with the themes of Jewish identity or emigration. Faktor only hints at the fact that Georg is writing from the perspective of an emigrant: although he describes several temporary departures from Prague, he does not describe his emigration from the city. However, Georg constantly adopts a retrospective attitude to Prague, as if the city only existed in the past.

The text is shaped both by the absence of the Germans in Prague, and by the absence of Georg's emigration to Germany. Georg tells us several times that the furniture in his family home originally belonged to Germans who fled:

Unsere Wohnung war voll von dunklen Möbelstücken reicher und 1945 nach Österreich geflohener Deutscher. Diese Einrichtung war zwar nicht nur häßlich [...], alle verrückbaren Einzelteile der Einrichtung waren aber [...] gefühllos [...] zusammengeschoben, aufeinandergetürmt oder ineinander verkeilt. (p. 13-14)

Faktor's depiction of the furniture makes the absence of the Germans a physical presence: it fills the flat, obstructing Georg's movements around his own room. The long, unwieldy participles, 'zusammengeschoben' and 'aufeinandergetürmt', emphasise the heaviness and solidity of these reminders of the flat's earlier inhabitants. As elsewhere in Georg's descriptions of his home, there is an emphasis on overwhelming proliferation, disorder, and barriers. Faktor implies that these remnants of the past cannot easily be distinguished from each other, analysed or used as clues to gain a better understanding of the people who once lived here. However, this furniture also becomes part of Georg's identity: he personifies it, talks of 'making friends with it' and even claims, with characteristic hyperbole, that some pieces were closer to him at times than his mother (p. 14).

The Germans, then, are palpably absent – and yet, the German language is overwhelmingly present, as Georg spends over six hundred pages telling his story, delighting in neologisms and wordplay ('jedefrau und jedermann' (p. 23),

‘tantenseits’ (p. 22)).³⁶⁸ Georg chooses to address a German audience, but never tells us how he came to write his memories down in German, rather than Czech.³⁶⁹

Faktor does not attempt to incorporate the German-speaking and Jewish history of Prague smoothly into the text: instead, he focusses on the discontinuities in Georg’s Czech-German-Jewish background, as well as the ambivalence which his writer-narrator feels both towards his personal past and towards the cultural heritage with which readers might see all-too-obvious links. His treatment of the Czech and German literary canon is characteristic of this nuanced and often humorous approach to the complexities of establishing an authorial stance at the intersection of Czech, German and Jewish culture.³⁷⁰ Georg regards himself as lacking an adequate father: his parents are divorced, and he portrays his father as an emotionally crippled alcoholic who never misses a chance to humiliate others. Seeking alternative role models, Georg finds one in the shape of an author who is known for his own difficult relationship with his father:

Franz Kafka, der Meister des Kristallklaren, hätte für mich unter den vielen Pragern vielleicht noch den besten aller Väter abgegeben haben können – seinerzeit. [...] Sagte der aufmerksame Franz doch an der Ostsee zu seinem kleinen Neffen, der gerade gestolpert und hingefallen war:

– Wie geschickt bist du gefallen und wie geschickt wieder aufgestanden!
(p. 326)

Here Faktor acknowledges the fact that in German-speaking literary histories, Prague is the city of Kafka; the reader has been expecting to hear something about this writer,

³⁶⁸ Faktor has commented that the text is ‘a Czech novel written in German’ (Renata Cornejo, ‘Faktor: Názvem knihy jsem chtěl provokovat’, in *Děčínský deník*, 15.5.2012 <http://decinsky.denik.cz/kultura_region/faktor-nazvem-knihy-jsem-chtel-provokovat-20120515-8pmt.html> [accessed 10.6.2016]).

³⁶⁹ See Lovenberg.

³⁷⁰ Norbert Wichard describes his perspective as ‘mitteleuropäisch’ rather than national (‘Mittleuropäische Blickrichtungen. Geschichtsdarstellungen bei Saša Stanišić und Jan Faktor’, *Aussiger Beiträge*, 6 (2012), 159-176), whilst Inga Probst calls it ‘supranational’ (‘“Rodina” / “Familie” / “Mischpoke” oder Georgs Sorgen um die multikulturelle Familienerinnerung’, *Aussiger Beiträge*, 6 (2012), 177-192 (p. 185)).

and is bound to regard him as the artistic ‘father’ of Georg (and Faktor). Faktor’s response to these expectations contains a degree of irony. In the phrase ‘Meister des Kristallklaren’, Faktor echoes Max Brod’s words of praise, knowing that the reader will see a contrast between Kafka’s unadorned style and his own baroque neologisms.³⁷¹ Thus, he implies that we should not take this suggestion of artistic influence too seriously.

On the other hand, the anecdote demonstrating Kafka’s kindness does provide a striking contrast with the behaviour of almost all the men Georg knows. Kafka, according to the anecdote, met mistakes with praise.³⁷² He is therefore a benevolent figure in the background of Faktor’s writing, rather than a threatening force against which he has to struggle. Georg may have an oedipal relationship with his male relatives, but his attitude to his literary predecessor does not follow the models of conflict set out by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence*.³⁷³ His portrayal of Kafka as his surrogate father is one of many experiments with different identities:

Ich stellte ihn mir in dieser Rolle jedenfalls einmal vor, und es klappte recht gut. (p. 326)

By ‘imagining’ Kafka in this role, Georg conjures up a fictionalised version of the earlier writer, incorporating him into the ever-changing construct of his identity. At the same time, Faktor indicates through his ironic tone that he is assembling an ethos partly on the basis of assumptions about his readers’ expectations, and that his authorial stance emerges from the interactions between many potential identities.

³⁷¹ See Max Brod, ‘Der Dichter Franz Kafka’, in *Juden in der deutschen Literatur: Essays über zeitgenössische Schriftsteller*, ed. by Gustav Krojanker (Berlin: Welt-Verlag, 1922), pp. 55-62 (p. 55).

³⁷² The incident was described by Kafka’s girlfriend Dora Diamant, although she did not suggest that the child was his nephew. See *Das Kafka-Buch. Eine innere Biographie in Selbstzeugnissen*, ed. by Heinz Politzer (Hamburg: Fischer, 1965), p. 167.

³⁷³ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 5.

‘Geradlinigkeit’ and emigration

Faktor’s exploration of the uncertainties, unanswered questions and silences which play a role in shaping authorial ethos culminates in a passage towards the end of *Georgs Sorgen*, in which the protagonist joins a group of dissidents who are walking together through Prague, discussing Jaroslav Hašek’s influence on the Czech self-image. The leader of the dissidents is a blind Marxist philosopher called Klaudius, who has a particularly intense connection with Prague: he finds his way around the city without a stick, and has an almost superhuman awareness of the city’s subtlest sensory details (p. 96).³⁷⁴ By moving around the city, the dissidents have been avoiding talking in a space which could be under surveillance, though in fact they do attract the attention of the secret police, and end up jokingly planning to continue the discussion at Klaudius’ house, so that it will be recorded and transcribed (p. 536). Wandering together through the streets is presented as an assertion of fragile intellectual freedom – particularly when one of the dissidents (‘der Philosoph K.’) insists on being allowed to make his point in front of the Philosophical Faculty of the university, where he lost his job as a result of his views.

Their conversation focusses on one of the best-known Czech writers, to whom Georg’s relationship is no less ambivalent than his attitude to Kafka: the discussion of the dissidents revolves around the damaging national myths for which Hašek’s works have become a vehicle. Klaudius argues that it is a mistake to view Švejk as a rebel in a quintessentially Czech mould: the ‘good soldier’ Švejk can only be admired in the fictional context of Hašek’s novels, whereas in real life, his behaviour would be

³⁷⁴ This recalls Johannes Urzidil’s portrayal of the wise blind man Kilián, in *Prager Triptychon*, p. 123.

‘halbintelligentes und schleimiges “Herumeiern”’.³⁷⁵ The only way to annoy the authorities is through ‘Geradlinigkeit’, not Švejk’s clowning (pp. 531-534).

Following this discussion of ethos and fiction, Klaudius advises Georg on his ambitions to become an author, urging him to leave Prague and write novels: he hopes that the younger generation will write about socialist Czechoslovakia, remarking that he himself, as a former communist, feels too implicated in the political situation to write about it (‘wir Alten [sind] mit dem jetzigen Mist total verstrickt’, p. 538). The advice to leave Prague encourages Georg to separate himself from the topography of his youth, to seek geographical and moral distance, and to cease defining himself by the streets of his home city; this is one of the moments in the novel which come closest to the model of the *Bildungsroman*.

And yet, the whole discussion takes place in those very streets, and Klaudius implies that the reason Georg ought to move away is in order to write about his home: the act of emigration is presented as a step towards an authorial role which confronts the difficult political and historical elements of Czech culture. Klaudius implies that by leaving behind the older dissidents such as himself, Georg can take a winding path towards the elusive truthfulness and ‘Geradlinigkeit’ of a dissident ethos.³⁷⁶

Jáchym Topol’s novel *Sestra*

Like Faktor, Jáchym Topol confronts the reader with a fragmented authorial subject. With his shifting claims, confused memories, wandering chronology, and leaps between linguistic registers, the narrator of *Sestra* seems to personify the chaotic

³⁷⁵ On the role of Švejk in the Czech self-image, see Ladislav Holý, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Transformation of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 72-73.

³⁷⁶ On the construction of dissidence around ‘courage, truthfulness, steadfast self-confidence’, see Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 2.

transformation of Prague after 1989. His name itself suggests ambiguity: without specifying whether it is a nickname or a surname, he calls himself Potok, meaning 'stream'. Apart from reflecting the continuous flow of his narrative, which often uses ellipses in place of other punctuation, this name contains an echo of 'Topol'. It also plays on the notion of authenticity: can Potok's words be compared with the pure water of a stream, and thus be seen as quintessentially authentic? Does the fact that 'Potok' is almost an anagram of 'Topol' mean that the narrator is a thinly veiled version of the author, and thus 'authentic' in the sense that he voices the author's own views?

Potok's disorientating narration reflects the instability of Czech society in the early nineties, and might therefore be read as an authentic account of a moment in Czech history. However, Topol avoids realism, presenting Prague in fantastical terms, as a city where hallucinations and visions mingle with the everyday dreariness of the tenements on the periphery. *Sestra* is both an attempt, rare in contemporary Czech literature, to express the shock of 1989 and the underlying brutality of the years which followed it, and a boldly anti-realist text.³⁷⁷

Two questions underlie Potok's wanderings around post-1989 Prague in *Sestra*, and relate to two interpretations of ethos: what can it mean to belong to a group, an ideology or another person, and what is the meaning of 'good' and 'evil' in this chaotic city? The novel is divided into three parts, entitled 'Město' ('City'), 'Sestra' ('Sister') and 'Stříbro' ('Silver').³⁷⁸ In the first, Potok describes how he lost

³⁷⁷ Some critics emphasise that the novel is a direct response to historical realities: see e.g. Wachtel, pp. 166-188; Květoslav Chvatík, 'Zběsilost', *Tvar*, 16 (1994), 17. Others suggest that the novel's connection with reality is ambiguous and heavily mediated (e.g. Petr A. Bílek, 'Topolův román ... uličnický', *Tvar*, 16 (1994), 17-18; Alfrun Kliems, 'Wenn die Reise über Leichen geht (und zu Tarantino führt): Jáchym Topols *Die Schwester* und der Holocaust', in *Geschlechtergedächtnisse: Gender-Konstellationen und Erinnerungsmuster in Literatur und Film der Gegenwart*, ed. by Ilse Nagelschmidt, Inga Probst and Torsten Erdbrügger (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2010), pp. 209-224).

³⁷⁸ In Alex Zucker's English translation, these section headings were combined to form the title of the novel.

his girlfriend, Bára, in 1989: she appears to vanish into the city, but later in the novel it emerges that he probably killed her. Potok describes his relationship with Bára as if they belonged to an ancient tribe ('kmen'): his nickname for her, 'Malá Bílá Psice' ('Little White She-Dog') echoes literal translations of tribal names, and their sexual encounters are described as a 'ritual'. This exemplifies Topol's treatment of the theme of shared identity throughout the novel: after Bára disappears or dies, Potok finds a new 'tribe', a gang of men with links to the pre-1989 underground scene, whose subversive activities now involve profiting illegally from the political and economic chaos of the new Czech capitalism. They also exploit the wave of migration which followed 1989, working together with a group of Laotian immigrants to sell products from their homeland. At the same time, however, the tribe has an ethical or spiritual purpose: they call themselves the 'people of the Secret' ('Byli jsme lidi Tajemství'³⁷⁹), and their 'secret' is that they are waiting for the Messiah to arrive. This provides a reason for the moral limits which they impose on themselves: they agree never to be involved in selling guns, drugs or human beings, because of the risk that the future Messiah could be hurt by their actions.

Over the course of the novel, each of Potok's 'tribes' disintegrates. Thus, at the start of the 'Sister' section, the tribe of the 'people of the Secret' falls apart. Potok wanders the city alone, searching for his 'sister': his first girlfriend, Bára, promised that he would meet a soulmate one day. After zigzagging around the margins of the city, searching the dilapidated tenements, he finds his predestined lover, a singer known as Černá ('Black'). They live together for a while, their intense relationship offering a further form of tribal identity. Potok becomes involved in the ethical entanglements of the post-1989 period: he is drawn into cooperating with a group of ex-dissidents who are ostensibly taking revenge on the secret policemen who tortured them before 1989. However, the seemingly simple divisions between pre-1989 'victims' and

³⁷⁹ Jáchym Topol, *Sestra* (Brno: Atlantis, 1994), p. 7. Future references are given in the text.

‘perpetrators’ become increasingly blurred. He and Černá leave Prague, escaping this increasingly violent situation, and find themselves somewhere in Eastern Slovakia, among the semi-criminals who run a large market outside a border town – but here, at the very margins of what was once Czechoslovakia, Potok’s relationship with Černá disintegrates, as he descends into alcoholism.

Thus, another ‘tribe’ implodes, and in the final section of the novel, ‘Silver’, Potok is alone, seeking to recover the sense of ethical purpose by which he was intermittently guided earlier on. He returns to Prague, living rough at the main railway station and then out on the furthest edge of the city, at the municipal dump; each place is inhabited by a fragile community of homeless people with whom Potok forms loose connections. Here, the problem of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ once again surfaces: Potok shoots a child whom he considers to be an embodiment of the devil. After leaving the dump, he begins again to search for Černá in Prague, which has changed: the flat where he was living has been taken over by a hotel, and his belongings have vanished, along with many of the people and places he knew before. He catches glimpses of Černá in advertisements for shiny products, crosses paths again with his friend Micka, who was the founder of the disbanded ‘people of the Secret’, and begins living with one of the Laotian women whom he knew in the time of the gang’s successes.

In keeping with the wandering, fragmented narrative, the novel ends ambiguously: in the closing scene, Potok returns to Černá’s flat and is reunited with her, but as with many passages in the novel, it is impossible to tell whether this occurs only in his imagination.³⁸⁰

Good, evil and chaos

³⁸⁰ Martin Hybler derides this ‘kitsch happy ending’ (‘barvotiskový happy end’), ignoring its ambiguities (‘Topolova přepestrá Sestra’, *otevřený rány: Výbrané studie o díle Jáchyma Topola*, ed. by Ivo Říha (Prague: Torst, 2013), pp. 46-50 (p. 50)).

Topol's approach to the spaces of the city plays on the relationship between two notions of ethos: the struggle against evil, and the artistic ethos of the underground. He therefore explores two conventional dichotomies: the distinction between good and evil, and between the underground and the ruling regime. In his approach to the connections between these two dichotomies, he combines several contrasting stances, constructing a notion of absolute evil and simultaneously dismantling it in favour of moral chaos.

Potok presents his gang as being on the side of 'good', as having a shared set of spiritual values predicated on their belief that the Messiah is coming.³⁸¹ At the same time, these suggestions of a teleological understanding of morality are undercut by ambiguity: on the first page of the novel, Potok says, 'Některým z nás možná připadalo, že směr už není v přímce, ale že se otáčíme do kruhu' (p. 7, 'Some of us might have noticed we had stopped going in a straight line and were turning in a circle'³⁸²). The process of waiting for the Messiah implies teleology and a system of moral values, an overarching narrative which could structure Potok's reality, but Topol undermines this with the claim that the group does not have a direction. Two conflicting attitudes to ethos define Potok and his tribe: on the one hand, a clearly structured struggle between good and evil, and on the other, the chaotic destruction of all such values.

These conflicting attitudes are encapsulated in Potok's battle with 'evil' at the municipal dump: when a serial killer begins committing nightly murders, Potok

³⁸¹ Unlike other Czech reviewers, Martin C. Putna emphasises this spiritual aspect of the text ('Jáchym Topol (1962) & Martin Komárek (1961): Hněv nad světem nedovokoupeným', in *My poslední křesťané: hněvivé eseje a vlivné kritiky* (Prague: Herrmann & synové, 1994), pp. 209-217).

³⁸² Jáchym Topol, *City Sister Silver*; trans. by Alex Zucker (North Haven: Catbird, 2000), p. 13. Future references are given in the text.

realises that the culprit is a little boy who has become an embodiment of the Devil.³⁸³

The boy asks Potok to kill him:

musíš to udělat, řekl Ďábl, mý tělo malýho hochy je už unavený, bylo to moc hrozný dělat ty věci. (p. 409)

[you gotta do it, said the Devil, my little boy body's all tired out, it was horrible doin those things. (p. 450)]

Topol intertwines suggestions that the boy is an incarnation of evil with quotations of childish language designed to make us pity him. Potok kills him with a bullet created by melting down his silver amulet of the Black Madonna, an emblem of the 'people of the Secret'. If we accept Potok's moral point of view, this is a battle between 'evil' magic and the 'good' principles on which Potok's tribal beliefs are based. However, in that moral system, killing a child was the most strictly forbidden act – so perhaps we are seeing the Devil tempting Potok to commit evil, and succeeding. The decision to melt down his silver image would then be the last step in his wanderings away from his 'tribe'. One could argue that the scene is a game with the notions of good and evil, in which Topol rejects the idea that any such simple opposition can exist: silver characterises both the tribe's amulets and the evil energy possessing the boy. Many reviewers of *Sestra* represent it as a portrayal – or a celebration – of moral chaos.³⁸⁴ However, given that Topol pays such close attention to definitions of evil in *Sestra*, it seems odd to suggest that he is indifferent to moral questions.³⁸⁵ Topol both encourages a moral response from the reader and obstructs such a response.

Underground ethos after 1989

³⁸³ Perhaps, as well as 'a merging of the *Omen* films, vampire legends and the Book of Revelation' (Chitnis, *Literature*, p. 111), this is a reference to the similarity between the word 'Ďábl' ('Devil') and the location of the largest Prague dump in the suburb of Ďáblice.

³⁸⁴ See e.g. Bílek, who argues that Potok has no moral boundaries.

³⁸⁵ See e.g. Pavel Janoušek, 'Dejte mi pevný bod aneb Za společenský román krásnější!', *Tvar*, 12 (1994), 3.

In choosing this paradoxical stance – asking questions about good and evil, whilst throwing the validity of these questions into doubt – Topol plays on the role of the Czech author in post-1989 society. The problems of this role were unwittingly encapsulated by Tibor Fischer, reviewing Topol's work in *The Guardian*, when he referred to the author as coming from 'sound dissident stock'.³⁸⁶ This can be taken to refer to the literary work of Topol's father and grandfather, as well as to his stance in the 1980s as an underground writer and signatory of the Charter 77, but Fischer does not discuss these details: he comments on Topol's background as an aside, while praising the historical accuracy of his writing. The phrase functions as a signpost to the reader who is wondering about the writer's authorial stance, and who is presumably reassured by the brief reference to dissidents. Both in the Czech Republic and in a wider European context, Topol's position as a 'dissident' writer increases his moral authority for many readers. It also makes him seem easy to categorise without questioning our own assumptions or considering the potential problems with such a system of categorisation, let alone the complex distinctions between 'dissident' and 'underground' writing.³⁸⁷ We then approach works such as *Sestra* expecting to read an authoritative account of post-1989 Prague: whilst remaining aware that we are reading fiction, we also imagine that this fiction will be in some way 'truthful' and 'representative' or portray the 'real' city.³⁸⁸

Topol subverts this notion of moral authority. In his literary texts, he does not establish a single ethos, a location from which he speaks. He shifts between a Manichaean presentation of good and evil, and images of moral chaos; he juxtaposes suggestions that the writer should be accorded moral authority with passages which

³⁸⁶ Tibor Fischer, 'Gargling with Tar by Jáchym Topol, translated by David Short', *The Guardian*, 1.5.2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/may/01/gargling-tar-jachym-topol-novel>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

³⁸⁷ See Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, particularly pp. 1-18 and pp. 134-143.

³⁸⁸ Topol also plays on this expectation in interviews, where he emphasises the importance of moral questions to *Sestra* (e.g. Naděžda Macurová, 'A ty to vemeš, nebo ne', *Tvar*, 10 (1995), 8-9, and Jáchym Topol and Tomáš Weiss, *Nemůžu se zastavit* (Prague: Portál, 2000), p. 123.

seem playful and amoral; he moves from implying that the writer has a duty to speak the language of the marginalised and express the anger of the oppressed, to the suggestion that language itself is his only real theme. Rather than challenging us to find his ‘real position’, he demands that we engage with the different implications of his writing simultaneously: his authorial stance is a plurality of stances, and the reader has to navigate between them, discovering the ways in which they affect one another.³⁸⁹ Reviewers have implied that the innovative language of *Sestra* takes us beyond questions of ethos or makes such questions irrelevant, but in fact, with its combination of many registers, of neologisms and foreign loan words, of dialects and pidgin Czech, the language of *Sestra* is itself plural.³⁹⁰ Potok’s search for an authorial ethos is intertwined with a search for language: during his time at the dump, he discovers ‘the bone of language’ (‘kost jazyka’) in the obscene ramblings of the men who live there, and begins to write poetry on scraps of old magazines.³⁹¹ With his ‘broken tongue’ (‘rozbitej jazyk’, p. 431), Topol takes us into areas of linguistic fragmentation which reflect the tensions between different authorial stances.

Topol’s complex approach to authorial ethos shapes his portrayal of Prague in *Sestra*. His depiction of the novel’s various semi-criminal gangs mocks the notion that the voices of the underground should be accorded authority. In his post-1989 Prague, the gangsters in Potok’s ‘tribe’ rely on their links with the cultural underground and their connections from before the Velvet Revolution to bribe officials, many of whom also come from ‘sound dissident stock’. Potok frequently makes use of his status as an ‘artist’ to exploit the gullibility or nostalgia of those in power. And when the gang unwittingly break their vow to avoid trading in weapons, it is because another gangster, the American known as Zlat’ák (‘Goldie’), has succeeded in using their

³⁸⁹ This may be the reason for the claim, by some critics, that *Sestra* is impossible to interpret, e.g. Viktor Budín, ‘Román v roku 1 a 2 a 3’, *Nové knihy*, 34, 22 (1994), 1.

³⁹⁰ Bílek, 17-18.

³⁹¹ See Hodrová, *citlivé město* (p. 130), on the literary motif of the dump as a ‘wild collage’.

reputation as a group of dissident artists in order to make arms deals: ‘velvetový méno naší Organizace byla záruka’ (p. 173, ‘the Organization’s velvet reputation [was] the guarantee’, p. 190). The wording is significant: rather than using the Czech word ‘sametový’, Topol chooses the Anglicism ‘velvetový’ in reference to the international resonance of 1989, and to the ease with which the ‘velvet’ ethos could be instrumentalised for cash.

It might seem ironic that the success of *Sestra* is derived partly from the very authority which Topol mocks: their connection with the underground gives the actions of Potok’s gang the glamour associated with a cult novel, and Topol’s irreverence towards dissidence has not prevented critics from drawing straightforward connections between his biography and his authority as a writer. But perhaps this irony should be viewed from the opposite point of view: Topol makes use of the authority we give him, only to undermine it.

Prague histories

The destabilisation of the authorial role has a profound effect on Topol’s portrayal of Prague, and particularly on his treatment of the city’s place in Central European history. By imagining a fantastical Prague which he names ‘Perla’ in homage to Alfred Kubin’s fantasy city in *Die andere Seite* (1909), Topol appears to depart from any obligation to engage with the real world, but in fact he embeds his imagined city in a complex treatment of Central European history. This is exemplified in the opening scenes of the novel, in which Potok introduces the ‘people of the Secret’ and the rituals of his relationship with Bára/Little White She-Dog – and interweaves these tribal mysteries with his description of the East German refugees gathering at the West German embassy. Having begun by positioning his text as anti-realist, Topol goes on to explore how different historical narratives can remain present in the same

space, and how the novelist can make the dissonances and complications of these narratives uncomfortably apparent.³⁹²

Rather than focusing on the most familiar collective narratives of the student protests and the work of the dissidents surrounding Václav Havel, Topol chooses the emigration of the Germans as a representative moment for the changes of 1989. Potok's description of the East German refugees includes many unsettling references to the Holocaust and to Jewish history.³⁹³ He uses the word 'selekce' ('selection'), comparing the Germans' fear that they might not be allowed into the embassy with the 'selection' of Jews at the entry points of concentration camps (p. 11), and refers to the 'exodus' of the Germans (p. 14). These provocative allusions allow Topol to probe the ways in which the Holocaust continues to shape our images of post-war history. Narratives about the Holocaust are so influential that we might instinctively associate all images of European refugees with the extermination of the Jews – and yet, such associations are potentially offensive or taboo, precisely because of the horrific nature of Nazi brutality. This clash between the tendency to make such associations and the urge to suppress them is particularly evident when it comes to the image of German refugees: the events of the Holocaust provided such defining examples of brutality on the part of Germans, that the very appearance of German refugees in Prague, in the guise of nervous victims of an authoritarian regime, is uncomfortable and difficult to interpret.

³⁹² His approach could be seen in the context of Linda Hutcheon's 'historiographic metafiction,' where the 'theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs [...] [becomes] grounds for rethinking and reworking the forms and contents of the past' (*A Poetics Of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 5).

³⁹³ On Topol's approach to the legacy of the holocaust, see Zuzana Jürgensová and Magdalena Marszałková, 'Svědci a dědicové dějin: holocaust v české literatuře (Richard Glazar a Jáchým Topol)', in Říha (ed.), pp. 263-275 (p. 275). See also Jiří Holý, 'Obraz šoa v české literatuře', in *Česká literatura rozhraní a okraje*, ed. by Lenka Jungmannová (Prague: Acropolis, 2010), pp. 99-109.

Topol portrays the liberating moments of 1989 as being inseparable from historical narratives of guilt and victimhood.³⁹⁴ The fraught relationship between Czechs and Germans and their shared, yet distinct experiences of socialist regimes, make the situation outside the embassy even more difficult to incorporate into a simple narrative of the ‘velvet revolution’. One of Topol’s acquaintances, Glaser, succeeds in crossing into the embassy, despite not being German, and as he does so, he spits on the Czech policeman at the gate. Some of the Germans do the same thing, which suddenly changes the implications of the situation, as Glaser says:

[...] bylo to najednou divný, jako něčo z války [...] že Němci poplivali Čecha, i když to byl komunistickéj žoldák... (p. 14)

[[...] it was weird all of a sudden, like somethin outta the war, Germans spitting on a Czech, even if he was a Commie mercenary (p. 22)

Here, different definitions of the ‘enemy’ compete, and the unease between Czechs and Germans is unavoidably connected with the Second World War.

Themes of historical guilt and retribution continue to resurface throughout the novel, as Topol depicts Potok’s wanderings through Prague and his attempts to remain part of a ‘tribe’ against the background of the Holocaust and totalitarian brutality. With the ‘explosion’ of time and the fragmentation of Potok’s surroundings, the traumatic history of Central Europe becomes tangible in contemporary Prague, and the violence of Nazism and Stalinism could return at any moment. Hence Potok’s comment early in the novel, ‘nebylo moc moudrý v tý tehdejší dnešní době bejt samotnej...’ (p. 42, ‘it wasn’t too wise, back in those days of today, to be on your own’, p. 52): in this time of fragmentation, it is especially necessary to belong to a ‘tribe’, and therefore to have an ‘ethos’. The oxymoronic use of ‘tehdejší dnešní’ suggests both the ambiguous

³⁹⁴ On Czech narratives of victimhood, see Robert Pynsent, *Questions of Identity*, pp. 147-210. Topol has criticised this aspect of the Czech self image in interviews; see e.g. Josef Chuchma, ‘Jáchym Topol: Snad se v nás neprobudí démoni’, *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, 3.5.2002 <http://kultura.idnes.cz/jachym-topol-snad-se-v-nas-neprobudi-demoni-f2u-/literatura.aspx?c=A020503_105352_literatura_kne> [accessed 10.6.2016].

distance between Potok and his narrative – it is not certain that the post-1989 period which he is describing has now come to an end – and the mingling of different historical times, as events which seemed to be ‘tehdejší’ abruptly appear to be ‘dnešní’. The fantastical ‘People of the Secret’ form their ‘tribe’ against the background of this ambiguous time, and their hallucinatory city is marked by the violence of the Nazis and of the socialist regime. In his treatment of Central European history, we see Topol’s complex approach to ethos particularly clearly. He avoids offering an ‘authentic’ or ‘authoritative’ account of post-1989 Prague: instead, his city emerges as an experiment with the possibilities of fiction. And yet, in its very fictionality, this imagined Prague confronts readers with the painful history of Central Europe.³⁹⁵

Conclusions

In Faktor and Topol’s novels, ethos is self-contradictory and plural. Tracing the wanderings of two writer-narrator-protagonists who occupy uncertain locations in a fragmented city, both authors construct an authorial ethos which is composed of several contradictory stances. Topol and Faktor therefore respond to the literary traditions of the imagined city not by positioning themselves securely within these traditions but by unsettling them.

Creating a hybrid authorial stance allows Faktor and Topol to express the discontinuities of the city and narrate many versions of the past simultaneously. In both works, time is fractured; to structure their narratives, the authors use the spaces of the city instead. In the post-1989 Prague novel, the fractures which characterise the

³⁹⁵ See Stephan Delbos, ‘Interview with Jáchym Topol’, *Prague Post*, 17.10.10 <<http://www.praguepost.com/blogs/books/2010/10/17/interview-with-jachym-topol-part-12/>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

city are not healed or obscured by the integrity of an authorial subject; they are put on show, made visible by a fractured narrative stance.

Both Topol and Faktor are responding to notions of authorial ethos which shaped Czech literature before 1989. Alfrun Kliems has suggested that *Sestra* is a quintessential ‘underground’ novel, and in many ways, this is justified: with his kaleidoscope of styles, his focus on a semi-criminal milieu, and his hallucinatory images of the rubbish dumps and drinking holes of Prague, Topol adopts the full palette of underground approaches, creating a novel which recalls Egon Bondy’s prose and Ivan Martin Jirous’ poetry and incorporates them into a grand new celebration of myth-making.³⁹⁶

At the same time, an ‘underground’ novel is precisely what *Sestra* is not. It appeared with a conventional commercial publisher and became a bestseller; it was adopted so readily by the cultural establishment that it was the only post-1989 work in the ‘top 100 Czech novels’; it was reviewed in all the major newspapers and cultural periodicals, sometimes more than once.³⁹⁷ With the publication of *Sestra*, Topol stopped being an ‘underground author’ and entered the post-socialist literary system.

Seen in this light, *Sestra* is a self-conscious response to the notion of an underground novel. In this, too, it follows in an underground tradition of irreverent self-reflexivity. The specific dynamic of Topol’s self-reflection can be found in his approach to authorial ethos: in his depiction of the absolutes of good and evil alongside images of moral chaos, and in his exploration of the desire to build new underground tribes in post-1989 Prague alongside the disintegration of these tribes, he dismantles the

³⁹⁶ See Kliems, *Der Underground*, p. 248.

³⁹⁷ On the ‘top 100 Czech novels’, see Andrew Roberts, *From Good King Wenceslas to the Good Soldier Švejk* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), p. 164. Critical responses to *Sestra* are reprinted in *otevřený rány: Výbrané studie o díle Jáchyma Topola*, ed. by Ivo Říha (Prague: Torst, 2013).

notions of authenticity which were central to the underground, and mocks the authority which is claimed by and ascribed to the ‘former underground author’.

In Jan Faktor’s *Georgs Sorgen*, Georg experiments with many different models of authorship: he responds to the demands of socialist realism, to dissidence and the perspective of the emigrant, and to the legacy of Prague’s intercultural past. He attempts to repair his own past by constructing a ‘Bildungsroman’. In the fragmented city, none of these models can provide the basis for an authorial ethos, and so instead, he assembles their remnants, collecting them into a long and circuitous text which can never be complete. Both *Georgs Sorgen* and *Sestra* trace irretrievable pasts, and in doing so, they question the potential of the author to reconstruct the city which crumbled along with the socialist realist mosaics, or shattered when ‘time exploded’. However, despite the limitations implied by the fragile relationship between authorship and memory, the disintegration of authorial ethos is liberating: Faktor cuts himself loose from the duty to ‘deal with’ the past, and from the structures of guilt and victimhood which dominate the notion of ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’. In their place, he develops a flexible, mutable authorial ethos which allows him to narrate the contradictions of the imagined city.

While their approaches to authorial ethos are strikingly similar, Faktor and Topol differ in their treatment of fictionality. Topol’s Prague, like that of Hodrová and Ajvaz, is imagined as two cities: its most banal details can lead to a fantastical realm in which silver is imbued with magic power and dreams are prophetic. Faktor’s city contains no such coded elements of sacred ritual and divine retribution. From this point of view, the two novels belong to different strands of post-1989 literature: Faktor’s novel is part of the wave of autobiographical writing which emerged after the collapse of socialism, whilst Topol’s novel exemplifies the antirealist, antilinear, fantastical ‘literature of the changes’, with its rebellious rejection of any expectation

that authors should be moral ‘truth-tellers’.³⁹⁸ Simultaneously, *Georgs Sorgen* is in some ways a delayed ‘normalisation novel’: the lack of a fantastical realm reflects its setting in a time when literature tended to remain in the narrow spaces of the ‘real world’ even when it incorporated fantastical elements.³⁹⁹

Nevertheless, in their playful approach to language, their construction of intricate urban topographies which take the place of chronological linearity, and their determination to assemble many fragmentary narratives simultaneously, Topol and Faktor share an aesthetic which defies the reader’s expectations of authorship. In disrupting the conventions of ethos, they make us question our notion of authenticity, our tendency to connect each reference to the real spaces of Prague with an expectation of truthfulness. This allows them to double back and explore the past from a new stance. They find ways to bridge the discontinuities between post-1989 Prague and the traditional topoi of the imagined city, whilst insisting that these discontinuities remain visible.

³⁹⁸ Chitnis, *Literature*, p. 1; on the dominance of autobiographical works, see pp. 11-12.

³⁹⁹ See Brabec, p. 13.

IV

Mythical Prague

Daniela Hodrová's *Komedie* (2003, 'Comedy') and Libuše

Moníková's *Verklärte Nacht* (1996)



Tram 22 reaching its final stop at Bílá Hora, close to the site of the Battle of White Mountain (Honza Groh, CC BY-SA 3.0).

Many of the conventional narratives of the imagined city resurface in a fragmented, semi-obscured form in post-1989 fiction. They are present as echoes and remnants, as brief quotations and playful allusions. Daniela Hodrová and Libuše Moníková explore Prague's collective narratives as part of an investigation of the relationship between

fiction and myth.⁴⁰⁰ As the protagonists of their texts seek orientation in the city and investigate the meanings of Czech history in the present day, they trace paths through a mythical Prague. Hodrová and Moníková uncover discontinuities in the cultural imagery surrounding Prague, and experiment with mythical narration as an approach to the workings of memory.

In their explorations of Prague, Hodrová and Moníková evoke multiple interpretations of myth, intertwining them in their response to one of the central questions which arises in post-1989 Prague literature: how can writers both explore the continued significance of collective narratives in Prague and express the irreparable discontinuities which separate past from present?⁴⁰¹ Daniela Hodrová's *Komedie* (2003) and Libuše Moníková's *Verklärte Nacht* (1996) not only explore the national myths which underpin notions of Czech identity, but also take us beyond Prague, into the myths of other nations as well as ancient and biblical mythology. These different narratives are connected by recurring references to myths of resurrection and rebirth. The combination of many mythical discourses is not a process of abstraction from the specific location and history of Prague to a universal theme of birth and death: multiple narratives remain simultaneously present rather than superseding one another. The authors trace how mythical narratives interact reciprocally with the

⁴⁰⁰ On the problems of the term 'myth' in the context of Prague literature, see Ingeborg Fiala-Furst, 'Der produktive Mythos Prag: Die Mythen um das jüdische Prag', in Todorow and Weinberg (eds), pp. 17-30 (p. 17). The notion of myth now invites more scepticism from scholars than it did in the 1950s (see Robertson, 'Myth vs. Enlightenment', pp. 387-388); works which take a universalising approach to mythical narratives and to mythical consciousness (e.g. Karen Armstrong, *Introduction to Myth* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005); Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (San Diego: Harcourt, 1959)) or which use the term without any definition (e.g. *Mythen der Nationen*, ed. by Monika Flacke, 2 vols (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2004)) can be contrasted with calls for a historicising approach to myth as a 'Denkgewohnheit' (Gerhart von Graevenitz, *Mythos: Zur Geschichte einer Denkgewohnheit* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987)). Robert Pynsent offers a useful working definition of myth (*Questions of Identity*, p. 43), emphasising that it 'binds a group morally and historically', 'explains origins', and looks 'to the future as well as the past'.

⁴⁰¹ See Webber's discussion of this question in relation to Berlin (pp. 55-57).

spaces of the city with which they come to be connected, the literary texts which adapt and repeat them, and the performances in which they are reenacted.⁴⁰²

In both Hodrová's *Komedie* and Moníková's *Verklärte Nacht*, the topography of Prague is dense with overlapping collective narratives.⁴⁰³ Hodrová's novel is set at the Olšany cemetery in the Vinohrady neighbourhood of Prague, and connects the posthumous lives of the many Czech historical figures who are buried there with the personal struggle of the writer-narrator-protagonist to come to terms with the deaths of her friends and family and with her own mortality. Moníková's *Verklärte Nacht* is narrated by a Czech emigrant named Leonora Marty, a dancer who has returned to Prague after 1989 and whose life is strangely connected with her latest stage role: she plays the part of Emilia Marty, an alchemist's daughter at the time of Rudolf II, who became immortal when her father made her try his elixir of life. Here, too, autobiographical motifs are interwoven with collective narratives: Moníková plays on the parallels between her own emigrant perspective and the wanderings of Leonora and Emilia.

Hodrová and Moníková explore how the collective narratives of Prague become part of cultural memory and shape national identity. The term 'myth', in this context, corresponds with Jan Assmann's definition:

Mythos ist eine fundierende Geschichte, eine Geschichte, die erzählt wird, um eine Gegenwart vom Ursprung her zu erhellen.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰² Lisiak refers to 'literization,' arguing that literary images of a city become the basis for myths; Hodrová and Moníková evoke instead reciprocal interactions between myth and literature (Lisiak, p. 23).

⁴⁰³ Matonoha characterises Hodrová's fictional world as 'mýtologický' (p. 254), whilst Brigid Haines discusses Moníková's relationship with myth in 'Representations of "Bohemia" in the works of Libuše Moníková (1945-1998)', in *Time Refigured: Myths, Foundation Texts & Imagined Communities*, ed. by Martin Procházka and Ondřej Pilný (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2005), pp. 268-280.

⁴⁰⁴ Jan Assmann, p. 52.

In Assmann's view, myths are teleological narratives; they concern the past, but their function is to point towards the present and explain it. He distinguishes between two functions of myth: 'fundierend' and 'kontrapräsent'. 'Foundational' myths place the present era in the light of a history which makes it seem 'sinnvoll, gottgewollt, notwendig und unabänderlich', whereas 'contrapresent' describes myths which portray the present as being inferior to the past, emphasising 'das Fehlende, Verschwundene, Verlorene, an den Rand Gedrängte'.⁴⁰⁵

Moníková's approach to the teleological structure of such myths is exemplified in the opening of *Verklärte Nacht*, in which the protagonist describes riding tram line 22 and emphasises that its final stop is a symbolic location for the Czech nation: 'Bílá Hora, Weißer Berg, wo in der Schlacht von 1620 der böhmische protestantische Adel vernichtet wurde. Endstation.'⁴⁰⁶ This refers to the common portrayal of the Battle of White Mountain as the endpoint of Czech sovereignty and cultural freedom: according to the conventional view, 'religious freedom was buried, the people were violated by the imperial army and the freedoms of the nation were suppressed'.⁴⁰⁷ Both the teleological structure of myths and the complexities of their 'foundational' and 'contrapresent' functions are evoked by Moníková's image of the tram line. The notion of the Battle of White Mountain as an 'Endstation' refers both to the 'contrapresent' myth of a lost Bohemian culture which was destroyed in 1620, and to the 'foundational' myths of the National Revival, which has frequently been presented as restoring that lost culture. The jarring connection between the seventeenth-century battle and the twentieth-century tram underlines the function of myths as explanations of the present: the myth of Bílá Hora does not 'transport' its audience into the past;

⁴⁰⁵ Jan Assmann, p. 79.

⁴⁰⁶ Libuše Moníková, *Verklärte Nacht* (Munich: Hanser, 1996), p. 5.

⁴⁰⁷ 'svoboda náboženství pohřbena, lid znásilněn vojskem císařským a svobody národa potlačeny'. Bahlcke gives this quotation from Karel Starecký's 1902 history of the Jesuits (Bahlcke, p. 40). Derek Sayer makes use of the same rhetoric, calling Bílá Hora 'without any doubt the most cataclysmic event in modern Czech history' (*The Coasts of Bohemia*, p. 45).

instead, like the tram line, it fulfils a function for them in the present, taking them along a specific route to a particular interpretation of their own history.

However, Hodrová and Moníková's explorations of the myths surrounding Prague are not only concerned with collective narratives as interpretations of the national past. They take us beyond Prague, constructing a heterogeneous mythology through borrowings from other traditions and texts. In *Komedie*, Olšany cemetery functions as a space where figures from the city's past mingle in an afterlife, repeating scenes from their lives with some variations; into these adaptations of Prague myths, Hodrová incorporates references to Dionysos and Orpheus, returning repeatedly to the process of death and resurrection. These eclectic mythologies draw attention to the ambiguous role of literature in the process of myth-making. Assmann's description of myth as the result of a transformation of the past ('Vergangenheit') into 'foundational history' ('fundierende Geschichte') does not directly consider whether all of the material for a myth comes from historical events: can some of it be literary invention?

⁴⁰⁸ By intertwining the 'national myths' of the Czechs with elements of other mythologies, ancient, biblical and modern, Moníková and Hodrová construct new myths, suggesting an intense reciprocity between myth and literature.

Recurring throughout these heterogeneous narratives is the theme of death and rebirth. The discontinuities and instabilities which the protagonists of the two novels find as they confront the city's past are closely connected with mortality – with the protagonists' own vulnerable physicality, and the historical deaths and transformations which they trace in Prague. The novels explore the possibilities of resurrection: the resurrection of the protagonists, of the Czech nation, and of the narratives themselves. These are reincarnated, repeated, adapted and overlaid with different versions of the same story; parallels are discovered between one set of events and another in a

⁴⁰⁸ Jan Assmann, p. 77.

different era, and the loss of past narratives is accompanied by their reemergence in a new form.

Daniela Hodrová's novel *Komedie*

In *Komedie*, Daniela Hodrová returns to a location which played a key role in her first work of fiction, the trilogy *Trýznivé město* ('City of Torment', written 1977-1990, published 1991-1992): she imagines the afterlives of a great variety of Czechs at Olšany cemetery, weaving them together with an overtly autobiographical contemplation of mortality and the role of the author. The linear structure of a plot is almost entirely replaced by a multilayered network of allusions to a range of literary works.⁴⁰⁹ These include many reworkings of Czech collective narratives: dramatisations of the Libuše legend, Václav Thám's plays, and Alois Jirásek's novels. The writer-narrator, who is identified as 'Daniela Hodrová', weaves these together with texts which have personal significance for her – the novels of her friend Vladimír Macura, the work of her husband Karel Milota, and her own novels, especially the *Trýznivé město* trilogy.⁴¹⁰

Komedie is therefore composed of densely interconnected repetitions of other texts. It explores afresh the narrative spaces of the *Trýznivé město* trilogy, modifying and destabilising the earlier text. The writer-narrator delves into the autobiographical background of the trilogy and blames herself for fictionalising the true stories of her family. The death of Hodrová's father, which was depicted in *Théta*, is recalled once again, as the narrator questions his attitude to the socialist regime. *Komedie* emerges

⁴⁰⁹ Matonoha, p. 244.

⁴¹⁰ Pavlína Krupová describes this approach as 'a typically feminine gesture' in her discussion of Hodrová's *Théta* ('Daniela Hodrová: Théta', *Česká literatura*, 3, 53 (2005), 395-406 (p. 398)). Jan Matonoha criticises Krupová's essentialism but puts forward a concept of 'feminine writing' ('ženské psaní') in which such shifting textual networks are created by both male and female authors (Matonoha, p. 152).

not as the final ‘true version’ of Hodrová’s past which throws the others into question, but as a new adaptation of the earlier material which draws attention to the fictionality of *Trýznivé město* and to the ethical questions involved in the process of writing.

The Olšany cemetery structures these repetitions and transformations: it becomes a microcosm of the city, containing within it the history of Prague and the personal history of the narrator.⁴¹¹ The cemetery functions as a space resembling hell, crowded with deceased fictional characters from Hodrová’s earlier work, as well as a range of historical figures connected with nineteenth-century Czech patriotism and the Prague theatres. The myths of rebirth and resurrection which were central to the National Revival are intertwined with personal images of death and dying.⁴¹² Thus, for the writer-narrator, the most obvious catalyst for the process of writing is the illness of her aunt Emilka, who has suffered a stroke and can only say, ‘ano, ano, ne, ne’ (‘yes, yes, no, no’). This becomes the novel’s uncertain refrain, comparing the process of dying with the loss of language, and emphasising the ambiguity which characterises the writer-protagonist’s relationship to Prague and its past: she struggles to resurrect the myths of the city whilst simultaneously showing that this resurrection cannot take place.

Komedie repeats the motif of descent into the ‘city of torment’ which underpinned Hodrová’s approach to Prague in *Trýznivé město*: like the title of the trilogy, the title of *Komedie* refers to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. In Dante’s text, we meet with characters in the afterlife one after another as we descend to the centre of hell, whereas in *Komedie* there is no such order: characters recur, alternating as focalisers so that we only gradually become aware of which perspective has taken over. Hodrová’s city does not have a clearly demarcated centre, and instead, one of the main sources of pain for its inhabitants is the lack of such symbolic definitions, the uncertainty about

⁴¹¹ On the cemetery as a literary topos, see Buckler, p. 228, and Hodrová, *citlivé město*, p. 169.

⁴¹² Matonoha, p. 254.

what is to come. Thus, Hodrová's 'comedy' is not divine: there is no prospect of salvation. Instead, the title takes on other implications, as a 'misleading, but paradoxically accurate' reference to the dramatic genre of comedy.⁴¹³

Theatre, performance and adaptation in *Komedie*

The fragmented text of *Komedie*, with its myriad focalisers and complex narrative layers, is loosely held together by the myths of the Prague theatres. These form part of an exploration of theatricality, performance and adaptation in relation to the construction of Czech cultural memory, as well as to the fragility of personal identity. As we wander Olšany cemetery with Hodrová, we encounter a range of figures connected with the Prague theatre world. As well as engaging with the common view of the Prague theatres as a nexus of Czech identity, Hodrová explores their role as a space for the 'reenactment' of other foundational myths: several dramatic adaptations of the Libuše myth find their way into the text.

Interwoven with the many narrative strands which constitute *Komedie*, Hodrová introduces echoes of the rhetoric of the National Revival, in which the foundational myth of the Czech-speaking theatres resurfaces. Throughout the novel, it is rumoured that a theatre is going to be established at Olšany cemetery, and thus we meet with the repeated refrains, 'Zase už se tu prý nějaké divadlo chystá' ('Apparently some kind of theatre is going to be happening here again'), and 'Co se to tu chystá za představení?' ('What sort of performance are they planning here?').⁴¹⁴ In comparison with *Perunův den*, which ends with the performance at the protagonists' former school, *Komedie* has a more open structure: the rumour never culminates in a particular performance, but nor is it ever contradicted. The actor and playwright

⁴¹³ 'stejně zavádějící jako paradoxně přesně' (Matonoha, p. 253).

⁴¹⁴ Daniela Hodrová, *Komedie* (Prague: Torst, 2003), p. 72 and p. 90. Future references are given in the text.

Václav Thám wanders the cemetery, hoping that he will be included in the plans, and quoting the same words which he used in Alois Jirásek's *F. L. Věk*: 'Ó, mít ustavičné divadlo, jaký by mělo podíl v našem díle a boji!' (p. 73, 'Oh, to have a permanent theatre, what a difference it would make to our cause and to our struggle!').⁴¹⁵ As the theatre is always in the process of being (re)established, the myth of the Czech theatres is always in the process of being retold – and Hodrová's narration encompasses both an affirmative retelling of collective narratives and a satire on the theatre's mythical status, as Thám at first insists on the centrality of the theatre for Czech identity, but then rapidly begins to doubt his own identity, seeming to be aware that he is encased in several layers of fictionality.

Hodrová plays on the multiple roles of the Prague theatres in cultural memory, as space and imagination interact: not only are the physical buildings the focus of national myths, but theatre itself is a medium for repeating and strengthening collective narratives. She weaves references to theatrical performances of Czech myths into the text, tracing the fate of the actress Jiřina Štěpničková (1912-1985), who attempted to emigrate in 1951 and was subjected to a show trial; she was apparently denounced by some of her fellow actors, who requested that she be executed.⁴¹⁶ The authorial persona in *Komedie* wonders whether Hodrová's father Zdeněk Hodr, who acted alongside Štěpničková at the Vinohrady theatre, could have been one of those who denounced her. The myth of Libuše emerges in a fragmentary manner from Štěpničková's half-remembered lines:

– K děvinské Matce již nevoláš? Kaša jí vyčítá zradu, zrovna Světla, která...
[...] Kterou hru to probůh hrají? (p. 87)

⁴¹⁵ See Jirásek, *Sebrané spisy*, XX: *F. L. Věk II*, p. 163.

⁴¹⁶ She was imprisoned from 1952 until 1960. The relevant files of the secret police have not survived, meaning that the details of the denunciation have not been confirmed. See Daniel Růžička, 'Politické procesy v ČSR v 50. letech: Proces s Jiřinou Štěpničkovou', <http://www.totalita.cz/proc/proc_stepnickovaj.php> [accessed 10.6.2016].

[– So you're no longer calling on the Mother of Děvín? Kaša is accusing *her* of betrayal, Světla of all people, who... [...] Which play are they performing, for God's sake?]

Here Štěpničková relives a performance of Stanislav Lom's *Děvín* (1919), a reworking of the myths of Libuše and the Maidens' War, in which she finds herself once again playing Libuše. She encounters her former colleague, Světla Svozilová, who ought to be playing the part of Kaša, Libuše's sister, but who here quotes a line in which Vlasta (leader of the rebellious Maidens) accuses Libuše of betrayal: 'So you're no longer calling on the Mother of Děvín?' is an accusation that Libuše is no longer true to the maidens' matriarchal stronghold, the castle of Děvín. The scene is interrupted by the aggressive questions of Kulič, Hodrová's uncle and a character in the *Trýznivé město* trilogy, who remembers performances of Smetana's opera *Libuše*, and who demands, 'hrajete si na Libuši?' (p. 87, 'Are you lot playing Libuše?') The wording of this question exploits the ambiguity of the verb 'hrát' in Czech, which can mean both 'to play' and 'to act [in a play]'. Here, the construction 'hrát si na' implies not that the women are acting, but that they are playing a children's 'pretending game'. The myth of Libuše thus enters the text not only in the form of several performances and adaptations, but also as a game. The connections between 'plays' and 'playing' emerge at several other points in the text. The focus on Prague myths as 'hry' ('games' and 'plays') allows Hodrová to present us with multiple narrations of the Czech past, none of which is presented as authentic.

Hodrová does not 'retell' the narrative of Libuše: she only recalls snatches of remembered performances, fragments from a myriad versions of the myth. She underlines the distance between the inaccessible 'original' mythical material and its emergence in the text, showing the many transformations which it undergoes. Hodrová imagines Štěpničková performing a role which she has performed many times before, and which is an adaptation of other versions of the same role; Hodrová's text is itself a further adaptation of the myth. The form in which the Libuše narrative

reaches the reader after this process of transmission is contingent on a set of intertextual connections, not only between different adaptations of Libuše's story (such as Smetana's opera and Lom's play), but also with other texts. It is interwoven with quotations from other plays in which Štěpničková performed, including her most famous role as Joan of Arc in George Bernard Shaw's play *Saint Joan* (1924). *Saint Joan* becomes entangled with Schiller's *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (1801), and thus the mythical feminine embodiment of the nation is linked with the themes of martyrdom, execution and guilt which underpin Hodrová's portrayal of the denunciation of Štěpničková.

These mythical narratives are so heavily mediated that we have to decode them, slowly uncovering the fragments of many different performances.⁴¹⁷ *Komedie* insistently confronts us with its own textuality: despite its title and its focus on theatre, it is a novel, not a play, and as such, it remains distant from the performances it describes. The significance of textuality in *Komedie* recalls Vladimír Macura's analysis of the paradoxical status of theatre in the National Rebirth: the early *obrozenci* emphasised the importance of theatre, and yet the beginnings of the movement were highly reliant on texts.⁴¹⁸ Meanwhile, in testing the possibilities of *intertextuality*, Hodrová traces the permeability of texts, showing how Joan of Arc and Libuše become intertwined, and indicating that although national myths might seem to imply a group identity characterised by wholeness and self-sufficiency, in fact the connections between different literatures, and between different cultural traditions, give rise to heterogeneity. *Komedie* subverts the dominant narratives of the National Revival by introducing this heterogeneity, bringing Dante and Hölderlin together with Němcová, and confronting Libuše with Joan of Arc. It dissolves the boundaries of

⁴¹⁷ On the layering of motifs which may remain partly illegible, see Milan Jankovič, 'Vyvolávání z nebytí v Komedii Daniely Hodrové', *Česká literatura*, 55, 1 (2007), 1-24 (p. 5).

⁴¹⁸ Macura, *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, pp. 215-224.

‘Czechness’ and the boundaries of individual texts, but in doing so, it approaches illegibility, questioning our ability to navigate a world without such distinctions.

Dismantling and reassembling the myths of Prague

Hodrová suggests that portrayals of the ‘origins’ of the city and the teleological process of its ‘rebirth’ are historically contingent, reaching the modern reader as descriptions of repetitions of performances of narratives, at many removes from the empirical content they may have had. Meanwhile, by tracing intertextual connections between many different mythical texts of various origins, she destabilises the notion of a closed, coherent ‘Czech culture’. However, this does not mean that Prague is finally stripped of its mythical significance: Hodrová constructs new narratives from the fragments.

Hodrová’s approach to Prague recalls the strategies of demythologisation which Roland Barthes discusses in the essay ‘Myth Today’.⁴¹⁹ He suggests that if an author turns an established myth into the ‘signifier’ of a new myth, this can result in the unravelling of the original myth-making. This manoeuvre is exemplified in *Komedie* by Hodrová’s depiction of Zdenka Havlíčková (1848-1872), the daughter of the well-known patriotic writer Karel Havlíček-Borovský.⁴²⁰ After Havlíčková’s parents died, a group of well-wishers organised a lottery to raise money for her, calling her the ‘daughter of the nation’ (‘Dcera národa’). They wanted Havlíčková to represent the gratitude of the Czechs for Havlíček-Borovský’s ‘martyrdom’, and to show that the ‘nation’ was a family which would look after its own: the image of Havlíčková receiving charity was supposed to demonstrate the strength and generosity of the Czech community. However, when Havlíčková fell in love with a Polish noble, Quido Battaglio, her former supporters were outraged and she became a scandalous figure.

⁴¹⁹ Roland Barthes, ‘Le mythe, aujourd’hui’, in *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 2010), pp. 225-247 (p. 237).

⁴²⁰ See Vladimír Macura, ‘Sen o dceři národa’, in *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, pp. 353-371.

In *Komedie*, Havlíčková arrives at Olšany wearing the dress which she wore to the ball at the Národní beseda in 1867 where she met Battaglio, and her fate repeats itself after death. The other inhabitants of the cemetery spurn her, suspecting her of being pregnant, and as she attempts to flee, the various objects donated to the lottery begin to force their way out of her body:

Teprve teď si všimne, že pod šaty s sebou vláčí spoustu věcí. [...] Vytahuje vázu s mušlí – [...] odhazuje nádobu co nejdál od sebe, na střepy se hned vrhají ze všech stran [...]. [...] A ještě stále není přívál věcí hrnoucích se jí z útrobu u konce. Teď spatřila světlo světa kněžna Libuše, maličká věstkyně se chvíli duší, jak se nadechla olšanského povětří. (p. 111)

[Only now does she notice that she is dragging a load of objects along with her. [...] She pulls out the vase with the shells [...] she throws the vessel away as far from herself as she can, and immediately from all directions people pounce on the fragments [...]. [...] And still the torrent of objects surging out of her insides has not come to an end. Now the princess Libuše has seen the light of day, the little prophetess chokes for a moment as she breathes in the air of Olšany.]

If we analyse the nineteenth-century myth of the ‘daughter of the nation’ in Barthes’ terms, the ‘signifier’ is Havlíčková receiving charity, the ‘signified’ is the strength and generosity of the Czech community, and the ‘signification’ is ‘Havlíčková as the daughter of the nation’. Hodrová transposes this to make ‘Havlíčková as the daughter of the nation’ a signifier for the theatricality of nineteenth-century Czech patriotism, its predilection for pathos, and its patronising treatment of women. The signification is the image, in *Komedie*, of Havlíčková at the cemetery, with a ‘torrent of objects surging out of her insides’. Rather than representing her shameful behaviour, Havlíčková’s seemingly pregnant body is evidence of the weight (‘a load of objects’) placed on her by patriotic charity. Rather than the ‘rebirth’ of the Czech nation, the passage shows the grotesque ‘rebirth’ of the unwanted objects. Instead of demonstrating the generosity and cohesion of the Czech community, the series of objects is haphazard and fragmentary; many have been destroyed or damaged. Thus,

rather than proving her unworthiness to be the ‘daughter of the nation’, Havlíčková’s rebellious body dismantles the myths of the Czech patriots.

In *Komedie*, the process of demythologisation interlocks with what could be called ‘remythologisation’: Hodrová incorporates her exploration of the theatricality of collective memory into mythical narratives of her own.⁴²¹ One of the objects donated to the lottery for Havlíčková was a statuette of Libuše, contributed by the son of the famous historian František Palacký. At one level, the role of this object in the text corresponds to Hodrová’s demythologising stance regarding Havlíčková: now in the afterlife, Palacký junior bitterly regrets donating the statuette (‘Komu teď bude maličká kněžna věštit? – Panchartovi!’ – ‘Who will get the tiny princess’s prophecies now? – A bastard!’, p. 109). Hodrová plays on the comic notion of a miniature Libuše; the smallness of the princess seems to reflect both the pettiness of the patriots’ attitude and the limitations placed on nineteenth-century women.⁴²²

However, when Hodrová shows the ‘rebirth’ of the statue, which comes to life and ‘chokes for a moment’, she begins to imagine a new Libuše narrative: the miniature, living Libuše continues to wander Olšany, vulnerable to its inhabitants. Towards the end of the novel, when they have passed her from hand to hand, she disappears and apparently disintegrates: the authorial persona finds her hand among the rotting leaves. She cannot decide whether she should take the object with her, but eventually does so:

[...] zapadala by listím a nikdo by ji už nenašel a slova věštby by nemohla být pronesena a město by nepovstalo z mlh, tam, ve vltavské kotlině, nad kterou krouží draci, ano, ano, ne, ne, najednou se Emilčina tvář rozzářila, ano, ano,

⁴²¹ See Krupová’s comment, regarding *Théta*, that an ‘individual mythology’ replaces ‘big narratives’ (‘Na místo “velkého vyprávění” [...] individuální mytologie’; Krupová, p. 401), and Hodrová’s own discussion of demythologisation and remythologisation (*citlivé město*, p. 117).

⁴²² It also reflects the large number of diminutives used in the original letter to the newspaper calling for the lottery, which Macura relates to the ‘mystic’ power of the myth: added together, ‘little trifles’ would be transformed into a lavish gift (Macura, ‘Sen o dceři národa’, pp. 355-357).

ne, ne, je ráda, že s tou mocnou ručičkou odcházím, tisknu ji k hrudi a ona mi svítí na cestu. (p. 189)

[...] it would disappear into the leaves and no one would find it anymore and the words of the prophecy could not be uttered and the city would not rise from the mist, there, in the Vltava basin, above which dragons are circling, yes, yes, no, no, suddenly Emilka's face has lit up, yes, yes, no, no, she is happy that I am leaving with this powerful little hand, I press it to my chest and she lights my way.]

The disintegration of Libuše suggests that the myth no longer functions as it once did: the transcendental sense of a specifically Czech teleology which was once represented by images of Libuše can no longer be invoked, and thus its signifier, too, is almost buried in the rotting leaves, and in the complex tangle of voices which constitute the text. The claim that 'the words of the prophecy could not be uttered and the city would not rise from the mist' has an ironic tone born of the disproportion between the miniature, dismembered statuette and its enormous mythical significance.

At the same time, by implying that the prophecy has not yet been uttered, Hodrová suggests that the myth of Libuše is still in the process of unfolding. Thus, just as the Libuše statuette does not vanish without a trace, nor does Hodrová conclude that the myth of Libuše has lost its significance: the statuette's hand remains, and the authorial persona decides to take it with her, to 'save' it ('zachránit'). The hand still seems to point in some direction, even if that direction is unclear and can no longer be defined based on patriotic teleology: it points 'somewhere into the darkness' ('někam do tmy'), towards an unknown place. The hand is still connected with the power to understand the fate of Prague – a power which the authorial persona hesitantly decides to claim for herself, thus suggesting that although the myth of Libuše may have disintegrated (helped by Hodrová's own satirical techniques of demythologisation), it takes on new meaning in its fragmentary form. By 'lighting' the 'way' of the author-protagonist, the hand offers the possibility that authorship can

still retain the echo of prophetic power, and thus imbues the author's wanderings around the city with new mythical meaning.⁴²³

Prague as a city beyond the grave

Hodrová's performances and adaptations are connected with multiple myths of death and the afterlife, in which Prague figures both as a 'real city' and as an 'underworld' where the dead mingle, taking on new identities. Hodrová is meticulously clear about the historical details of Olšany cemetery, imagining each historical figure as being located in the exact space where he or she was really buried, but rather than resulting in realism, this attention to detail adds to the fantastical aspects of the text. Thus, the inhabitants of the cemetery are depicted as living corpses which retain a threatened individuality:

V nejstarší části hřbitova se většina hrobů už propadla, byla srovnána s zemí, kosti, shrábany a sesypány, spočinuly v roztodivných objetích – Antonín Puchmajer se objímá s Annou Holinovou, láskou Nerudovou, dějepisec Gelasius Dobner s Janem Svatoplukem Preslerem [...]. (p. 63)

[In the oldest part of the cemetery, most of the graves have expired by now and have been levelled with the earth and the bones, raked and mixed together, coming to rest in bizarre embraces – Antonín Puchmajer embraces Anna Holinová, Neruda's beloved, the historian Gelasius Dobner embraces Jan Svatopluk Presler [...].]

Olšany is an uncomfortably visceral spatial representation of history. The bodies of these nineteenth-century historical figures are layered and mingled, having lost their physical integrity in the process of time and forgetting. However, they also remain vividly present: Hodrová shifts jarringly from describing them as piles of bones to the suggestion that they are 'embracing' each other, and soon after this she describes one

⁴²³ Matonoha argues that Hodrová does not continue any of the conventional 'Prague texts', but here it becomes clear that she does make use of fragments of such texts (Matonoha, p. 247). See also Hodrová's own comments on the heterogeneity and 'polymythical' nature of Prague 'women's writing', which recalls 'patchwork sewn from scraps of fabric of many patterns and colours' ('koberečky sešité z ústřížků látek mnoha vzorů a barev'; *citlivé město*, p. 147).

of them ‘sighing’ and another ‘jumping up’. The fictional Olšany is therefore simultaneously a space where the history and the myths of Prague are threatened by the process of forgetting, which levels everything and sifts it together, and a space where the dead narratives of the past are reanimated and live on beyond the grave.

Hodrová imagines the process of fictionalisation and adaptation as a transformation from life to afterlife. Thus, when the authorial persona describes how the dead will come from Olšany and watch her writing, she says, ‘někteří se už proměnili v románové postavy a další ta proměna čeká’ (p. 18, ‘some of them have already been transformed into characters in a novel and others are still awaiting the transformation’), implying that the process of becoming a fictional character can be regarded as a further change akin to death.

The authorial persona blames herself for subjecting the people around her to these transformations, and is also transformed herself: she confronts the connections between her own mortality and her struggle to orientate herself among the many repeated narratives which make up the text she is creating. Her description of receiving a cancer diagnosis and undergoing an operation is embedded in references to Prague’s past: she imagines that Jan Jesenius, who famously conducted the first public autopsy in the Czech lands in 1600, presides over her operation (p. 36). Shortly after this passage, she reflects that if she does not find the source of all stories, she will die:

Nenaleznu-li pramen příběhů, zemřu. [...] Možná bloudím a neustále mívám chodbu, která by mě přivedla k Hlavním Příběhu. A existuje takový příběh? Nemohou příběhy žít jen opakováním a prorůstáním? [...] Anebo je návrat ke starým příběhům pokusem vstoupit znovu do světa, v němž jsem ještě dokázala vyprávět příběh a v němž mám naději nějakou chvíli ještě přežít? (p. 40)

[If I don’t find the [or ‘a’] source of stories, I will die. [...] Maybe I am wandering and continually missing the corridor which would lead me to the

Main Story. And does such a story exist? Don't stories only live by being repeated and becoming intertwined? [...] Or is my return to old stories an attempt to reenter the world in which I was still capable of narrating a story and in which I hope still to survive for a short time?]

This passage connects the survival of the author with the survival of stories in the imagined city. The authorial persona returns to the image of 'wandering': her search for the 'Main Story' recalls the wanderings of her characters in the city, seeking meaning beyond the everyday. However, she goes on to contrast the singular 'Main Story' with the multiple stories which survive through repetition and 'prorůstání', which suggests 'interwining' or literally 'growing through each other'. The 'Main Story' awaits her in a labyrinth of corridors, like the minotaur; the multiple, repeated stories promise new life. Her phrasing implies that in her state of wandering uncertainty, she is already dead: reentering the world through the 'old stories' would be a kind of rebirth.

The role of death in *Komedie* is inseparable from the 'descent' of the authorial persona into the 'city of torment': the authorial persona makes her way down into her vision of Prague, descending both into her own past and into her own past texts. Hodrová describes the process of adapting her older work in mythical terms, recalling the struggles of Sisyphus: 'Nesu na zádech román [...] valím román do kopce jako balvan' (pp. 36-37; 'I carry a novel on my back [...] I roll the novel up the hill like a boulder'): the novel presents her with a never-ending task. She connects this image with a reference to the significance of wandering: noting the parallels in Czech between 'bludný balvan' (a 'glacial erratic' or literally 'wandering rock' which differs from those around it) and 'bludný rytíř' ('knight errant'), she imagines the novel itself 'wandering' from story to story. Thus, not only do Hodrová's protagonists wander the city; her novel wanders the realms of myth and literature.

Libuše Moníková's novel *Verklärte Nacht* (1996)

Of her connection with Prague, Libuše Moníková has said, ‘Alles, was ich schreibe, kommt aus dieser Stadt. [...] Ich bin für jede andere hoffnungslos verloren.’⁴²⁴ Born in Prague in 1945, she studied German and English literature at the Charles University. She married a German, Michael Herzog, and emigrated to West Germany in 1971; she later commented that one of her reasons for leaving Czechoslovakia was the discrimination of women.⁴²⁵ She taught German literature in Kassel and Bremen, before beginning to publish her novels in 1981, with *Eine Schädigung*, a response to the brutal suppression of the Prague Spring. During the 1980s, she lived in Berlin and frequently visited Prague; after 1989, she planned to live partly in Prague, and began renovating a flat there. She died in 1998.

Moníková’s last completed novel, *Verklärte Nacht*, is a response to post-1989 Prague which draws together the myths of the Prague theatres with the collective narrative of Czech-German tensions.⁴²⁶ It is narrated by Leonora Marty, an emigrant who has returned to visit Prague not long after the Velvet Revolution: like Moníková, whose initials she shares, she left Czechoslovakia in 1971, and has a background in the study of literature. Leonora is now at the height of her second career as a choreographer and dancer who adapts literary texts into dance performances.⁴²⁷ She has come to Prague to perform the leading role in her adaptation of *Věc Makropulos* (*Die Sache*

⁴²⁴ Libuše Moníková, ‘Vorstellung neuer Mitglieder’, in *Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung. Jahrbuch 1993*. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1994), 179-182, (pp. 181).

⁴²⁵ On Moníková’s biography, see Dana Pfeiferová, *Libuše Moníková: Eine Grenzgängerin* (Vienna: Praesens, 2010), pp. 58-59, and Brigid Haines, ‘Libuše Moníková: Life, Works and Reception’, in *Libuše Moníková in Memoriam*, ed. by Brigid Haines and Lyn Marven (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 9-22.

⁴²⁶ On Moníková’s approach to Czech and European history, see Helga G. Braunbeck, ‘The Body of the Nation: The Texts of Libuše Moníková’, *Monatshefte*, 89, 4 (1997), 489-506; Ulrike Vedder, ‘“Mit schiefem Mund auch ‘Heimat’” – Heimat und Nation in Libuše Moníková’s Texten’, *Monatshefte*, 89, 4 (1997), 477-488; Sibylle Cramer, ‘Die Majestät auf der Flucht in die Literatur. Tschechische Geschichte als Literatur im Frühwerk Libuše Moníkovás’, in *Hinter der Fassade: Libuše Moníková*, ed. by Patricia Broser and Dana Pfeiferová (Vienna: Praesens, 2005) pp. 227-237; and Hanus, pp. 78-99.

⁴²⁷ Moníková, *Verklärte Nacht*, pp. 24-25. Future references are given in the text.

Makropulos; The Makropulos Affair), a play by Karel Čapek which Leoš Janáček used as the basis for an opera.⁴²⁸ *Věc Makropulos* is rooted in the ‘magic Prague’ of Rudolf II: a young girl, Emilia Marty, tests an elixir of life created by her alchemist father and lives for three hundred years, becoming angrier and wearier as the centuries pass. Leonora Marty resembles Emilia Marty in more than name: she is a long-time observer of Czech history, a ‘storehouse of memory’, who feels increasingly lonely and disappointed in her home country.⁴²⁹

When the novel opens, the performance of *Věc Makropulos* has already taken place, and Leonora plans to remain in Prague for another week, commenting, ‘Ich will die Stadt für mich allein haben’ (p. 25). This phrasing is particularly appropriate: as Leonora wanders the city, reflecting on its past, recalling her childhood and observing her own struggle to feel at home, she expresses her anxieties in terms of ownership and encroachment.

Leonora’s anxiety regarding Prague is connected with the worry that the Czechs will forget their collective past. She complains, ‘Die nationale Vergangenheit interessiert niemanden’ (p. 39). It is not certain whether this ‘national past’ can offer a collective identity for the Czechs or for Leonora. Her frustrated path through Prague reaches a turning point when she meets Thomas, a German who speaks good Czech and has family connections with the Sudetenland. After she and Thomas fall into the Vltava, Leonora becomes dangerously feverish and Thomas nurses her back to health; in the process, they confront their misgivings about each other, and fall in love. The title, *Verklärte Nacht*, refers to the love scene at the close of the novel, in which the identities of the two protagonists are transformed; it also alludes to Richard Dehmel’s

⁴²⁸ Čapek’s play was first performed in 1922; the opera, which has the same title, had its premiere in 1926.

⁴²⁹ Marilya Veteto-Conrad, ‘Libuše Moniková. *Verklärte Nacht*’, *World Literature Today*, 71, 3 (1997), 580.

poem of the same name, which provided the words for Schönberg's string sextet.⁴³⁰ The poem concerns the forgiveness and love which a man shows towards a woman, after she confesses that she is pregnant with another man's child. Moníková picks up not only on the theme of forgiveness, but also on the transcendence of fixed identities which is implied in Dehmel's poem.

Theatre, performance and adaptation in *Verklärte Nacht*

Like Hodrová, Moníková incorporates the myths of the Prague theatres into her protagonist's wanderings around the city, exploring fragile shared identities and the place of performance in cultural memory. Early in the novel, Leonora Marty briefly recounts the history of the theatres, presenting the building of the National Theatre somewhat sceptically as part of a long Czech-German rivalry and concluding:

Die Geschichte der Stadt ist eine Geschichte der gegenseitigen Antworten zwischen Tschechen und Deutschen, ohne daß eine Seite jemals gefragt hätte. (pp. 38-39)

Leonora's presentation of the series of 'answers' without any questions suggests an unwillingness to subscribe wholly to the vision of the Czech theatres as triumphant evidence of the rise of Czech culture. However, her emphasis on Czech-German conflict foregrounds another enduring topos in Czech collective memory: the notion that Czech history has always been defined by an antagonistic relationship with the Germans. Painfully uncertain about where her own identity lies, Leonora frequently has recourse to collective narratives which focus on notions of territoriality.

Thus, when she retells the famous episode in which the premiere of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* was rapturously received in Prague, she comments, 'Die Prager liebten *ihren* Mozart' (p. 82) and 'Im Unterschied zu Wien brauchte Mozart hier nichts zu

⁴³⁰ Richard Dehmel, 'Verklärte Nacht', in *Weib und Welt* (Berlin: Schuster und Loeffler, 1896), pp. 60-63.

erklären' (p. 84).⁴³¹ Leonora's understanding of Czech identity is encapsulated by the italicisation of 'ihren' and the phrase 'Im Unterschied zu Wien'. It is an identity with strict boundaries, and a definite concept of what 'belongs' to the Czechs (Mozart) and what is un-Czech (Vienna). Leonora takes up such narratives defensively: she fears for the disappearance of 'her' Prague, and regards foreign tourists as a threat (p. 90).

The repetition of Prague myths in *Verklärte Nacht* often appears to impose a final interpretation on the city, presenting it to the German reader with a hint of didacticism. In contrast with Hodrová's detailed excavations of collective memory, Leonora lists some of the most famous people buried at Vyšehrad, but without further discussion of the significance of this canon of national heroes (p. 39).⁴³² Instead, she comments, 'Touristen kennen die Namen kaum': the list of names functions primarily as an example of the ignorance of foreigners. At such moments, *Verklärte Nacht* seems to close down the possibility of questioning the mythical narratives attached to Prague.

However Leonora's defensive perspective is undermined by the novel's many reenactments and adaptations, each of which hints at a mythical Prague which is characterised by heterogeneity rather than exclusive Czechness.⁴³³ We see Leonora Marty watching a performance of Janáček's *Věc Makropulos*, having recently starred

⁴³¹ See the similar description of this event by Josef Kajetán Tyl, 'Don Juan', in *Spisy Josefa Kajetána Tyla*, ed. by Mojmir Otruba and others, 20 vols (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1952-1989), IX: *Historické povídky III*, pp. 257-271.

⁴³² An exception is Božena Němcová, who is discussed in more detail in the same chapter (pp. 30-33).

⁴³³ Stephanie Bird suggests that there is a tension between Moníková's construction of counter-narratives, often read as post-structuralist, and her didacticism and patriotism ('*Libuše Moníková in Memoriam*' by Brigid Haines; Lyn Marven; *Body and Narrative in Contemporary Literatures in German: Herta Müller, Libuše Moníková, Kerstin Hensel* by Lyn Marven (review)', *The Modern Language Review*, 102, (2007), 286). Brigid Haines addresses this tension in several articles (see 'Representations of "Bohemia"', and "'Barren Territory for Grand Narratives"? Czech History in the Works of Libuše Moníková', in Haines and Marven (eds), pp. 179-200). Moníková discusses her emotional engagement with the historical events she writes about in her interviews and essays (e.g. Petr Kyncl, 'Writing is a Murderous Occupation', in Haines and Marven (eds), pp. 31-32 and Libuše Moníková, 'Kirschfeste', in Libuše Moníková, *Prager Fenster: Essays* (Munich: Hanser, 1994), pp. 9-17).

in a reinterpretation of the same piece; the opera is itself an adaptation of a play, which is a retelling of mythical material that connects with the ‘magic Prague’ topos. The concept of a clear-cut Czech identity resting on a set of shared narratives is thrown into question. Like Hodrová, Moníková explores the roles played by performance in creating and reshaping collective narratives, and makes this exploration part of a new, self-reflexive mythical narrative.

Leonora’s relationship with Thomas is a performance, too: they are reenacting the myth of eternal conflict between Czechs and Germans.⁴³⁴ Thomas joins Leonora on her dissatisfied wanderings around the city, which come to an abrupt end when they both fall into the Vltava. The river is a further symbolic location for Czech patriotism, but brings about a sudden, temporary erasure of the difference between the two of them – and unlike the monuments of the city, which Leonora has discussed earlier in the text, the Vltava is characterised by motion, change and organic physicality. Their first words to each other as they struggle out of the water relate to identity:

Ich sehe ihn an. “Wie heißen Sie überhaupt?”
“Ich dachte, Sie kennen mich.” (p. 99)

Up to this point, Leonora thought she knew that Thomas was a German, and that she disliked him. Now, their identities have become less stable; the boundary between them is more difficult to uphold:

Wir reden durcheinander, wechseln die Sprachen, eine Mischung aus Deutsch und Tschechisch, er will bei Tschechisch bleiben, aber ich werde ungeduldig und schreie deutsch, es geht schneller. (p. 101)

Their choice of languages becomes disconnected from their supposed identities: Thomas wants to keep speaking Czech, the language which is foreign to him, and Leonora finds it easier to speak to him in German, despite her Czech patriotism.

⁴³⁴ See Cornejo, p. 317.

As their relationship develops, we see the importance of performance as a response to the traumatic past: in their new adaptation of the Czech-German conflict, and Leonora and Thomas' dialogues offer possibilities of transformation for both of them.⁴³⁵ This process culminates in the 'transfigured night' which gives the novel its title: during their love scene, the boundaries of gender are blurred, as Leonora describes Thomas as 'motherly', and their bodies become indistinguishable from each other (p. 148). Moníková plays on Dehmel's poem, in which the male voice says, 'Du hast mich selbst zum Kind gemacht'; the switch in Thomas' gender reverses the stereotypes of earlier Czech-German literature, in which femininity is associated with the Czechs.⁴³⁶

Leonora's relationship with Thomas offers a performative alternative to the ossified forms of cultural memory which she sees reflected in the official renaming of Náměstí Krasnoarmějců (the Square of the Red Army) to Náměstí Jana Palacha (Jan Palach Square) after 1989. For Leonora, once Palach's name can be found written on the signs, collective memory begins to become collective forgetting, since the name can now be used 'ohne Risiko, ohne Anspannung und Verpflichtung zur Erinnerung' (p. 97).⁴³⁷ In contrast, her confrontation with Thomas does involve risk and tension, and their conversations about the expulsion of the Germans work as a form of active remembering.

Prague myths of immortality

Moníková's presentation of Prague as a space for the performance and adaptation of myths is intertwined with myths of death, immortality and rebirth. Leonora performs

⁴³⁵ See Moníková's comments on the difficult process of reconstructing the past and constructing a relationship through the medium of conversation (Helga G. Braunbeck, 'Gespräche mit Libuše Moníková 1992-1997', *Monatshefte*, 89, 4 (1997), 452-467 (p. 461)).

⁴³⁶ See Dehmel, p. 63, and Ritchie Robertson, 'National Stereotypes in Prague German Fiction', *Colloquia Germanica*, 22 (1989), 116-136 (pp. 131-132).

⁴³⁷ Moníková commemorates Palach alongside others who chose self-immolation after the 1968 invasion in 'Die lebenden Fackeln', in *Prager Fenster*, pp. 104-113.

as Emilia Marty, and is represented as a version of her fictional counterpart, unable to die, observing the whole of Czech history. Moníková explores the role of Emilia Marty as Leonora's 'doppelgänger':

Ich starre auf das Plakat an der Wand vor mir. Eine Frau, die in hohem Bogen über die Bühne springt, die Türme der Stadt im Hintergrund. Sie nimmt die ganze Fläche ein, durch ihre Bewegungen verändert sie den Raum und die Zeit. Eine Furie, in wehenden Kleidern, mit einem Gesicht, das dreihundert Jahre alt sein kann oder dreißig. Emilia oder Leonora Marty.
Diese Frau bin ich. (p. 29)

The claim 'diese Frau bin ich' has a double meaning: Leonora is literally depicted on the poster, which advertises her performance as Emilia Marty, but she also suggests that her identity has merged with that of Emilia. The image of Emilia/Leonora is an empowering one: as she leaps across the stage, she seems to have mastered the whole of Prague and taken control over space and time. She resembles a vengeful deity, a 'fury' whose wrath comes from observing hundreds of years of Czech history. However, the image of strength is undermined: in the phrase 'die Türme der Stadt', which recalls the cliché of 'hundred-towered Prague', the city shrinks and is simplified, leaving us unsure whether her mastery of Prague is more than a theatrical trick.

Elsewhere in the novel, Leonora presents a less triumphant image of herself: when she suggests that the processes in her body work more slowly than in other people (p. 48) and that her attempts to live in Prague seem 'staged' ('ähneln einer Inszenierung', p. 72), she suggests that she is imprisoned in a kind of lifelessness which is not quite death. The leap through space and time which was shown on the poster is replaced with a different image of physicality:

Es gibt mehrere Gründe, warum sie mir nahe ist.
Dreihundert Jahre zu lang auf der Welt, ermüdet. Die Liebesnacht mit ihr ist für den Mann voll Entsetzen und Schauer. Kalt wie ein Leichnam, sagt er.
(pp. 87-88)

Emilia/Leonora is exhausted by immortality, and cannot experience physical closeness with others because her body has come to resemble a corpse. The description from a man's point of view enhances the sense that Emilia/Leonora is distanced from the world, and that the reader or audience can only view her from the outside, as an almost lifeless body. The novel is framed by two contrasting sexual experiences which relate to this passage: her encounter with her old school friend, Radek, is characterised by coldness and disgust, as she first invites him to touch her, but then fights him off (pp. 26-27). At the end of the novel, her night with Thomas finally allows her to escape from her state of 'immortality' and even perceive the unity of life and death: sex with him resembles 'eine Geburt und [...] ein Sterben' (p. 148).

Moníková's myth of immortality differs from Hodrová's image of the 'city of torment', where all historical and fictional figures can expect to enter the afterlife at some point, and the mythical spaces of the city are equated with a graveyard where no one is ever entirely dead. For Moníková, immortality is specific to her protagonist. Leonora's sense of alienation from her home city is connected with her loneliness as an emigrant. In contrast with the radically open structure of *Komedie, Verklärte Nacht* follows an implied teleology, as Leonora moves from a rigidly exclusive national identity towards a sense of plurality. This difference in structure is accompanied by stylistic distinctions: *Verklärte Nacht* addresses German readers in a style which frequently becomes essayistic, explaining many details of the Czech past.⁴³⁸

Beyond Prague

⁴³⁸ Some of these explanations are misleading, such as the account of Jan Patočka's death (p. 5), which echoes the incorrect claims made by Western media (Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 158).

Moníková traces the process of near death and rebirth as a journey through Prague and beyond. In her fever, Leonora dreams of boarding tram 22, as she did at the start of the novel, and travelling to Bílá Hora, which ought to be the final stop. But the tram keeps going:

Sie hält nicht an, an dem Ort der barocken Niederlage, rast weiter, in die Vorgeschichte, in das Tal der Wilden Šárka, wo der mythologische Mädchenkrieg einen seiner blutigen Höhepunkte fand, als die Anführerin Vlasta die schöne Šárka zwischen den Felsen anbinden ließ, als Lockvogel für den kämpferischen Ctirad. (p. 117)

In taking Leonora onward into prehistory, the tram transports her from the location of one defeat to another: the female warriors were defeated in the Maidens' War, after a temporary victory in which Vlasta and Šárka tricked some of the men and slaughtered them.⁴³⁹ The defeat marked the end of prehistoric matriarchy and the beginning of the patriarchal Přemyslid dynasty. Hodrová engages with the same myths in *Komedie*, referring to the theatrical roles of figures such as Libuše and Ctirad. Like Hodrová, Moníková makes the mythical status of this narrative explicit, but also underlines its continued relevance, commenting that the Maidens' stronghold, Děvín, was destroyed: 'Der Widerstand wurde ins Mythische abgeschoben' (p. 117). The tram does not give her an unmediated glimpse of the past, but rather evokes the process of forgetting and myth-making. The real Děvín, if it ever existed, is erased in favour of a mythical Děvín, a foundational myth for the patriarchal present.

At this point, the tram takes Leonora beyond the boundaries of Czech national myths, leaving Prague to make an intertextual connection: she travels to Egypt, where she relives the fate of Hatshepsut ('Ich bin Hatschepsut', p. 119), buried and almost erased from history. This recalls Ingeborg Bachmann's references to the same Egyptian queen in *Der Fall Franza* (1978): like Hodrová's use of the Joan of Arc

⁴³⁹ On Moníková's approach to such narratives, see Michael Schwidtal, 'Libuše, Přemysl und Prometheus. Zum mythischen Erzählen', in *Prag-Berlin: Libuše Moníková*, ed. by Delf Schmidt and Michael Schwidtal (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1999), pp. 64-69.

myth, the intertextual departure from Prague implies the heterogeneous connections between different myths, and ascribes a relevance to the Maidens' War beyond the confines of 'Czech identity'.⁴⁴⁰ Moníková strikes a more hopeful tone than Bachmann: where Franza points out that it is still possible to 'read' the story of Hatshepsut in the empty spaces where the hieroglyphs have been scratched out, for Leonora, the image of burial offers the possibility of rebirth.⁴⁴¹ She rips off the bedcovers, having survived the worst of the fever (p. 120). The repetition and adaptation of Bachmann's text, as well as of the other strands of history and myth on which Moníková touches here, create a moment of catharsis and allow Leonora to travel past the 'Endstation' of Bílá Hora.

Conclusions

In both *Komedie* and *Verklärte Nacht*, the authors dismantle and reassemble the collective narratives surrounding Prague. They make use of mythical narration whilst simultaneously questioning the structures which underpin it, reworking Prague myths in a process of adaptation and repetition. Hodrová states, 'opakování přece není nikdy prostým opakováním' (p. 40, 'repetition is never just repetition'): in these novels, fragments and echoes of myths provoke new explorations of the city, whilst at the same time revealing how collective narratives are constructed and reconstructed over time, fulfilling the needs of each new era. Both authors reconfigure the relationship between literature, myth and memory, tracing the ways in which adaptations of mythical narratives can bring about an uneasy process of remembering.

⁴⁴⁰ On Moníková's engagement with Bachmann, see Pfeiferová, pp. 70-76.

⁴⁴¹ Ingeborg Bachmann, "*Todesarten*"-Projekt, ed. by Monika Albrecht and Dirk Göttsche, 4 vols (Munich: Piper, 1995), II: *Das Buch Franza*, p. 274.

In *Komedie*, mythical Prague is a buried realm which is still unsettlingly alive. Correspondingly, the foundational myths of the city live on there: Hodrová incorporates Libuše and the ‘patriots of the Bouda’ into the text. However, by embedding the fragments of these myths in a complex, polyphonic narrative which also involves an eclectic range of myths from other traditions, she creates a heterogeneous mythical Prague: echoes of patriotic ‘Czechness’ are heard simultaneously with many other narratives. The myths of the afterlife include both the rupture of death and the continuity represented by life after death, and in the same way, Hodrová’s Prague is characterised both by the continuities between narratives which are endlessly repeated and recreated, and by the disintegration of these narratives.⁴⁴² Hodrová enacts this paradoxical process herself by demythologising the city – revealing how symbolic narratives such as that of Zdenka Havlíčková are constructed – and simultaneously reassembling the narratives she has dismantled.

Whilst performance is inseparable from the body, adaptation is textual; both are key to the process by which mythical narratives are intertwined, dismantled and recreated in *Komedie*. The bodies of the generations of Czechs who are buried in Olšany remain grotesquely present, performing again as they did when they were alive. With their symbolic implications, these repeated performances resemble rituals. The characters’ lives are adapted and reinterpreted, interspersed with elements from other myths and extracts from other texts. The heterogeneity of Hodrová’s city is found not only in its combination of many myths from different sources, but also in the tense interaction between the performing body and the constantly adapted text.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴² Prague is thus a space for ‘simultaneously continuous and fragmented memory’ (‘jedním z prostorů současně fragmentární i kontinuální paměti’); see Matonoha (p. 246) and Jedličková.

⁴⁴³ See Lyn Marven, *Body and Narrative in Contemporary Literatures in German: Herta Müller, Libuše Moníková, and Kerstin Hensel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), p. 156, on ‘text as performance’.

In *Komedie*, fiction both disrupts the creation and transfer of myths and constructs mythical narratives. The relationship between fiction and myth is characterised by reciprocity and tension: Hodrová incorporates mythical narratives into her novel, dismantles, transforms and recreates them through multiple processes of performance and adaptation, and uses them to create a new mythical topography of the city, where discontinuities and transcultural connections play a defining role.

For Jan Assmann, myths underpin collective memory, providing it with narrative structures and motifs which are reworked according to the requirements of each generation. Hodrová destabilises these structures: she imagines Prague as a space in which linear temporality has been replaced with simultaneity, and the teleological relationship between past and present which is presupposed by the notion of ‘foundational’ myths has disintegrated. The graves in the oldest part of the cemetery are an emblem of the process of forgetting: the earth has been levelled, and the bones of individual historical figures mingle in the dust. And yet, this image also exemplifies the role of fiction in reconstructing the past: Hodrová marks the unmarked graves in her novel by listing the names of the people buried there, and confronts the process of forgetting with a boldly literal reanimation of the past.

Thus, Hodrová’s fiction intervenes in collective memory, replacing linear temporality and teleology with the physical spaces of Prague, which provide an alternative structure.⁴⁴⁴ Here, many simultaneous performances take place, and the past occupies the same space as the present, just as the world of the dead occupies the same space as the world of the living. It is only occasionally possible to move between the two: the connections between past and present are fragile. Yet by tracing the wanderings of the narrator-protagonist as she tries to understand the dead, and the wanderings of the dead as they try to understand the living, Hodrová re-forms these connections.

⁴⁴⁴ See Matonoha, p. 246.

Whilst Hodrová's approach to myth in *Komedie* is radical in its rejection of linear time and its intricate reworking of many fragmented narratives, Moníková's *Verklärte Nacht* does not depart from the novelistic conventions of linearity and legibility. It focuses on one central character and imagines the functions of myth and memory from her perspective, even retaining an implication of teleology, as Leonora seems to develop from nationalist prejudice towards a more complex understanding of the past.

Although Moníková does not replace linear temporality with space in the same uncompromising manner as Hodrová, she does use her depiction of Prague's physical spaces to challenge the teleological patterns of collective memory. This is encapsulated in her two portrayals of the tram line, which correspond in importance with Hodrová's cemetery. The opening description of tram number 22 foregrounds the teleological structure of foundational myths: Bílá Hora is the inevitable 'Endstation'. Nevertheless, Moníková hints at discontinuities in this structure: she disorients the reader by opening the text with the unfamiliar names 'Malovanka, Marijánka, Drinopol', which most readers will not immediately recognise to be tram stops. In the second depiction of tram 22, such tensions between continuity and discontinuity become the focus: the tram goes beyond Bílá Hora, beyond the history of Prague, and beyond the space of Prague itself, into Egypt. This expanded Prague offers a new framework for spatial memory.

V

Prague boundaries

Libuše Moníková's *Der Taumel* (2000) and Jáchym Topol's *Anděl* (1995)



The synagogue in Smíchov, with the Anděl junction in the background (Petr Vilgus, CC BY-SA 3.0).

The Prague of post-1989 fiction is demarcated by unstable boundaries: authors explore the distinctions between spaces within the city and consider how the limits of the city are defined. The boundaries which circumscribe and divide the city not only mark out specific spaces, but also distinguish between group identities. They are historically contingent, emerging in a specific context and shifting, vanishing or becoming entrenched according to the ways in which the city's past is collectively imagined. They reflect both geographical realities, such as the hills and waterways which shape Prague's physical appearance, and less tangible circumstances such as social difference, legal delineations of space, and religious practices. Prašná brána, a

gate built at the edge of the city in the medieval period, has become a centrally-located tourist attraction by the twentieth century; the once significant boundary of the ‘ghetto’ vanishes; the multi-lane ‘magistrála’ road creates a physical barrier between the National Museum and Wenceslas Square. The city is not only a network of connected locations – it can also be mapped according to its changing boundaries.

Boundaries in the post-1989 city are unstable not just because their individual meaning is in flux, but because their underlying dual function in joining and separating spaces is called into question. Distinctions and borders make the city legible and therefore navigable for the individual: it is difficult to describe a city or orientate oneself within it without observing the distinctions between private and public space, between one side of the street and the other, between the freezing waters of the Vltava and the solid ground of the bank. On the other hand, a boundary does not only separate one space from another: it also represents a line which joins two spaces and which can be crossed.

In post-1989 Prague fiction, tensions arise between the struggle to uphold boundaries, and the urge to transgress them. These two seemingly opposite responses to the demarcation of space are combined in a paradoxical manner: both are crucial to the construction of individual and collective identity in the texts discussed here. This paradox is particularly exemplified by Libuše Moníková’s *Der Taumel* (2000) and Jáchym Topol’s *Anděl* (1995), both of which focus on protagonists who are forced into a liminal status in the city, and who respond to this by alternating between extremes of self-imposed isolation and transgression.

Libuše Moníková’s unfinished novel *Der Taumel*

The protagonist of Libuše Moníková's final work is an epileptic artist, Jakub Brandl, who occupies a liminal space between official tolerance and persecution in the Prague of 'normalisation'. His paths through the city outline a complex picture of his position in the socialist regime: he attempts to avoid allying himself either with the ruling ideology or with the dissident artists whom he encounters, which leaves him in an uncertain zone.⁴⁴⁵ He retreats both from the regime and from dissidence in order to safeguard his integrity, but finds that this position of noncompliance is fraught with compromise. Moníková's exploration of Brandl's role as an artist in an authoritarian state undermines the clearly demarcated images of pre-1989 political roles which dominate Czech and European collective memory. She dismantles the boundary between 'regime' and 'dissidents' as opposing alternatives, along with the corresponding dichotomies of artifice and authenticity, violence and victimhood. The novel is therefore not only a response to the oppressive atmosphere of 1970s Prague, but also an implicit challenge to post-1989 narratives about life under socialism.

Der Taumel was planned as a four-hundred-page work; the posthumously published text constitutes roughly half of that.⁴⁴⁶ In its published form, it consists of eleven chapters which appear to be mainly complete, followed by around ten pages of fragmentary scenes and notes. These refer to Brandl saying farewell to the city and apparently arriving in a dreamlike version of Egypt, suggesting that Moníková considered depicting his departure from Prague.

Brandl's efforts to exist beyond the choice between the regime, dissidence and emigration place him under extreme pressure. His epilepsy is connected with his experience of the regime's brutality, which is portrayed as part of a pattern of violence

⁴⁴⁵ His position recalls Jiřina Šiklová's discussion of the 'grey zone' ('The "Gray Zone" and the Future of Dissent in Czechoslovakia,' *Social Research*, 57, 2 (1990), 347-363).

⁴⁴⁶ Libuše Moníková, *Der Taumel* (Munich: Hanser, 2000), p. 193. Future references are given in the text.

characterising the twentieth century.⁴⁴⁷ During his attacks of epilepsy, Brandl vividly ‘relives’ the experiences of his uncle during the Second World War, trapped in a bunker in the Atlantic Wall. The title of the novel, *Der Taumel*, refers to the dizziness and frenzy of the epileptic fit, as well as to the feeling of being ‘transported’ from one brutal historical moment to another. Brandl responds to these feelings in his paintings: his epileptic fits bring about agonising bursts of inspiration.

At the centre of the novel are the boundaries which Brandl both preserves and transgresses as he navigates his illness and his art in Prague. His instinctive response to the demands of normalisation is to isolate himself in his flat and his studio. He lives alone: his wife has left him, taking their two sons, because of her own pro-regime stance and his refusal to conform. His isolation is punctured by the unwelcome intrusion of the secret police and of his dissident acquaintance, the artist Oswald Machor, as well as other intrusions which Brandl cautiously welcomes: he allows two students to spend time at his studio, exchanges visits with a neighbour who shares his interest in Egyptology, and becomes friends with a Polish artist, Halina Potocka. Like Brandl, Halina returns repeatedly to her experiences of violence: she lost her family in the Holocaust, and this memory shapes her life as an artist.

Boundaries within the city

Der Taumel begins in an ambiguous, liminal space, which is initially only implicitly linked with Prague. Brandl is crossing a threshold; Moníková only gradually specifies that it is the threshold of a courthouse, and that he has just been injured during an interrogation (p. 5). The opening pages of the novel thus evoke both the founding

⁴⁴⁷ On trauma and memory in *Der Taumel*, see e.g. Lyn Marven, ‘Falling Down: Images of Trauma in Moníková’s Fragmentary Novel, *Der Taumel*’, in *Libuše Moníková in Memoriam*, ed. by Brigid Haines and Lyn Marven (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 93-112, and Karin Windt, *Beschädigung, Entschädigung – Überlieferung, Auslieferung: Körper, Räume und Geschichte im Werk von Libuše Moníková* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2007), pp. 171-204.

tradition of Prague as a threshold and Kafka's *Der Process*; later in the chapter, Moníková comments emphatically, 'Noch war er frei' (p. 7).⁴⁴⁸ In his disorientated state, Brandl finds himself recalling many different locations he has read about and brutal historical episodes in which he might be implicated ('Berlin in den Dreißigern, Paris der Kommune'). Only after drawing these parallels does Moníková begin to make his position clear, by referring to two conventional historical boundaries: hearing military music, Brandl guesses that it is the anniversary of 'victorious February', 1948, the year in which the socialist regime was established, or the 'brotherly invasion' of 1968, when the Warsaw Pact troops suppressed the Prague Spring.⁴⁴⁹ Having evoked this layering of painful historical events, Moníková laconically specifies: 'Prag der Siebziger'. This short, truncated sentence has an air of finality, circumscribing Brandl's position to the point of claustrophobia, and yet the route which Moníková takes to reach this point ensures that his story is connected with multiple narratives of twentieth-century brutality which cross spatial and temporal borders.

Brandl's unstable position in Prague is expressed by his movements between his flat in the Old Town and his studio on Korunovační, a street beyond Prague Castle and somewhat outside the centre of the city. On his regular path between the two, he often crosses a police checkpoint close to the empty plinth which once supported the Stalin monument (p. 21). As an art student, he was involved both in the construction of the monument and in its subsequent destruction. The plinth is a reminder of Brandl's own implication in the system, and therefore of his compromised identity as an artist, a point which is underscored when he has to show his identity card to the police.

⁴⁴⁸ Franz Kafka, *Der Proceß*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1990), p. 12.

⁴⁴⁹ See Jürgen Eder, 'Die Jahre mit Acht - 1918, 1938, 1948, 1968... Zum Historischen bei Libuše Moníková', in *Prag-Berlin: Libuše Moníková*, ed. by Delf Schmidt and Michael Schwidtal (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1999), pp. 87-98.

Both Brandl's flat and his studio offer a fragile refuge from the political pressure to 'identify himself'. Even well-meaning intrusions are unsettling. When he wakes from an epileptic fit to find his neighbour, Halina Potocka, looking after him, his sense of shame is reminiscent of Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*:

Er verkriecht sich unter die Decke. Ein wehrhaftes Ungeheuer, Minotauros in seinem Labyrinth, gepanzert, mit zittrigen Beinen. (p. 77)

The words 'Ungeheuer' and 'gepanzert', along with Brandl's trembling legs, echo Gregor Samsa's first view of himself as 'ein ungeheures Ungeziefer'.⁴⁵⁰ Moníková's portrayal of his position recalls her discussion of isolation in Kafka's work: 'die Situation der aufgezwungenen oder selbstgewählten Isolation ist das durchgehende Thema Kafkas'.⁴⁵¹ She interweaves the allusion to *Die Verwandlung* with a reference to a 'minotaur in his labyrinth'. The space around Brandl is difficult to navigate; it protects him as well as imprisoning him. Moreover, like Gregor's room at the centre of the family flat, Brandl's private sphere leaves him intensely vulnerable.⁴⁵²

Escaping Prague

In the oppressive Prague of *Der Taumel*, the theme of departure from the city recurs frequently. The possibility of leaving Prague is associated with one of the city's most quintessentially 'Czech' landmarks: the Vltava, where Brandl and Halina's conversation takes them away from the confined spaces of the studio:

⁴⁵⁰ Franz Kafka, 'Die Verwandlung', in *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, ed. by Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch and Gerhard Neumann (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1994), p. 115.

⁴⁵¹ 'Moníková, 'Der Prozeß: Schuld und Integration'', in *Schloß, Aleph, Wunschtorte* (Munich: Hanser, 1990), pp. 9-21, p. 10.

⁴⁵² Kafka's texts play a central role in Moníková's work, particularly the earlier novels *Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin* (1983) and *Die Fassade* (1987). See Brigid Haines, "'Er ist das Maß": Franz Kafka in Libuše Moníková', in *German Life and Letters*, 60 (2007), 116-132. Moníková wrote several essays about Kafka; see 'Der Prozeß: Schuld und Integration' and 'Das Schloß als Diskurs. Die Entstehung der Macht aus Projektionen', in *Schloß, Aleph, Wunschtorte* (Munich: Hanser, 1990), pp. 69-83.

Gemeinsame Wege am Kai entlang; es erinnert sie an Paris, sagt Halina. Die Stadt ist genauso durch den Fluß bestimmt, gegliedert. Saint-Denis ist eine Betonfalle, ohne Ausweg.

‘So empfanden einige Prag auch,’ sagt Brandl. ‘Als die Moldau schiffbar gemacht wurde, freuten sich einige *Insassen*, daß man die Stadt jetzt auch auf dem Wasserwege verlassen kann.’

‘Wie war das? Das Mütterchen mit Krallen,’ sagt Halina.

‘Diesmal war es Meyrink.’

‘Der gleiche Schlag. Literat, Jude.’ (p. 97)

Halina’s response to the city does not correspond to the stereotype of Western freedom and Eastern tyranny: she sees parallels between Prague and Paris as oppressive spaces. Brandl’s comments refer to a light-hearted essay about Prague by Gustav Meyrink, in which he exclaims, ‘Wieviel Monde noch, und man wird Prag sogar per Schiff verlassen können!’.⁴⁵³ Through a series of literary and historical references, the conversation approaches the questions the protagonists have to confront: whether Brandl, too, ought to desire to leave Prague, and whether Halina will ever move on from her compulsive retellings of Jewish suffering.⁴⁵⁴ This may be the reason for Halina’s incorrect assumption that Meyrink was Jewish: the conversation circles inexorably towards the memory of Prague in the Second World War, when Jewish riches were amassed there by the Nazis, before returning to Halina’s ‘endlose Schleife’, the story of her parents’ deaths in Treblinka. Prague is not located in a simple East-West constellation: it reflects the brutality of the twentieth century, and its own violent history is echoed in Moníková’s images of other places. Crossing the border and emigrating from Czechoslovakia would not allow Brandl to leave behind this network of suffering, but it would exclude him from the city which defines him as an artist.

⁴⁵³ Gustav Meyrink, ‘Prag: Eine optimistisch gehaltene Städteschilderung in vier Bildern’, in *Des deutschen Spießers Wunderhorn*, 3 vols (Munich: Langen, 1913), III, pp. 16-24 (p. 16).

⁴⁵⁴ On the role of intertextual spaces in *Der Taumel*, see Windt (*Beschädigung*, p. 183), who suggests that the process of discovering art and culture reverses the traumatic image of being buried alive: instead of being buried, Brandl is ‘unearthing’ cultural artifacts when he pores over his books. Windt does not address the communicative aspects of Brandl’s engagement with the past.

The Vltava takes on a similar function to the tramline in *Verklärte Nacht*: Halina and Brandl imagine fictional connections joining the river Nĕmen, where she was born, to the river Jordan, and the Vltava becomes part of that liberating vision of unlimited journeys. The reality is different: the two of them briefly step onto a tourist boat which promises to take them to Slapy (a resort south of Prague), but as it becomes increasingly claustrophobic, they disembark shortly before it leaves. This moment of indecision is symbolic of Brandl's ambiguous position: he is neither integrated into his city nor prepared to emigrate.

Spaces of memory and imagination

Brandl's illness confronts him with unstable boundaries within his own mind, whilst his art offers the possibility of transgression – though what appears on the surface to be a dichotomy between imprisonment and freedom is in fact more complex, as his epilepsy creates an impetus for his art.

During his epileptic fits, Brandl enters the claustrophobic spaces of memory. His illness began when he was a child and his uncle returned from the Second World War, irreparably damaged by the time he spent buried alive in a bunker in the Atlantic Wall, seeing his fellow soldiers slowly die. The epilepsy remains as a reminder of the day Brandl's uncle returned home ('[Brandl] behielt die fallende Krankheit als Erinnerung', p. 14); it is closely related to the process of remembering the past. His fits transport him to the bunker, a traumatic space of memory which he does not directly remember. Halina has a parallel experience: she compulsively recalls hiding in a box full of scraps of fabric, to avoid being taken to a concentration camp by the Nazis. Halina's box is not exactly equivalent to Brandl's bunker – she did experience it directly – but their experiences are parallel in the sense that Halina herself was not imprisoned in a concentration camp, but is instead traumatised by the experience of

her parents. The spaces of the bunker and of the box represent inherited memories of violence, which are both visceral and mediated by the imagination:

In Brandls Kopf tickte es. Bei dem Gespräch nach dem Schlag seiner Stirn auf die Tischplatte platzte etwas. [...] Es zieht, Modergeruch, es arrangiert sich lautlos, die Szenerie ordnet sich nach uraltem verschüttetem Muster. Schwarz. [...] Montur, Filz, Schweiß, Katakomben, Rascheln zwischen Säcken mit Vorräten, voll verschimmelten Brots, Keksen, eingeschweißt, Mehl. (pp. 10-11)

Here, Brandl's epilepsy is explicitly connected with the interrogation which took place shortly before the opening of the novel: the violence of the regime leads him back to the brutality of the bunker, which he initially perceives from a certain distance. The phrases 'es arrangiert sich lautlos' and 'die Szenerie ordnet sich' imply that he sees the scene being constructed – though the construction is fragmented, as the broken syntax of the sentence suggests. This suggestion of theatricality and fictionality contrasts with the sensual detail of the description: Brandl, who never experienced the bunker in reality, nevertheless 're-lives' it, feeling the draught, smelling the mould and sweat, and hearing the rustling among the sacks.⁴⁵⁵ The process of returning to the traumatic experience involves elements of fictional construction.

Moníková's portrayal of Brandl's epilepsy is based around paradoxes: his fit is both an instinctive, visceral experience and a response to his interrogation, and thus seems both natural and culturally contingent; his experience of the bunker is both physically immediate and carefully mediated; the bunker itself seems both to be sensually and historically real, and to be constructed as a form of fiction; Brandl returns to the bunker as if to a scene from his own past, even though he has no genuine memory of it. Moníková shifts between the specificity of Brandl's fit and a collective experience:

⁴⁵⁵ See Windt, *Beschädigung*, p. 175.

Taumel, Schwindelgefühl, die seit kurzem vertraute Taubheit in der Hand und das Ticken im Kopf. Wir alle tragen unseren Tod mit uns, unbewußt, im allgemeinen Tumult und Rumor unbemerkt, bis uns unsere Verschütteten einholen. Das Jahrhundert der Verschütteten. Die Begrabenen vom Atlantikwall haben ihn eingeholt. (p. 15)

The reference to 'all of us' ('Wir alle') suggests that Brandl's epilepsy is an expression of a common existential state. For Moníková, living in the twentieth century brings with it a particular claustrophobia: through collective memory, we are connected with those who have died, and we are trapped along with them.

In *Der Taumel*, spatial memory plays a central role, though the spaces which Moníková connects most strongly with memory in this novel are strikingly distant from Prague. She suggests that her characters occupy many spaces simultaneously. Brandl is located in Czechoslovakia, with its well-guarded borders; he is located in Prague, the city which Meyrink and Kafka portrayed as a trap; within Prague, he retreats to the carefully defended isolation of his studio; there, he recalls his detainment in the interrogation room; during his fit, he once again finds himself in the bunker.

Thus, in transporting him mentally to a location far from Prague, Brandl's epilepsy has a certain power to transgress boundaries, but the space of the bunker is an even more suffocating counterpart to the other confined spaces which he inhabits – Czechoslovakia, Prague, and his studio. However, the space of the bunker allows him to locate himself and define his position. This function of spatial memory is reflected in Halina's words when she introduces herself: 'Halina Potocka, aus Grodno. Genauer, aus einer Seifenkiste' (p. 77). To Halina, it seems more accurate to claim to come from a soapbox than from Grodno. She declares that she is 'from' – and therefore defined by – a location in history or even 'from' the Holocaust itself. She is confined to her own past – this is what defines her. In contrast with such confined

spaces of memory, Brandl's art offers the possibility of transgression. When he is painting, he tries to overcome his isolation, to mend the rift between himself and the world (p. 15). He even imagines painting with his own blood, which would be 'more direct' (p. 16). The notion of painting using blood reinforces the impression that his art is an effort to cross boundaries: he is willing to destroy the integrity of his own body.⁴⁵⁶

Brandl's impulse to transgress boundaries in his art is inseparable from the painful experience of his epilepsy. As he paints, he navigates the imagined spaces which he enters during his fits:

Er möchte einen schwachen, entfernten Strahl vor seinen Augen verfolgen; er würde ihn zu einem anderen, helleren Licht hinübergeleiten, zu einem anderen Bild, zum Aufatmen. Er verliert ihn unter dem Anprall der Blitze, die mit zunehmender Wucht aufeinander zustürzen, sich in seinem Kopf überkreuzen, ihn erfassen, verschütten. (p. 74)

Brandl attempts to move into a 'different picture' which would offer release from his attack. Instead, he is once again 'buried': the word 'verschütten' indicates that he is confronted by the boundedness of his position in time and space. 'Anprall', 'Wucht' and 'erfassen' all imply the physical force with which his fit takes hold. Brandl's paintings respond to these violent experiences within his own body and to the external reality of normalisation: they are described as 'Zeugnis von einer Leere. Für einige, die sie kennen, ist es die Leere im Land' (p. 16). Brandl draws a boundary around his paintings, only allowing a few people to see them; these people recognise them as a political statement.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁶ On the importance of the body throughout Moníková's work and in *Der Taumel*, see Lyn Marven, 'Falling Down', and *Body and Narrative*, and Windt, *Beschädigung*, pp. 174-180.

⁴⁵⁷ See Karin Windt, "Die Zeit der Bilder ist noch nicht gekommen": Ästhetische Erfahrung, Kunstproduktion und Werkverweigerung in *Der Taumel*, in Haines and Marven (eds), pp. 113-130.

The term 'Zeugnis' evokes the significance of bearing witness to human suffering. It refers to a specific form of transgression: the 'testament' to suffering is a message which is passed on, crossing the gulf between those who directly experience trauma and those who live later and who perhaps preserve the memory collectively. Brandl's paintings combine his indirect response to his uncle's experiences with a direct response to the paradoxical experience of normalisation: it is an experience of emptiness, and thus the 'testament' is not a narrative, as one might expect, but is instead an image of nothing. His paintings are a form of 'Gedächtniskunst', like Moníková's own works.⁴⁵⁸

In some ways, Moníková adheres to convention by portraying normalisation as a time of 'emptiness' in which Prague stagnated – a time which lacked a narrative. As Jonathan Bolton comments, the term 'normalisation' expresses the 'ironic resignation, boredom, and often despair that characterized the 1970s for [...] artists [...] who had taken advantage of the newly creative public life of the 1960s'.⁴⁵⁹ However, by emphasising the parallels between this emptiness and other violent episodes in the twentieth century, Moníková moves beyond 'resignation' to create a multi-stranded narrative which draws on elements of many different histories. Because this narrative is not limited to pre-1989 Czechoslovakia, Moníková suggests that 1989 was not an automatic ending or beginning. Instead, she explores normalisation in the context of European memory, imagining Prague as a point of intersection for a multitude of narratives. As he wanders around Prague and around the 'labyrinth' of his illness and his art, Brandl seeks to retreat into isolation and create boundaries around himself, and simultaneously desires to transgress the boundaries of his own body, of his illness, and of his individual position in space and time. Since there can be no

⁴⁵⁸ See Sibylle Cramer, 'Eine humoristisch gewendete Ästhetik des Widerstands. Prospekt zur Verbesserung Mitteleuropas: das Werk Libuše Moníkovás', in Schmidt and Schwidtal (eds), pp. 70-77 (p. 70).

⁴⁵⁹ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 12.

transgression without boundaries, the imagined city remains a space in which freedom and imprisonment are tensely intertwined.

Jáchym Topol's novel *Anděl*

If the Prague portrayed in Jáchym Topol's *Anděl* were plotted on a map of the city, it would barely overlap with Jakub Brandl's paths between his flat in the Old Town and his studio on Korunovační, or with his walks along the river. *Anděl* depicts a limited area of Prague: the districts of Smíchov and Košíře, which were regarded as suburbs until the early twentieth century. Smíchov can no longer be described as peripheral – it borders on Malá Strana – but Topol's focus on this area ensures that the conventional centre of the city plays no role in the novel: instead, the 'central' location of the novel is the junction known as Anděl ('Angel'), one of the landmarks of Smíchov. This choice of location plays on a range of unstable distinctions: between centre and periphery, between those who are 'included' in the life of the city and those who are marginalised, and between the mundane functions of a modern intersection and the hidden significance which it takes on for Topol's protagonist.⁴⁶⁰

Jatek, the protagonist, shifts between the urge to enclose himself in his flat and the desire for transgression. Early in the novel, he checks himself into the psychiatric hospital in Bohnice, on the southern periphery of Prague, because of his visions. The narrator comments that this is not the first time Jatek has been there, recalling the topos of the psychiatric ward in the Prague underground.⁴⁶¹ By entering the psychiatric hospital of his own accord, Jatek excludes himself from Prague society, crossing the boundary between the 'normal' population of the city and the space marked out for those who cannot conform.

⁴⁶⁰ Alexander Bobrakov-Timoškin surprisingly claims that Prague is only a backdrop for the action in Topol's novels (p. 552).

⁴⁶¹ Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 130.

Having introduced us to Jatek in this context, the narrative jumps back in time to explain how he reached this point. It describes briefly how he became estranged from his family and began working in a hellish boiler room – another confined space and topos of underground and dissident literature, since this was one of the menial jobs allotted to those who refused to renounce the ideals of the Prague Spring, or who signed Charter 77.⁴⁶² While working at the boiler room, Jatek moves into a one-room flat, to which he gradually retreats entirely, no longer going to work. His isolation is disturbed by Ljuba, his new neighbour, with whom he begins a relationship. Soon afterwards, he encounters another woman, Věra, and begins taking drugs with her; the two leave for Paris together. Paris is the location for one of the key events in the novel's plot: after a violent argument, Věra and Jatek discover that the latest batch of the drug they have been making is extraordinarily potent, bringing 'eternal bliss'. It later becomes clear that the drug contains a mixture of Jatek and Věra's blood. The 'miracle' drug brings them a cult-like following, but they return to Prague separately after a police raid. Jatek therefore oscillates between extreme isolation (retreating to the boiler room, to his tiny flat, and to Bohnice) and extreme transgression (leaving for Paris, selling drugs, mixing his blood with Věra's).

The novel culminates in two brutal scenes: Jatek goes to meet Věra and make the drug, but locks her into the storeroom where he has been living, and leaves. A chaotic show-down follows with his former friend, the drug-dealer Pernica, in the shop belonging to Jatek's sadistic neighbours, Machata and Helena. After finding that Machata's adopted daughter Nad'a has been killed, Jatek sets fire to the shop and locks them all inside. In the final scene, his connection with the Anděl junction appears to be the only lasting anchor for his identity.

⁴⁶² Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 91.

Throughout the novel, Topol hints at spiritual meanings beyond the everyday surface of the city. Thus, not only does the title, *Anděl* ('angel'), refer both to the mundane location of the crossing and to the apocalyptic message which may be hidden in Jatek's visions, but the names of Věra, Nad'a and Ljuba encode the biblical virtues of faith, hope and love.⁴⁶³ Jatek's own name means 'of the slaughterhouse' ('jatek' being the genitive form of 'jataka'), anticipating the novel's violent ending. In the film version of the novel, Nad'a remains with Jatek at the end, entirely changing these implications: in Topol's text, such biblical references remain a mocking presence, as Jatek has access only to faint echoes of transcendental meaning.

The limits of the underground

Like Brandl, Jatek isolates himself in his flat, which offers only a fragile refuge. The flats on Jatek's floor are single rooms which open straight onto an inner balcony ('pavlač'): they were created after the Communist takeover, when the 'bourgeoisie' were evicted and the poor moved in.⁴⁶⁴ Jatek lives in fear that his door will be kicked in by thugs, or that the authorities will discover that he has stopped going to work. However, his isolation is in fact destroyed by his next-door neighbour, Ljuba, whose family originally owned the building. When Jatek returns from his stay in the psychiatric hospital, Ljuba has regained the family property through the post-1989 process of restitution ('restituce') and reinstated the old layout, so that the 'pavlač' is gone and his room is part of her flat. The new decor signals an unfamiliar upper-class identity: 'Záclony, televize, kytka, jak někde na zámku' (p. 68, 'Curtains, television, flowers, like in some kind of stately home'). Jatek is disorientated and soon retreats further, moving into a storeroom with boarded up windows and metal doors.

⁴⁶³ See Karen Gammelgaardová, 'Výstavba postav v *Andělu* Jáchyma Topola', in Říha (ed.), pp. 153-161 (p. 160).

⁴⁶⁴ Jáchym Topol, *Anděl* (Prague: Labyrint, 2000), p. 25. Future references are given in the text.

In his depiction of the flat, Topol demonstrates the fragility of the physical boundaries which protect Jatek's private self. His representation of the local pub poses the question of whether the demarcation of group identity is just as flimsy, and elaborates on his claim, made in a 1994 interview, that the Czech underground no longer exists.⁴⁶⁵ Alfrun Kliems takes this statement at face value in *Der Underground, die Wende und die Stadt*, refuting it from a range of perspectives.⁴⁶⁶ However, *Anděl* suggests that Topol's post-1989 stance towards the underground includes elements of provocation and conscious self-contradiction which Kliems passes over. The pub recalls the existence, the traditions and the ethos of the underground, and is presented irreverently as a 'lieu de mémoire'. At the same time, it retains a vestigial potential to define post-1989 identities, by transgressing the boundaries of historical specificity and forming a connection with a mythical past.

Topol portrays the pub as a space of memory in a manner which both connects it with the pre-1989 underground and undermines this connection. He suggests that the pub has 'remained a museum of bolshevism' ('zůstala skanzenem bolševismu'), connecting it with the artificiality of organised collective memory. A 'skanzen' is an outdoor replica village, filled with folklore elements, and often blurring the distinction between authenticity and artificiality: genuine examples of rural houses in regional styles might be brought from across the country to create a village which would never exist otherwise. Although such museums originate in Scandinavia and are not specific to socialism, the concept corresponded with the efforts of socialist regimes to celebrate the work of the proletariat. The word 'skanzen' thus suggests that since 1989, the memory of socialism has itself merged with the kitsch nostalgia for folklore which characterised the socialist image of the Czech past. It also casts the boundaries

⁴⁶⁵ Viktor Šlajchrt and Jáchym Topol, 'Slalom mezi idejemi. Rozhovor se spisovatelem Jáchymem Topolem', *Respekt*, 25 (1994), 10.

⁴⁶⁶ Kliems, pp. 364-365.

of the pub in a specific light: a skanzen is an enclosed, artificial world which contrasts with ordinary reality.

However, Topol swiftly overwrites this connection with the politics of collective memory by pushing the pub further back into the past, into a mythical prehistoric time:

Tahle hospoda jakoby zůstala skanzenem bolševismu. Ba ne, ještě něčeho předtím, nebylo tu nic [...], co by rušilo ohně pralidí. [...] Pár automatů. Místní jako by se obrnili proto toku času. Vnitřní a vnější svět tu starousedlíkům prostě splýval [...]. Z jedny ze zdí shlížela na opilce blond'atá děvka s vědoucím, krutým úsměvem. Byla to dáma. Visela tu od nepaměti na fotografii v rámu, nikdo neznal její jméno. Jako ozdoba tu všem stačila. Byla něčím víc než ozdobou.

Jinak zářivky a umakart. (p. 74)

[This pub seemed to have remained a museum of bolshevism. In fact, no, an even earlier time, there was nothing here which would get in the way of the fire of prehistoric people. [...] A few slot machines. The locals seemed to be frozen in time. The inner and outer worlds just merged here, for the old residents. [...] From one of the walls, a blonde whore looked down at the drunks, with a knowing, cruel smile. She was a lady. She had hung here for as long as anyone could remember, in a photograph in a frame, no one knew her name. She was enough decoration for anyone. She was something more than decoration.

Apart from that, lightbulbs and formica.]

At the pub, the linear progress of history has no effect. The 'fire of the prehistoric people' is juxtaposed with the arcade games and transforms the space into a mythical one, where the boundaries are erased: the 'inner and outer worlds' merge together, evoking the harmony of a golden age before the tensions of historical time.⁴⁶⁷ The 'blonde whore' on the wall also takes on mythical proportions: her unknown name and the fact that she has been hanging there 'od nepaměti' ('since before memory', or literally, 'since non-memory') remove her from historical time and space and suggest

⁴⁶⁷ Gertraude Zandová observes a similar dynamic in *Sestra*, arguing that 'Topol-Potok' makes use of a 'much older, archaic world' in order to understand the 'new' world after 1989 ('"Výbuch času" 1989: Jáchym Topol a staronový svět jeho románu *Sestra*', in Říha (ed.), pp. 23-30 (p. 26)).

instead that she has symbolic meaning. The claim that she is ‘more than decoration’ hints at ritual significance. Topol plays on the tension between this hint at spirituality and the prosaic, shabby Czech pub. This combination of proletarian simplicity (‘lightbulbs and formica’) with spiritual gestures is characteristic of underground literature: Topol’s construction of the pub is an embodiment of underground aesthetics.

The members of the underground were once connected by specific locations and collective events, as ‘spojenci z psychiatrií, fízláren a demonstrací’ (‘allies from the psych ward, from interrogations and demonstrations’), but these shared topoi, along with their shared language, have fallen apart (‘rozpadl svět’ (‘the world fell apart’)). Those members of the old underground who have stayed at the pub have created a new world there, by going back in time rather than forward, into prehistory:

A underground se ve svých klasických kulisách vrátil k jednomu ze svých nejstarších ohnisek; stal se podsvětím. (p. 75)

[And the underground, in its classic setting, returned to one of its oldest epicentres; it became the underworld.]

Here, the shifting significance of the underground is encapsulated in the relationship between the words ‘underground’ and ‘podsvětí’ in Czech. The replacement of a recent anglicism with a native Czech word implies a step backward into the past in search of an older equivalent; ‘podsvětí’ is almost a literal translation of ‘underground’. However, the shift is also a step away from a specific cultural space, into a far more ambiguous context: the meaning of ‘underground’ in Czech is usually limited to alternative cultural production in the socialist era, whereas ‘podsvětí’ encompasses both the criminal underworld and the notion of a mythical afterlife.

Topol’s description of the pub plays both on the claim that 1989 represents an irrevocable boundary, and on suggestions of continuity. For those one-time members

of the underground who have become part of the establishment, the pub is a space of memory: they come back ‘na výlety, zavzpomínat’ (‘on excursions, to look back on the past’). The reference to ‘výlety’ echoes the term ‘skanzen’, suggesting an excursion, a day out from the city. In this sense, the pub is a ‘lieu de mémoire’, a reminder of discontinuity with the past: the ex-members of the underground make their ‘excursions’ in order to remind themselves of their distance from their own pasts. However, for those who are still regulars, the break with the past draws attention to a deeper, retrograde continuity: the underground returns to its ‘oldest’ form, and is thus preserved.

With its memories and myths, the pub offers a fragile sense of belonging which is not enough to help Jatek to orientate himself in Prague. It is only a means of ‘postponing’ the confrontation with himself (p. 75): it does not alleviate the problems of individual and collective identity entirely, because its spaces contain only a vestige of underground identity. As a ‘skanzen’, it appears identical to the pre-1989 pubs which housed the rebels of the Prague underground – but is really no more than a faithful replica of an earlier time. The collective identity offered by the pub no longer has the same transgressive qualities as the underground had before 1989: the underground was defined by its stance towards the ruling regime, to which it responded with indifference, rejection, and sometimes open protest. The repressive measures implemented by the regime created an entrenched boundary between ‘normal’ people who participated in society in an acceptable manner and those whose ‘positions, actions and views [were] foreign to socialism’.⁴⁶⁸ With the disintegration of socialism, these boundaries faded.⁴⁶⁹ Thus, Topol’s pub embodies his claim that the Czech underground is finished: he suggests that whilst many aspects of the underground still

⁴⁶⁸ See Jan Krýžl’s pro-regime polemic, “‘Nová’ vlna se starým obsahem’, *Tribuna*, 14, 12 (1983), 5.

⁴⁶⁹ Although adherents of ‘alternative’ culture are still criticised and accused of ‘vulgarity’, only the most radical divergences from social and political norms are now threatened with censorship (see Janáček and others (eds), II, pp. 1363-1550, particularly pp. 1404-1408 and pp. 1467-1481).

play a role in Czech culture, not least in his own writing, the collective identity represented by the underground is now present only in fragmentary form.

The junction as a space of the imagination

The Anděl junction, where Jatek's visions mainly take place, is the focal point of his struggle to orientate himself in Prague. Superficially, Topol appears to desacralise the city, ignoring landmarks such as the Castle, the Vltava or Vyšehrad and emphasising the 'Nonstop' bar and the post-1989 McDonalds. In fact, Jatek's visions suggest that the sacred centre of the city has been 'relocated' to Smíchov.⁴⁷⁰ When Jatek sees the sky turn red, he seems to be confronting a terrifying view of the 'other city', in which the familiar Smíchov is engulfed in flames and blood. The entry into the metro is transformed into a gaping abyss.

This portrayal of Anděl as an apocalyptic location responds to a tradition in the literature of the Prague underground, in which transcendence and banality intersect in the topos of the urban junction. Thus, Egon Bondy combined 'the most sublime and the most banal' in a poem responding to the death of his friend Milan Koch, who was run over by a tram at the Smíchov crossing.⁴⁷¹ Jatek tries to conquer his visions by travelling back and forth on the tram, repeatedly crossing the location where the visions take place:

A pak jel zas. A zas. A šlo to. Taky měl permanentku. (p. 67)

[And then he went again. And again. And it was fine. He had a season ticket, after all.]

⁴⁷⁰ See Alexander Bobrakov-Timoškin's comments on the emergence of 'new symbolic centres' ('nová symbolická centra') in recent Prague literature (Bobrakov-Timoškin, p. 558).

⁴⁷¹ Egon Bondy, 'Anděl nám Kocho vzal', in Kliems, *Der Underground*, pp. 85-86.

The reference to Jatek's season ticket (using the colloquialism 'permanentka') is comically anticlimactic: the everyday detail undermines Topol's construction of a hidden realm, and recalls the aesthetic of Bondy's poem, which mourns Koch's death with an irreverent evocation of his new life in Heaven. *Anděl* reassesses the forms of transgression which characterised pre-1989 underground literature, testing out their implications in a post-1989 context.

A similar ambivalence, encompassing both the disruption of tradition and an interest in reusing earlier fragments of the imagined city, underlies Topol's exploration of the *Anděl* junction as a space of memory. Here, he combines Prague's fragmented, obscured Jewish past with a fabricated local mythology. Describing the Smíchov synagogue, a real landmark which has stood at *Anděl* since 1863, he suggests that it is literally obscured by the accretions of the contemporary city:

U synagogy cítil moč. Od války tu chčije už kolikátá generace opilců. V podloubí na zatlučený hlavní dveře. Jsou tu vývěsky [...]: Klub Perun přijímá členky, spolek Za Prahu krásnější a jasnější buduje a Boxerská Jednota Tatry Smíchov je v naprostém klidu. Zjistil, že do vagónky a tramvajovny přijmou brusiče a frézaře. Zauvažoval o svých šancích a zavrhl je. (p. 107)

[By the synagogue he smelt urine. Since the war, the umpteenth generation of drunks has been pissing here. Under the archways, against the boarded-up entrance. There are signs here [...]: Club Perun is accepting female members, the Association for a Brighter and More Beautiful Prague is building and the Boxing Team Tatry Smíchov is doing just fine. He found out that the tram factory was taking people who could work grinding and milling machines. He considered his chances and dismissed them.]

Topol's description of the synagogue enacts a double process of desacralisation and resacralisation. The decades since the Prague Jews were deported or fled are represented by generations of drunkards' urine. The boarded up doors covered in notices and advertisements emphasise the fact that the synagogue is being hidden, the Jewish past obscured. The sacred space which could once be found here is now

inaccessible, hidden by messages about other, more recent communities which are shaping the modern city.

The notices imply particular Prague communities from which Jatek is excluded. Each has an emphatically ‘Slavic’ sound to it: Perun is the Slavic God of thunder, the ‘club for a more beautiful Prague’ echoes the Czech local patriotism of the early twentieth century, and the Tatry mountains are the symbol of Slovak national identity. Jatek not only rejects the idea of working at the tram depot; he backs away from all these communities.

To Jatek, the synagogue retains a vestige of significance, offering a point of reference in his wanderings. In one of his moments of uncertainty, he raises his head:

Věděl, že nad vši touhle měňavou amébovitou kulisou, řekněme: všedního dne, uvidí hebrejsky i česky vytesaný nápis: ‘Mír a zdar dalekému i blízkému’. To určitě. To určitě, pomyslel si Jatek. (p. 107)

[He knew that above the shifting amoebic backdrop of what might be called an ordinary day he would see the inscription engraved in Hebrew and Czech: ‘Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near’. Yeah, right. Yeah, right, thought Jatek to himself.]⁴⁷²

Topol combines the biological metaphor of the amoeba with the more familiar urban image of the theatrical backdrop to express the difficulty of capturing the shifting city, and contrasts this slippery world with the written remnant of a sacred space: the bilingual inscription invoking peace.⁴⁷³ Jatek’s response to the inscription once again creates an ironic distance from the suggestion of spiritual peace, but by seeking it out

⁴⁷² The Czech inscription says ‘peace and prosperity’; English renderings such as the King James version repeat the word ‘peace’ (Isaiah 57.19).

⁴⁷³ Topol presents the bilingual inscription as a memory of cross-cultural communication. In fact, the Czech and Hebrew inscriptions on the synagogue each quote different bible verses (Czech: Isaiah 57.19; Hebrew: Zechariah 4.6).

he also demonstrates his desire for meaning. Boarded up, plastered with posters and stinking of urine, the entrance of the synagogue remains a vestigial sacred space.⁴⁷⁴

The doors of the synagogue represent a barrier which Jatek cannot cross: he cannot access the city's Jewish past or its spiritual significance, but can only see the traces of that past. These faint echoes of the 'city of three peoples' appear to contrast with the elaborate origin myths which Topol constructs to explain the naming of Smíchov and Anděl, in the chapter 'Kde je Li?' ('Where is Li?'). Li is a Chinese hired killer who appears at intervals in the novel; the narrator claims that he knows nothing of Prague's history. Written in a formal, literary register which promises objectivity but which sounds artificial and stilted in comparison with the colloquial tone used elsewhere in the novel, this chapter presents us with a multicultural past: the 'gypsies' who once wove baskets and carpets in Košíře ('koš' is 'basket'), the cunning Slavic smuggler, Klestka, who made the inhabitants of Smíchov laugh by presenting them with mirrors ('smích' is 'laughter'), and the fleeing rabbi who saw a vision of his teacher, Abraham Anděl, at the crossing and decided to settle there.⁴⁷⁵

Topol's myths teasingly recall the poetological topoi of weaving and mirroring: the carpets show exotic and fantastical scenes, including 'depictions of long-ago gods' ('vyobrazení dávných bohů'), but are superseded by the desacralised, mimetic art of Klestka's mirrors (p. 110).⁴⁷⁶ Topol seems to offer these fabricated myths as a replacement for the forgotten intercultural past of Smíchov, but just as Li's presence has no consequences in the plot of the novel, so these myths play no lasting role either

⁴⁷⁴ See Kliems, pp. 239-240.

⁴⁷⁵ Peter Z. Schubert takes the story of the Rabbi at face value in his review ('Jáchym Topol. *Engel Exit.*', *World Literature Today*, 71, 4 (1997), 827-828), but it does not seem to appear outside Topol's novel.

⁴⁷⁶ The image of art as a mirror held up to life appears in Plato's *Republic* (Plato, *Republic (Books 6-10)*, trans. and ed. by Chris Emlyn Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 397).

in his experience of the city (he knows nothing of them) or in Jatek's efforts to navigate the city.

Visions of transgression

Both Jatek and Brandl attempt to navigate their visions as if they were spaces, seeking the path which would lead them to an interpretation of the traumatic image. Brandl follows the distant beam of light, whilst Jatek tries to take hold of a 'red thread', evoking the possibility of a narrative with a 'red thread' of continuity (a metaphor shared by Czech and German).⁴⁷⁷

It is in the relationship between image and narrative that a crucial difference between *Der Taumel* and *Anděl* becomes apparent. The suffering which Brandl sees when he has an attack is connected by Moníková with multiple narratives of human torment, expressed in the repeated phrase, 'Das Jahrhundert der Verschütteten'. Brandl's paintings of tortured faces are illustrations or expressions of these narratives, of which Halina's story also becomes a part. When Moníková refers to Halina once more taking up her story, she uses the image of a never-ending 'möbius strip' rather than a thread: the möbius strip cannot lead onward like a 'red thread', but only back to its own beginning. Analogously, the novel tells its story of suffering again and again in different settings: the story is defined by repetition rather than linearity or teleological resolution. *Anděl* does not have any such overarching narrative, although Jatek wishes for one:

[...] chtěl stopovat svoje vidění k jeho počátku, rozmagořit ho, dobrat se, chtěl vědět, co to je, chtěl vědět proč, toužil nezešilet. (p. 17)

⁴⁷⁷ Moníková, *Der Taumel*, p. 74.

[...] he wanted to trace his vision to its beginning, unravel its craziness, uncover it, he wanted to know what it was, he wanted to know why, he wanted not to go insane.]

The neologism ‘rozmagorit’ implies unpicking the ‘crazy’ aspects of the vision and finding the part which makes sense. ‘Magor’ means ‘lunatic’, but was also the nickname of one the best-known representatives of the Prague underground, Ivan Martin Jirous. The word ‘rozmagorit’ recalls the intersections of madness and sanity which characterised underground literature. Jatek’s search for an explanation and his desire not to ‘go insane’ are connected with the desire for a linear narrative implied by the possibility of tracing his visions back ‘to the beginning’. Rather than allowing such linear tracing, *Anděl* sketches a network of interconnected motifs. In Jatek’s visions, these motifs interact, but the visions remain unstable images at the core of the novel, resisting narration.

In *Der Taumel*, Brandl responds to his fits by creating works of art; his art is the act of transgression which allows him to cross the boundary between his individual experience and the collective trauma of the ‘Jahrhundert der Verschütteten’. Similarly, in *Sestra*, Potok turns his experiences into a narrative, shaping his own unruly language and structure of narration, rather than remaining within the bounds of literary convention. This option is not open to Jatek, who is not an artist and who does not narrate his own story.⁴⁷⁸ The three poems which are incorporated into *Anděl*, two of which refer to Jatek’s visions, are fragmentary reminders of the power with which art is imbued in *Sestra*. Where both *Der Taumel* and *Sestra* reflect on the provocative potential of art to connect the isolated experience of the individual with the shifting network of the collective imagination, the significance of the poems in *Anděl* remains ambiguous: Topol leaves them without titles, does not indicate whether they are

⁴⁷⁸ Alfrun Kliems’ claim that Jatek is ‘ein ehemaliger Dissident und Künstler’ (*Der Underground*, p. 238) is a significant misreading; given Topol’s own status and that of his first protagonist Potok as artists of the former underground, it is striking that he avoids characterising Jatek in this manner. Altogether, Kliems misjudges the relationship between *Anděl* and the pre-1989 underground, suggesting that it is one of unproblematic continuity.

composed by Jatek or by the narrator of the novel, and does not contextualise them by discussing their potential addressees. For Brandl, the act of transforming his visions into art is painful, but crucial to his sense of identity. In Jatek's case, only faint echoes of such a transformation remain.

Conclusions

Although *Der Taumel* is set entirely in the 1970s, whilst *Anděl* spans the 1980s and 1990s, both novels question post-1989 interpretations of socialist Czechoslovakia, 'Eastern' Europe and the transition to post-socialism, undermining the imagined boundaries between East and West and between pre-1989 and post-1989 Prague. It is doubtful that travelling to Western Europe would promise Brandl a greater sense of freedom: instead, it would sever him from the spaces which underpin his sense of identity and integrity. Moníková departs from the conventional distinctions between dissidence and conformity and instead creates links between Brandl's experience and other histories of trauma in Europe and the world. She imagines Prague as a space in which these histories meet.

Similarly, Topol avoids portraying the transition of 1989 as a revolution in any form, but instead comments on it indirectly in his satirical evocations of private space and individuality. His post-1989 Prague is characterised by the disintegration of shared identity.

Although both Brandl and Jatek confront conflicting urges to retreat and to rebel, they take different paths. The difference lies in the measure of transgressive power ascribed to art and narration in each of the two texts. In *Der Taumel*, Brandl's paintings allow him to retain a notion of his identity as an artist, defining himself both as an individual and as part of a community of artists and writers stretching across

time and space. In order to assert his artistic integrity in a city shaped by compromise, he has to allow both the oppression he suffers and the painful memories he has inherited to take hold of him and hurl him into the ‘*Taumel*’ of his fits: the only way to demarcate his identity is to cross the boundaries between his body, his memories and his canvas.

Anděl calls the connections between art, narration and identity into question. Despite being a finished work (unlike *Der Taumel*), it is surprisingly disjointed. The opening scenes are barely connected with the rest of the novel; the presence of Li, the hired killer, has no obvious consequences; the plot appears to dominate the narrative much more strongly than in *Sestra*, but many of its details are left unresolved. Jatek himself is an inarticulate protagonist, particularly in comparison with the garrulous Potok. The novel is characterised by a sceptical treatment of fiction: Jatek’s experiences are seemingly only partly narratable.

In fact, many aspects of *Anděl* give the impression that this novel is a truncated counterpart of *Sestra*: it is not only far shorter, but is also much less expansive in the possibilities it offers to its protagonist.⁴⁷⁹ One of the refrains of *Sestra* is ‘sou různé možnosti’ (‘there are various possibilities’).⁴⁸⁰ In *Anděl*, these possibilities are reduced and called into question. In *Sestra*, Topol asserts multiple authorial stances simultaneously, a tendency which can also be observed in *Anděl*: after all, this novel both questions the power of narrative and offers a narration of Jatek’s wanderings, and therefore contains elements of paradox. However, where the Topol of *Sestra* appeared to revel in paradoxes and celebrate the fragmentation of post-1989 Prague, *Anděl* approaches the remnants of pre-1989 identities more cautiously, questioning their

⁴⁷⁹ See Josef Vohryzek, ‘Topolova křižovatka: archetypální vzorce na dlažbě u Anděla’, in Řiha (ed.), pp. 164-166 (p. 164).

⁴⁸⁰ Topol, *Sestra*, p. 153 and p. 186.

validity. The spiritual teleology which remained a focal point of *Sestra* is present only in a vestigial form in *Anděl*.⁴⁸¹

Thus, the pub which was once connected with the underground is no longer a site of transgression; it only offers a memory of community. The Anděl junction retains fragments of intercultural identity, which Topol supplements with his ostentatiously fictitious local history, but the myths he creates have no power to anchor Jatek's unstable sense of self. *Anděl* expresses uncertainties both about the legacy of the underground aesthetic, and about the potential of fiction to forge connections between fragmented urban spaces and between the disintegrating memories of the imagined city.

⁴⁸¹ *Anděl* also brought a less substantial response from critics than *Sestra*. See Ivo Říha, 'Na úvod – o otvírání ran', in Říha (ed.), pp. 5-15 (p. 11).

Conclusion



David Černý's Kafka head, outside the Quadrio shopping centre (Jindřich Nosek, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Musíš být obyvatelem obou měst, jen tak pochopíš
smysl všednosti a tajemný směr své cesty [...].

[You must inhabit both cities, only then will you
understand the meaning of ordinary things and the
secret direction of your journey [...].]

– Michal Ajvaz⁴⁸²

David Černý's stainless steel sculpture of Kafka's head is eleven metres tall and is composed of forty-two separate layers which continuously move into new arrangements.⁴⁸³ It can be found in front of the Quadrio shopping centre, just off Národní třída. Once called Ferdinandova třída after the Emperor Ferdinand (1793-1875), this street was renamed 'National Avenue' in 1919. Národní třída later

⁴⁸² Michal Ajvaz, 'Lano', in *Návrat starého varana* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1991), pp. 69-71 (p. 70).

⁴⁸³ 'Socha Franze Kafky' <<http://quadrio.cz/franz-kafka/>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

took on particular meaning in Czech collective memory, as the site of large-scale student protests and police violence in 1989. However, the building work on the Quadrio shopping centre drew attention to the fact that this location also has much older historical significance. The Quadrio project was delayed by the discovery of gothic cellars, as well as graves belonging to a medieval Jewish cemetery known as the 'Jewish Garden' ('Židovská zahrada').⁴⁸⁴ In spite of disputes over the cost of the archaeological work, as well as over the question of whether the height of the shopping centre would disturb the 'panorama' of Prague, Quadrio was completed in 2014, advertising itself as 'your centre in the centre'.⁴⁸⁵

Unlike the fragment of the Jewish Cemetery at the foot of the Žižkov tower, the thirteenth-century 'Jewish Garden' is not visible to visitors. Some of the cellars have been preserved, but have not been made accessible to the public. The Jewish graves were left in place and sealed in concrete. In the entrance to the offices which form part of the Quadrio complex, a glass sculpture by Maxim Velčovský called 'Dobří Duchové' ('Good Spirits') refers to three of the houses which used to stand in this location: it is shaped like a black horse, a white lion and a white shoe, corresponding to the names of the houses.⁴⁸⁶ Otherwise, the shopping centre seems to obscure the past even more successfully than the small, chaotic square which could be found here from the 1970s onward.

How does David Černý's Kafka head relate to the simultaneous presence of many histories, visible and invisible, in this 'centre in the centre' of Prague? It is presented

⁴⁸⁴ Tomasz Cymbalak and Veronika Staňková, 'Židovská zahrada na novém městě pražském', *Staletá Praha*, 30, 2 (2014), 86-100.

⁴⁸⁵ See Klára Bešćecová, 'Kauza národní třída: obří projekt už začíná růst', *Dům & Zahrada* <<http://www.dumazahrada.cz/stavba-rekonstrukce/architektura/2012/7/17/nad-gotickymi-sklepy-vyroste-v-centrum-prahy-novy-obchodni-komplex/>> [accessed 10.6.2016], and Richard Biegel, 'COPA centrum ve spálené ulici' <<http://stary-web.zastarouprahu.cz/kauzy/copa/copa.htm>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

⁴⁸⁶ čtk, 'Kafkovu sochu pro komplex na Národní třídě vyrobil David Černý', <<http://art.ihned.cz/umeni/c1-63038720-quadrio-cerny>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

in Quadrio's marketing materials as part of a familiar series of Prague topoi. There, Kafka is referred to as a 'famous Czech author', eliding the complexities of his linguistic, national and cultural identity and implying that he wrote in Czech. We are told that the sculpture was built by the proverbial 'golden hands' of Czech craftsmen, and that its 'exquisite mechanisms' compare with those of the astrological clock on Old Town Square.⁴⁸⁷ Thus, Kafka is appropriated as a symbol of Czech identity.

Černý himself has suggested that the work is an act of political rebellion. In the promotional video, he comments:

I would say that Kafka's influence on Prague was so far-reaching that we are still living on the foundations he laid. The site – Národní Avenue – also rather appeals to me, because there is a subtle sense of sabotage when we consider that Kafka is practically knocking on the door of City Hall. There is a hint of inspiration from *Metamorphosis*.⁴⁸⁸

Černý named the work 'K.', recalling *Das Schloss* and *Der Process*; the reference to *Die Verwandlung*, which is evoked by the shifting features of the sculpture, adds a third literary text. The 'subtle sense of sabotage' becomes more explicit in a comment made by Černý when the work was unveiled, in which he refers pejoratively to President Miloš Zeman and claims that Kafka is the 'last point of reference' in a nation where such a 'creature' 'sits' in the Castle.⁴⁸⁹ However, given that the provocative implications of 'K.' are far more muted than those of Černý's other works, and given its location in a hidden courtyard in front of a shopping centre, these claims sound like half-hearted repetitions of the artist's traditional 'controversial' statements. Unlike the giant hand raising its middle finger towards Prague Castle, the

⁴⁸⁷ See 'Socha Franze Kafky'; the second quote is in the promotional video (DEIMOS Automation, 'DEIMOS 42 Layers in Motion' <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqsSQVT3rg4>> [accessed 10.6.2016]).

⁴⁸⁸ The comments are made in Czech, with English subtitles. The word translated as 'sabotage' is 'diverze', a term once used by the socialist authorities in condemnation of rebellious acts.

⁴⁸⁹ Ani Boučková, 'Na Národní třídě stojí obchodák, co se ho bojím, a socha, co se jí bojím taky', *Zmatená kudrlina* <<http://www.zmatena-kudrlina.cz/na-narodni-tride-stoji-obchodak-co-se-ho-bojim-a-socha-co-se-ji-bojim-taky/>> [accessed 10.6.2016].

sculpture of Kafka did not create much public debate.⁴⁹⁰ It can easily be dismissed as a further simplistic monumentalisation of Kafka as a ‘Prague writer’, and an example of what Alfrun Kliems calls ‘die Entropierung des Undergrounds’: the potential for protest to be absorbed by market capitalism.⁴⁹¹

Nevertheless, if we consider the Quadrio centre in the historical context of its location, Černý’s Kafka becomes a reference to the layering of shifting narratives in the imagined city. The sculpture outside the shopping centre represents a figure whom Černý designates a ‘last’ reference point for the nation, and whom the website of Quadrio paints in similarly Czech-national terms, even though Kafka himself belonged to a period of Prague history which epitomised the complexities of national identity: the constantly rippling layers which make up his face are resistant to the expectation that he should be seen as a ‘Czech author’ or a ‘point of reference’ for Czech collective identity. The sculpture expresses the dynamic significance of language and location in the process of remembering Prague. The ‘Jewish Garden’ under the shopping centre may not be visible, but the fragmented surface of Černý’s sculpture draws attention to its absence. In this sense, although the corporate location of the sculpture undermines its force as a political protest, it is appropriate to its function as a sign of what is hidden by the shining facade of a new building.

Černý’s Kafka contains echoes of the characteristics of post-1989 Prague fiction. It is a fantastical outcrop of ‘magic Prague’, a living statue which constantly assumes a new shape. At the same time, like many of the details of the ‘other city’ in the work of Hodrová and Ajvaz, it is also a banal element of Prague’s modern commercial incarnation, its shining surface matching that of the shopping centre. The slogan ‘your

⁴⁹⁰ Exceptions are Kateřina Nechvilová’s short piece calling it a waste of money (‘Nevyhodila náhodou společnost Quadrio třicet miliónů?’, *Literární noviny* <<http://www.literarky.cz/blogy/katerina-nechvilova/18654>> [accessed 10.6.2016]), and an article in the student magazine *Zmatena Kudrlina* arguing that its location outside Quadrio neutralised its potential as a protest (see Ani Boučková).

⁴⁹¹ Kliems is referring to another of Černý’s works – the hoax artwork ‘Entropa’ (Kliems, p. 361).

centre in the centre' recalls the repurposing of ordinary phrases and symbols in Hodrová's work: our wanderings around the city lead us to the sacred location of Quadrio, where the offices are guarded by 'good spirits' and Kafka, the 'last point of reference', gleams in the courtyard. The sculpture challenges us to 'read' it as an overdetermined agglomeration of *Die Verwandlung*, *Das Schloss* and *Der Process*.

Meanwhile, the sculpture draws attention to the dominant, yet fragmented figure of the author, and the importance of its positioning. Like the author-narrators in the novels of Faktor and Topol, it is constantly in the process of disintegrating. As the layers move, it becomes possible to 'discover Kafka', before he becomes unrecognisable again. Positioned outside Quadrio, the sculpture is not far from the locations which have come to be regarded as classic favourites of Kafka, such as the Café Louvre.⁴⁹² At the same time, this very location undermines Černý's attempts to retain his own 'ethos' as a protest artist.

Furthermore, the sculpture evokes the difficulties of responding to the myths of Prague. Its continuous movement resembles a mechanical repetition of Ripellino's claim that 'To this day, every evening at five, Franz Kafka returns home to Celetná Street (Zeltnergasse) wearing a bowler hat and black suit.'⁴⁹³ It is also a continuation of the nineteenth-century tendency to invest authors with special 'national' meaning. In exploring repetitions and reconfigurations of national myths, Moníková and Hodrová open up the hidden, half-remembered intercultural spaces of the city's past, the layered narratives which are only faintly implied by Černý's forty-two layers of stainless steel.

⁴⁹² Max Brod mentions visiting the Café Louvre with Kafka to attend meetings of a philosophical circle (*Streitbares Leben*, pp. 241-254); the café makes prominent use of this connection in its advertising.

⁴⁹³ Ripellino, p. 3.

Finally, with its ‘subtle sense of sabotage’, the sculpture raises the question of how artistic transgression is understood in post-1989 Prague. Jakub Brandl, the protagonist of Moníková’s *Der Taumel*, remembers participating in the construction of the Stalin monument; his later art transgresses the boundaries of ‘normalisation’, but he hides it carefully, ensuring that he avoids the position of the dissident. Černý’s artworks, which occupy so many locations in Prague that they have come to be characteristic of the post-1989 city, contain an echo of oppositional aesthetics which is akin to the fading presence of the underground in Topol’s *Anděl*. His monumental portrait of Kafka occupies an uneasy position between the enormous Stalin of the 1950s and the subversive art of the underground.

At the Liblice conference of 1963, Alexej Kusák summarised Eduard Goldstücker’s approach to Kafka with the statement, ‘man [kann] Kafka vollgültig [wohl] nur von Prag aus erkennen’, and asked provocatively:

Ist Prag vielleicht mit einem besonderen Fluidum gesegnet, das zu erkennen nur den Pragern gegeben ist? Kann man Kafkas Geheimnis nur mit dem Schlüssel des Prager Primators aufschließen?⁴⁹⁴

Goldstücker answered in his summary of the discussion:

viele Momente [...] sprechen [dafür], daß gewisse Dinge nur von Prag aus gesagt werden können, aus der intimen Kenntnis dessen, was Prag zu Kafkas Lebzeiten bedeutete.⁴⁹⁵

This disagreement encapsulates several of the questions which recur in post-1989 Prague literature. The significance of location is at stake – the spatial and temporal location of both author and reader. Kusák referred mockingly to the topoi of ‘magic Prague’, distancing himself from that tradition and implying that scholars who

⁴⁹⁴ Alexej Kusák, ‘Bemerkungen zu einer marxistischen Interpretation Kafkas’, in Goldstücker, Kautman and Reimann (eds), pp. 168-180 (p. 171).

⁴⁹⁵ Eduard Goldstücker, ‘Zusammenfassung der Diskussion’, in Goldstücker, Kautman and Reimann (eds), pp. 277-288 (p. 278).

emphasised the importance of the Prague context to Kafka's work and its reception were behaving irrationally. Goldstücker insisted not only that Kafka's location in Prague was crucial to his work, but that readers from Prague had special knowledge and authority when it came to reading his texts. His argument assumed that the continuities between pre-war Prague and the Prague of the 1960s were strong enough to withstand the Nazi occupation, the Holocaust and the Communist rise to power: he ignored the fact that the intercultural Prague of Kafka's lifetime no longer existed, and could not even be discussed freely.⁴⁹⁶

In the post-1989 context, these questions of location resurface in Prague fiction. The collapse of the socialist regime heralded the overwhelming return of past Pragues: magic Prague, Kafka's Prague and Jewish Prague all abruptly reappeared in mainstream discourse, both in superficial, commercialised forms and in the form of literary and scholarly texts which could not previously be published.⁴⁹⁷ However, the reemergence of these traditions did not signal straightforward continuity: if anything, the irreparable absence of pre-war Prague was made more obvious. Moreover, the changes of 1989 were themselves a further phase of discontinuity and fragmentation which was itself difficult to interpret. It followed earlier upheavals in the terrain of the imagined city: the authors discussed in this thesis respond not only to 1989, but also to the complex topography of socialist Prague, where 'official' narratives intersected with the narratives which emerged from underground, dissident and emigrant circles, leading to a splintering of the imagined city.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁶ Manfred Weinberg, 'Die versäumte Suche nach der verlorenen Zeit: Anmerkungen zur ersten Liblice-Konferenz *Franz Kafka aus Prager Sicht 1963*', in *Franz Kafka: Wirkung und Wirkungsverhinderung*, ed. by Steffen Höhne and Ludger Udolph (Cologne: Böhlau, 2014), pp. 209-236 (p. 229).

⁴⁹⁷ Thus, Ripellino's *Magic Prague* was not published officially in Czech until 1992.

⁴⁹⁸ Perhaps these different imagined cities could be interpreted along the lines of power discussed by Webber (p. 4), although even within the milieux of dissidence and the underground, further hierarchies of power can be traced.

In their engagement with these Prague topographies, post-1989 authors offer new perspectives on the question which underlay the disagreement between Goldstücker and Kusák: does it matter if an author is located in Prague? What bearing does spatial and temporal location have on the writing and reading of a text? It was in the 1990s that ‘postmodernism’ began to be used frequently as a term in Czech literary criticism; we might expect this to be accompanied by the ‘death of the author’ and the irrelevance of the author’s location.⁴⁹⁹ In fact, these post-1989 authors suggest that ‘it *does* matter who is speaking or writing’, and where.⁵⁰⁰ They achieve this by positioning themselves in the areas of tension between the continuities and ruptures of Prague.

Since at least the time of Cosmas’ *Chronica boemorum*, Prague has been imagined as a city on a threshold. In post-1989 Prague literature, the space of the threshold is crucial. Each of the authors discussed here endeavours to open up a space in between – an interstitial or intermediate location for a possible authorial ethos.

Daniela Hodrová’s fiction opens up spaces in which her protagonists are able to explore the fragments of the city’s multiple pasts. The status of these spaces as ‘between’ confronts us at every turn: they are between the real city and the other city, and between the worlds of the living and the dead.⁵⁰¹ By reanimating the past – for instance, in the form of the living statuette of Libuše – she not only makes it possible for us to trace fragile continuities between the imagined city of earlier centuries and today’s Prague, but also introduces a stubborn element of futurity, echoing the

⁴⁹⁹ Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, in *Image - Music - Text*, ed. and trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 142-148. On postmodernism as a Czech trend, see Lubomír Machala, *Literární bludiště: bilance polistopadové prózy* (Prague: Brána, 2001), p. 20, and Chitnis, *Literature*, p. 19 and pp. 21-23.

⁵⁰⁰ Andreas Huyssen, ‘Mapping the Postmodern’, *New German Critique*, 33 (1984), pp. 5-52 (pp. 44-45).

⁵⁰¹ See Matonoha, p. 249.

prophecies of greatness which recur in Prague literature. Thus, the author-narrator in *Komedie* picks up the little hand and perhaps takes on the role of the prophetess.

At the same time, Hodrová explores the challenges presented by the space of the threshold: in *Perunův den*, the protagonists struggle to discover signs, and often catch only a glimpse of the patterns of meaning which can be found on the boundary between the 'real' city and the 'other' city. In her theoretical discussion of Prague in *citlivé město*, Daniela Hodrová asks, 'dochází k opětovnému zatajennění chrámu?' ('does the cathedral become mysterious again?'), referring to the possible resacralisation of Prague in recent literature, and the reopening of the 'other' city.⁵⁰² This remains a question in her fiction, as opposed to a statement. The double image of the apocalypse and the thunderstorm at the end of *Perunův den* suggests the ambivalent power of the authorial position 'in between' the real world and the hidden transcendental realm: Janů, as one of the author's alter egos, prophesies the spiritual future of the city whilst also forecasting the weather. However, each of the four female evangelists in the novel form part of the author's plural perspective, and thus, the martyrdom of Marková is also an expression of Hodrová's precarious authorial position, between speech and silence.⁵⁰³

In his short story, 'Lano' ('The Lift', 1991), Michal Ajvaz's narrator ascends into mysterious mountains where a map of Prague is engraved in the rock; at the summit, he finds himself at the National Theatre. Ajvaz's fiction opens up a space for wandering between the real city and the other city, and insists that we 'must inhabit both cities' if we hope to understand both the mundane and the hidden meaning of our own movements: 'Musíš být obyvatelem obou měst'.⁵⁰⁴ This positioning is fraught

⁵⁰² Hodrová, *citlivé město*, p. 174.

⁵⁰³ See Chitnis, *Literature*, pp. 163-167.

⁵⁰⁴ Michal Ajvaz, 'Lano', p. 70.

with danger, because the fantastical realm is governed by the unexpected, and can therefore descend into chaos. Meaning, though, is also a threat – and particularly the past meanings of the city. In ‘Minulost’, Ajvaz comments on this: ‘Jak strašná jsou setkání s příšerami nezkrocené minulosti’ (‘How terrible it is to meet the monsters of the untamed past’).⁵⁰⁵ At first sight, the past of the city seems to be so absent from his work that critics have concluded that he ‘erases’ it or that his Prague is ‘without memory’.⁵⁰⁶ The past of Prague is not absent from ‘Bílí mravenci’: in fact, it is always looming, and references to Blaník or Petřín, or to the music which is heard on the Vltava but which is not Smetana, indicate that the author-narrator is balancing between the overwritten ‘palimpsest’ and the jungle of non-meaning.

Jan Faktor explores the position of the author between fragmentation and integrity. He shows Georg tracing his childhood routes through a city which is constantly falling to pieces. The question of ‘repairing’ the city recurs, as a question of authorial responsibility – and because it is impossible to do this, the author takes responsibility for the fragments.⁵⁰⁷ He constructs an emigrant ethos: Georg is between departure and return, between his past self and his present self, and within the narrative of the novel, both his departure from Prague and his return remain in the future, unnarrated.

Topol’s search for a space in between takes different forms in *Sestra* and in *Anděl*. In *Sestra*, he combines irreconcilable positions, between a spiritual stance defining ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and a radical departure from such definitions, between an ‘underground ethos’ and a parody of such literary models. He takes on the responsibility of tracing the ‘prehistory’ of Prague, and approaches both the ‘revolution’ of 1989 and the memory of the holocaust from a paradoxical perspective,

⁵⁰⁵ Michal Ajvaz, ‘Minulost’, in *Návrat starého varana*, pp. 41-43 (p. 42).

⁵⁰⁶ See Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*, p. 172, and Hodrová, *citlivé město*, p. 160.

⁵⁰⁷ See his reference to Bohumil Hrabal’s *Toto město je ve společné péči obyvatel* (1967); Faktor, *Georgs Sorgen*, p. 406.

narrating them and taking back his narration simultaneously.⁵⁰⁸ In *Anděl*, he approaches Prague from a different angle: Jatek wants to trace a path through his visions and find transcendental meaning, but the novel ends with an apocalyptic reminder that he can only be sure of the paving stones beneath his feet. Jatek inhabits a space between the ethos of retribution and the banality of murder, but Topol's perspective is distanced: the novel shows the end of the underground, the end of transcendental meaning, and allows Jatek only a very faint insight into the vestiges of the city's past.

In both *Verklärte Nacht* and *Der Taumel*, Moníková depicts an artist-protagonist attempting to find a position from which to respond to the almost unbearable pressure of the city's past, which is intertwined with a broader European past, and to find a way beyond the bounded categories of the imagined city. She imagines an artistic ethos which involves confronting and discussing the past, and which has clear parallels with her own positioning of her work as a writer. Leonora Marty is initially trapped in a territorial view of the city; she goes beyond Prague in her fever, dissolves some of the boundaries between Czech and German identities, and is able to enter into a transfigured unity with Thomas. Brandl is caught between the authorities and the dissidents, but finds a space of transgression in which to create his paintings – this location is painful, but essential to his ethos.

In these texts, the author has not dissolved or been cut loose from the territories of Prague – or been liberated. Authorship is defined by location in the threatened spaces in between, and even where such spaces seem to be closed (as in *Anděl*), these texts are distinguished by their concern for the possibility of such spaces. They lead us back to the notion of Prague as a space between – between languages, between cultures, between differing notions of identity – but not as a site of nostalgia or as an

⁵⁰⁸ See Peter Zusi, 'History's Loose Ends', p. 240.

idealised topos of ‘three peoples’. In each text, images of the apocalyptic destruction of the city are simultaneously offered and withdrawn, the prospect of leaving the city is presented simultaneously with the possibility of return, and the protagonists enter spaces between life and death. The threshold is exposed to irreconcilable tensions, and only occasionally – as in Hodrová’s image of Libuše’s severed hand – does a sense of utopian potential enter into these portrayals of a city stretched between past and future.

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Reading the city: Prague in Czech and Czech-German narrative fiction since 1989

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In the course of its history, Prague has been the site of many significant cultural confrontations and conversations. From the medieval chronicle of Cosmas to the work of contemporary writers, the city has taken shape in literature as a multivalent space where identities are constructed and questioned. The evolution of Prague's literary significance has taken place in an intercultural context: both Czech-speaking and German-speaking writers have engaged with the city and its past, and their texts have interacted with each other. The city has played a central part in many collective narratives in which myth, history and literature intertwine.

Looking at contemporary prose fiction written in both Czech and German, this thesis explores continuities and contrasts in the literary roles played by Prague. It analyses two German-speaking emigrant authors, Libuše Moníková (1945-1998) and Jan Faktor (1951-), viewing them alongside three Czech writers, Jáchym Topol (1962-), Daniela Hodrová (1946-), and Michal Ajvaz (1949-). Through close readings of eight texts, the thesis approaches the imagined city from four angles. It discusses how contemporary authors portray the search for meaning in the city by imagining Prague as two contrasting realms (the 'real' city and the 'other' city), how the discontinuities of the city are reflected by the fragmentation of the authorial stance, how these authors assemble new Prague myths from the vestiges of older topoi, and how they confront the contradictory urges to uphold the boundaries of the city and to transgress them. In post-1989 Prague, authors explore the unstable spaces between continuity and discontinuity, constructing an authorial ethos in these areas of tension.

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Approaching Prague as a ‘cultural network’ (Buckler 2005) of topoi, narratives and texts, this thesis asks how the city is imagined in post-1989 Czech and Czech-German literature. It draws on the diverse cultural histories of Prague (e.g. Ripellino 1973, Demetz 1997) and the theoretical work of Daniela Hodrová (2006), who traces recurring motifs in literary portrayals of Prague, but by focusing in depth on the contemporary imagined city, it explores an area which has not yet received much attention. Alfred Thomas (2010) reduces recent Prague literature to a repetition of earlier texts in his approach to the city as a ‘palimpsest’; this thesis questions his conclusions and makes use of close readings to enable a more nuanced investigation of the interactions between memory, literature and the city. Discussions of collective memory have so far not examined the relationship between memory and fiction in sufficient detail (Jan Assmann 2007, Aleida Assmann 2010); the example of Prague offers rich possibilities for this area of research to be developed.

By placing authors who were born in Czechoslovakia but write in German alongside those who write in Czech, this thesis departs from recent scholarship on German ‘Migrationsliteratur’ or ‘exile literature’ (Hanus 2008; Kliems 2002), which treats Czech- German literature as a separate category. Instead, it places contemporary Prague in the tradition of the pre-war Czech-German-Jewish city, asking how post-1989 fiction responds to the memory of the city as a transcultural space. Recent research into pre-war Prague provides an excellent source of insights into the mutability and heterogeneity of shared identities in Prague (Koeltzsch 2012, Lahl 2014). The debate over the status of Kafka and ‘Prague German literature’ which took place in 1960s Czechoslovakia raises questions which remain pertinent in contemporary Prague: how can scholars approach the significance of location to literature, and how can cultural heterogeneity be traced in fiction? The continuing

relevance of such questions underlines the continuities between pre-war Prague and the contemporary city: 1989 is not treated here as a definitive boundary. Nevertheless, given the changes in the ways in which literature was published and read after 1989, and the shifts in the role of the author (Chitnis 2005), 1989 is an intuitive starting point.

The thesis begins by exploring the imagined city both as a theoretical construct and as a specific network of texts. The first chapter, 'Imagining Prague', discusses the ways in which the spaces of the city are imagined in literature, making use of one of the first texts in Czech literature, the *Chronica Boemorum* of Cosmas Pragensis (c. 1125), to show how authors approach the city as a space of history, memory and literature, whilst introducing the topos of the founding of Prague. The chapter then approaches the shifting topography of the imagined city from three interconnected points of view: it discusses Prague as a centre of Czech identity in the collective imagination, as an intercultural space in which notions of 'Czechness' are confronted with definitions of 'German' and 'Jewish' identity, and as a city of 'magic' in which such questions of national consciousness are ostensibly superseded by a fantastical representation of the past. These paths around the imagined city are chosen in order to present some of the images of Prague which recur in the Czech and Czech-German literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and to test out the concept of the imagined city as a network of connected motifs.

Where some critics argue that contemporary authors do not continue the established 'Prague text' (Matonoha 2002) and others emphasise the importance of repetition (Thomas 2010), a central argument of this thesis is that contemporary authors do respond to the imagined city, including its most well-worn paths, but that the relationships between post-1989 texts and the Prague literature of earlier decades are unstable and fragmented. The four chapters of close readings trace these fragmented relationships.

‘Seeking the other Prague’ explores one of the most immediately striking aspects of post-1989 Prague literature – its explicit concern with how the city can be interpreted. In many of these texts, the protagonist wanders Prague in search of signs which might lead to another realm beyond the everyday reality of the city. Prague is therefore imagined as two cities existing simultaneously in the same space. Moving from one to the other involves interpreting ordinary details of the urban surroundings, and yet, the protagonist lacks any kind of established code on which to base these interpretations. This is exemplified by Daniela Hodrová’s novel *Perunův den* (1994) and Michal Ajvaz’s novella ‘Bílí mravenci’ (1997), in which the portrayal of Prague as two contrasting realms recalls Jan Amos Komenský’s paradigmatic allegorical text, *Labyrint světa a ráj srdce* (1631, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*). The tendency to explore the city from this perspective can be traced through nineteenth- and twentieth-century Prague literature, but the status of the two realms shifts significantly over time. For Hodrová and Ajvaz, the process of searching for the other Prague resembles the process of seeking to understand a text, and thus, the key questions discussed in this chapter relate to the role of the reader.

‘The Author in the City’ pursues some of the patterns which began to appear in the previous chapter: in ‘reopening’ the fantastical ‘other city’ whilst questioning how the process of interpretation can take place without a shared code of beliefs, Hodrová and Ajvaz imagine a fractured city. From the perspective of literary history, this raises the question of how their work relates to the shifting role of literature in the Czech context after 1989. The novels of Jáchym Topol (*Sestra*, 1994) and Jan Faktor (*Georgs Sorgen über die Vergangenheit oder Im Reich des heiligen Hodensack-Bimbams von Prag*, 2010) offer a starting point for a discussion of how the uncertain status of literature comes to be embodied by the figure of the author, whose ethos is shaped by the spaces of Prague, and who in turn constructs an image of Prague as a fragmented city. Topol and Faktor respond to notions of authorial ethos which are closely connected with the pre-1989 era: Topol takes an irreverent approach to the

status of the cultural underground, whilst Faktor questions the ethos of dissidence and the legacy of Prague German authorship. Faktor's response to the traditions of the imagined city is characterised by silences, omissions, and discontinuities. The protagonist's retrospective exploration of the city is presented as a search to 'locate' himself – but this is possible only by engaging with the fragmentation of the city. Topol situates his text in the Prague underground tradition, but disrupts this tradition by questioning whether we should ascribe authority and authenticity to underground writers. His combination of multiple stances allows him to destabilise the imagined topography of Prague as a space of collective memory, intertwining the liberating chaos of 1989 with the memory of tyranny and war.

The question of how the history and memory of Prague are approached in contemporary fiction recurs in relation to all of the authors discussed here. 'Mythical Prague' looks more closely at the ways in which contemporary authors respond to the narratives which have shaped the imagined Prague. This chapter investigates how topoi connected with Prague are repeated, adapted, dismantled and reassembled in Daniela Hodrová's *Komedie* (2003) and Libuše Moníková's *Verklärte Nacht* (1996), and how the authors make use of the concepts of performance, adaptation and immortality to experiment with the relationships between memory, myth and fiction. The notion of myth is evoked explicitly in post-1989 Prague fiction and plays a significant role in the post-1989 imagined city.

Moníková and Hodrová intertwine the 'foundational' myths of Jan Assmann with ancient myths of death and immortality, connecting them with the clichés of the imagined city within a dynamic process of demythologisation and remythologisation (Barthes 1957). In 'staging' these myths in the spaces of Prague, they experiment with the possibilities of spatial memory: the teleological narratives which form the basis of collective memory are destabilised, but the fictional text offers an alternative form of mythical narration, in which fragments of past narratives are reassembled and

connected with the spaces of the city, rather than with a chronological account of the past.

‘Prague Boundaries’ was originally conceived in response to a question which seemed central to the notion of ‘reading’ or ‘writing’ Prague: do contemporary authors construct a ‘new’ identity for the city? Is there a ‘post-1989 imagined Prague’? Over the centuries, identities have been mapped out in the spaces of the city, often in an exclusive or territorial manner. The Prague of the National Revival was imagined as an exclusively Czech space by patriotic writers; later, the city was divided into ‘Czech’ and ‘German’ territories, whilst the Jews sought to define their identity in between (Spector, 2000). The Prague of contemporary literature is also a topography composed of boundaries and borders. Libuše Moníková’s *Der Taumel* (2000) and Jáchym Topol’s *Anděl* (1995) confront the challenges of shared identity and individual integrity in the context of the city. In the microcosms of the municipal courthouse, the private flat and the pub, the private and the political overlap and frequently conflict. The protagonists of these novels, who each experience visions which take them beyond the immediate reality of the city, respond to such conflicts both by attempting to retreat into their private spaces and by transgressing the boundaries which circumscribe their existence in the city. The dynamic whereby boundaries are both reasserted and transgressed shapes the construction of identity in post-1989 Prague literature.

In the texts discussed in this thesis, we are confronted anew with the question on which Eduard Goldstücker and Alexej Kusák disagreed at the 1963 Liblice conference (Goldstücker 1965, Kusák 1965): does it matter if an author is located in Prague? Although we might expect the author to be ‘liberated’ from spatial and temporal categories in the period following 1989, and for the notion of the author to become irrelevant as ‘postmodernism’ becomes a frequently used term in the Czech context, in fact these writers respond to the discontinuities of the post-1989 city by seeking out

interstitial or intermediate spaces in which a possible authorial ethos can take shape. These are spaces of great tension, between alternatives which cannot be reconciled: between the 'real' and the 'other' city, between moral codes and chaos, between life and death. They contain only fragmentary reminders of the threshold in Libuše's vision of the future, and of the intersections between differing identities in the intercultural city – and yet, these fragments are crucial to the positioning of authorship in post-1989 Prague.