Possible Worlds in Ruins

Unreality in the novels *Chladnou zemí* (2009) and *Strážci občanského dobra* (2010)

Astrid Greve Kristensen

Master's thesis in Czech Literature.
Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages.
Faculty of Humanities.

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

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Possible Worlds in Ruins. Unreality in the novels *Chladnou zemí* (2009) and *Strážci občanského dobra* (2010)

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Abstract

This thesis is a reading of two contemporary Czech novels, *Chladnou zemí* (2009) by Jáchym Topol and *Strážci občanského dobra* (2010) by Petra Hůlová. Through the application of Possible Worlds theory as well an exploration of the Gothic uncanny, the novels are read as modern horror stories placed in unstable, unreliable versions of our own world. Although the topic of modern history has been central to former readings of these novels, the attempt is to reorient these understandings by pointing out aspects that cause distortions of history and reality in the fictional worlds depicted. Spaces are central to this reading, as historical real places, Gothic spaces and ruins of different kinds intersect to construct possible fictional worlds of simultaneous familiarity and strangeness. Taking the Gothic horror elements of these novels into account creates a different set of possible interpretations of the characters, their worlds and the relationship between modern history and fiction. By constructing possible fictional worlds that exist at the margins between the real and the unreal, these novels invite the reader to explore concepts such as truth, fictionality and alienation.

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Finally, only one person is left. Alex, thanks for being everything and carrying me through. I can't wait till June 1st comes around.

Contents

1 Introductory chapter

1.1 Modern Czech History as Literary Topic

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, literature, as all other aspects of social life underwent a restructuring process in then Czechoslovakia. Three separate tiers of literary production and publishing were to fall together: the samizdat or illegal production and distribution of text, the exile publishing houses and the official domestic publishing. During the years following this initial restructuring process, an increased number of titles were published, and a consumer-driven market was reconstituted, alongside a new, young and liberated art scene. A lot of works first published in exile or samizdat were published, banned authors were rehabilitated and a lot of previously banned non-Czech literature was published in translation. (Fialová; Machala, 2001).

During this time there are a few distinctive trends in the literature that emerged, of which the most relevant to this thesis would be that of historical fiction. At the beginning of this period, the trend is reflected in the publication of memoirs, diaries and other archival genres, as well as humoristic or nostalgic glances back into recent past. A good ten years after the transformation[1], more sophisticated works crop up, dealing with tougher and more controversial historical events and periods (the treatment of the German population after World War II for instance). Within this landscape, at the turn of the first decade of the millennium, two novels, *Chladnou zemí* [The Devil's Workshop] (2009) by Jáchym Topol and *Strážci občanského dobra* [Guardians of the Civil Good] (2010) by Petra Hůlová, were published. Like many other contemporary titles, they deal with the Czech past and contemporary society. Referencing well-known and recognisable historical settings and having two renowned authors behind them, these two novels in many ways write themselves into the modern canon of historical prose. However, as the stories develop, it becomes increasingly evident that something simply is not 'right', that the stories derail, that the settings lack authenticity. What constitutes this disruption? What is the purpose of such a disruption, and why build historical backdrops only to abandon history? The novels both toy with genre in ways that create a distortive effect on the historical aspects both novels can be claimed to represent and leave the territory of realism to explore the uncanny and oft-trivialized unreality of Gothic horror-fiction. To what end and in what way are the novels disrupted, and how does this affect the novels' relationship

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[1] The period of restructuring following the fall of the communist regime in 1989

to the historical and societal aspects that they also portray? It is difficult to assign these novels to any specific genre. They tiptoe around the margins of the uncanny, realism, postmodern ironic fiction, historical fiction, family drama and downright action-adventure stories. One of the goals of this thesis will be to circle in on the genres that they represent, and comment on the function of blending genres in these specific examples of modern Czech prose. My research question therefore is: _In what way_ and _to what end_ does the interplay between representations of reality and unreality distort and affect the novels' relationship to history and genre in *Chladnou zemí* (2009) and *Strážci občanského dobra* (2010)?

1.2   Jáchym Topol (1962-)

Son of playwright, poet and dissident Josef Topol, Jáchym Topol has enjoyed a respectable reputation as an author since the publication of iconic *Sestra* in 1994. Considered by many scholars as the epitome of the expression of the chaos of the early 90's transformation in the Czech Republic (Machala, 2001, pp. 65-68), *Sestra* is known for linguistic experimentation, fragmented storytelling and descriptions of alternative youth culture. Topol has since then published an additional five novels, one of which is the object of study for this thesis.

1.3   Petra Hůlová (1979-)

Petra Hůlová is most famous for her 2002 Magnesia prize winning novel *Paměť mojí babičce* and is the author of nine novels in total per May 2019. Inspired by her year abroad in Mongolia, *Paměť mojí babičce* became one of the most read Czech novels at the time (Fialová). Hůlová has won prestigious awards for her novels, among others, the Josef Škvorecký award for *Stanice Tajga* (2008). Her 2010 *Strážci občanského dobra* [Guardians of the Civil Good] is her sixth published novel. A sequel, *Strážci občanského dobra 2* (2018), was set up as a drama at the iconic Meet Factory scene in Prague in 2018[2].

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[2] The play will not impact this thesis

1.4 Summary of *Chladnou zemí* (2009)

The first-person narrator in *Chladnou zemí*[3] is nameless and remains so throughout the novel. The story begins *in medias res*, as he is walking along the highway towards the Prague airport. He recalls the story of what has occurred so far in his life that has brought him to this point. He was born in the town of Terezín, a historical fortress town, former concentration camp, Jewish ghetto, and Gestapo prison. As a child he rummages through the ruins and catacombs of Terezín along with other local children, led by Lebo, his half-brother. The narrator's mother dies when he is still young. After serving a prison sentence for murdering his father, he returns to Terezín after 1989, to find an increased flow of tourists. Among these tourists are young Europeans who carry with them their parents' and grandparents' traumas from World War II. Together with Lebo, the narrator and these young people form the Komenium[4] whose aim is to preserve Terezín as a whole and revitalize the lives of the locals. The Komenium's goals are healing through storytelling. This healing is mainly performed by Lebo, the last child to be born in the town during the war. The Komenium comes into conflict with the people running the official memorial, as they are squatting in the town's buildings and start profiteering off their project, which they name 'the Happy Workshop'. They garner international attention and receive donations from all over the world for their alternative approach to conservation and memory. The memorial seeks to remove them by force, and in the end, are successful, bringing bulldozers in to destroy 'the Happy Workshop' and everything else to which the Komenium has been working.

The story then circles back to the narrator in the present tense. He is on his way to Belarus to help set up a new memorial in the village Chatyň. Belarusian Alex and Maruška, both of which were also in Terezín, have made arrangements for the narrator to be brought there, as he holds the information of all the donors that gifted money to 'the Happy Workshop'. He arrives in Minsk first, led by Maruška. Belarus is a very different place from the Czech Republic. There are military police present in the streets and while he is there, the president declares martial law. When he is taken to Chatyň, he becomes a prisoner rather than an 'international expert', as they had told him his role would be. The Belarusians are mainly interested in the donors and in putting Belarus on the map as the

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[3] The title of the novel in Czech, translates to "Through a Cold Land". The intention was to call it *Ďáblova dílna*, like the English title, but shortly before publication, a German movie was released which in its Czech release was named *Ďáblova dílna,* resulting in the change of title (Topol & Zucker, 2013, p. 165).

[4] Named after Jan Amos Komenský, Czech philosopher and educator

centre of suffering in Europe during World War II. It becomes evident that unlike the positive and healing attitude promoted by the Komenium, Alex and the Belarusians are interested in a very different experience for their future visitors. They want to build a museum dedicated specifically to the horrors that occurred there. They explain that the Devil had his workshop in Belarus during the war, and as such, they wish to build a museum in honour of 'the Devil's Workshop'. The museum includes a bunker containing what the narrator realizes are the embalmed bodies of time witnesses to the massacre that occurred in Chatyň in 1941. Their bodies are animated by mechanical structures, and tapes play their recorded voices, telling their stories, forever in a loop. In terror, the narrator hits Alex in the head and sets fire to the bunker and flees into the woods. The novel ends with him meeting a Western European researcher in a tent as a winter storm sets in. They stay in the tent together, waiting out the potentially fatal storm.

1.5   Summary of *Strážci občanského dobra* (2010)

In *Strážci občanského dobra* the reader follows an unnamed[5] first-person narrator through her childhood, teens, and early adulthood in the fictional Czechoslovakian town of Krakov. With her family, consisting of her mother, father and younger sister, the narrator moves to the newly built Krakov in Czechoslovakia in the 1970's. Krakov, along with four other towns, is meant to represent a new era of social living, and to function as a model town for the rest of society. This takes place during the period of so-called 'normalization', a term used to define the era after the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw-pact countries. This era is remembered for restoration of strict regulations and reinstating order after the 'thawing period' known as the Prague Spring. 'Normalization' lasted until the fall of the Czechoslovakian communist regime in November 1989. The family is promised a new, perfect living space in a town of upstanding socialist standards and security. Upon arrival, they discover that the promises were empty and that the new town is far from finished. At the outskirts of Krakov, there is a suburb named Krakov II that is in far worse shape than Krakov. This is where the local Romani have been forced to move and is – in the mind of the narrator, a place bound in mystery and much prejudice.

The narrator grows up as both an outcast, and a devout socialist. Her younger sister Milada is far more successful socially, and befriends the local dissidents' children, much to the consternation of the narrator. During their school and early teen years, the narrator

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[5] The family name is Komárek, so I occasionally refer to her as Komárková.

struggles to navigate socially, and develops a warped sense of right and wrong, informed by her own understanding of what benefits the socialist civil good. At the same time, the narrator's family starts to break apart for a few different reasons, amongst which includes the mother's decision to have an affair as well as the father's loss of employment and local standing. In the meantime, the town is crumbling before it is even finished. People start falling ill and become diagnosed with a mysterious 'Krakov illness'. The dissidents that were first sent to Krakov for re-education purposes start gaining more attention, and soon, the pivotal year of 1989 is upon Czechoslovakia. The narrator dubs the democratic transformation 'the counter-revolution' and starts battling the new era of capitalism. Meanwhile, Milada and the local dissidents' son Standa Vidlička are dating, and the narrator feels disgusted by this, and lets her sister know. After coming into conflict with everyone in the family, Milada leaves home and starts squatting with Standa.

At this point, Krakov sees a mass emigration of people, as jobs disappear when the new order takes hold. More and more of the city is abandoned, and whole blocks have their power turned off. A section of the city becomes known as the black quarter, into which Milada and Standa moves, along with other squatters, artists and destitutes. The narrator calls them 'existence' in Czech, indicating their inhumanity and unproductivity in the service of the civil good. I will refer to them as the 'undependables' in this thesis to avoid confusion with the English word 'existence'. Soon, the black quarter merges with the Romani people of Krakov II, and a proper divide between the 'undependables' and the regular citizens manifests itself, demarcated by a physical barrier. Meanwhile, the narrator has moved in with her only friend, Anděla, and started a pioneer troupe for a group of young Vietnamese immigrant children. Just after the 'counter-revolution', she tries to rally with the remaining members of the communist party but is severely disappointed with their lack of engagement and passion in the run up to the local election. Instead she establishes what becomes Krakov's child militia. The project starts out as a way for the frustrated narrator to rebuild something of the past, a past she finds infinitely more glorious, compassionate and structured.

Initially, the 'undependables' versus 'patriots' are in a conflict that resembles some kind of cold war as a result of the border patrol between the black quarter and the rest of Krakov. Tourists and media become interested in the conflict, and in particular in the squatters and their workshops. The narrator's group on the other hand, are presented as racist fascists because of their disdain for the Romani as well as, perhaps their uniform, military appearance. In the end, the barrier falls, violent fighting breaks out, and several

people die in the crossfires between the 'undependables' and the patriots. The novel ends with the narrator leaving Krakov for Prague on a bus. The outcome of the battle of Krakov is never clarified. The narrator only hints that it has become something of a modern legend.

1.6   Reception and Perceptions of Genre

In general, *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra* were met with mixed reviews, the former's often more favourable than the latter's. Interestingly, in some reviews of Hůlová's novel, Topol's novels were cited as a potential influences and, *Chladnou zemí* in particular. One review of *Chladnou zemí* mentioned Hůlová's novel published in 2008, *Stanice Tajga*, as a possible influence or similar work, as it explores the cold expanses of Siberia and the history of World War II, not unlike the journey eastwards in Topol's story. This shows us that reviewers of the novels in the Czech press found overlap and similarity between the novels, and the writers. Topol mentions in an interview with the magazine *Reflex* (2009) that he asked Hůlová to read *Chladnou zemí* before its publication on account of them being friends. Both novels were incidentally also published by the same publishing house, Torst, which was founded in 1990 during the post-1989 literary bonanza.

It is obvious from reading several reviews that critics were left uncertain, at times even provoked or baffled, by the confusing mix of genres employed in both works. The perceived break in genre is actually blamed for what critics find unsatisfactory in the endings of the stories. With Hůlová in particular, the unravelling of the story at the end was perceived as a weakness, an unnecessary fabulation in an already bleak story.

Radim Kopáč writes for novinky.cz that Topol's Belarus is an "apocalyptic postsoviet wilderness". About Topol's style he says: "[He is] enchanted by narration, a vortex of speech with dynamic and imaginative living sentences, in which reality transforms into fantastical phantoms or an evil dream and where spacetime shrinks and moves at will"[6] (Kopáč, 2009). Interestingly, both apocalypse and nightmare are mentioned, yet he does not venture out to provide a definition of the genre. The same cannot be said for Hůlová, as critics are more interested in trying to define her work. Zdenko Pavelka reviewed her novel for the same publication, novinky.cz, naming *Strážci*

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[6] "Okouzlený narací, vírem řeči, dynamickými a imaginací živenými větami, v nichž se skutečnost proměňuje ve fantastický přízrak nebo zlý sen a časové plochy se libovolně smršťují či přesouvají,".

občanského dobra "černá sci-fi," or "dark sci-fi" and writes "[r]eality is believably rendered in the story. But something isn't right"[7] (Pavelka, 2010). The title of the review is "Brutální ironie Petry Hůlové", "The Brutal Irony of Petra Hůlová" pointing to the ironic streak of the text. Other reviews of the novel calls it everything from "magický socrealismus" "magical socialist realism" (Adamovič, 2010) to "[t]emná politická satira", "dark, political satire" (Stehlíková, 2010). It is not necessarily fashionable to always try to strictly define the genre of novels in reviews these days, however the diversity and variation of the categorizations of these novels do indicate that genre in these two cases is complex.

In the mammoth volume *V souřadnicích mnohosti – Česká literatura první dekády 21. století v souvislostech a interpretacích* (2014), both Topol and Hůlová are considered in the present-day Czech literary context. Short articles on novels (*Paměť mojí babičce* by Hůlová and *Kloktat dehet* by Topol) by both authors are included, however neither *Chladnou zemí* nor *Strážci občanského dobra* are written about extensively. In an introduction to the chapter concerning prose, Alena Fialová details some general trends in Czech fiction after 2000. Here, both novels are mentioned under rather interesting headlines, *Chladnou zemí* under the headline "Stále živá postmoderna" or "The Postmodern lives on" and *Strážci občanského dobra* under the headline "V zajetí normalizace" or "In the Grip of Normalization". About *Chladnou zemí,* Fialová offers:

> The topic of historical violence, guilt and memory spaces is found in the novel *Chladnou zemí*, which is concerned with the crimes and horrors of totalitarian regimes[: T]he hero's attempt to save Terezín as a place of respect and in the second part of the novel to preserve the Belarusian memorial to the victims of communist despotism, however both encounter obstacles in the form of commercialisation, selfishness, indifference and excessive bureaucracy (2014, p. 346)[8]

Strážci občanského dobra, is mentioned under the headline emphasising normalization, "V zajetí normalizace". This is interesting considering the fact that the novel takes place equally in the 1990's and 2000's, but this is evidently of less importance to Fialová:

> [...] Petra Hůlová's *Guardians of the Civil Good* straddles on the border between social novel, satire and mystifying game. The narrator is a rather backward and peculiar girl growing up in the fictional experimental city of Krakov, in which the true reality of life during normalization in Czechoslovakia is mixed with the image of an entirely exhausted and impoverished totalitarian system of a developing state. The (velvet) revolution and the conditions of the new era are

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[7] "Realita se v příběhu odráží věrohodně. Ale něco nesedí,".
[8] "Téma dějinného násilí, viny a paměti míst pak přináší román Chladnou zemí (2009) tematizující zločiny a hrůzy totalitních režimů. Hrdinova snaha o záchranu Terezína jakožto pietního místa a v druhé části i románu pak zachování běloruského památníku obětem komunistické zvůle však naráží na překážky v podobě komercionalizace, sobectví, zapomnění i zbytnělé byrokracie,".

> perceived as crueller and more ruthless, and the only way out is the organization of a paramilitary division of obedient Vietnamese children, or the whole, still cohesive and unspoiled Vietnamese community, though the counter revolution is ultimately in vain, [9]

No space is afforded to the writers' Gothic or horror-related qualities.

1.7   Structure

This thesis has four main chapters, along with a chapter summarizing a theoretical framework. In the theory chapter, I introduce the two main theoretical approaches in this thesis, Possible Worlds theory and Gothic genre theory. The first analysis chapter, "History and Space – *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra* as Historical Fiction" is concerned with creating a link between the historical spaces of the novels and their relationship to reality and history. Historical modern fiction is also a topic discussed in this chapter. "Spaces – Fracturing and Uncanniness" deals with the settings of the novels as well, but takes a different approach, discussing ruins and the uncanny as entrypoints to understand the spaces the novels deal with, severing them partially from their historical context. The third main chapter, entitled "Voices – Irony and Distance" is concerned with the narrational modes of the novels, establishing links between unreliable narration and Gothic tendencies. This chapter analyses the main characters and their interactions with said spaces and surroundings. The final chapter is simply called "Horror". This is where the final stages of the novels are discussed, where their violent climaxes and unresolved endings are brought forward for scrutiny. I conduct a final evaluation of the relationship between modern history, Gothic horror fiction, reality and unreality, and tie the previous chapters together in a concluding remark.

1.8   Previous research

No extensive papers of note have been written about *Chladnou zemí* nor *Strážci občanského dobra*. A few articles have discussed *Chladnou zemí,* in particular as an

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[9] [...] Petry Hůlové Strážci občanského dobra balancující na pomezí společenského románu, satiry a mystifikační hry. Vypravěčkou je poněkud zaostalá a svérázní dívka vyrůstající ve fiktivním experimentálním městě Krakov, v němž se mísí skutečně reálie životního stylu za normalizace v Československu s obrazem zcela vyčerpaného a zbídačeného totalitního systému rozvojového státu. Převrat a podmínky nové doby jsou tu pak vnímány jako mnohem krutější a bezohlednější a jediným východiskem, i když nakonec marným, se ukáže být organizování polovojenského oddílu poslušných vietnamských dětí, potažmo celé, dosud ještě soudržné a nezkažené vietnamské komunity, (2014, p. 356)

example of Holocaust literature. One article called "'Dissidence' in Holocaust Memorials in Literature: Jáchym Topol's The Devil's Workshop (Chladnou zemí)" was written by Geoffrey Chew in 2015. Valentina Kaptayn wrote an article called "Another Way to Remember: Jáchym Topol's Works *Sestra* (1994) and *Chladnou zemí* (2009) in the Context of Czech Cultural Memory of the Holocaust" in 2014. As of spring 2019, a German article is in the works, also concerned with memory politics. I have not unearthed a single article on *Strážci občanského dobra.*

1.9   Note on Translation

I have opted to translate all Czech quotes into English to reach readers unacquanted with Czech language. Translations of *Chladnou zemí* are lifted from the English translation by Alex Zucker from 2013. Translations of *Strážci občanského dobra,* reviews of the books and other academic sources are done by me and approved by my supervisor. With regards to Lubomír Doležel, I have utilized his own translations of his work. All quotes from the fictional works have been left in their original form, with English translations in footnotes to retain the integrity of the original texts, as my analysis is based on the original works. All other quotations are in English translation in the main text, with Czech original quotations in footnotes.

2   Theoretical framework

2.1   Possible Worlds Theory

There are several reasons behind the desicion to bring in Possible Worlds theory[10] (PW theory) as a theoretical foundation of this thesis. I want to focus on spaces in the novels, discussing their relation to both reality and history. PW theory offers an interesting opportunity to do so. Lubomír Doležel (1922-2017) problematizes representations of history in fiction. I am also concerned with what one might call 'liminal space', the transgressive spaces of narrative where reality and unreality may intersect and cause chaos. As such, I contend that Doležel's take on PW theory provides a starting point where the space-setting and the fictional world is central and valuable for understanding how a text may function or how it can be interpreted.

The narratological aspects of the theory were in large part developed by Romanian Thomas G. Pavel (1941-) and Doležel, as well as Marie-Laure Ryan (1946-). In this chapter I will give an overview of the theory as presented by Doležel in his two books *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*[11] (1998) and *Fikce a historie v období postmoderny*[12] (2008) in order to subsequently propose a way of utilizing this theory. I also make use of the book *Possible Worlds Theory and Contemporary Narratology* (Bell & Ryan, 2019), a fresh volume comprising twelve new essays on the topic as well as comprehensive commentary on the most recent trends within the field. The book includes an essay written by Doležel shortly before his death and continues the use of many concepts that he established in his time as a scholar. The designation 'world' is used to refer to the "[…location], period, culture, and context in which the story is narrated and the emotions disclosed by a literary work are taking place," (Pavel, 2019, p. 317). A 'world' includes people, their interest and feelings, dreams and interactions, and all of these elements are also taken into account in a 'world', unlike the designation 'setting' that exludes many of the less concrete elements of a story (pp. 317-318).

PW theory offers an alternative to "textualist" schools of literary theory, namely New Criticism, poststructuralism and deconstruction (Bell & Ryan, 2019, p. 1):

> If the one world is made of language, and (as in poststructuralism), we cannot
> get out of it, and the question of truth or falsity becomes irrelevant, since it takes

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[10] PW fiction theory sprung out from analytic philosophy and logic (Doležel, 1998, p. 12). In this field, the world-concepts and rules discussed are necessarily different than in narratology, as they are used to test various potential moral implications and metaphysical truths. I concern myself only with PW theory as it relates to fiction and narratology and will only refer to theory concerned with this field.
[11] Originally written in English, released in Czech in 2003, so I use the original version.
[12] Shortened from here on as *Heterocosmica* and *Fikce a historie*

> an external point of view to evaluate propositions, [...] if the one world is a language-independent reality, and no other world exists, all propositions about imaginary entitites become automatically false or indeterminate, since they do not refer to anything. In a many-worlds ontology, fictional texts can be associated with worlds, these worlds can be imagined on the basis of all the propositions presented as true in the text, and it is possible to distinguish true statements about the members of particular fictional worlds, such as "Emma Bovary was a dissatisfied country doctor's wife" from false ones such as "Emma Bovary was a paragon of marital fidelity" (p. 3)

The radical notion that PW theory introduces is that the textualist attitude of the "centrality of language," and that "[...] not only is there only one world but this world is made of language," (p. 1) limits the reader's ability to make truth statements about a fictional text. In PW theory this one-world system is replaced in favour of a multi-world system. This means that what is true in one world may not be true in the next, for instance the existence of dragons, or a Vietnamese child milita threatening the Czech town of Krakov.

The main part of Doležel's *Heterocosmica* consists of introducing different types of fictional worlds and discussing levels of authenticity on varying scales. There is a sliding scale of authenticity on which a possible world can exist, from the realistic to the utterly impossible. This requires a central point of reference which, understandably, is our world, the actual world or AW. A simple way to exemplify how the modality of reality functions in PW theory is to use Doležel's own example of fictional encyclopaedias:

> Fictional encyclopaedias are many and diverse, but all of them to a greater or lesser degree digress from the actual-world encyclopaedia. [...] The geography of Gabriel García Márquez' novel *Love in the time of Cholera* (1985) illustrates a minimal but nevertheless significant departure. The fictional text provides many names of actual locations – Ricohacha, Rionegro, the Magdalena River, the Caribbean, the Andes, and so on – for the reader to infer with the aid of the actual-world encyclopaedia that the story takes place in Colombia. But the main locale of the action, the town of La Manga, cannot be found on any map of Colombia […] García Márquez does not describe the actual Colombia but constructs a possible Colombia. His fictional characters possess, as part of their encyclopaedia, the mental map of this possible country, (1998, pp. 177-178)

Here we see the creation of one possible fictional world that differs little from the AW. What is important to understand, is that even if a fictional text tries to stay strictly within the realm of realism[13], the world that is textually created is still a possible world different from the AW. There is one main reason for this, namely that there will always be gaps, things not present in the fictional encyclopaedia, as we cannot ever be presented with a text wherein all facts of the world can be accounted for. An example could be that of

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[13] I do not mean realism in the genre of the realistic novel, but a sense of realness, believability and understanding of the world as truthful and adhering to the natural laws of the actual physical world.

cityscapes, for instance the different iterations of Prague in *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra*. Neither version *is* the Prague of the AW. The reader cannot know if the streets all have the same street names as in the AW, how many inhabitants the city has, if a certain store exists on a corner, et cetera, as these facts are not part of the text. These are all gaps that are necessary and unavoidable, as a work of fiction is never merely an encyclopaedic list of facts and items (2008, pp. 44-45). These two possible versions of Prague have a lot of potential to break the norms and realities of the actual real-life Prague. Still, unless the reader is in some way guided by the text to consider the city to be different or in other ways inconsistent with reality, one generally tends to accept any fictional Prague as close to or identical to the Prague of the AW. If the reader is given no textual incentive in either of the two novels to imagine a Prague with vastly different qualities or topography, one automatically fill in the gaps with what one knows of the real Prague[14]. This is called "the principle of minimal departure" by Ryan (2013) and is a constituting factor in fictional world-building.

In this thesis, I understand the role of the reader as close to Wolfgang Iser's reader. The reading process is here understood as a dynamic action between text and reader where the act of reading is what causes the text to become *realized* – brings it into existence. An interplay between what the text makes possible and the reader's filling of gaps and pre-existing knowledge is the pressure point that realizes a literary work. The filling of gaps is reliant on the reader and is what constitutes the creative aspect of the reader's role. When in this thesis the word 'reader' crops up, this understanding is implied. I am not talking about a personal reading experience, but what I believe the text makes possible or probable based on what it contains. (Iser, 1972).

2.1.1   Graded Authentication

In a fictional text, there are certain ways to build facts and authenticate the fictional world as factual. Doležel posits that 'fictional fact', i.e. the facts established within the text, must be considered as real within the text and thus the world adheres to the logic extrapolated from the existence of these facts (1998, p. 146). The fictional Czech town Krakov exists in *Strážci občanského dobra* and the fictional world represented in the novel accepts this as a

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[14] Which leads to a more general topic of the pre-existing knowledge of a reader influencing the reader's ability to fill in gaps in fiction, and thus affecting the reading process. A reader with no real life knowledge of, for example Prague as a city, will have a lower ability to recognize where the possible Prague of the text may differ or diverge from reality.

natural, factual truth. In general, Doležel differentiates between two modes, dyadic authentication and graded authentication. This is reliant on the narrative mode of the text, roughly divided between first- and third-person narrative modes. In a third-person narrative, which is linked to dyadic authentication, there exists an omniscient authoritative narrator that constructs the world and its facts, and the third-person(s) then react to them. Thus, the characters can lie or make false statements about the world[15], but the reader will know them to be false, as the facts of the world already have been established by the text (1998, pp. 148-149). Hence, a 'conversation' can happen between the truth of the text, its fictional facts and the characters' response to them, for example by being in denial of the textual reality.

The more complex and, to this thesis, applicable type of authentication is that which Doležel names graded authentication. This is mainly observed when the text has a first-person narrator. The narrator is simultaneously building and reacting to the fictional world and its facts. Of course, the topic of unreliable narrators crops up here. Many first-person narrators are not unreliable of course, but in any case, we are always presented with the narrators' perceived world, their version, and thus, the text is coloured by the person's beliefs, knowledge, feelings and failings. Also, as seen in *Chladnou zemí,* the narrator is drugged during parts of the story, which means the reader is relayed a version of reality that is drug-induced, which may very well lead the narrator to make certain fantastical detours without truly leaving the realm of realism. In *Strážci občanského dobra*, the narrator is a fanatic socialist, which colours the world represented while simultaneously shrouding the text in an ironic veil.

2.1.2   Types of Worlds and the Modern Myth

Doležel operates with several categories that the possible worlds may belong to and what rules apply to them. Although I prefer a more flexible approach to the understanding and classification of worlds, some of his observations remain both interesting and relevant to this thesis. The majority of *Heterocosmica* is devoted precisely to determine and classify different types of world, such as 'one-person worlds' and 'multiple-person worlds' and narrative modal systems. The modal system Doležel proposes is meant to suggest axes of different factors that affect the worlds and potential genres that typically are connected to

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[15] An example used is Don Quixote being convinced that he sees giants in place of windmills (1998, pp. 148-149).

them. Modalities "[are] rudimentary and inescapable constraints, which each person acting in the world faces," (1998, p. 113). The four categories are the "alethic system (possible, impossible, and necessary), [...] epistemic system (known, unknown, believed), [...] axiological system (good, bad, and indifferent) [...and] deontic system (permitted, prohibited, and obligatory)" (Schuknecht, 2019, pp. 238-239). For the purposes of this thesis, only the deontic system will be in use. This is because in dealing with fiction which can be deemed as Gothic horror and containing a reality-unreality dichotomy, the topic of transgression is central. Transgression happens along the axis of what is permitted, prohibited and obligatory in the fictional world, the established and incurred 'fictional facts'. When the characters transgress these internal rules, the deontic system is in play.

A realistic fictional world, as logic would suggest, adheres to the logic and facts of the AW to such a degree that readers accept it as a realistic narrative. The factual gaps in the text are easily filled by the reader, and as such the reader helps to build the fictional world with their own knowledge and experience. If the reader is given no reason to doubt the authenticity and logic of these worlds, then any flaws or incorrect information would be considered an error on the part of the author, and not a hint of inconsistency or abandoned logic (1998, p. 149). Physically impossible worlds are, as the name suggests, fictional worlds that through different linguistic or narrative strategies make themselves logically so improbable or impossible that they vastly differ from the AW. Strong meta-narratives or impossible events, such as a character dying three times, draws attention to the text as fictional and unlikely or impossible. Genres such as science fiction and fantasy are normally included in this category. (2008, pp. 38-39)

Doležel introduces the modern myth as a concept that is directly linked to the type of worlds that modern fiction has created – so-called 'hybrid world[s]', which are exemplified through the writings of Franz Kafka (1883-1924) and Andrej Belyj (1880-1934). Here, the traditional distance between the earthly human and the gods or supernatural beings of myth has ceased to exist: God(s) and traditional myths are no longer true. Thus, we enter a secularized and modern approach to the human struggle with higher powers, which are now neither supernatural nor inhuman, but rather deeply human and, yet often invisible, thus representative of an invisible world. Doležel makes a distinction between the visible and invisible world within a possible fictional world. Several layers of a world can thus exist simultaneously. The visible realm consists of whatever characters, events and things that are present in the text, whereas the invisible is a kind of force, power or entity that still affects the text, but without being present within the text, one never

reaches it or sees it. The main idea of the 'hybrid world' is that supernatural events, for example Kafka's Gregor Samsa turning into a bug in "The Metamorphosis" (1915), are not actually considered supernatural, meaning divine powers or magic are responsible, but that within the reality of these worlds such events are accepted without linking them to the supernatural. That does not mean that the surroundings do not necessarily react with horror, sorrow or fright (or conversely joy, should something good occur), but rather that the link to the mythical has been severed. Thus, the hybrid world gives us a new playground, where there still are big, unruly powers that may challenge the human. One of the examples he uses, also from Kafka, is the distinction in *The Castle* (1926) between the town and the castle. In the town, protagonist K is in contact with the people, and yet everyone, including himself, has their lives affected by that invisible force that is the authority of the Castle.

2.1.3   History and Fiction – A Complicated Relationship

Doležel draws up distinctions between the act of writing historical texts and fictional texts in *Fikce a historie*, critiquing the postmodern trend, the oft-referenced 'postmodern challenge', of treating them as one and the same; merely constructs through text. His answer to this challenge is PW theory. A central part of *Fikce a historie* is dedicated to discussions regarding historical fiction and alternative historiography. If we accept the premise that a fictional work constitutes its own world with its own internal logic and facts – what happens when a work, typically a novel, wants to address AW history? There are different levels and layers as to how history can be incorporated into a fictional world, from very superficial hints and nods to deeply immersive and fact-checked historical realism. To dig into this aspect of world-building, we must first address the relationship that exists between fiction and history as subjects.

Generally, there exists among most of us an understanding of what history 'is' – it is what happened in the past. Events and facts in our past can be verified through a host of sources such as excavation, records and testimony. We mostly agree that through extensive fact-checking and interpretation we can reconstruct the past and get an understanding of it. As the historian gathers and collects information, they write texts that we then consider 'historical', and generally, when they are corroborated by others, as reconstructions of the past. However, this is problematic, as facts, intepretations and selective processes all constitute part of the historian's work (Carr, 1961, p. 16). Thus, we have factors that are

unstable, and ultimately only partially objective. Who interprets the sources? Who decides what sources are relevant and which are not, who chooses the relevant facts? And who had the agency or opportunity to be the origin of these sources to begin with? British historian E. H. Carr solidifies the subjectivity of the field with the quote: "[s]tudy the historian before you begin to study the facts" (pp. 6-17).

The relativity and flexibility of the nature of text itself means it is hard, even impossible, to trust a singular version of the past. This also comes through in many of the academic movements linked with the postmodernist turn; re-writing history through the lens of postcolonialism, feminism, and of course New Historicism are all effects of this. Yet – something *did* happen in the past, and some things are hard, even dangerous to doubt or deny. The Holocaust test, as Doležel mentions in the introduction of *Fikce a historie*, shows the volatility of considering history as equally relative as fiction. If history is merely a list of facts that we can discuss and doubt, we can employ them as plot points, which gives us the opportunity to re-write the narrative of the Holocaust as the tragic story of the noble men Hitler, Himmler and Goebbels, because "[i]n tragedies, even villains are noble," (2010, p. 24)[16].

When Doležel then ventures to show that there are semantic differences between possible historical worlds versus possible fictional worlds, he undermines the equative factors that have allowed postmodernists to claim that there is no distinction, thus separating the two fields. Historical relativism is, according to this theory, not absolute. Doležel proposes:

> The only worlds that human language is capable of creating or producing are possible worlds. This concept, I believe, is crucial for finding a new response to the postmodern challenge that denies the distinction between historical and fictional representations, (2010, p. 30) [17]

Alternative historical fiction, in many ways a sub-genre of science fiction, deals intensely with history, but aims to subvert well-known, often epoch-defining events. One of the most famous and routinely mentioned examples is Philip K. Dick's *Man in the High Castle* (1962) in which the Axis powers defeat the Allies in World War II. The story then relays a vision of what the AW *could* look like in that case. Doležel links this literary

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[16] "[...]v tragédiích jsou i lotři urození" (2008, pp. 31-33).
[17] "Jediným druhem světa, který je lidský jazyk schopen vyvolat nebo stvořit, je možný svět. V této knize nám tento pojem pomůže najít novou odpověď na postmoderní výzvu, [...] která popírá rozdíl mezi historickými a fikčními reprezentacemi," (2008, pp. 36-37).

genre[18] to dystopian science fiction wherein authors speculate what might happen in the future if certain events occur, such as nuclear holocaust, global warming or alien invasion, and try to give an impression or interpretation of what could happen. The alternative historical fiction aims to answer the central question of *what if..?* and usually still takes place within our time, or even in the past, and as such are intrinsically linked with AW history, recent or older. As such they can be considered two sides of the same coin, our present being the threshold. (Doležel, 2008, p. 122)

2.2 Strange Familiarity – The Uncanny

My claim is that these novels bear Gothic horror-elements within them without necessarily touching upon the supernatural. Atmospherically, the novels are eerie, shrouded in illusions and imaginative language. The unreality of the novels is something I consider central to my reading of them. Pinpointing exactly what constitutes the breach or unfamiliarity in a text is hard – as one reviewer said of *Strážci občanského dobra*, "[something] isn't right,"[19] (Pavelka, 2010). How do you know when something isn't *quite* right? It must have something to do with disrupting the expectation of the world-logic in the text, abstract or ephemeral as it may sound. Realism and familiarity play an initial and crucial role in both novels. If there is a sense of unreality, it can be related to Doležel's term 'graded authentication' which has to do with the world's closeness to the AW, which at the same time can be linked to the reader's experience of the uncanny, the familiar made strange. Therefore, I will present a selection of theory related to the uncanny and to Gothic spaces.

Nicholas Royle, in the introduction of *The Uncanny* (2003), mentions several well-known sources for studies and definitions of the uncanny, most notably those by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Tzvetan Todorov (1939-2017). His conclusion is that all efforts to strictly define the uncanny, are futile – it is:

> [a] crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought
> was 'part of nature': one's own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and
> the world. But the uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness or
> alienation. More specifically, it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and
> the unfamiliar, [...] A feeling of uncanniness may come from curious

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[18] Doležel consequently refers to the genre known in English as "alternative historical fiction" as "counterfactual historical fiction" in his English translations. There is a distinction between these two terms in English. I believe that the use of "counterfactual historical fiction" in Doležel's case stems from the Czech designation "kontrafaktuální/protifaktuální historická fikce" which is used by both Doležel (2014), Gilk (2014), Uher (2014) and others writing about what in English is called alternative historical fiction. I use the English term "alternative historical fiction".

[19] "[Něco] nesedí"

> coincidences, a sudden sense that things seem to be fated or 'meant to happen'
> [...] the uncanny can be felt in response to witnessing epileptic or similar fits,
> manifestations of insanity or other forms of what might appear merely
> mechanical or automatic life, such as one might associate with trance or
> hypnosis [...] the uncanny has to do with a strangeness of framing and borders,
> an experience of liminality (pp. 1-2)

Royle's book points towards a Gothic and traditional understanding of the uncanny, as well as other, more modern approaches, that have to do with dislocation and uneasiness in modernity. Anthony Vidler describes the sensation of the uncanny thus:

> [the] uncanny would be sinister, disturbing, suspect, strange; it would be
> characterized better as "dread" than terror, deriving its force from its very
> inexplicability, its sense of lurking unease, rather than from any clearly defined
> source of fear – an uncomfortable sense of haunting rather than a present
> apparition, (1992, p. 23)

The uncanny has a central place in the arts, and in literature it is often associated with Gothic and horror fiction. Other understandings and readings of these novels will most likely bring out different meanings. A lot of the content in the books is not uncanny, but quite mundane and more interested in inter-relational aspects of the characters. However, I have found it very fruitful in other readings of contemporary literature to use the Gothic horror genre as a starting point because it provides tools that deal with alienation, spatial displacement, trauma and repression.

2.2.1   On Hesitation and Genre – Horror, Uncanny, Fantastic

In Tzvetan Todorov's book *The Fantastic. A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975), he explores a segment of literature meant to give readers goosebumps. As evident from the book title, Todorov is strongly rooted in structuralism – his genre qualifiers are strict and inflexible, and in the end, he considers only two works of fiction to be classifiable as fantastical. Yet, he has points and thoughts that can be expanded upon and utilized to my benefit. The first is *hesitation* as an integral component in what constitutes the fantastic – you are supposed to doubt whether events are supernatural or can be explained by reason. The other is his foray into *the uncanny* as a subject, how it functions and how he sees it.

According to Todorov, the fantastic only occurs on the hesitation line between marvelous and uncanny, meaning that the supernatural is either accepted or explained in the text (1975, p. 41). At the end of a story, most readers will, regardless of textual evidence, make a choice and thereby relegate the narrative to either category, leaving the fantastic once reading is over. The marvelous is accepting of the supernatural. The

uncanny "in the pure state", are "[events] readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected, and which thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction similar to that which works of the fantastic have made familiar" (p. 46). Despite his adherence to rules and qualifiers, Todorov is inconsistent with the terms he uses. Neither the fantastic nor the uncanny are meant to be understood as literary genres. The sub-title of the book, *A structural approach to a literary genre*, contradicts this though, making Todorov's stance unclear. I will for this thesis not understand either as genres in and of themselves, but as genre traits, elements that can crop up in a variety of works, though the uncanny and the fantastic is specifically and excessively present within Gothic horror as a genre.

The genre names are manifold and often confusing; the Gothic in fiction is generally referring to novels written in the period between 1760 and 1820, by authors such as Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley (Punter, 1996, p. 1). Horror fiction, which is connected to a less sophisticated turn from the early 1900's, is often connected to pulp magazines and supernatural science fiction, and formulaic stories written by writers such as H. P. Lovecraft and John W. Campbell (Clute & Nicholls, 2019). A common denominator in the theory is the presence of the supernatural as a constituting factor (Bloom, 2012, p. 221), along with chilling and uncanny imagery. Even this descriptor is not all-encompassing when discussing these overlapping genres. 'Gothic' and 'horror' are often used interchangeably, which leads to further confusion, since tales of horror can exist without Gothic elements and vice versa (p. 211). According to Gina Wisker:

> [h]orror is located in both the real and the nightmareish imaginary, and an important ingredient in its success is the ability to entertain, terrify, problematize, and provoke politicized, philosophical engaged thought. Important also is its embodying that of which we cannot speak, our deep-seated longings and terrors, and then, once they have been embodied, acted out, they are managed. Order is restored (if only temporarily), (2005, p. 2)

Gothic horror, ghost stories, weird tales, fantastical fiction, gore or simply horror are all designators used for the wide swath of works loosely connected by uncannyness and often the fantastical. Depending on the specifics of a work, one tends to adjust the genre name to fit the elements present in the story. To avoid confusion of this sort, I will use the term Gothic horror. I will utilize a wide and modern approach, not reliant on any absolute requirements that limit the genre, but rather a combination of elements, traits and marked presence of the uncanny and Gothic space theory as entryways into understanding these novels. As such, at different points in my arguments I will use designators such as

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'Gothic', 'horror', 'action-adventure'[20], or 'Gothic horror' to connote different traits when applicable.

Chladnou zemí and *Strážci občanského dobra* never interact with the supernatural, which means that according to Todorov, they are neither fantastic or marvelous, and as such, no hesitation between supernatural and non-supernatural occurs. This, by the process of elimination, leaves us with the uncanny. The worlds the characters inhabit are some version of our own, exhibiting neither ghosts, nor extra-terrestrials nor witches – just human monsters and evil systems and institutions. However, I want to stress that there still exists a form of hesitation on behalf of a reader in both of these works, a hesitation not modelled on acceptance of the supernatural, but on acceptance of these two fictional worlds as more or less congruent with the AW. Hesitation also might emerge when the storylines devolve into insanity, a reader may question the *likelihood* of events, hesitating whether to, for example, understand an ending as allegorical rather than literal. It goes without saying that if the world exhibited, is indeed *not* unfamiliar, fantastic or unknown, it is, at least to a certain degree, built upon a representation of our own known world. In the case of these two novels, modern Czech history plays a major part in the construction of these two fictional worlds. The reader, for all intents and purposes Czechs in modern Czech Republic, will recognize and acknowledge major parts of the description of the worlds.

2.2.2   Gothic Space

I want to introduce the subject of Gothic space as the last theoretical aspect before beginning the actual analysis. Manuel Aguirre argues that the Gothic occurs on a threshold – between the rational and irrational. In a spatial understanding of this, we can list various typical spaces that have irrational qualities; haunted castles, labyrinths, sublime mountains, wastelands. These frontiers have been "[colonised by the Other]" (2006, p. 17) (the concept of the 'Other' is explored in 6.2.1), effectively expanding the threshold, turning it into a landscape. The character enters a world of irrationality, often demarcated by entering a space of otherness, sometimes in such literal ways as entering a house, walking

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[20] Action-adventure is not a fictional genre, but a set of conventions often connected to block buster movies such as *Jurassic Park* and video games that combine elements of action and adventure into their gameplay. I use the term loosely in this thesis to signify high-energy and sequenced events that constitute a similar experience to a reader as watching such a movie can.

into a cave or getting lost in the woods. What happens in the confrontation with the Other is an existential negotiation with the self and its basest fears.

In Aguirre's case, the realm of irrationality is populated by the supernatural. In our case, the supernatural has been established as non-existent. Is it still possible to talk about a Gothic space when the supernatural is not there to interact with? I would argue that the combination of hesitatation in the texts, with either grotesque elements (Topol) or action elements (Hůlová) generate elements of irrationality that interact with the rational. This refers back to the concept of strange familiarity introduced earlier. If we also accept these fictional worlds as Gothic because of the strong uncanniness they exhibit, then we can talk about the spatial qualities of the texts, the surroundings of the characters and how they are affected by them in the same manner, but without the presence of the overtly supernatural Gothic horror that is more typical and well known.

Anthony Vidler applies many of these same concepts to the architectural in his book *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*. The haunted house of course, as the trope goes, is the homely, the bourgeois' safe space, turned on its head and made unfamiliar and alien. As such, Vidler explores modern urban cityscapes and spaces as uncanny territory. A house or architectural project cannot be considered uncanny at all times, because of some inherent qualities. Rather, there are certain times, perspectives or features that will render a space temporarily uncanny:

> In both cases, of course [house and city], the "uncanny" is not a property of the space itself, nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial conformation; it is, in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming. (p. 11)

Vidler also explores the urban uncanny and the spatial properties of modernity that leads to feelings of dislocation, alienation and loss. This loss can be linked to a lost utopia, a dream of the modern that turns out to be soulless and void of history. The discourse of Gothic spaces, modern architectural uncanny and urban dislocation will all play a part in my understanding and interpretation of the novels' sense of unreality as well as their relationship with history.

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3 History and Space - *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra* as Historical Fiction

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, spaces will be central to my analysis of these two novels. 'Space' connotes several different things at once. My understanding of the term for this thesis is a combination of spaces as the *spatial frames* in the novels, meaning the actual places the characters move around in, and *story space* which comprises all spaces relevant to the plot. The former aspect is, simply put, the places where the characters are and how they describe them. The latter aspect "[...consists] of all the spatial frames plus all the locations mentioned by the text that are not the scene of actually occurring events" (Ryan, 2014). As such, imaginary places that are referred to by characters, or places never visited are also to be included in the understanding of space[21]. The term 'setting', which is frequently in use in analyses, is concerned with "the general socio-politico-geographical environment" as a whole. (All definitions above also from: (Ryan, 2014)).

The settings and time-markers of *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra* relate to a traceable, historical past and recent history, familiar to most Czech readers. I will delve further into Doležel's theories about historical fiction to discuss the place modern history has in these novels, and how it affects the possible fictional worlds that they present. I believe an exploration of the spaces of the novels is key to understanding in what way the fictional worlds relate to history – and as such, to what degree we can understand them as historical fiction, and how they then relate to the AW. This is connected to accessibility relations between the text and the AW, which "[detail] points of departure (or connection) between the AW and the many possible alternatives," (Schuknecht, 2019, p. 231).

Both novels exist in a possible, fictionalized Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, and later, in the transition period starting with 1989, Czechoslovakia and finally the Czech Republic in 1993. Yet, as we have seen with the example of Prague (see 2.1), neither of these variations of Czechoslovakia nor the Czech Republic are real, but rather possible variations of something known to the reader as a real place. *Chladnou zemí* features a possible Terezín, Minsk and Chatyň, and briefly Prague. In *Strážci občanského dobra* the

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[21] Worth noting is *narrative worlds* which Ryan also considers a space. A narrative world is closely related to possible worlds: "The story space completed by the reader's imagination on the basis of cultural knowledge and real world experience," (Ryan, 2014) In this thesis the term will not be utilized to avoid confusion with possible worlds.

fictionality of the world is immediately addressed by the advent of the five model cities Krakov, Drážďany, Minsk, Charkov and Debrecín. Cities of these names never existed in AW Czechoslovakia, and as such, like the example of Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985), we have a Czechoslovakia with fictional cities in it, a map that differs from the real one. As such, Krakov is a part of an imagined, possible Czechoslovakia in the same way that La Manga and Macondo are cities in a possible Colombia. Even though Hůlová's Krakov is not real, initially it does not appear unrealistic. Again, it does require the reader to have the pre-existing knowledge that these cities do not exist in Czechoslovakia, but a Czech readership would have this knowledge.

The two novels were published within a year of each other – *Chladnou zemí* in 2009 and *Strážci občanského dobra* in 2010, both following a trend of historical novels of the 2000's (Fialová, 2014, pp. 350-351, 355-364). Their historical aspects are similar, as they both open in Czechoslovakia, and immediately draw attention to the era by providing overt time-markers such as pro-Soviet banners, party meetings and the like. Writing about the genre of historical novel, Doležel argues that there are two domains that interact; the fictional domain, that which is entirely invented by the author, and the "second domain, which is, in fact, the defining feature of the genre, [which] is constituted by fictional entitites that have counterparts in actual historical agents, *historical events, past economic, political, and cultural conditions, physical settings*, and so on" [my emphasis] (2010, p. 84)[22]. Regardless of the research and 'objective truthfulness' of certain parts of the second domain, within a novel they will always be considered a possible version, a fictionalized version, of what is represented. For example, Napoleon Bonaparte in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is a fictionalized version of Napoleon, not a historical depiction (2008, p. 95).

The chronologies of the novels are slightly different. In *Strážci občanského dobra* the transformation takes place midway in the novel, demarcating a definite change for the worse, and ends just at the turn of the millennium (2010, p. 195). In *Chladnou zemí* however, more of the novel is centred in the 1990's and 2000's, that is, in post-transformation Czech Republic, and ends some years into the new millennium, indicated through the text by the fact that the characters use the web resource Wikipedia, which was launched in 2001 (p. 104).

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[22] "[…druhá] oblast, která vlastně definuje tento žánr, se skládá z fikčních entit, které maji protějšky v historických konatelích, událostech, společenských podmínkách, materiálním prostředí atd," [my emphasis] (2008, pp. 94-95)

Hůlová situates *Strážci občanského dobra* in time unambiguously and time-markers in the world are plentiful. Living conditions, typical clothing and activities and discourses of the 1970's, 80's and 90's are well presented through the narrative. In *Chladnou zemí,* the setting of Terezín in and of itself holds such potent historical relevance that it is hard to deny its allusions and interest in history. Memories, storytelling and inherited trauma are also main components of the novel, addressed in very different ways in part one and part two. Even though the directly referenced historical context is weaker in Topol's novel (see chapter 5.1), the spectre of totalitarianism both in the form of Nazism and communism looms. The presense and legacy of these totalitarian systems, along with the presence of memorials and museums as places of physical and bureaucratic conflict, clearly marks history as a central topic.

I want to stress that this chapter is not intended to comment on the mimetic properties of the novels and I will not attempt to verify how historically accurate or inaccurate the fictional worlds of *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra* are. Factual accuracy is not in any way a pre-requisite for the historical fiction genre, and as Doležel points out, such requirements would then also invalidate postmodern historical fiction which often toys with our conceptions of history.

> I believe that the asking of such questions, whether by a student of literature or by a historian, is a manifestation of a mimetic attitude that treats historical fictions as historical documents. It is, in fact, an assessment of the reliability of historical fiction as a source of historical knowledge. This assessment violates the rights and freedoms of the fictional imaginations in the construction of the past and would prevent the creation of anti-mimetic historical-fiction worlds (2010, p. 86) [23]

My intention behind comparing the settings to their actual historical AW counterparts is, conversely, inspired by a wish to locate disruption, and argue against how critics and academics have read these texts. As such, I here bring forth some of the accessability relations and discuss them with focus on the connecting aspects, that is, the main points of resemblance in the spaces between the AW and the two fictional worlds in the novels. My reading of these novels objects to the notion that their main objective is to tell readers something historico-political related to the AW. I do, however, believe that the historical backdrop frames the narratives and anchors the possible fictional worlds in relation to our

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[23] "Takové otázky si často kladou jak čtenáři, tak i literární badatelé a historikové. Jde jim ve skutečnosti o posouzení spolehlivosti historické fikce jako pramene znalosti o minulosti. Avšak pro potřeby fikční sémantický je toto posuzování nadbytečné a často zavádějící, protože porušuje práva literární představivosti ve fikční reprezentaci minulosti a přechází existenci "nemimetických" nebo "protifaktových" historických fikce," (2008, p. 97)

world. I believe this anchoring in a historicized possible world by contrast strengthens the uncanniness and disruptiveness of the narratives that will be discussed at length in chapter 4 and 6.

3.1 *Chladnou zemí*

Chladnou zemí takes place in specific settings that are intimately connected to the two dominating -isms of the 20th Century – Nazism and communism. One of the most striking aspects of the novel is the eerie and dark settings traversed by the narrator, and with the setting of the novel in Terezín, Minsk and Chatyň, Topol inextricably also links his narrative with modern history and memory. Briefly, the settings are those of Terezín, a former concentration camp, Jewish ghetto and Gestapo prison, Minsk, capital of Belarus and Chatyň, a Belarusian village destroyed by the Nazis in World War II. The timeframe of the novel is mainly after the fall of communism, which also affects the history- and memory-oriented readings of the settings. The landscape of *Chladnou zemí* is littered with World War II and Cold War debris. Bunkers, tanks, bullets, helmets, uniforms and underground tunnel systems are constantly encountered, giving the reader a sense of a landscape heavily affected by its modern history. It also marks it as a very militarized, violent, state-centred landscape. In the Central and Eastern Europe of *Chladnou zemí,* history is oppressive and inescapable.

3.1.1   Terezín

The first important space of *Chladnou zemí* is that of Terezín, also known in German as Theresienstadt. In the AW, the fortress town Terezín was built in the 1780's by Emperor Joseph II during the Habsburg Empire's reign in the region. Within the red-brick fortress walls, homes were built. During World War II, Terezín functioned both as a Gestapo prison as well as a transit camp for Jews and other so-called undesirables. Despite it not being a designated extermination camp, as many as 35,000 people perished there, due to the abhorrent conditions. After the war, Terezín was made into a memorial space for the 'victims of fascism'. It is located in Northern Bohemia and is today inhabited by

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[24] Greetings from Terezín! / In memory of Minsk. Suvernir plates with inscriptions in *Chladnou zemí.*

approximately 3,000 people. It is mainly known for its dark history, and has a large quantity of tourists coming through each year. (Památník-Terezín, 2017)

In *Chladnou zemí,* Terezín appears much as it is in the AW, and only the events that take place there differ from reality. In the novel, all but the fortress is demolished by bulldozers – something which never happened in the AW. Does that make it counterfactual? Because we never see any consequences of it, we never get a *what if...* question answered. We know the setting is central to the plot, because the preservation of the space is established as a significant topic from early on. Terezín becomes a battleground between the radical Komenium, to which the narrator belongs, and the faceless, bureaucratic suits of the memorial.

Terezín of the 1990's-2000's is described in *Chladnou zemí* as a nearly empty, ghost town, only visited by tourists interested in the memorial museum. The moats and walls that surround the town are grazed by the narrator's goats, and a host of drunkards and derelicts live there. Especially after the narrator's return from prison, the town presents as void of young people and life until the Komenium is formed. The houses within the fortress walls, and the fortress itself, are all to some degree falling apart, and the town is covered in red dust from the walls' bricks. It is true in the AW that the town was constructed by red bricks, but an omnipresent dust is not to be found.

3.1.2   Minsk

The very first mention of Minsk occurs as the narrator awakens in a cold, smelly hotel room that has brown stains on the walls and carpeting. He appears to be recovering from a night of heavy drinking, not remembering quite how he got there, nor understanding where he is. Maruška, Alex's sister and erotic interest of the narrator, is by his side throughout his time in Minsk. The escape from the fires in Terezín is contrasted with the coldness of the Belarusian capital:

> A teď mi to dojde.
> Utekl jsem z pevnostního města, dokázal jsem to skrz ruiny a oheň. [...]
> Kouknu zase ven, tak širokou ulici jsem v životě neviděl, pochudují tam pluky,
> vojíni házej nohama. [...]
> A nevím.
> Z otevřeného okna jde hluk, který vydává obrněná vozba, a taky vítr a teď mi na
> tvář dopadlo pár sněhových vloček, do dveří vejde Maruška.
> Obleč se, říká. Je tu zima!
> Kde jsme?

V Minsku, (pp. 70-71)[25]

Where Terezín is a place teeming with history, emotions and different fates, Minsk appears distant, sublime and looming in comparison.

The city is constructed of palaces, statues and wide boulevards. It is opulent, but oppressive, imposing a sense of sublimity (see 4.2.1). The military is very much present in Belarus, alluding to a more aggressive and militarily active country. As the reader may know, AW Belarus is, thirty years since the fall of communism, still considered to be an unfree regime in Europe (Kazakevich, 2018), and the narrator's description of the nation's capital presents something closer to a military dictatorship. The sense of having stepped back in time to totalitarian communist regimes of the past is strengthened by the chaos that ensues. Common to both the inside and outside spaces of Minsk are narrative representations of oppression, claustrophobia and sinister aggression. Architecturally, this possible Minsk is awe-inspiring, but artificial. The facades and ornaments do not match the content of the buildings, creating a sense of unease. According to descriptions by Artur Klinau (2011 [2006]), AW Minsk as a town does indeed have these sublime qualities as a city, and as such, again, there is no textual incentive to understand this Minsk as anyplace other than a possible representation of the AW Minsk – the literary form and affectations aside. Again, the novel anchors itself to a world map very much like our own.

3.1.3   Chatyň

Lastly, we have the ruin of Chatyň[26], a village razed to the ground during World War II, where today, in the AW, only a memorial remains, but in the novel, the village is in the upcoming stages of being both excavated and turned into yet another museum. In the AW, Belarusian Chatyň was the site of a massacre in 1943, during which the entire village of 149 people were murdered by the auxiliary Nazi police battalion Schutzmannschaft Batallion 118, one of the more well-known events of this kind from Belarusian history.

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[25] "And then it hits me./ I escaped the fortress town, I made it out of the ruins and the fire. [...] I peek out again. I've never seen a street so wide in all my life, regiments marching past, soldiers swinging their legs. [...] What happened to all my people? / The noise of an armored vehicle comes through the open window, and the wind. A couple of snowflakes land on my face. Maruška walks in. / Get dressed, she says. It's cold! / Where are we? / Minsk. (Topol & Zucker, 2013, pp. 77-78)

[26] I use the Czech spelling of the names, Chatyň for the Belarusian village and Katyň for the Polish site. The English spellings used in the Alex Zucker translation of *Chladnou zemí* is Khatyn for Belarus and Katyn for the Polish site.

Similar stories can be found from all over the country, hundreds of villages having suffering the same fate. (Rudling, 2012).

Belarusian Chatyň has a namesake in Polish history, Katyň. In the history of Poland in World War II, The Katyň massacre that occurred in 1940 close to Smolensk, today located in Belarus, was one of the greatest and most infamous traumas of the war. The liquidation of intellectuals, professionals and officers that happened there counts as many as 20, 000 estimated dead. This massacre is named after the Katyň forest, where about 3000 of the victims were uncovered, shot with German bullets and bound behind their backs. In truth, it was the Soviet NKVD that stood behind the liquidation, using Nazi bullets as a strategy of deception. This deception led to decades of problematic silence on behalf of the Soviet Union towards Poland, which suffered immensely from this loss. Thus, the Katyň massacre has become a symbol of Soviet ruthlessness. (Davies, 2001, pp. 58-59). Norman Davies suggests that the reason for choosing Chatyň in Belarus as the site of another memorial in honour of the victims of fascism was to cloud the distinction between these names. The choice of the tiny village of Chatyň as a synecdochical memorial to all villages destroyed during World War II appears conspicuous and calculating, suggesting a wish on the part of the Soviet Union to strategically confuse the names Chatyň and Katyň, muddling the history of the crimes. (p. 59). Historically, Chatyň has been a memorial site since 1969 (Rudling, 2012, p. 29).

The Chatyň of *Chladnou zemí* is an unhomely place, people live in tents, cabins and bunkers – no homes to be found. Very little is said of Chatyň other than this, that it is barren, cold, and isolated. Chatyň is not a squat or commune in the same sense as 'the Happy Workshop', Komenium of Terezín. As expressed by Alex, it is to become a museum of horror, first and foremost. To this end, the village more closely resembles a military operation camp site than an anarchic squat. In *Chladnou zemí,* allusions to the AW memorial are made, referencing bell towers and a recreation of the village. It is not open to the public or functional, as of yet. The Belarusians are very concerned with the support they are receiving from the state along with some Jewish interest groups, and their main interest is the commercial potential of the musealization of Chatyň.

When the narrator escapes from Alex and 'the Devil's Workshop', he re-encounters a researcher named Ula, who studies the mass graves outside of Minsk. She invites him to stay in her tent; it is filled with plastic crates that are in turn filled with bones and rags. Ula points out the difficulties of keeping historical fact straight, when she tells the narrator about her co-workers:

> A Ula se natáhla ke stěně z krabic a podala mi plátěný pytlík. Hrábnu tam.
> Knoflíky. Medaile. Potěžkám přezku se svastikou. Odznáčky s lebkama! Je jich
> tu spousta.
> Fjodor a Jegor a jejich kumpáni, říká mi Ula do ucha. Přistihli jsme Fjodora a
> Jegora, jak při měsíčku chodějí a rozhazujou do jam esesácký knoflíky. Proč to
> dělají? Chtějí, aby všechnu tu obnovu platilo Německo. Ale to není spravedlivý!
> (p. 135)[27]

This mirrors the actions of the NKVD's effort to cover up their part in the Polish Katyň massacre by using German bullets. Alex and Kagan (military veteran and one of the leaders of the excavation in Minsk and the establishing of the new museum) express earlier that they want to uncover the truth, and acknowledge that locals and other Slavs, in the particular case of Chatyň, Ukrainians, also took part in the killing in Belarus. This is to be forever impeded by the local partisans, here exemplified by Fjodor and Jegor, by their meddling in the dig. The difficulty of keeping the narrative of World War II clear is a major concern in *Chladnou zemí.* This concern indicates the importance of modern history as a backdrop for the settings of the novel and anchors the fictional world of *Chladnou zemí* firmly in the AW.

3.2 *Strážci občanského dobra*

> "Krakov – najbardziej depresyjne czeskie miasto"
> (Hůlová, p. 186)[28]

The greatest contrast between *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra* with regards to space is the fact that *Chladnou zemí* refers to real places with real names, and *Strážci občanského dobra* does not. The naming of places has a great impact on the reader's immediate understanding and expectations of a setting (Ryan, 2019, p. 77). According to Doležel, if a place is named in a fictional text, we are presented with a possible version of the place. When, however, we are presented with a place-name that does not exist in the AW, it is still a possible place, but not quite as fixedly related to the readers' expectations of a real place. Presuppositions colour the reader's interpretation of the settings in the novel, and in particular if referring to a real place, that some things may deviate from what

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[27] "Ula reaches over to the wall of boxes and hands me a canvas sack. I reach inside. Buttons. Medals. I feel the heft of a swastika belt buckle. Skull insignias! Lots of them. / Fyodor and Yegor and their cronies, Ula says in my ear. We caught the two of them walking around in the moonlight, tossing SS buttons in the pits. Why would they do that? They wanted Germany to pay for the restoration. But that isn't right! (2013, p. 155)

[28] According to Komárková, some Polish vigilantes rudely interupt mayor Staněk to award Krakov this dubious title, "Krakov – the most depressing Czech town". They are subsequently chased out of town by the narrator's trusty pioneers.

the reader knows to expect from the AW. If we are told a town was demolished by bulldozers (Terezín) and we know for a fact that it wasn't – it draws the reader's attention to the fictionality of the text. When referring to a place with no such inherent expectations on the reader's part (Krakov), the author has a different set of expectations that apply to them, a different fictional encyclopaedia (cf. Doležel in 2.1).

Another stark contrast is that of the lack of mobility on the part of the narrator. With the exception of a short family holiday to East Germany and the ultimate flight to Prague, the narrator never leaves Krakov. It is her home and her only known environment, the novel opens with her claim that she remembers next to nothing from her childhood hometown Louče. The place appears isolated and difficult to leave, and practically all events and actions take place within Krakov.

A reader with little knowledge of this area of the world or modern Czech history might not even know that these towns do not exist – they appear quite plausible in the novel at the outset. Others might connect the time period and certain details in such a way as to establish a relationship between Krakov, Krakov II and the AW. Many details in Hůlová's descriptions of Krakov and Krakov II may in fact be modelled on the real Northern Bohemian town Most, and its nearby suburb Chanov. These details include a financially motivated move, the construction of the new cities, the suburb-ghetto of Romani people represented in Krakov II/Chanov, the overall description of the panelák[29] town, as well as the surrounding landscape. One reviewer also commented on the likeness in her review: "The black quarter of the new-town Krakov is reminiscent of Most or Karvina, but as we get deeper into the story, the place gains more surreal contours," (Jirkalová, 2010) [30].

In the book *Most do budoucnosti. Laboratoř socialistické modernity na severy Čech* (2016), Matěj Spurný undertakes a wide study of the history and discourses linked to the demolition and re-building of Most. Most, originally a medieval city in the northwestern part of Bohemia, was historically inhabited by Germans prior to World War II. When the communists consolidated their power, Most became an attractive town for the authorities. It was historically well-known that the ground on which old Most stood was rich with coal, and a radical choice of physically moving the entire population and town was made. The demolition and move were executed, and the town of old Most was no

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[29] 'Panelák' refers to pre-fabricated concrete buildings, often long and uniform constructions.
[30] "Černá čtvrť Novoměsto Krakov připomene Most či Karvinou, ale čím hlouběji se noříme do děje, tím surreálnější kontury toto místo získává,"

longer. In its stead was a town, also named Most (often referred to as Nový Most, New Most), in many ways similar to the promised paradise of Krakov. It was to be the example of a well-structured socialist town, and built on solid, socialist values. Spurný presents the ideals and goals of the Nový Most in the sub-chapter "Mezi Stalinem a Corbusierem" ("Between Stalin and Le Corbusier") (2016, pp. 156-164), as that – to construct and plan the perfect new town for the modern socialist, replete with all he/she could possibly need. The site where the old town once stood, is today nothing but a lake. This link between the AW and the text may be strengthened by this quote about the town the Krakovians move away from: "Protože Louče se propadla do země [...] Propadla se doslova. Do jam vyhryzanejch od výbuchů a rypadel bagrů, do podpovrchu zemskýho jako v pohádce,"[31] (p. 17). The fantastical and rather absurd nature of the project Most could be underlined in this quote. Hůlová might very well have been inspired by Most and Chanov for creating the aesthetic and historical backdrop for Krakov and Krakov II, it not for me to say. This may have something to do with readers' expectations and presuppositions as well – perhaps this resemblance was needed in order to establish this particular fictional world?

3.2.1 Krakov

Kraków, of course, is an old Polish city, the cultural capital of Poland. It becomes clear from the beginning that the Krakov we read about, is not the Polish metropole, but a modern, constructed city, dissimilar to its namesake in most ways.

> Všechno v Krakově bylo fórový. Klandry se kinklaly, do baráků teklo, jesle, kam máma Miladu vodila, neměly nejdřív topení a pak záchod, protože se kvůli příliš tenkejm trubkám ucpal odpad. Houpačky byly často rozlámaný, na barácích strašily tmavý fleky od zatejkání, velký dlaždice před Domem služeb se houpaly a silný kluci je ve dvou uměli vyndat[32], (p. 21)

Krakov, the panelák town, indistinguishable from countless new constructions of the 1970's, is dominated by long, homogenous apartment buildings and the main industrial complex of the city. The overhead quotation opens with a distinctive phrase: "Všechno v Krakově bylo fórový,", "Everything in Krakov was run-down". In the 1970's, the inhabitants of the small mountain town of Louče were compelled to move to the new model city Krakov. The promise of the perfect society, the socialist experiment done *right*

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[31] "Because Louče sank into the earth, [...] It was literally swallowed by the earth. Into a pit of explosions and digging excavators, to the underground world, like in a fairytale,"

[32] "Everything in Krakov was run-down. The bannisters were loose, the houses were leaking, the nursery where mom put Milada at first didn't have heating and then no loo because the too narrow pipes got clogged. The swings were often broken, the houses had scary dark stains from leakage and the huge pavement stones in front of the housing services wobbled, a couple of strong guys would be able to break it loose,"

hangs thick in the air. People are promised great schools, centres of health and culture, great jobs and stability. As the families arrive however, they realize that many promises were either exaggerated or downright empty. The houses, the paneláks, are poorly built and poorly isolated. The kindergarten lacks heating and plumbing. The sports arena and playgrounds are never realized, and the pavement is cracking and deformed already at arrival. The novel is littered with descriptions of decay and failing structures, and Krakov appears as a decrepit place. This description of the kids' playground, for instance, is a good example of both the general tone along with the ever-present focus on what should or could have been, had the promises of the local officials been kept:

> To, že se náš Krakov nemusí každýmu líbit, jsme se ségrou věděly už dávno. [...] A přitom to mělo bejt parádní místo. Z plánů ale zůstaly jen fóry, [...] Místo předem vymyšlenýho hřiště, který nepostavili, sloužily na hraní skruže a kusy betonu za barákama, tam, kde měl bejt šlechtěnej lesopark, ale spíš se to na Sahaře podobalo pravlasti indošů, zvlněnej písek tu a tam s drnama, (2010, p. 9) [33]

The elements are already taking over the town, before most of its new inhabitants have even moved in, a state of affairs which already makes the town appear dystopian. After the initial move from the willing participants, more and more dissidents (nosály, 'nosies' is the name the narrator Komárková uses) end up in Krakov too. It is evident that they have been redirected there as a part of a re-education plan, and 'righteous' locals are engaged as the dissidents' monitors. Money to repair or restore the town is nowhere to be found and after 1989 hordes of people move away, leaving whole blocks empty and dark.

3.2.2 Krakov II

Krakov II lies at the outskirts of Krakov, an even shabbier, scarier and darker version of its neighbour. One can take a bus there, and when the narrator was younger, Krakovian children would dare each other to enter. Rumour has it that the Romani people who live there make goulash from cats, have poor standards of hygiene, and that they all live off of welfare. These bigoted rumours and prejudices are held by a clear majority of the townspeople. As Komárková never enters Krakov II in the novel, we only have the

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[33] "Not everyone could love our Krakov, that, my sister and I realized early on [...], and still, it was intended to be a fantastic place. But the only things that became of the plans were a joke, [...] In place of the playground that was never built, we played among pipes and concrete slabs, behind the houses where there was going to be a forested park, was rather a Sahara, a primordial Indian land, with sand and vegetation billowing here and there,"

rumours of her town to rely upon with regards to descriptions of the place, all of which are negatively biased, to say the least.

> Krakov II, druhá část našeho novoměsta, která se nikdy nedokončila ani tak jako Krakov náš, byla jejich, co si pamatuju. Říkalo se, že se to tam nikdy nemohlo dodělat právě kvůli nim. Plány s tím byly ještě velkolepější než s Krakovem. A i když nevěřím tomu, že by tam kdy, byť bez cikánů, fakt postavili nejvyšší československej panelák, jak prej stálo v těch plánech, s cikánama tam nejenom nestálo, ale ani nefungovalo skoro nic. Přišli a obsadili polohotový baráky a dělníky pověřený dodělávkama vyhnali jako dobytek klackama pryč, (p. 155) [34]

The existence of Krakov II in *Strážci občanského dobra*, however, also strengthens the notion that the setting is deeply inspired by Most/Chanov. Spurný discusses the ethnic segregation project of the Romani that lead to the construction of the Chanov suburb to Most. Chanov, like Krakov II, was built of lesser quality than Most, and people were housed randomly, often placing very incompatible families next to each other, leading to a high level of unhappiness and conflict. The local communist authorities wrote about the project: "[h]ousing units for residents with lower housing culture... might influence the re-education of the Gypsy citizens better,"[35] (2016, p. 178) which can be read as a bankruptcy of socialist values, when the value of living together in harmony was left in favour of segregation.

3.3 The Worlds of *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra* - Historical or Alternative History?

One of the challenges presented by these two novels pertains to their classification. Certainly, they are not historical novels in the sense that they seek to realistically represent a certain past era. *Strážci občanského dobra* in particular has been read as such, but I argue against such claims. *Chladnou zemí* largely takes place in contemporary times (21st Century) and *Strážci občanského dobra* spends at least half of its time situated in the post-1989 Czech lands. When is the cut-off for what is considered history and what is considered contemporary? Is the 1990's to be seen as a part of the contemporary era, and if so, is a novel dealing with the Yugoslav war, the release of Nelson Mandela and the end of

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[34] "Krakov II, our new town's second part, was theirs, and was never finished, less than our Krakov even, that I remember. It was said that it never could have been done because of them. The plans had been even more spectacular than those for Krakov. And even if I don't believe it would have been possible, even without the gypsies, the plan was to build Czechoslovakias tallest panelák, the plan said so, but with the gypsies there, nothing was finished and almost nothing worked. They came and occupied the half-finished houses and drove the workers that were in charge of finalizing it out with sticks, like cattle,"

[35] "[B]ytových jednotek pro obyvatele s nižší kulturou bydlení… bude možno lépe působit na převýchovu cikánských občanů"

apartheid or the Oklahoma City Bombing *not* historical *yet*? One can consider history to begin "[...w]hen men begin to think of the passage of time in terms not of natural process – the cycle of the seasons, the human life-span – but of a series of specific events in which men are consciously involved," (Carr, 1961, p. 129). This would mean that one could consider something history that is not far in the past, but that we mentally treat as historical.

The fact that the novels seem to be deeply rooted in what we could categorize as historical possible fictional worlds, realism and adherence to AW logic should be a natural consequence. The novels, in different ways, break into uncanny liminal territory, effectively shattering the historical background and build-up. These can no longer be read as fictional accounts of late stage Czechoslovak communism and the aftermath, but morph into something more sinister. Literary critics have called *Strážci občanského dobra* a satire, *Chladnou zemí* an alternative reality. Several of the critics (Kopáč, 2009; Stehlíková, 2010) comment on the darkness and bleakness of the novels, but never fully embrace them as horror stories, which, arguably, they could be read as.

Can these novels then be read as alternative historical fiction like Topol's *Kloktat dehet* (Gilk, 2014)? The novels at hand do not demonstrate any interest in trying to answer the *what if?* -component vital to this category (Thiess, 2015, p. 8), and do not include any history-altering alternative versions of real events that have massive and disrupting outcomes (p. 26). They do indeed introduce new non-historical events (the street fights in Krakov, and a Terezín in flames and the advent of 'the Devil's Workshop' museum) but the reader is never made aware of the consequences. The world at large is, as far as the reader knows, unaffected[36]. Instead they might be read as symbolic events related to the narratives *within* the fictional worlds they exist in, rather than a comment on the actual historical backdrop, as alternative historical fiction usually aims at (p. 8). This does not, in the end, mean that they do not comment on history – just that the nature of the commentary will be significantly different than that of alternative historical fiction, or traditional historical fiction. To conclude, *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra* are not historical novels in the traditional sense, nor are they alternative historical fiction, even if modern history still serves as more than a mere backdrop within these novels.

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[36] It bears to mention that Krakov, according to the very last passage of the novel, has become a town familiar to all, something of a modern myth, but the reader is never made privvy to what this entails or what the actual aftermath of the mini-civil war is.

Valentina Kaptayn makes the bold claim that *Chladnou zemí* is a Holocaust novel (2014, pp. 263, 272), a claim I object to on several levels. While the aspect of the Holocaust in Central and Eastern Europe is a motif in the novel, claiming that the novel primarily is about the Holocaust is arguably reductive, and underplays the uncanny and more fabulatory elements of the novel. It is quite telling that Kaptayn completely ignores the human puppets in Alex' museum at the end of the story, as this, in my opinion is a much more clear-cut example of a horror-trope, than it is a comment on either the Shoah or memory and trauma (see 6.1.2). A thematic reading of this sort is by all means possible – but leaves questions with regard to both the absurdity and the narrator's stance. Kaptayn claims that the narrator sets the fire in Chatyň "[because] he wants to prevent the commercial deal with history: he has to stop the new devil's workshop" (p. 271). I find no textual evidence to suggest this, and I believe this interpretation exposes the flaws in reading *Chladnou zemí* as a comment on history, as it facilitates false equivalencies between the motivations of the characters and the reader/critic's personal views on history.

Strážci občanského dobra has consistently been read as a representation of the 'grey of normalization', with several critics commenting on the familiarity or, conversely, the too-grim representation of the 1970's and 80's in Czechoslovakia. "Nicely in order, she presents her life to us from the mid-1970's, in the panelák new-town Krakov, built on a swamp in the middle of nowhere"[37] (Jirkalová, 2010). The second part of the novel which takes place during the 1990's is in large part smoothed over or dismissed as 'too unrealistic'. "Is it a drama about ideologic blindness or a farce? If the author knew, she would have communicated it more consicely and said it unambiguously,"[38] (Marešová, 2010). The author of this particular review appears bothered that we are not served clarity about the motivation and conclusion of the story. She also critiques when the story begins to 'stretch', and reminds her of *Chladnou zemí:*

> The moment the story begins to be remimiscent of Topol's *Chladnou zemí*, when the narrative begins to stretch, it ceases to be clear exactly where Hůlová's story is going. When the main heroine sinks into something like timelessness and is too static, still just a naïve child, repeating the same phrase […The] author didn't have to exaggerate the fabulation into some kind of attempt at a bizarre parable, to a degrading grotesque (2010) [39]

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[37] "Pěkně popořádku nám pak předkládá svůj život odehrávající se od poloviny 70. let v panelákovém novoměstě Krakově, postaveném na bažinách uprostřed ničeho,".

[38] "[Je] to drama o ideologické zaslepenosti nebo fraška? Pokud to autorka věděla, mohla to sdělit stručněji a říct v jednoznačných konturách,".

[39] "Ve chvíli, kdy začne příběh připomínat Topolovu *Chladnou zemi*, tehdy, když se začne vyprávění natahovat a přestává být zřetelné, kam vlastně Hůlová příběh směřuje. Když se hlavní hrdinka zadrhne v jakémsi bezčasí a je příliš neměnná, pořád ono naivní dítě, které opakuje stále stejné fráze, [...Autorka] nemusela přehánět fabulaci až do jakéhosi pokusu o bizarní podobenství, do znevažujícího groteskna,".

When glancing once more at the reception of these two novels, as well as the academic articles that have been published about *Chladnou zemí*, it becomes apparent that contemporary critics' interpretations are strongly influenced by the historical settings. I counter that this in fact is reductive and misses several intriguiging aspects of these novels.

3.4   Summary

The fictional possible worlds that *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra* manifest are relying on modern history so as to anchor them in the AW and thereby create a backdrop that they can disrupt and with which they can play. The topics and time markers are provocative and direct – and reviewers have been tantalized, bothered and impressed with them. I believe they have missed an opportunity by letting the historical aspects of the novels play first fiddle. The darkness, humour, absurdity, satire, violence and action that these novels are increasingly packed with during their narratives, indicate to me a movement *away* from history. The specific and relatable settings are, in my view, used to ground the narratives in such ways that the unreality of the texts is emphasized. Distortion and disruption of the familiar is at the centre, hence the importance placed on setting and time markers at the outset – to build possible worlds where the apparently reliable becomes unreliable from a very early point. The remaining chapters of the thesis will look into these neglected aspects of the novels, now shifting its focus away from more or less historical understandings of the settings, people and spaces encountered.

4   Spaces – Fracturing and Uncanniness

> *As articulated theoretically by Freud, the uncanny or unheimlich is rooted by etymology*
> *and usage in the environment of the domestic, or the heimlich, thereby opening up*
> *problems of identity around the self, the other, the body and its absence: thence its force in*
> *interpreting the relations between the psyche and the dwelling, the body and the house, the*
> *individual and the metropolis,* (Vidler, 1992, p. x)

Both novels showcase spaces that can be understood as uncanny, Gothic spaces. The possible world of *Chladnou zemí*, at least in the first part dealing with Terezín, is not historically accurate, but nevertheless realistic. The familiarity in *Chladnou zemí* can be construed from the settings and time, as seen in 3.1 – 3.1.3. Yet, there is a disruptive underlying current in this novel that only strengthens as the story develops. The main character's mentally ill mother and the explorations of the catacombs beneath the concentration camp fortress are permeated with darkness and death. One could argue that due to a setting that is concerned with World War II, the presence of the grotesque is inevitable. I would argue that *Chladnou zemí* has a deeper and more profound fascination with the grotesque or horrifying than referring to World War II alone would imply, and the development of the story into graphic horror underlines this.

In the case of *Strážci občanského dobra*, the expectation the reader enters the 'grey of normalization' at first glance seems accurate. As the story develops, the familiarity of education, sibling rivalry, the domestic issues of the parents, the lack of goods in stores, the local party meetings, not to mention the influx of dissidents and their activities, all point to what one could consider a realistic and historically accurate[40] narrative. Yet, the surroundings of Krakov transform from the 'grey of normalization' that are realistic in the first half, into increasingly decrepit ruins, ghost-town like and strangely exotic in their juxtaposition of the 'undependables', the Vietnamese, the Romani and curious tourists.

Other novels published post-1989 also deal with the era of normalization, sometimes in a humorous, nostalgic way, other times more solemnly, but most often realistic (Fialová, 2014, pp. 355-358). This is where *Strážci občanského dobra* differs. The familiarity of the narrative is punctured by strangeness, underpinned by a creeping sense of dread and inhospitable surroundings. The manner in which Hůlová describes it takes it from grim realism and turns it into something more akin to a dystopia. As such, I will here investigate accessability relations between the AW and the fictional worlds with a focus on

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[40] Accurate in the sense that it does not involve any counterfactual historical facts

the points of departure, rather than connection (Schuknecht, 2019, p. 231). I explore some select spaces in the novels as Gothic, uncanny spaces, and narrative strategies that underline a Gothic structure. The goal is to show how what at first glance may be historical or realistic spaces can in fact be warped into Gothic spaces, and how this opens up a different route for analysis and exploration.

4.1   Ruins, Fractured Space

In *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra*, different types of ruin are present at various stages of the stories. Terezín in *Chladnou zemí* can be considered an inhabited ruin. When we encounter Terezín, the implication of World War II as well as the communist era influences the state of care and repair of the town. Preservationists working for the official memorial want to turn Terezín into a memorial and nothing else. The locals live within the walls and utilize the wall structure for grazing goats, for living, lounging and drinking. Typical modern ruins are also found in *Chladnou zemí;* interspersed in the landscapes both of Terezín and Chatyň are bunkers, abandoned military gear and structures that litter the post-Cold War lands of East- and Central Europe. The debris of different regimes found in the catacombs of Terezín carries a 'waste of ruins' (Edensor, 2005, pp. 100-101) quality:

> Lebo nás pozbuzoval, když jsme prolézali kilometry zakázaných chodeb pod
> Terezínem, a nikdy nás nezradil, když jsme v labyrintu pod zemí dupali po
> starodávných cedulích Ostorožno, tif! nebo Zákaz vstupu! nebo Achtung,
> Minen! a nacházeli další a další skrýše v kanálech, pískem jemně poprášené,
> zapomenuté sklady pryčen či plynových masek, průchody a prolézačky, a vůbec
> nás neodradilo, když jsme našli trochu už do podzemních písků sesutou
> popravčí komoru plnou vypálených nábojnic, (p. 25) [41]

The town of Krakov in *Strážci občanského dobra* is continually described in stages of disrepair. Death and decay dominate most descriptions of the town, buildings are cold and crumbling, people mysteriously fall ill, and what was supposed to be a vibrant and green town is only described as a deserted concrete wasteland. As time passes, especially after 1989 and more and more people leave Krakov, the buildings fall apart and whole abandoned blocks line the streets of the town. The paradox of Krakov is that it is newly

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[41] "Lebo encouraged us as we crept through the maze of forbidden tunnels underneath Terezín, and he never gave us away when we trampled on some ancient sign saying ОСТОРОЖНО, ТИФ! or ZÁKAZ VSTUPU! or ACHTUNG, MINEN! We kept finding more and more hiding places in the sewers sprinkled with sand, forgotten stores of planks and gas masks, passageways and crawl spaces, and it didn't put us off one bit when we found an execution chamber filled with spent bullet shells buried in the sand," (2013, p. 17)

built at the beginning of the novel. In fact, part of its ruinous quality is that its buildings are simply never completed before people move in. An abandoned construction site becomes the residents' home, and it is up to the locals to repair, improve and secure their families' new domiciles. This also leads to an interesting factor of considering Krakov a ruin – it is inhabited, at least partially, through the entire novel.

Ruins have fascinated writers and scholars. The romantic, melancholic view of the ruin coincides with the enlightenment movement and the beginning of historiography as we understand it today. As such it can be considered a rather modern phenomenon, with a new wave of interest recorded after the World War II. The interest in fallen empires, faded beauty and suggestive melancholia provided inspiration to the romantics (Schönle & Hell, 2010, p. 3), a tradition in which the Gothic is deeply rooted (Hogle, 2012, pp. 196-198). With an ebb and flow of varying interest, the last ten to fifteen years has seen a surge of academic works directed towards the ruin as a phenomenon. According to cultural geographers Tim Edensor and Caitlin DeSilvey, "[we] seem to be in the midst of a contemporary *Ruinenlust*, which carries strange echoes of earlier obsessions with ruination and decay" (2013, p. 465). In their article they index a whole swath of different contemporary scholarly takes on the ruin, counting both literary studies, architecture, memory studies, history, sociology, urban ecology and planning, and philosophy among the branches of academia that have a new-found interest in the subject. "The ruin indexes both the hope and hubris of the futures that never came to pass – whether early capitalism's promise of abundance and ease, or socialism's vision of collective labour and equality", (p. 468). A need for renegotiations of former regimes may have increased this surge of interest in modern ruins.

A ruin is a pile of rubble, a house that is no longer a house, a castle no longer a castle. One can usually glimpse the shadow of a former structure, imagine a former life. A ruin can be trash, romantic, dangerous and melancholic all at once. The space has lost its original function, been taken over by time, decaying either because of nature's slow takeover or the relentless movement of violent history, and as such, we can think of ruins as both potentially slow or fast (Desilvey & Edensor, 2013, pp. 466 - 467). A bomb can transform a family home into a ruin in a matter of seconds. According to Andreas Huyssen, the ruin and our fascination with it is linked with modernity: "Real ruins of different kinds function as screens on which modernity projects its asynchronous temporalities and its fear of and obsession with the passing of time", (2010, p. 19). The ruin can thus be a symbolic and material representation of time passing, and the different

speeds at which time can pass simultaneously. We imbue ruins with meaning through ascribing importance to what they once stood for, and, through their ruination, the passing of the thing represented: "Georg Simmel [...] saw the ruin as an object that offers endelss opposition to the will to the creation to form," (Featherstone, 2006, p. 303). The ruin can also be considered human waste, for the ruin is never a natural structure, of products, structures, lives and processes deemed obsolete – either through passive abandonment or targeted destruction and disuse (Edensor, 2005, p. 100).

4.1.1 Modern Socialist Ruins – The Inhabited Ruins of Central Europe

The symbolism often connected to modern types of ruin, the industrial or prefab buildings, is linked to the values of the system that built them (Pusca, 2010, p. 240). If somewhat convenient and direct, this interpretation is the most available understanding of a post-socialist ruin, the lost utopia, the beautiful idea of the ideal society that failed. The buildings, waste and rubble left behind become strong symbols of the attempt to create a better life for all, but also of the folly and hubris of thinking this possible. Today we can consider the naiveté of the project of the succesful socialist state because we have the knowledge of the fallout, the consequences and loss of life and freedom that ensued. A problem arises when the authorities in charge do not *actually* hold these idealistic values, but build a simulacrum, a shadow version of the utopia, which is then deemed to fail due to its lack of internal structure. Krakov and Krakov II hold within them both the utopia and the dystopia at the same time. This dualistic tension within the setting of *Strážci občanského dobra* is part of what lends it an eerie quality, a sensation of unease. The dualistic and uncanny effect of the dystopia/utopia is summed up well in this quote by Vidler;

> Estrangement, [...] seemed a natural consequence of a conception of history, of the implacable impulsion of time that, while sweeping away the past in favour of the future, was necessarily uncertain only about the present. The remedies to such uncertainty, which ranged from revolution to restoration, from reform to utopia, were equally caught in the dilemmas of temporality, tied to the inhospitable context of the here-and-now at the same time as imagining a there-and-then, [...] the dystopian effects of unwonted interference with the natural development of things, on the one hand, and the psychological effects of past and future shock on the other, (1992, p. 5)

What happens to a ruin determines how we end up seeing it in posterity. Ultimate destruction, either by natural forces or bulldozers is one option and the most likely for the modern ruins, as they generally are deemed less attractive than older ruins. Repurposing of the space is another alternative, especially when the state can decide to invest money in

transforming formerly abandoned spaces into something new. Another more unusual sort of repurposing, is that of a local, voluntary effort in the form of squatting. A final option is that of musealization, when the structure is secured, elements are curated, selected or left out, and the whole space becomes a museum to itself, or whatever it is deemed to represent. Musealization ultimately ends the structure's existence as a potential living, breathing space, but still preserves it for whatever reason it might be found to have a social, aesthetic or didactic value. This final option appears to be the goal of the memorial in *Chladnou zemí.*

A culture of squatting, political dissidence and counter-culture post-1989 emerged in many areas of former communist countries; the availability of abandoned and disused spaces may be partially responsible for this strong squat culture.

> The [...] power of ruins as political counter-sites is exemplified [in a] discussion of how Soviet imperial ruins in the borderlands between the Ukraine and Poland have been appropriated for use as a commune. The commune, which occupies a derelict nuclear base, is based on an anarchist self-sufficiency that responds to the disorder of post-socialist transitional state yet uses the unexpectedly durable structures of totalitarian power as an exercise in recycling. The commune offers a home to dispossessed and politically marginal people, and suggests the emergence of a more egalitarian kind of collectivism, and an alternative to the wholesale reform and market capitalism that defines mainstream postsocialist reconstruction, (Desilvey & Edensor, 2013, p. 469)

The ruins in these novels are intermittently used as squats by dissidents and alternative youth groups. The Komenium that surrounds Lebo, occupies and squats in several of the defunct buildings standing in disrepair in Terezín. Their occupation of the main square in the town, with tents, souvenir sales and protest culture also underline their alternative leanings. "Hledači pryčen" (p. 33), the bunk seekers, are what the young searching Europeans become known as to the narrator. This indicates a closeness and attraction to the ruin itself, to lie in the bunks of their forebears and partake in the space of memory. The Komenium creates souvenirs that in some sense mocks the nostalgia-heritage industry that has cropped up in the former eastern bloc after 1989. At many markets in former communist countries, you can buy beanies with the hammer and sickle, busts of Lenin or other commercialized communist paraphernalia. In the Komenium's case, they buy tourist t-shirts with Franz Kafka's portrait on it in Prague, and in typical alternative youth fashion, DIY-label (do-it-yourself) them with the text "Theresienstadt. Kdyby Franz Kafka přežil svou smrt, zabili by ho tady…" (p. 37), "*Theresienstadt.* […] *If Franz Kafka hadn't died, they would have killed him here*" (p. 36). In addition to this, much to the chagrin of the memorial people, they sell so-called "ghetto pizza" (p. 58), homemade pizza sprinkled

with the red dusted grass of the ruins as a kind of local 'spice'. The memorial attempts to shut them down on the grounds of food safety issues, which is in no way heeded by the Komenium.

In *Strážci občanského dobra,* the people that occupy the black quarter are locals, either hailing from the Romani ghetto of Krakov II, or the 'undependables', the autonomous protesters from Krakov. They gather and live "[...] jako v Itálii, jen místo špaget karbonára se tam na zařízení z vybrakovanejch bejváků opejkali holubi a hrdlama tekly lihový splašky," [42] (p. 173). The squatting culture which is introduced in *Strážci občanského dobra* is portrayed and filtered through the perception of Komárková, and as such, is represented as loathsome, dirty and void of values. She alludes to the fact that the squatters claim to propagate the values of multiculturalism and dialogue, and that they consider the Romani population the helping hands of tomorrow, as Krakov will lack personnel to tend to the elderly in few years. Komarková only finds this appalling, claiming that "vzájemná nedůvěra, kterou mezi sebou bílý a černý přirozeně maj, tam vzala za svý,"[43] (pp. 172-173), strongly underlining the increasing radicalization and racism the narrator exhibits. Standa Vidlička, like the Komenium, sells souvenirs, and becomes the spokesperson for the project of the black quarter. The 'undependables' and Romani party together, create art and host countercultural political gatherings. They are fetishized by the tourists that come there, the alternative youth living in harmony with the Romani, and sympathizers are delighted to see the squalor upfront. Preservation is not a topic in this respect, only survival and protest, and the desire to live at the edge of societal norm.

The aspect of ruin-gazing as touristic exploit is thus touched upon in both novels. Visiting spaces in various stages of disrepair, many of which are often unguarded and perilously derelict, has become a fashionable and modern form of tourism. Tim Edensor argues "[as] visiting ruins is a kind of anti-tourism, the ruin itself stands as a sort of anti-heritage", (2005, p. 139). The modern ruins of Central Europe provide these youth groups with ample space to rejuvenate, protest and disrupt. None of the novels are unequivocally positive about these tendencies, but question and comment on these activities. The modern ruin as a disruptive, innovative and cultural space shows a form of usefulness and potential that may lay in otherwise derelict and unappreciated buildings. In *Chladnou zemí* and

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[42] Translation: "... like in Italy, but instead of spaghetti carbonara, they roasted pigeons on the furniture they had hauled out of the buildings, and wet their throats with foul liqour,"

[43] "[T]he mutual distrust that is shared between white and black, had dissipated from there,"

Strážci občanského dobra this perspective on ruins, squatters and dissidence is present and central.

4.1.2   Embodying the Ruin

The ruin serves as a form of *memento mori*, and can indicate transitions and renogotiations with spaces:

> Whilst ruins can throw up the utterly strange and the very familiar, the uncanniness of that which is frightening and strange but simultaneously comforting and familiar, is that which provokes nebulous memories, for to confront such things is to encounter a radical otherness which is also a part of ourselves. Partly, this is connected with the alterity of the past and the impossibility of reclaiming it whole, and it is also because traces of our past selves leak out from a present in which we have tried to contain and encode the past, (Edensor, 2005, p. 152)

A relationship between the ruin and preservation is found in the crumbling fortress town that stores all kinds of debris related both to World War II and the time after. The different ways that the memorial and the Komenium engage with the ruins can be understood and interpreted as a state-sanctioned versus an alternative way of engaging with memory. One is considered correct, and the other as transgressive, perverse and inappropriate, and thus, the Komenium is ultimately stifled by the powers that be. Lebo is obsessed with collecting this debris of horror. Every note, sign, bone fragment and bullet has value to him. The walls of Terezín are decaying, turning to dust, and the rust-red dust, which can be interpreted as blood-red, covers everything and everyone that comes into contact with it. The dust that covers everything can be understood symbolically as the blood of the dead, of the dread and horror influencing and marking all the surrounding spaces. When the narrator and Sara have a sexual interaction in the grass, they return to the centre, embarrassed that they are covered in the dust, proof of their rough-and-tumble. The people of the Komenium also both eat and smoke the dust, getting sustenance from their 'ghetto pizza' and a pleasant high from the grass. As such they partake in the ruin as a physical interaction, they *embody* the ruin, living, sleeping, drinking, copulating, eating and smoking it and in it. No act of malice or dominance is evident in their interaction with the space, they simply live in it and function within the space. By living and embodying the ruin, they turn Terezín from a place of horror to a place of life, which also is the actual goal of the Komenium, avoiding musealization.

The idyll of the Komenium and Terezín as a space is interrupted by the arrival of the Belarusian Alex, and the escalating conflict with the memorial. Alex challenges the

peace of the group from within, just as the memorial challenges it from the outside. The freedom and hippie-esque levity is disturbed by Alex' presence. Their internal and external existence is put under pressure and in the end the narrator in a desperate move sets fire to their main office and flees, while the bulldozers are descending upon Terezín. The vision doesn't last, and as the bulldozers are razing the town to the ground and the squatters are taken by the police, their transgressive perfomance comes to an end.

Geoffrey Chew in an article about *Chladnou zemí,* comments on the futility of the 'dissidence museums' existence, pointing to its failure to stay uncorrupted. The sales of pizza and shirts as well as their international charitable backing, are for him signs of a commercialistic or capitalistic turn. This points, according to Chew, to an unsustainability that reaches beyond their educational values, all of which culminates in the narrator burning down the Komenium's office, "very probably in order to destroy incriminating evidence," (2015, p. 92). I am not quite as certain as Chew in the eventual disregard for the motives of the Komenium. If the embodying of the ruin is anything of value, then I would instead link the eventual downfall of the Komenium to the transgressive nature of the act, and the intrusion by Alex, who wants to take the symbolic act of embodiment to a level of actual terror (see 5.1.1).

In *Strážci občanského dobra,* Hůlová lets the fractured and faulty infrstructure of Krakov be a source of illness and decay in the town. The citizens are plagued with a chronic, sometimes lethal disease called the "krakovská choroba" (p. 129), the Krakov illness. Its presence in the local hospital is described, rather morbidly, in this quote;

> Nechtěli už nikoho ani v nemocnici. Jen chlapy na nošení těžkejch těl nafouknutejch nemocnejch. Hodit je z postele na vozejk a zas zpátky, když je vezli po nemocnici na vyšetření, jinak se s nima nic moc nedělalo. Většina z nakaženejch zůstala něco jako chronicky nemocná podobně jako starej Vidlička, ale pár lidí taky umřelo. Asi víc, než je na nemocnici a pětiletku republikovej průměr, protože se najednou kolem špitálu začali motat cizí lidi, (p. 143)[44]

The cause is unknown but thought to be a combination of gas leaks from the abandoned industrial complex and polluted water (p. 121). People exhibit signs of fatigue, bloating, coughing and various infection-related symptoms. Scientists and doctors travel to Krakov to study the causes. The territory of Krakov and Krakov II is limited to the outskirts of the town, enclosed in marshes, into which the water and plumbing systems run out;

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[44] "They didn't even need anyone at the hospital anymore. Only guys who could carry the heavy, swollen bodies of the sick. Throw them from their bed to the stretcher and back when they were to be rolled through the hospital for an exam, other than that, not much was done. The majority of the infected became chronically ill like old Vidlička, but some died too. Probably more than the hospital and the five-year plan average, because suddenly strange people showed up running around the hospital,"

> Jednou jsem se táty ptala, kam vlastně všechny záchodový splašky tečou. Řekl,
> že tečou do močálů kus za Krakovem, kam jsme s Pionýrem chodili na naučný
> vycházky, že naše město na tom celý stojí. Na močálištích, který soudruzi
> permanentně vysušujou, ale nikdy je nevysušej úplně. Proto ty hejna komárů
> v ulicích v létě navečer, (p. 36) [45]

The plumbing, which runs out to the marshes, infects bugs that come back into the city at night, making the illness a circle of the inhabitants' own waste coming back to infect and disable them, as well as their industrial waste from the ruined plant. The Krakov illness is present only in Krakov, and the only real cure would be to demolish the entire town, the illness having infested the very buildings.

We follow the Komárek family – komár in direct translation means mosquito, and the family appears in many ways to be a proxy, a synecdoche of the fragmented and disillusioned communist and postcommunist family. In the family, the characters all represent different ways of engaging with authority and societal systems. The narrator herself is a radicalized believer who rises to defend her lost, and arguably corrupt, deficient and malfunctioning system after it falls. The father appears as a silent majority-follower who neither protests nor supports any system to any particular degree, and comes off as passive and therefore accepting. Milada fights the system of communism – but fails to appreciate and engage in the democratic transformation, becoming an eternal protester rather than a true agent of change. The mother cheats on her husband with the dissident Šrámek, while she is supposed to be monitoring him at work. She neglects her family to an increasing degree, maintaining on the one hand a façade of fidelity to both family and system, but secretly on the other hand, engaging in illicit affairs with a representative for dissidence. After the transformation, she too is at a loss as to how to confront the new times. She has no footing either in the silent majority nor in the dissidents' camp. All four Komáreks are symbolic iterations of moral choices and political leanings that soil the nuclear family, which stands as Hůlová's increasingly unstable foundation of Krakov. They are the bugs, the mosquitoes that infect the system, and ss such, they are infecting themselves, causing a perpetual-motion of disease and infection though the very infrastructure the city was founded on. This provides a symbolic reading of the Krakov illness as a more sinister form of ruin-embodiment, the locals are infecting themselves by way of the modern socialist ruin.

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[45] "Once I asked dad where all the toilet-flushings went. He said that they all flow out into the marshes a bit behind Krakov, where we went on educational trips with the Pioneers, the marshes our entire town stood upon. On the marshes, that the comrades continuously attempted to drain, but never fully managed. Hence the swarms of mosquitoes in the streets at nights in summer,"

Based on Doležel's categories of narrative modalities introduced in 2.1.2, it can be inferred that both of these novels contain a high level of conflict between deontic modalities, that is to say, – between what is permitted, prohibited and, obligatory. The conflicts occur on a world scale level, meaning that the actions of few individuals "[....could] decide the future modal structure of the entire fictional universe," (Schuknecht, 2019, p. 240). The spaces and the characters within them are threatened by conflict, both external and internal, that may end up destroying their existence all together. As seen in Terezín, the deontic conflict between the 'permitted', 'prohibited' or 'obligatory' way of remembering, showcases transgressive behaviour that ultimately destroys the micro-world the Komenium constructed. In *Strážci občanského dobra*, the characters transgress what is permitted, prohibited and obligatory at will, creating a muddy pool of ethics. The illness brought on by the people of the town poisoning themselves because of their muddled morality, may only be eliminated by tearing the whole town down. Schuknecht connects high level of deontic conflict to dystopian literary worlds (2019, p. 239). The ruin is embodied within the people as well as a physical space they interact with.

4.2   Gothic Liminal Narrative

In this sub-chapter, I argue that spaces that showcase such traits as the sublime and the uncanny are present in both novels, and that these are used in a typical Gothic fashion to invoke fear. Sublimity can affect a post-communist modern landscape and create an atmosphere of unease that is directly related to the fictional worlds in which these novels take place – and shows how the specific signifiers of post-communist landscapes can be made into Gothic spaces instead of historical signifiers. To reiterate the concept of liminal space, Aguirre's definition is related specifically to Gothic narrative fiction. The interaction between the rational and the irrational is encountered by characters *entering* a threshold, a *limen,* which can either be an entryway such as a door, or by entering a landscape that has expanded the uncanny to give the character a physical space to confront the subconscious or irrational – whether demons, aliens or personal insanity.

> At its deceptive simplest, horror fiction [...] postulates two spaces: on the one hand, the domain of rationality and intelligible events; on the other hand, the world of the Other, the Numinous, that which transcends human reason. These are separated -and simultaneaously brought into contact- by some manner of threshold, and plots consistenlty involve movement from one side to the other – a movement which, most often, is viewed as constituting a transgression, (2006, p. 15)

These two novels, with their ruins and cityscapes, excavation sites and wastelands, become increasingly irrational and offer several points of entry into the world of the Other, some of which will be discussed here.

4.2.1 Minsk as Sublime, Liminal Space

Minsk is the transitional place between the two main settings Terezín and Chatyň, the 'Workshops' the book is founded on. Between the realm of 'the Happy Workshop', the lighter and more rational space of the novel, and 'the Devil's Workshop' where the rational is suspended, Minsk becomes a liminal space between the two – the frontier which the narrator must travel through. When the drugged-out narrator is traversing Minsk, he is constantly in a state of combined awe, unease and confusion (see 5.1.1). This sensation can be attributed to a fluctuating state between agora- and claustrophobia, continually induced by his surroundings. The way in which the surroundings cause these phobic reactions in the narrator will be discussed here, with the presence of sublimity in Minsk as a focal point. Anne Janowitz explains the sublime thus:

> These heightened experiences included the monumentality of geo-graphical space and architectural construction, the thunder and lightning above an icy silent glacier, and the elevations and abysses of subjective states. It is worth keeping in mind that contemporary expressions such as "I can't get my head around that," "awesome," and the violent military phrase, "shock and awe," derive from what we can call the idiom of sublimity – a way of talking and writing about what happens when we are faced with things or concepts that are too large, too deep, too big, too tiny, too vague – in short, overwhelming, (2012, p. 55)

The more sinister and complex understanding of the sublime is mainly indebted to the philosopher and conservative politician Edmund Burke (1729-1797), who first made this connection between the sublime and the terrible, (Mishra, 2012, pp. 290-291). The horror we experience is related to an instantaneous experience of individual solitude (Janowitz, 2012, p. 60). In general, the sublime is found in things and spaces of overwhelming power and majesty - in nature, where the poles as well as mountains are favoured objects, and in culture such as architecture and cityscapes. We can then claim that places, objects, buildings and landscapes are where the sublime is found. However, as Mishra points out in his essay "The Gothic Sublime": "The question one asks [...] is, 'Where does one locate the sublime, in the object or in us'? Burke has a bet each way and the Gothic, as most critics have implicitly presumed, does the same," (p. 291). The Gothic sublime thus relates to topics typical of Gothic narratives – overwhelming or illogical architecture and landscapes, dream logic and incomprehension. Mishra locates the Gothic sublime in the

moment of letting go of reason, of being overwhelmed by staring into the abyss, hearing the voice from the crypt (pp. 291-292). I will in this sub-chapter allow the same open understanding of the sublime – as potentially located in both the perceiver and the perceived. Thus, I can use both the descriptions of spaces in the novels – as well as the narrators' reactions to them – as points of view.

These are some descriptions of Minsk of *Chladnou zemí* as an open, outdoors space:

> Tohle je třída Hrdinů, mávne před nás Maruška, kloužu po nedohledné ulici očima, [...]
> Žádné davy tu po ulicích nekorzujou, chodci jsou proti všem těm velkolepým domům maličký. Pamatuju, že ulice v Praze jsou všelijak pokroucené, tady je před sebe vidět dodaleka, každého jde spočítat. Jdeme zas pod nějakým tím ohromujícím palácem. Matná žluť velikýho domu se ztrácí ve výšce, ve vločkách, [...]
> Pořád rázujeme po nějakých těch nedohledných, rovných ulicích. Někde svištěj auťáky, někde ne. Ulice mi splývají, [...]
> Jdeme, pořád jdeme, já žádný město, mimo mého rodného pevnostního a pár pražských záblesků, neznám. A proč jsem teď v tom Minsku tak ostražitý, pořád připravený uskočit? Vždyť ty paláce jsou nádherné. Rovné, dlouhé, pevné zdi. Ale vím, co mě mate. Je tu na mě vidět ze všech stran. Jako na Ústředním náměstí. No jo, jenže v Terezíně jsem uvykl pásům hradeb, průlezům mezi nimi, katakombám, v Praze jde většinou vlízt do nejbližší zakroucené uličky jako do rukávu, (pp. 73-76) [46]

Most prominent is the description of Minsk being endless and uniform. Every street is similar to the next, with the same looming and impressive palaces and the occasional enormous square. The architecture impresses the narrator at the same time as it bothers him – he humorously comments at one point that the entire population of Terezín could easily fit within one of the palaces, a statemeny indicative of the sheer size of the buildings. It also shows the narrator feeling incredibly small and solitary. His Terezín family is – as far as he knows – lost, and he is separated from them in this threatening city, in which they all would pale in comparison to the enormous buildings. The city feels

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[46] "This is the Boulevard of Heroes, Maruška says with a sweep of her hand. My eyes slide down its length, I can't even see the end, [...]
There are no crowds strolling the streets. The people are tiny compared to the spectacular size of the buildings. I remember the way in Prague the streets twist and turn. Here you can see into the distance and count everyone. We walk past another stunning palace. The pale yellow of its facade disappears up above in the snow [...]
We keep striding along these straight, seemingly endless streets. Some with cars zooming by, some without. They all merge into one for me [...] We walk, we keep walking. I don't know any city except for my native fortress town and a few glimpses of Prague. So why do I feel so on edge here? The palaces are amazing. Straight, long, solid walls. Now I know what's bothering me. I can be seen from all sides, just like on Central Square. Right, but in Terezín there were passages through the walls, and catacombs underneath them, and in Prague you could just slip into the nearest winding lane," (pp. 80-84)

animated and threatening, and mentally placing his whole hometown in a single building connotes being swallowed by a monster.

Another factor that he mentions on several occasions is that every street is straight in Minsk, in contrast to Prague where most streets are crooked. This gives him a feeling of not being able to escape – that he is observable at any point and every place in the city. He mentions that he easily can count every single person in the endless street before him. This threatening panopticon becomes especially evident in the last of the three quotes, where he specifically links his feeling of unease to that of being observable. We have no particular textual incentive to believe that he is in fact being observed by anyone. This lack of a human observer-role imbues the city itself with the role of the observer of the little human, the abyss staring back at the perceiver. It is dizzying and disorienting, and makes the narrator feel unsafe, typical signs of agoraphobic reactions to one's surroundings. It also plays into Doležel's notion of the hybrid world of modern myth. To reiterate, in place of actual divine supernatural entities, the hybrid world may play at the existence of unreal things and generate a sense of urgecy and threat in the charcter(s) that reside within it. The looming sense of disorientation and fear is thus connected to the space and not any actual concrete and visually recognizable threat.

There is civil unrest and a strong military presence in the city. From the very first moment, the narrator wakes up in a hotel room and hears the "vřískot trumpet a umtata umtata bubnů"[47] (p. 69). The military presence is so strong it practically permeates the barriers of the hotel room before the narrator even realizes where he is. The narrator does not provide information about the actual political situation. Instead, the military functions like an extension of the menacing city, a threat intrinsically connected to the boulevards and the many military portraits hanging from the buildings' facades. Even Maruška, who the narrator has nourished erotic or romantic interest in, is transformed from a backpacker type in Terezín, to wearing what appears to be a military uniform. She is issuing orders to the narrator, who blindly abides, evidencing his simultaneous awe and infatuation with her – and by extension the military and Minsk itself.

All these different aspects of Minsk points towards Gothic sublime characteristics – its enormity is unfathomable, it is threatening yet alluring. "Because we cannot see its limits, we do not know in how many directions the castle [city] extends, or what its natural borders are, nor can we perceive its beginning and its end; and therefore, it is not only

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[47] "Blaring trumpets and the boom-tata-boom of drums" (p. 75)

unfinished, but potentially infinite. And so we reach Burke's notion of the sublime as associated with darkness, disorder an infinitude," (Aguirre, 2006, p. 19) The environment is utterly hostile, yet the narrator does not react with much emotion towards his surroundings. This is, at least partially, facilitated by Maruška's constantly feeding him drugs that make him feel "ohromně fajn!" [48] (p. 73), thereby distancing him from the sense of danger and disorganization present in his own descriptions.

After waking up and leaving the hotel room which is being invaded by the outside, the narrator experiences two places indoors in Minsk – both of which are also 'infected' by the outside. By this, I mean that even though the sublime outside is left in favour of a supremely claustrophobic indoor experience, the unrest and disorientation of the city permeates the other spaces as well. Every place in Minsk is part of the whole, the rooms and places visited are just retardant in terms of furthering the plot, building the atmospheric tension. The two places are a tunnel and a pub. In the underground tunnel, a strangely funerary atmosphere is present, as people are visiting a glass coffin containing the embalmed remains of a "nevěsta", a "bride". Fifty three young people were trampled to death at a concert in 1999, Maruška explains, the grate at the end of the tunnel was closed, and people were mashed together, "[k]rve tu prej bylo po kotníky" (p. 79), "[blood] up to their ankles" (p. 87). These brides are located all over the city in memoriam. This one nevěsta-specimen that the reader and narrator encounter, is then just one of a whole network, a tiny part of a huge synecdochical network of death, memory and staging that takes place all over Minsk. The tunnel is described as long and dark, with claw marks still visible from the tragic event. Despite its appearance as empty, the story Maruška tells creates a suffocating atmosphere, recreating the events that happened as they walk away from the coffin.

Next, they enter a pub, where the patrons are watching TV, as the president announces Martial Law in action. The crowd goes wild and someone starts chanting a poem about killing the president. Another brandishes a gun, everyone goes ballistic, and Maruška and the narrator flees before the situation evolves further. The episode is brief and disorienting, leaving the narrator discombobulated. They escape through the window of the women's room, back again into the increasingly menacing and dangerous streets. All these episodes are rapid and happen one after the other in quick succession. The separation and sequencing of events does not further the plot, but rather just impedes the

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[48] "[U]nbelievable!" (p. 80)

narrator and Maruška from reaching Chatyň. Manuel Aguirre comments on this plot
structure as a typical element in Gothic narratives:

> Related techniques used much to the same effect in Gothic include the device of
> the old manuscript which is fragmentary and illegible in places, **the interrupted
> narrative, labyrinthine spaces, withheld or insufficient information**; in
> particular, a type of text-construction which I have labelled *phasing*. [...] In that
> it sets up thresholds in place of one continuous motion, phasing may have the
> effect of fragmenting, and hindering, of movement. Because it creates borders
> athwart the expected development of action, an impression of the unfinished, the
> irregular and broken may be part of its effect; but it can also generate a sense of
> extent and infinitude, (2006, pp. 19-21) [my emphasis].

Leaving Minsk becomes a matter of dream logic. Maruška drags the narrator from the
streets and into a palace, a museum. The enormity of the museum is described, with long
dark hallways and ancient moth-eaten maps hanging from the walls, replacing the exterior
sublime with the interior, in contrast to the claustrophobic tunnel and pub. They enter a
small, hidden elevator and are taken below the surface of the earth – to a cavernous, dark
pit. This is an excavation site, a mass grave hidden beneath the glorious palaces of the city.
"Žárovky visí na dřevěném stožáru. Je tu stan. Bedny, lavice. Dupnu, všude hlína. Jsme v
jeskyni? Strop nebo klenbu nedohlídnu,"[49] (p. 87). The ceiling is so high the narrator
cannot fathom the size of the site. This sudden dislocation is disruptive in the narrative.
It is here the narrator reencounters Alex from Terezín, as well as the other executors of
carrying out the construction of the new 'Devil's Workshop'. The entire space is a mass
grave, and crates filled with remains are everywhere throughout the scene. Threatened yet
again by the violent masses from the outside, the entire operation leaves the site in a hurry.
The *phasing* structure is maintained until the arrival in Chatyň. They are taken to a
miniature underground train, reminiscent of old mineshaft wagons. Squeezed so tightly
that they can't even move, they run through the underground in utter darkness at a high
pace. Kagan (an antithesis to Lebo in many ways), comments as they enter the train:
"Věděl jste, kolego, že ještě jsou země, kde si archeolog může skutečně připadat jako
Indiana Jones, hohoho?"[50] (p. 91) underlining the absolute absurdity of the situation, and
once and for all demarcating the descent into irrational, illogical narrative. From this point
on, the book truly evolves into something like a Spielberg-flick, with rapid action
sequences and absurd dialogues. Spielberg is intertextually referenced in this part of the
novel with the mention of the Indiana Jones character, among other things. The impact this

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[49] "Light bulbs hang off a wooden flagpole. I see a tent. Crates, benches. I stamp my foot, dirt. Are we in a
cave? The ceiling's too high up to see," (p. 97)
[50] "I bet you didn't know there are still countries where an archeologist can feel like Indiana Jones. Eh, my
friend? Ho ho ho!" (p. 102)

intertextuality has on the possible world and the Gothic space of Chatyň will be discussed at length in chapter 5.1.1.

4.2.2   Krakov – the Darkness of the Black Quarter

Krakov as a space does not exhibit the same overt Gothic markers as the spaces in *Chladnou zemí.* It does not feature mass graves, sublime palaces or buried bunkers. This does not mean, however, that Krakov is devoid of Gothic narrative features. In this subchapter, I will point out one of the distinguishing factors that aid my reading of *Strážci občanského dobra* as a Gothic narrative, the spatial Gothic features. These spatial features highlight topics that have a duplicity in them, as they at one and the same time point to something related specifically to ruins of communism and to the sinister, uncanny that lends itself to Gothic interpretation.

The spatial Gothic features of Krakov have already been hinted at in the previous chapters. As noted in 3.2, ruinous and decaying are the main descriptors of Krakov, and are used to such an extent that it appears like a wasteland or ghost town at times. The city is often animated in the mind of the narrator as a beast or entity that has a will of its own, or as a space constructed by a combination of living things. Here for example, Komárková talks of her father's knowledge of the town plumbing:

> [Tata] vyznal se nejenom v trubkách pod zemí, ale hlavně v těch, co jako choboty slonů s tělama schovanejma ve sklepě vedou barákem nahoru, a když jsem byla potichu, často to bylo slyšet i v našem dětským pokoji mezi zdma. Šplouchání, klokotání a kručení jako ve velrybím břiše, (p. 36)[51]

Her imagination animates the space, creating a fantasy-beast consisting of both trapped elephants and a whale. She imagines herself trapped within the whale too, no less, and the sound descriptors she uses are uncomfortable and menacing. As such she distorts the prosaic image of infrastructure such as plumbing and defamiliarizes it to the point where it may be perceived as disturbing.

There is also a space of the 'Other' which is separated from the orderly space of normalcy by a physical barrier. In apartment blocks where fifty percent or more of its inhabitants have left, the remaining families are forced to relocate, and the electricity and heating is permanently turned off. In a particular part of Krakov, several paneláks of this type combine to create what becomes known as "černá čtvrt'", the black quarter.

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[51] "Not only was [Dad] familiar with the underground pipes, but also those that led up outside the house, like the trunks of elephants with their bodies hidden in the basement. If I were to be real quiet, I could often hear them behind the walls of our room. Splashing, gurgling and growling like in a whale's belly"

Alternative young squatters such as Milada and Standa, random derelicts and a swath of Romani people from Krakov II move into these abandoned buildings, and make them their homes:

> Pokud počet obydlenejch jednotek v jakýmkoli paneláku klesne pod půlku, zbylí občani jsou povinni se odstěhovat do jinýho, městem vybranýho náhradního bydlení a nikdo tam nemá víc co pohledávat. Jenže byli tam. Černý stíny hubenejch postav [klinkající] se mezi zdemolovanejma lavičkama a ségra byla jedna z nich. V bytech v přízemí se svítilo svičkama. Vypáčili dveře nebo je rozřezali pilama a prohlásili to za svý území, (p. 131) [52]

The black quarter is considered an unsafe area of the city by Krakovians and the occupation is shunned and disliked by the citizens. As mentioned in the section about squatting earlier, the inhabitants of the black quarter do what young squatters are wont to do – they create art, party and, as far as Komárková is concerned, live disorganized and petty lives, because they are not contributing to society in her line of thinking.

'Regular' Krakovians dare not engage the black quarter. The barrier separating the two parts of the city is constantly guarded, eventually by representatives from both sides of the divide. A woman on her way home from doing her shopping is viciously attacked by balls of fire (p. 174) and outrage stirs in the locals. People are bothered by their loud parties and bonfires and are frightened by the savage lifestyles of the fringe society they have built. The fears are directly connected to the biases the locals have against the Romani people as well. Their dislike and distrust of Krakov II is transferred to the black quarter, staining the 'undependables' that have moved there with the same otherness as the Romani already carry. The otherness and exotification of both the Romani and the Vietnamese people of this novel will be returned to in 6.2.1.

For Aguirre, the threshold that keeps the rational and irrational worlds separated demarcates the liminality of the Gothic genre. In *Strážci občanského dobra* there is a literal barrier separating what, to the narrator, constitutes a rational, sane world order, and the other of utter chaos. The barrier becomes the line which runs through Krakov, separating families, and dividing the people politically. The very first time the narrator approaches the barrier, she describes it thus:

> Pražská ulice, co se táhla několik kilometrů jako bulvár pro přistávání letadel, končila závorou, kde stáli dva strážníci a hned ne mě křičeli, co tam chci. [...] Koukali nevraživě, jako bych se právě chystala prostříhat ostnáčem do

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[52] "If the amount of inhabited units in a panelák fell below half, the remaining inhabitants where compelled to move to another of the city's chosen alternative housing, and no one had anything to do there anymore. But they were there. Black shadows of scrawny figures, drifting between the demolished benches, my sister among them. They lit the ground floors with candles. They pried or cut the doors open and claimed the land theirs,"

> západního Německa. Už dvacet metrů před začátkem černý čtvrti totiž začínala
> zóna zvýšený ostrahy, (p. 132) [53]

The grand scale of the Prague street is likened to that of a landing strip for an airplane, and like in Minsk, thoughts go to the portrayal of endless, modern streets. In addition to this, the narrator alludes to the border crossings between West Germany and Czechoslovakia during the Cold War, which, by this time in the novel is decade old history. This brings the spectre of the communist panopticon into play, the sense of unease that is ascribed to being under constant surveillance, and vulnerable out in the open. In fact, the barrier is nothing. No true authority governs this imagined blockage between the one part of the city and the other. Instead, first the black quarter inhabitants, then the narrator's pioneer troupe and *eventually* the local police start guarding it, as if the people on the one side are equally wary of those on the other. The true power of the threshold lies within what the actors in the city apply to it, the power they give it by letting it be the symbol of the divide. In this sense it becomes a holy place, an evil axis mundi around which the second half of the novel, and its two spaces, revolve (cf. (Aguirre, 2006)).

All in all, the black quarter develops into a representation of the shadow side of society, one in which Komárková feels supremely threatened. Even the name, which first of all is designated due to the lack of electric light also makes for a dichotomous relationship between the two parts of the city. The 'civilized' righteous part of Krakov becomes, in contrast, the white city, infested with a dangerous and unstable black quarter. Descriptions of the black quarter highlights the Gothic potential this space embodies. We are never made certain of the size of the quarter, only that it continues to expand, invading the territory of the law-abiding citizens of Krakov:

> Černá čtvrť rostla spolu s tím, jak prosperovala Masálova stěhovácká firma a
> ubývalo krakovskejch patriotů. Z Pražský ulice si černá čtvrť ukousla další dva
> bloky, o dva bloky se přiblížila spořádanýmu městu, který odevzdaně
> ustupovalo. Kam až, to si nikdo netroufal domyslet, (p. 154) [54]

When the narrator visits her sister, she describes the black quarter in several different, menacing ways:

> Zatímco blok dvacet metrů před závorou svítil plnej útulnejch kuchyní a
> obejváků, ten další byl černej jako havran a vymlácenejma oknama se tam

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[53] "Prague street, which stretched some kilometers like a landing strip for airplanes, ended in a barrier where two guards were standing, and they immediately yelled at me to know what I wanted, [...]. They looked at me with hostility, as if I were attempting to cut my way through barbed wire to West Germany. Twenty meters before the black quarter even began, there was a zone of heightened security,"

[54] "The black quarter grew parallell with Masál's moving company and the disappearance of Krakov patriots. From Prague street, the black quarter had chewed off another two blocks, two blocks closer to the respectable town, which receded with resignation. How far it would go, no one dared to even think about,"

> prohánel vítr. I silnice za závorou vypadala jinak. Pár měsíců stačilo na to, aby
> tráva začala rašit i tam, kde neměla [...]. Rozsvítilo se to přede mnou jako žlutá
> tlama, poblikávající záře uprostřed tmy, jako loučema ohraničený území, jako
> obří žlutý oko tygra, co ve tmě číhá na kořist, (pp. 134-136) [55]

The darkness lit by candle light contrasts the modernity of the concrete slab city of Krakov, giving the black quarter an air of antiquity. The broken windows with the wind blowing through, lit with candles like the eyes of prowling tigers animates the buildings with menacing life. Windows as unpleasant eyes is a classical Gothic trope[56]. Lifted from descriptions of haunted castles, here the eyes are imbued with the exotic wildness of a tiger, exotification (Bernasconi, Halsall, Jansen, & Murphy, 2012, pp. 153-154) being a part of the defamiliarization strategy that Hůlová employs throughout the novel. Again, like in Minsk, the sensation of being watched by the surrounding buildings is heightened when confronting a large and unfathomable space. The previous quote referring to the expansion of the black quarter also exhibits animation of the buildings, here with the choice of the verb "ukousat", to chew or bite off. This gives an impression that the black quarter indeed is a many-eyed wild beast eating its way into the white city. Doležel writes of the sense of oppression of the hybrid world: "[the] visible domain is under the domination and control of the invisible domain, […] the asymmetry of power is a breeding ground for revolt," (1998, pp. 193-194)[57]. As will become evident later in this analysis, revolt indeed becomes an answer to this sense of threat and oppression (6.2.1 – 6.2.2).

Fire as a motif recurs throughout descriptions of the black quater. The squatters gather around bonfires of furniture, light their apartments with candles, and set fires in the upper floors. People perish within the buildings, trapped in modern tombs of steel: "[tři] lidi údajně uhořeli ve vejtazích. Mysleli si, že do kovovýho boxu vejtahu oheň nepřijde, a upekli se,"[58] (p. 137). The fire adds an element of flickering and danger that shrouds the space in mystery and incomprehension – in the flickering light it is impossible to make out the whole space, to take it in clearly with your eyes. It is life giving, warming, but

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[55] "While the block twenty meters in front of the barrier shone from cozy kitchens and livingrooms, the next was black as night, and the wind coursed through the smashed out windows. Even the road behind the barrier looked different. A couple of months was all it took for the grass to regrow where it shouldn't [...] It lit up before me like out of yellow muzzles, blinking lights in the dark, like a meadow-surrounded land, like the giant yellow eyes of a tiger, lurking in the dark for prey,"

[56] Edgar Allan Poe's famous "The Fall of the House of Usher": "I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, [...] upon the vacant eye-like windows" (1997 [1839]).

[57] The asymmetry of power is here perceived by the narrator, not necessarily a factual truth about the situation, but it appears so in her radicalized mind, which is the ultimate source the reader has to access this world.

[58] "Three people had reportedly died in fires in the elevators. They thought that the fire couldn't go in the metal boxes, and were roasted alive,"

dangerous and deceptive. The squatters even use it as a weapon against the patriots. The presence of fire continually underlies the darkness that permeates the space, just as little points of light mark the absence of light everywhere else. Darkness and magnitude are sublime features, and as the narrator visits, she feels disoriented in the long, sprawling corridors and among the strange people there. When arriving closer to the huge, darkened, crumbling structure, lit by live candles, the assosciation is easily made to that of a crumbling castle, a staple of the Gothic genre. The fact that the buildings are derelict to the point of imminent collapse also echoes the castle ruin as a motif, turning the modern socialist ruin into Gothic imagery. The black quarter with its menacing and obscure features becomes an invisible world that is in conflict with Komárková's visible and rational one. A modern myth (cf. Doležel) is born in the tension between the two internal worlds in Krakov.

4.3   Summary

In this chapter, the fracturing and uncanniness of the spaces in these novels has been explored. By referring to modern ruin theory, I have shown that the ruins in these novels become both symbolic structures of the past as well as commenting on the path forward with regards to preservation or destruction. The ruin is uncanny in its perpetual messaging of *memento mori* and the overlapping temporalities that can be observed in them. Terezín-as-ruin can be seen as caught in the struggle between two schools of preservation and musealization on the one hand and squatting and revival on the other. The fracturing of the spaces in Krakov point towards loss of political power and illness. In the section about Gothic narrative, I show in what ways the novels turn modern towns into Gothic landscapes of uncertainty and fear. The sublime features that are found in both novels turn the narrators into small, powerless beings when they are confronted with spaciality of magnitude and incomprehensibility. The oppressive sense of being under surveillence and constant threat from an invisible world lets these fictional worlds develop into modern myths, where secular, hidden powers are just as potent in oppressing and affecting the human characters as divine spirits have been in the past.

5   Voices – Irony and Distance

5.1   Unreliable Narrators

Both novels are written in the first person singular. This means that as a reader, one is subject to the notions of the narrator and their representation of events, places and their selves. When trying to elucidate features with regards to the dichotomy of reality and unreality and the representations of genre and history, a closer look into the two narrators of the novels is necessary. My stake is that both these narrators are unreliable, and that the relationship the narrators have with their reality has a crucial effect on how one might interpret and understand these ficitonal worlds. I will first briefly discuss theories regarding unreliable narrators.

Since Wayne C. Booth's theories on narrative unreliability from the 1960's, the general definition has "[emphasized] that unreliability consists of a moral distance between the norms of the implied or real author and those articulated by the narrator," (Nünning, 2008, p. 36). Ansgar Nünning, among others, today challenge this definition. Nünning comments on the problematic construct of the implied author as a defence of narrative intent, assuming that there is an inner, traceable moral code in a text that will reveal the 'most correct' or ideal interpretation of said text (2008, p. 35). Nünning instead proposes the relationship as reliant on the interplay between text and reader. "Deviations from what is usually referred to as 'common sense' or general world-knowledge may indicate that the narrator is unreliable" (p. 47). He also acknowledges and problematizes the need to scrutinize the inner moral workings or world-knowledge the reader may have, to fully appreciate the potential unreliability of the narrator. James Phelan widens the understanding by introducing bonding or estranging with the narrator as a possible consequence of the unreliable narrative mode which also undercuts the 'moral' fabric of a text in contrast to the narrator (2008).

Alice Jedličková offers another way of understanding unreliability that is directly linked to the fictional world: "Understanding the nature of the storyworld may be enhanced by [...] locating the narrator in a fictional world, which appears as a type of storyworld 'unreliable' in itself, "(2008, pp. 298-299) [59]. Her claim is that by adding the aspect of PW theory, we can challenge not only the narrator's reliability, but the reliability

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[59] Jedličková also questions the potential unreliability of third-person omniscient worlds. This will not be discussed here, as it does not apply to the novels at hand but is an interesting point of departure from the first-person oriented former theories.

of the possible world itself. As evident in Nünning's focus on the world-knowledge of the reader/critic, the specific qualities of the possible fictional world will come into play once a narrator begins describing it. This is also underlined by Doležel's distinction between the worlds of first-person narrators and third-person narrators, as referenced in the theory chapter. As posited by Doležel, the first-person narrator creates a different tension in a text than a third-person omniscient narrator (1998, pp. 152-159). Third-person narrative omniscience leads readers more easily to accept the possible world, it is presumed authenticated through the narrative mode provided, whereas the first-person narrator is on the axis of 'graded authentication', because of the perceived subjectivity of the point of view in the text. If the possible world starts showing signs of differing from the Actual World, the narrator's descriptions must also be reassessed, so as to confirm whether they are in accordance with the fictional world (Jedličková, 2008, p. 296). This tension can be understood as an instability in the text wherein the entire narrative is being filtered through the lens of the narrator.

The last theoretical aspect I wish to include is a taxonomy of categories developed by Per Krogh Hansen. I include this for the purpose of having something on which to hinge the unreliable narration that is a modern and flexible understanding of the subject. Marrying several former theoretical approaches, Hansen posits that one can consider four factors that may indicate unreliability. These categories are:

> *Intranarrational unreliability* [which] refers to unreliability established and supported by the large stock of what [...] textual indicators of uncertainty in and on what is being narrated [...]. *internarrational unreliability* refers to the situation where a narrator's version of the incidents is contrasted by the version of one or more other narrators. [...] *Intertextual unreliability* is based on manifest character types, which direct the reader's attention towards their potential unreliablility, either through their conventional configuration or through paratextual elements, [...] [*extratextual unreliability* depends] on the reader's direct implementation of his or her own values or knowledge in the story world, (2008, pp. 331-333)

With these different understandings of unreliability in mind, I will, with backing in Jedličková's co-mingling of PW theory and narrative unreliability, analyze the two narrators of the novels and relate the analysis to Gothic narrative strategies.

5.1.1   The Narrator of *Chladnou zemí*

I suggest that one of the reasons behind the sense of unease in *Chladnou zemí* is due to the narrator's distance to what he relays. As a narrator, he describes events and settings, but frequently avoids making moral or emotional judgements about them, leaving those to be

made by the reader instead. His narrational style is typical not of a deliberate liar, but rather of an underreader and underinterpreter (Phelan, 2008, p. 10), the cause of which has to do with his observational skills. Quickly the aspect of 'common sense' enters, which, of course carries within it a subjective element. I do, however, consider this *extratextual unreliability* to be one of the main features of the narrator's unreliable traits. His inability to react according to what could be conceived as 'common sense' is often recorded. An example is when he early in the novel he matter-of-factly describes his mother's crippling agoraphobia and death, and soon goes on:

> Moje neštěstí zas pramenilo z toho, že jsem musel studovat, potácet se po odlehlých prostorách střelnic a také učeben s obrovskými okny, kudy mi na záda dopadl celý svět, zdrhal jsem tedy, kdykoli to šlo a nakonec i kdykoli to nešlo, neboť jsem se dokázal protáhnout i utěsněnými vchody, vždy jsem nějak našel průlez, i když mě zavírali, a nějak se dostal domů, pak mě vždycky nacházeli ve výklenku hradeb, kde prkna a cihly tvořily kozí chlív,[60] (p. 14)

He becomes a military school deserter and his father gives him a beating for this, which the narrator says "[mu se] nakonec nevyplatilo"(p. 14)[61]. His description of his later fatal altercation with his father is ambiguous at best, but this comment certainly indicates that he is responsible for his death. When the father falls off the rampart, the narrator is more worried about his scared goats scattering, and only attends to his father after soothing them. He alleges that he tries to revive him: "tatínka jsem oživoval přesně podle instruktáží z učiliště, ale marně,"[62] (p. 16) but as he both admits to not learning much of anything in school, and that there are several indicators he actually is responsible for the fall in the first place, this seems suspicious at best. This indicates both *intranarrational* and *extratextual unreliability* at once.

Passivity is one of the main characteristics of the narrator. He seldom acts independently but is rather led along by the people around him. He also lets the reader know that he never finished school, and doesn't know much about the world, which gives him an uneducated and under-perceptive point of view. Because of his lack of 'appropriate' reactions, the effect on the reader might be that of an estranging unreliability (Phelan, 2008, pp. 9-12). His complete lack of reflection and remorse around his role as

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[60] "My own unhappiness sprang from the fact that I had to study. Stumbling around shooting ranges, stuck in classrooms with huge windows that let in the weight of the world, I ran away whenever I had a chance, and even when I didn't. I could squeeze my way out even if all the doors were sealed. I always managed to escape somehow, even when they locked me up, and I would make my way home, and they'd come and find me in a nook of the ramparts, where the boards and bricks came together to form a makeshift goat shed," (pp. 9-10)

[61] "[which] he paid for in the end," (p. 9)

[62] "[I tried] to revive my dad the way they'd taught us in school, but it was no use," (p. 11)

executioner's assistant in prison, for example, leaves an unsavoury impression. On the other hand, his loving care for his goats and often child-like reactions to things[63] could paint him as a naive child, which might instead lean towards a bonding unreliability – we feel for him, and the darkness that has been thrust upon him (p. 17). This ambiguity and hesitation (see 2.2.1) can lead the reader to be unsure of the narrator, his motivations and potential flaws.

I want to take the point further by introducing a question of temporality to the narrational style. According to Hansen, first person present tense (FPPT) narration has some very peculiar functions that have a profound effect on a text, it is a "narrative tense where the narrator's imaginations and observations are being juxtaposed and presented in the same temporal grammar," (2008, p. 328). I also add that the fictional world that is relayed through this tense differs from that of a first person past tense narration. *Chladnou zemí* fluctuates between the two tenses, and my claim is that the use of FPPT informs the reader of the excessive Gothic narrational parts of the novel. The main shift from past to present tense happens when 'the Happy Workshop' is over – from the moment the narrator leaves Terezín for good. The novel opens at this moment: "Zdrhám do Prahy na letiště. No, zdrhám, spíš jdu škarpou, trošičku obestřen mrákotným mrakem, protože piju,"[64] (p. 7). This *in medias res* opening has a profound sense of urgency due to the FPPT. Also, interesting with regards to unreliability, is the fact that he modifies his opening statement already in the second sentence, "spíš jdu škarpou". However, in a heartbeat the narrator shifts his mode and slows down the story by relaying to the reader the background for his being where he is in the opening sequence. This past narrational mode then dominates the first half of the novel, until he opens up his eyes in Minsk in chapter 7: "Dunění. Otevřu oči, ale bdělý ještě nejsem [...] vyskočím, chci ze snu, škubem, nejde to"[65] (p. 69). The first part of the novel, when the narrator in the present tense, drunk and underway, he is navigating between the two realms that *Chladnou zemí* operates in; 'The Happy Workshop', the past, and 'the Devil's Workshop', a nightmare-ish present. When he wakes up in Minsk, he has entered the Gothic space of the novel, and from there on out, his descriptions grow increasingly fantastical and gruesome.

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[63] Maruška, whom he has a crush on, he wants to hold hands with, and with regards to the whole Happy Workshop project he claims "Mně ale o nějakou paměť nešlo, mně šlo o to někde žít," (p. 31)/ "I didn't care about memory though. I just needed a place to live," (p. 29).

[64] "I'm on the run to the airport in Prague. Run, well, more like I'm walking along the roadside ditch, wrapped in a dizzying cloud, from my drinking," (p. 1)

[65] "A rumbling. I open my eyes, but I'm not yet awake [...] I spring to my feet. I want out of this dream. I twitch. Doesn't work," (p. 75)

Interestingly, *Chladnou zemí* in the chapters narrated in the present tense displays a hybrid between two different modes of present tense narration. Hansen makes a distinction between so-called 'historical present', which is a narrative technique where a narrator will use the present tense as a device to depict a situation or scene that happened in the past. Many clues can inform the reader that this is the technique in use, mainly that the narrator will point to the future, or other textual clues that shows the narrator reflect on a situation in a way that can only be possible in hindsight. The other technique is that of 'fictional present': "In contrast to the historical present, FPPT does not just simulate, but actually *is* narration from within the incidents" (p. 319). What makes this mode interesting to my analysis, and to the particular aspects of unreliability in the text, is "the semantic implications of the narrative tense, e.g. the fact that the narrator's imaginations and observations are being juxtaposed and presented in the same temporal grammar, facilitate a high degree of uncertainty regarding what is true and false, *real and fantasy within the fictional world*" [my emphasis] (p. 320).

The narrator does indicate that the story being told is actually in the past; little nudges such as: "[p]omůžu jí vstát... je odjinud, říkám si, koukám jí do očí, myslím, že se bojí... [...] to ona je spíš bezmocná... no, tehdy na dvorku Ula strach měla... ale moc dobře jsem ji neodhadl, to ne," (p. 83) [66] and "Ach jo, řeknu si. Už bych radši někam dál. Kdybych ale tušil, kam se dostanu, budu se sedadla ve vláčku držet jako přibitej," (p. 92) [67] show nudges to a histoical present. However, unlike Hansen, I do not think there is indication of a present (implied) authorial voice, which would halt the effect FTTP can have on the narrational mode. The examples he uses to showcase this, consist of textual elements that lead to the narrator's "mimetic status [breaking down]" (p. 324). This might include word choices or lengthy explanations of things that violate the narrator's abilities and interests, or the narrator mentioning inexplicable things such as walking away, not noticing a car behind them (p. 326). While *Chladnou zemí* includes the indications of past tense that draw attention to the story being told in hindsight, the present tense narration never violates the narrator's mimetic status in the fictional now. I therefore claim that, while not told in a consistent fictional present, *Chladnou zemí* teeters in the margins between fictional present and historical present in these chapters.

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[66] "I help her up. She's from somewhere else, I can tell by the look in her eyes: they're afraid [...] Well, she may have been scared in the yard that time, but I turned out to be wrong about her," (p. 91).

[67] "Oh no. And here I was hoping we were on our way somewhere else. But if I'd had any idea where I was going to end up, I would have stayed nailed to my seat in that train," (p. 102).

All things and events that are described, I understand as being directly related from the perception of the narrator, which has an immediate effect on the world presented. His naive and unknowledgeable point of view is the one the reader follows throughout. The world presented in the second part of the novel is then completely reliant on his drug-induced, traumatized and hectic narration. The opening sequence of the novel is when he relates the journey along the highway from Terezín to the Prague Airport. During this journey he is drunk and exhausted, one of his first statements is "[p]oslední dobou jsme se studenty terezínského Koménia pili dost,"[68] (p. 7). The reader is immediately made aware of his unreliable point of view.

The split between Terezín and Belarus is marked by the shift in tense made by the narrator that emphasizes unreliability and urgency. The narrator is moved away from an environment in which he is comfortable and feels safe and is thrust into a series of events and different places that are described with a strong emphasis on elements of horror and uncertainty. The shift in tense mimics the narrator's state of mind, in that his representation of the fictional world is destabilized and fragmented as soon as the bulldozers enter Terezín. His only frame of reference, Terezín, is also the only thing he uses as comparison to the places in Belarus, implying again that no authorial descriptions sneak in. The fictional world of *Chladnou zemí* is one solely described by the narrator and is completely under the influence of his perceptions. Because of his lacking knowledge and stumped emotional abilities, the reader will in the end most likely not feel bonded to but estranging from him. The world is presented by the mind of a narrator that has been desensitized to violence and death, from childhood through adolescence. A lot of interpretive work is left to the reader with regards to the moral or lack of moral it is possible to draw from the events.

If we allow the extension of unreliability not only to the narrator but to the world narrated, then intertextual elements can affect not only the narrator but also the world. I claim that the fictional Belarus, told in the hybrid present tense, is a different, altered realm than the one in Terezín. In addition to the altered, drugged state of the narrator, there are also intertextual elements present in this part of the story that are not at all present in the first part. These intertextual elements are related to pop culture and things of shock value, and I believe the reference to them informs the reader of the altered state of the world. The most heavily referenced thing is the movie director Steven Spielberg, famous for his

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[68] "I've been drinking a lot lately," (p. 1)

action-adventure movies, and his award-winning Holocaust and World War II movies. The narrator gives little indication that he has seen or is aware of Steven Spielberg's work, but the Belarusians do. Kagan asks the narrator about archaeologists feeling like Indiana Jones, specifically drawing attention to the movie *Indiana Jones and The Temple of Doom* (1984)[69] because of their dramatic travelling by mine cart. Later, they express that they want to turn Chatyň into a "Jurský park hrůzy" (p. 102), referencing the Jurassic Park franchise. Alex also references Spielberg directly: "Hele, říká mi Alex, já byl třeba za Spielbergem v Los Angeles. Má tam archiv holocaustu, kde v tisíci televizkách vykládají tisíce survivors svůj příběh. No, dobrý. Ale co lidi viděj v televizi, hned zapomenou. Na naše muzeum nezapomenou nikdy,"[70] (p. 95). Suddenly a lot of attention is paid to this Hollywood director, at the same time as the story takes a radical turn towards horror and action genre conventions. When Alex refers to how people will never forget what they will see in the future museum, he talks about creating a shock-effect that will never leave the spectators. He even suggests having shock rocker Marylin Manson record a music video there, which is another pop cultural reference that links the entertainment industry to his memory project. The fictional world, through these intertextual references, starts mimicking that of an action-adventure movie featuring horror elements.

The use of a 'MacGuffin'[71] in the second part also draws attention to the action-adventure movie turn. The narrator guards his 'pavouček', (little) Spider, a USB flash drive that contains the information of all the donators to Terezín, and thus a direct link to the powerful moneyed masses that may ensure the financial backing of 'the Devil's Workshop'. The last couple of chapters emphasise a tug-of-war between the narrator and the Belarusians in their attempts to retain/get a hold of the 'pavouček'. This is a classic adventure movie trope, the pursuit of an object that will solve the problem and/or bring about great misfortune. When Alex reappears, he has been transformed from a backpacker type to an action movie villain with an evil masterplan. He is constantly asking the narrator for the spider, which he has swallowed. Alex turns into a full-blown movie villain cliché in the end:

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[69] Which includes graphic violent scenes of an exaggerated nature, including a leader of an ancient cult tearing the heart out of the chest of a live sacrificial person with his bare hands, but also humoristic sequences.

[70] "You know, says Alex, I went to see Spielberg in Los Angeles. He's got a Holocaust archive with thousands of survivors telling their story on thousands of screens. Not bad. But when people see something on TV they forget it right away. What they see in our museum they'll never forget," (pp. 106-107)

[71] "An object, event, or character in a film or story that serves to set and keep the plot in motion despite usually lacking intrinsic importance" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/MacGuffin).

> Hele, když vám na Terezín přispěla Madonna. Co kdyby tady natočil klip
> takovej Marilyn Manson, co myslíš?
> Já jsem ale proti, říkám mu.
> Proč?
> Nevím.
> Mohl bys celýmu tomuhle podniku dělat tajemníka, mohl bys z toho královsky
> žít. Ale když na to nemáš žaludek, tak di třeba do prdele. Naval toho svýho
> Pavoučka. Máš to v žaludku? Ok, otevřu ti žaludek. Lidi jsou nahraditelný, (p.
> 113) [72]

For Alex to transform from a crusader for memory and remembrance to exclaim "Lidi jsou nahraditelný", shows his negative transformation and underlines his morally corrupt values. Earlier in the novel he at least feigned an interest in memory as a project. His lack of regard for human life as such muddles his motives, if his project was to honor the dead of the Chatyň massacre, but he has no regard for the lives of people today.

The intertextual elements draw attention to the genre shift that has happened, at the same time as the narrator has changed his use of tense and his state of mind is altered. He opens this part of the story by saying he wants out of this dream. The entire second part thus constitutes an action-adventure nightmare borne out of his unreliable narration and the world he narrates has become unreliable too. It relies on the reader's hesitation (cf. Todorov 2.2.1, Jedličková 5.1) and merges the dimension of world instability with narrational instability.

5.1.2   The Narrator of *Strážci občanského dobra*

In *Strážci občanského dobra,* the reader encounters a narrator with a marked and particular point of view that affects the entire novel. In contrast to the seemingly unprincipled narrator of *Chladnou zemí,* Komárková is driven by her ideology and conviction throughout the novel, which marks the text with a consistent narrational point of view. The presence of unreliability will be important to track in order to make a judgement call on her version of the story, as it is politically and ideologically informed at all turns.

There are strong indicators of narrative unreliability early in the novel. Like the system she adores, Komárková is willing to overlook aspects that do not work or represents the system in a bad way, yet she slips up and contradicts herself constantly. When describing their move to the model city, the dream home that they expect is not ready nor furnished or functioning in many ways. Yet, the narrator begins the explanation

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[72] "Hey, Madonna donated to Terezín, didn't she? What if we had Marylin Manson shoot a video here? / Bad idea, I say. / How come? / I don't know. / You could be in charge of the whole thing and live like a king. But if you don't have the stomach for it, well then, fuck off. Hand over the Spider. It's in your stomach? Ok, I'll open you up. People are expendable," (p. 129)

thus: "Přidělený místo, který jsme si vlastně sami v Krakově vybrali, [...] mělo jednu jedinou chybu, a sice bylo to v přízemí,"[73] (p. 18). The simple statement that the family were in fact allowed to choose their "přidělený [assigned]" place indicates at least some confusion on the narrator's behalf, if not outright delusion. She then goes on for page upon page to describe every little feature that does not work, never returning to the fact that she just said the only problem was the location on the ground floor. She then swoops in to adjust herself, by claiming "[t]ak špatný to ale v Krakově, pokud člověk nebyl nosálským škarohlídem, nebylo. Ztráty na životech nula, nějak se bydlelo a lidi se tu a tam i od srdce zasmáli," (p. 24)[74]. This establishes an *intranarrational unreliability* which is prevalent throughout the novel, as well as linked to Komárková's ideological blindness. She underreports, underreads, misrepresents and blankly denies or rejects faults that are related to the socialist project of Krakov, at the same time as she is in fact reporting them to the reader covertly. On top of this, she is hyperalert and critical about anything that might even remotely be considered uncommunist behaviour. Yet, when still in school, the narrator signs a "protistátní [counter-state]" document given to her by her nemesis, the dissident son Standa Vidlička:

> Vzpomínám si, jak Vidlička, a bylo to několikrát, nechal po škole kolovat protistátní dopis, kterej o přestávce sesmolil, jenže tenhle jsme zrovna se ségrou výjimečně podepsaly. Já proto, že mě štvala ta češtinářka, na jejíž hodině to kolovalo, jenže jen tak vstát a kritizovat úču nešlo. Tak proto. Ale přece jen to byl pamflet proti společenskýmu pořádku. [...] Tátova vařečka nás na zadku pálila jako ďas ještě druhej den.
>
> Politicky uvědomělá jsem byla nejdřív čistě intuitivně. Začalo to malůvkama Aurory, tanků a nabalzamovanýho Lenina v mateřský školce a časem se ta nesourodá spleť dětskejch představ tříbila a formoval se mi světonázor, (p. 41) [75]

Her claim that she intuitively was politically conscious is directly negated by the previous statement, and the fact that her father even beats her for her insolence, suggests a much more complicated journey towards her blind devotion than what she represents in this fable.

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[73] "Our assigned place in Krakov, which we had in fact chosen ourselves [...] had only one flaw, it was on the ground floor,"

[74] "It wasn't so bad in Krakov unless you were a nosie-pessimist. No one lost their life, everyone had a place to live, and people now and then laughed heartily,"

[75] "I remember how, and it happened a couple of times, Vidličká sent around a counter-state letter which he had written in the lunchbreak [...] My sister and I, for once, signed it, I because I was annoyed with my Czech teacher, in whose class the letter was circulating, but just getting up and criticising her wouldn't do. That's why. But it was a pamphlet against the common good after all, [...] Dad's wooden spoon still burnt like the devil on our buttocks the next day. / I was politically conscious purely intuitively right from the beginning. It started in kindergarten with drawings of Aurora [historical Soviet ship], tanks and the embalmed Lenin, and from these jumbled childish ideas a world-view slowly but surely formed,"

Because of these continuously contradicting statements it is also natural to infer an *extranarrational unreliablity*, based on a presumed reader's scepticism of the system and thoughts that the narrator promotes. Regardless of a reader's political standpoint, Komárková's blind and hypocritical approach to the world would be representative of the type of blind following mentality linked with brainwashed individuals rather than a critical and nuanced thinker. Most readers will not want to identify with that and will be critical of the narrator's explanations and descriptions. The narrator is so single-minded that she appears as a caricature much of the time, and only a few tender moments related to her sorrow of losing her relationship with her sister really informs the reader of emotions separated from the 'cause'.

The last point of unreliability as connected with Hansen's categories that I will address, is once more linked with intertextuality and production of possible fictional worlds. The narrator references Westerns and in particular Native American tribes, as well as exotic forests, deserts and fantastic stories. She struggles to fit in to the world around her. In its stead, she creates an alternative world where she has a pivotal role to ensure the civil good. She refers to herself as a member of the Hokama[76] Indian[77], tribe and puts it in direct opposition to the dissident tribe, at first fronted by Standa's father, the hero dissident in Krakov. Intertextuality of fictional worlds exist in her referencing the *Winnetou* series repeatedly, a book series by Karl May, popularized by German-Yugoslavian-made movies in the 1970's, and the novel *Kazan* (p. 58) by James O. Curwood. *Kazan* is a 1914 adventure fantasy novel about a hybrid wolf/dog, including bitter family feuds and the harsh conditions of the Canadian wilderness.

Her interest in these North American adventure stories is intertwined with her world view, where she creates a fiction of Krakov, a fantasy world where Native Americans, massive tigers, jungles and deserts exist together. She comments at one point that Krakov has the "krakovský kouzlo novejch věcí, který už od začátku vypadaj použitě jako

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[76] A Hokama tribe has never existed in America, but Hokama is Malayo-Polynesian Woi language word meaning "nose", which ironically redirects to the narrator calling her enemies "nosies". The language is estimated to be spoken by 1800 people.

[77] In the novel, the narrator consequently uses the word 'Indián' when talking about natives, as is in line with both the typical use in westerns, and in line with the time she would read and watch these works of fiction. I acknowledge the fact that today this is considered offensive in English language, but for the sake of maintaining the integrity of the novel's text, I will refer to her illusionary world and roles as Indian regardless. One can also argue that the stereotype of the Indian from westerns truly is what she is fascinated by, not actual native peoples and their plight.

schválně odrbaný kulisy filmovýho western," [78] (p. 35) linking the patina of poor materials with the magic of a film set, romanticising the decay instead of seeing it for what it is. As such, the narrator produces an alternative world to the very prosaic one she resides in. She claims that the new socialist project of the new towns is a "Prasilicon Valley [primordial Silicon Valley]" linking the modern with the old, to her more authentic time, and goes on:

> Si-licon-Val-ley znamená v indiánském jazyce kmene Hokama víc hlav víc ví, a náš Krakov a s ním nový český Drážďany, Minsk, Charkov a Debrecín měly dát hlav dohromady pět, a to už je jako pořádnej drak z českejch pohádek, (p. 14) [79]

The fact that she both mentions Silicon Valley, a non-existant Indian tribe's language and a many-headed Czech fairy tale dragon at once demonstrates to the reader the many fangled and mixed references and fantastical elements the narrator uses to make sense of the world. The exotification of her surroundings and her self-proclaimed role as an Indian tribesperson and leader both play a key role in her justification of acts that would otherwise be judged extreme or unnuanced. Again, the reader is left with a world that is narrated into instability, where the judgements and claims about the surroundings are reliant on an unreliable narrator. Unlike *Chladnou zemí*, the text has a strong inner irony, which leads to the narrator constantly justifying herself. The fact that she calls the fall of communism and the subsequent democratization of the Czech lands 'the counter-revolution' indicates this, as well as reminding the reader of her ideological standpoint in a humorous way.

The narrator's childishness and naiveté, which is a feature she shares with the narrator of *Chladnou zemí*, is undercut, often humourously, by her own defense of her behaviour. This also informs the reader of a childlike side of the narrator. She refuses to engage in perceived 'adult' activities such as sex or drinking alcohol, finding it repulsive and immoral. Her rejection of the 'adult' world is also a consequence of her being rejected by people. She struggles to make friends and meaningful connections, and as such, a reader may infer that she is the actual rejectee. The pioneer troupe becomes the tribe that she has been searching for, and she praises the Vietnamese Indian tribe for their loyalty, cleanliness and subservient behaviour. This can be considered just as offensive as her overt racist comments about the Romani population, but again, she manages to narrate the story

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[78] "[The] Krakov enchantment, which made new things look like they had been used already, like the set pieces in a western movie,"
[79] "Si-licon Val-ley in the Indian language of the Hokama tribe means more heads think better than one, and Krakov and the new Czech Dresden, Minsk, Charkov and Debrecen were going to put all their five heads together, like a Czech fairytale dragon,"

as a tribal conflict between the orderly and proper citizens against the disorderly and improper Romani.

Although she remains sanctimonious and judgemental throughout the novel, a shift happens as the narrator comes closer to the actual conflict escalation. When visiting Milada and Standa in the black quarter, she is confronted with her own bigotry. Shocked at the presence of Romani people in their house, she believes she has been summoned to help Standa fend them off. The opposite is the case, and the narrator reacts with shock. They are praising her for her troupe and talk about how they wish for a multicultural and inclusive society, where the Vietnamese and Romani will be treated well. The narrator's ideology and bigotry get tangled and she finishes the chapter with contradictory and inflammatory statements of this nature:

> Indiánskej kmen Vietnamců se mi prostě od začátku zamlouval. Protože kdo jinej u nás dřel, měl výdrž s tradicema, a přesto zůstával neoblíbenej? Jen oni, (p. 147)

> Asi zmizeli všichni naráz, cikáni v partách chodívaj. Rodový společenství maj v krvi stejně jako všechny ty nešvary, o kterejch jsem chtěla Miladě se Standou říct, (p. 159)

> Standa začal něco o většinový společnosti a Vietnamcích, co potřebujou posílit svý práva, jenže co byla černá čtvrť za většinovou společnost? /Je nás čím dál víc, Standa na to. /To byla bohužel pravda. Ale stejně. Společnost dnešní doby není přece nic, kam by se stálo za to doopravdy začlenit. V dobách československýho kolektivu jo. [...] Ponětí o společný věci nula, a to především měl náš pionýrák znova nakopnout. Vietnamskej proto, že skupinovej duch je u týhle indiánský skupiny mnohem vyvinutější. Je to něco, co by se Krakovský měli přiučit. A když to nepůjde po dobrým, tak po zlým, [...] Romové maj zdravej pohled na život. Nespěchaj, nikam se neženou. Standa se zatvářil šibalsky. Jako bychom byli my tři jedný krve. Občani se společnou slabostí pro lidi jinejch barev kůže, a všechno ostatní byly jen nepodstatný prkotiny, [...] Pilnej indiánskej kmen stánkových prodejců je něco úplně jinýho než armáda nemakačenků, co žijou z dávek. A takhle jsem to Standovi taky řekla./Vietnamci že nejsou cikáni, a když bude třeba, půjdou proti Krakovu II spolu s náma, (pp. 160-162) [80]

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[80] "I just liked the Vietnamese Indian tribe right from the beginning. Who else toiled for us, kept hold of their traditions and still remained disliked? Only them, [...] They had all disappeared at once, Gypsies move in groups. They have tribal community running in their blood, that, and other defects, which I wanted to talk to Milada and Standa about, [...] Standa started saying something about the majority society and the Vietnamese, that they needed their rights strengthened, but what kind of majority society was the black quarter? / We are becoming more and more, Standa said. / That was unfortunately true. But anyway. Today, society is nothing one would like to really be integrated in. In the time of the Czechoslovak collective, yeah. [...] No sense of community, and that, above all, was what our pioneers were going to re-establish. Vietnamese because in their Indian tribe, the sense of community is more developed. It is something that Krakovians could learn from. And if they won't want to voluntarily, then by force, [...] Romani have a healthy outlook on life. They don't rush, they don't race anywhere. Standa made a roguish face. As if the three of us were of the same blood. Citizens sharing an affinity for people of different coloured skin, as if everything else was immaterial. [...] the industrious Indian tribe of the market booths is something wholly different than the armada of slackers living off of handouts. And I told Standa as much. / The Vietnamese are no Gypsies, and if necessary, they will fight against Krakov II with us,"

I wish to link this shift in her tone to what David Punter calls psychic grotesquerie. The narrator's devotion to the cause completely blinds her to the extreme nature of her and her troupe's actions. This blindness bears similarities to the overwhelming nature of religious fanaticism, which, unlike the religious sublime, would include an element of Gothic terror that renders the otherwise positive grandeur of the spiritual, as dark, twisted and dangerous (Mishra, 2012, p. 291). Punter has linked certain contemporary American fiction to this newer form of Gothic, psychic grotesquerie. This is said to "[deal] in landscapes of the mind, settings which are distorted by the pressure of the principal character's psychological obsessions. We are given little or no access to an 'objective' world; instead we are immersed in the psyche of the protagonist, often through sophisticated use of first-person narration," (1996, p. 2). While Punter specifically links this trend to American fiction, I find this description just as apt for *Strážci občanského dobra* as any Joyce Carol Oates novel.

The moment the narrator's mental shift happens, she starts weaponizing her troupe. Her concept of community, group mentality, family, blood and tribe is so tangled and confused that she grasps at whatever that will service her in the moment and moves on to a radically contradictory statement the next. This makes the comprehension for the reader confusing as well, as her pure idealism actually is a muddy, desperate grasp at community. Her conviction develops and changes during the course of the novel, and as the climax grows closer, the more confused her ramblings become, to the point where the reader may in fact doubt the veracity of her account of the last chapter.

The narrational style moves from hypocritical and childlike to fanatical and even insane in the last part of the novel. The reader enters a fictional world with a loss of logic and empathy and an excess of violence, radical thoughts and suspicion. Like an insane Gothic narrator, she rambles towards a finish line which leaves her in a facility of an unspecified variety: "[a] první, co Vojta [Milada and Standa's son] dostane, až mě pustěj, bude můj pionýrskej šátek. Začneme znovu. Jinde. Nedáme se ničím oblbnout," [81] (p. 207). The nature of her incarceration is unspecified, so we do not know whether she is in prison or a mental facility of some sort. The only information she gives is "when they let me out", and so the reader is left speculating what her end might be, and, importantly, whether the

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[81] "And the first thing that Vojta will get when they let me out is my pioneer scarf. We will start over. Somewhere else. They will not fool us"

entire narrated story is a confessional from an institution. "The space of the institution as the narrator's point of narration is a highly marked one," (Bernaerts, 2008, p. 185), and to only hint at it at the very end changes how the novel can be understood and read. Instead of opening on this fact, which would render the narrator unreliable on a different and marked level from the start, the narrator chooses to underplay and underreport it. This ambiguous ending is in line with unreliability linked with her madness. "When the narrator substitutes reality with delusional ideas [...] the reader can recognize this operation as misreporting, misreading and misregarding," (p. 189). This misreporting, married with her hope that she can start over again, with her nephew wearing the pioneer scarf, indicates a high level of delusion on the narrator's part. When accepting the novel as a confessional, a reading I believe the final statement from the narrator facilitates, she can be considered a "[self-consious madman], who look[s] back on [her] life and [tries] to justify [her] acts" (p. 191). Madness is naturally linked with the literary uncanny (Royle, p. 214), and as such, I suggest this narrator can be understood as an unreliable narrator of the Gothic mad(wo)man type.

Beneath the level of the narrator's radicalized action-storytelling, a wholly different melodrama is unfolding. The narrator is too caught up in her fight to spare much emotion or reflection upon her family situation, which, it could be argued, is the secondary, but more realistic plot of the novel. Her parents stop talking to each other because of her mother's infidelity. Her father loses his job and becomes depressed and quiet. Her sister reaches out to the narrator several times, bringing her along to parties and offering her to stay with her in the black quarter. Due to the focus on the world of battle she has built in her narration, the entire family drama never comes close to having the same impact on the narrator on her level of communication to the reader.

5.2   Summary

Various approaches to theory about unreliable narrators has been utilized in this chapter to demonstrate that both narrators of these novels are markedly unreliable in their storytelling. Unreliability affects the possible fictional worlds created through narration by the first-person narrators. If the reader cannot rely on statements from the narrators about the world they exist in, then more fantastical or imaginative elements of their worlds may also be doubted, causing instability and uncertainty in the reader as to how the world may be classified and qualified. Intertextuality affects the fictional worlds and their reliability

through play with imaginary landscapes inspired by Westerns and action-adventure movies. I contend that this particular type of unreliability strengthens a reading of the novels as Gothic horror, as hesitation in the reader and ambivalence in the texts in relation to the less realistic aspects of a story is key for Gothic narration. Narrational distancing from violent and disturbing acts (*Chladnou zemí*), as well as potential insanity (*Strážci občanského dobra*) also add to confusion and discomfort in the reader, which are central emotions in the affective experience of horror (Hills, 2005, p. 26).

6 Horror

Taková tsantsa*, to chce šikovnost. Rozdrtit lebku, aby obličej zůstal zachovanej, vytahat nosem všechny kůstky, to už je mistrovství. Když je v tom lágru našli, byli všichni paf. Fotil je Jevgenij Chaldej pro norimberskej tribunál. Jako důkaz nacistický zvrhlosti. […]*
Otevřeme ho,
-Alex, standing over the body of *tsantsa*-creator
and embalming professor Luis Tapinabi (Topol, p. 115) [82]

V těch dnech padla závora, co oddělovala černou čtvrť. Lidi ji rozlámali napadrť, rozšlapali na třísky, s kusama dřev v rukou tančili naši lidi indiánskej tanec kmene Hokama. Místo závory zbyl mezi houfcem dvou znepřátelenejch skupin proužek země nikoho, čí bude a čí bude celý město, byla otázka příštích několika dnů, maximálně tejdnů,
-Komárková (Hůlová, p. 199)[83]

So far, I have covered the spaces and settings in *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra*. I have placed them in a historical context, expanded upon how this might affect genre aspects, and I have elaborated on how the spaces can be understood as uncanny Gothic spaces as well as markers of realism. The reliability of the narrators has been discussed, and found lacking, as well as carrying typical traits of Gothic narration in their madness and distant, defamiliarized voices. This is the last chapter, and this is where I focus in on the climaxes of the novels. The escalations and final shocks of the novels are what I claim take these novels from being realistic with uncanny elements to horror stories. Some aspects of the endings have already been touched upon – scenes from Alex' bunker have been mentioned, as has the narrator of *Strážci občanského dobra*'s final institutionalization. I will describe in more detail what actually happens in the climaxes, contextualize these within the Gothic horror genre and finally, comment on how history plays a new role in these action-packed and unrealistic endings. I will spend some time retelling the course of the climaxes, as I firmly believe they are worth focusing on. The endings have been undervalued and understudied in the case of both novels, and I suspect that this might have something to do with the underappreciation of the Gothic horror genre. The novels have been dismissed as satires, dark science fiction[84] and, in the case of

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[82] "A *tsantsa* like this takes finesse. Crushing the skull so the face stays intact, pulling all the little bones out through the nose, now that's what I call a masterpiece. Everyone was blown away when they found them in the camp. Yevgeni Khaldei took pictures for the Nuremberg Trials. As proof of Nazi perversion. […] Let's open him up," (p. 131)

[83] "In those days the barrier that closed off the black quarter fell. People tore it to pieces and our people danced the Indian dance of the Hokama tribe with woodchips in their hands while they trampled it to bits. Where the barrier had been between the two enemy camps, now stood only a strip of no-man's land, and it was only a matter of short time, days or weeks tops, before one of the sides would conquer the entire town,"

[84] 'Dark science fiction' sounds like an interesting genre, however it it not a well established or understood phenomena, and as I understand it is linked to dystopian literature. To me, the designation in this context seems rather vague and impresise.

Chladnou zemí, a Holocaust novel, all of which are definitions I find to be misrepresentative. That they are pure horror stories is not the claim I will make here however. Yet, the lack of understanding when it comes to the oft-trivialized genre of Gothic horror is what I believe is at the core for what I find missing in other readings.

6.1 *Chladnou zemí* – The End

6.1.1 V šeru – In the Dark

The narrator arrives in Chatyň in a military truck along with Alex, Maruška, the elderly embalmer Luis Tupinabi, and other Belarusian delegates of the department of tourism. In a tent, the narrator is happy to encounter Rolf, the former, cheerful photographer of 'the Happy Workshop' in Terezín. But Rolf has changed. He is covered in a blanket and is vomiting into a souvenir dish emblazoned with the slogan "Na pamjať o Minske"[85] (p. 107). The narrator does not appear too concerned with the altered state of his friend. In the meantime, Chatyň is described as a gloomy place:

> A to jsem jaktěživ neviděl. Z vlhké země k nebi trčí komíny. Komíny
> vesnických domků. Všude se tu drápou z mlhy. A kusy zdí, rozbité schody.
> Šedé roury komínů jsou všude kolem jak stěžně hřbitova lodí. Ale je to hřbitov
> vesnice, [86] (p. 108)

If Minsk can be considered the liminal space between the rational and irrational, the real and the unreal, then Chatyň is the irrational and the unreal. As the narrator looks around to orient himself, the many chimneys remind him of the masts of shipwrecked boats, and he states that the place is a village graveyard. Death is thus referred to in the very first descriptions, and its presence does not disappear during the penultimate and final chapter of the novel. The *phasing* structures mentioned in relation to Minsk (see 4.2.1) have continued to be in motion until arrival in Chatyň. The *phasing* consists of a sequence of events including the trip from the Minsk museum via subterranean train, and subsequent odd detours containing rioting locals, a macabre display of rat massacre and setting up camp along the way before arriving. Around the bonfire the Belarusians elaborate on their plans and thoughts on victimhood to the narrator, so it is not without its merits in terms of furthering the plot, but it is still another pausing moment that impedes the narrator's ultimate ending, having to do with disposing of the spider and/or escaping. Chatyň is, like

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[85] "*Na pamyat o Minske* I decipher in Cyrillic" [In memory of Minsk] (p. 121)

[86] "I've never seen anything like it. Chimneys jut towards the sky out of the damp earth. The chimneys of cottages everywhere, rising out of the mist. Chunks of walls, broken stairs. Grey chimney pots surround me like masts in a graveyard of ships. But it's a village graveyard," (p. 123)

most spaces, not intimately described by the narrator, but rather through tidbits such as the 'village graveyard' comparison. Everything is shrouded in twilight, obscuring the details and contours of the place, and the narrator discovers its different parts as he moves around. "[T]here is a certain paradox here: it is not so much darkness itself (whatever that might be), but the process of ceasing to be dark, the process of revelation or bringing to light, that is uncanny, […] The uncanny is what comes out of the darkness," (2003, p. 108) is Nicolas Royle's claim in reference to darkness and the uncanny. Indeed, once the narrator finds himself in Chatyň, the *phasing* ends and the revelatory unpeeling of the layers begins. As the chimneys become clearer, the narrator discerns names and numbers printed on them, and realizes they are the names and ages of the dead that inhabited the former houses, now ruins, only synecdochally suggested by the chimneys. Like tombstones to each massacred family, the chimneys do indeed turn into the components of a village graveyard. Other questions he has fearfully been carrying around will also be answered in the revelatory darkness, most importantly that of Lebo's fate.

As has been established, there is nothing supernatural in *Chladnou zemí*. However, the Devil has a role, in fact it is his workshop we visit in Belarus. 'The Devil's Workshop' is a twofold structure, as explained by Alex in a previous chapter: The Devil had his workshop in Belarus during World War II, the deepest graves are there (p. 95), and the new museum is also referred to as 'The Devil's Workshop'. The Devil cannot here be understood as a representation of a single great man or despot – claiming either Hitler, Stalin or a general or captain would be faulty, as the Belarusians are concerned with the shared responsibility of the atrocities, and the cover-ups. Can the Devil be the NKVD or Nazis more in general? This is unlikely too, as neighbours turned on neighbours, Slavs on Slavs, et cetera: "To se zametlo, ty stovky tisíc upálenejch, protože tomu sice šéfovali Germáni, ale za žold tu zabíjeli i Rusové, Ukrajinci, Litevci... a dnes se o tom mlčí, protože nikdo nechce nasrat Putina," (p. 108)[87]. The second aspect of 'the Devil's Workshop' is the new museum. In commemoration of 'the Devil's Workshop' of World War II, Alex is constructing a new one. It is never said explicitly but is alluded to with this name often enough that it suggests this will be the actual name of the museum once it opens. He tells the narrator of his plans, that the new Europeans will not be content with some "[p]amátník starýho typu, nuda," (p. 110) "boring, old-style memorial". He ends his

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[87] "It got swept under the rug because the Germans were in charge, but the ones who did the killing were Russians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians. They did it for the money, and everybody keeps quiet about it, because nobody wants to piss Putin off," (p. 123)

aggressive and grandiose speech with the rather ominous statement: "[t]ohle je Bělorusko, kámo. Tady nám ňáký trička s Kafkou nepomůžou," (p. 110) [88].

Once Alex takes the narrator into the actual Workshop, they enter through a firing cabin and down concrete steps into an underground bunker. The descent is a symbolically marked passage in the novel. The narrator is happy to go in at first; "A i při své neutěšené situaci se dolů do bunkru docela těším. Z toho lesa jsem začal kejchat. Tam mi dobře není. […] švihnu hlavou a ramenem a mám ten kus provazu za zádama. A to považuju za dobrý znamení," (p. 111) [89]. Why he thinks of the rope behind him as a good sign is hard to gauge, but nevertheless, his odd narrational distance is at the forefront here. The fact that he is still wearing a noose as he descends may rather strike one as a bad omen.

Descending underground holds psychoanalytical, linguistic and symbolic connotations – a descent into hell, to the subconscious, into madness, fears of being buried alive, tombs and the term 'six feet under'. Entering the subconscious, one is supposed to uncover what the psyche has repressed. Descending into the underworld, like Aeneas, offers a chance to fight for one's, or others' lives or afterlives. The repeated talk of the Devil in the novel suggests a descent into hell, not the Christian Devil and the Christian Hell per se, but a 'modern myth' (cf. (Doležel, 1998, pp. 185-197)), wherein secular devils and hells are at play. There is also a connection to archeology, excavations and historical tombs that has a certain mystical air to it. In either case, a confrontation of the self or a threat is central to the image of descent.

The bunker itself is described as a prototypical Gothic space – hallways leading to who-knows-where, poorly lit by candles, reminiscent of a primitive laboratory or infirmary, full of embalmed corpses. Linking the bunker to the Nazi past of the area, one can also comment on the bunker as a modern ruin in relation to Nazi thought of eternity: "Nazi arcitecture in general, and the structure of the bunker in particular, should be understood as expressions of this existential will to permanence," (Featherstone, 2006, p. 303). Alex has become a quintessential horror villain – a mad scientist with hubristic plans and no regard for human life. His wish to eternalize the stories of his subjects show a similar hubris as the Nazi's who planted bunkers all over Europe. Alex interestingly repurposes the space leftover by the previous regime, like the Komenium did in their day,

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[88] "This is Belarus, my friend. No Kafka T-shirts are going to help us here," (p. 126)
[89] "In spite of my bleak situation, I'm looking forward to going inside. The forest is starting to make me sneeze […] I swing my head and arm around and the piece of rope's behind my back. I take it as a good sign" (p. 126)

but has distorted the healing and didactive values of the Komenium. He thus becomes a representation of the Devil as well, as the Workshop mainly is his project.

Even more stereotypically horror-villainesque, he has an incessant need to elaborate and explain his plans to his victim, retarding the process of murder, ultimately enabling the protagonist's escape. His transformation into a typical villain teeters on the verge of becoming parodic, lacking nothing but a maniacal laugh. Alex' moral turn is suspect, as commemoration and reverence for civilian lives lost during World War II trumps the lives of the survivors and civilians of today, rendering life itself at differing values. The photographer Rolf, who has not grown up surrounded by the horrors of World War II, has lost his mind when confronting 'the Devil's Workshop'. He too, performs the role of a horror stock character, the shell shocked, laughing maniac who slides between states of illness, i. e. throwing up, and hysteria. As the darkness and the twilight oscillate, the narrator comes closer to the actual state of revulsion and fear that awaits him in the bunker.

6.1.2   Human Puppets and the Poor Simulation of Life

In the bunker, the rooms are dimly lit by smoky candles and here the narrator sees the museum props properly for the first time. Embalmed elderly people are arranged along the walls with appropriate time pieces provided by the Ethnographic institute. Alex keeps sharing his plans for Chatyň and showing the narrator around, turning the puppets on and off again so he can display the mechanics, as well as show the recordings of their voices. In the infirmary, Rolf is back, supposed to help Alex with the embalming of professor Luis Tupinabi, who lays suspended in chemicals in a tub with his head gripped in a vice. Rolf is sobbing softly, and Alex explains to the narrator that, unlike him, Rolf is soft.

The human puppet has a direct and rich history related to the topic of the uncanny, most famously, perhaps, with Freud's ever-present essay "The Uncanny" (1919). Freud discusses "The Sandman" (1816), a short story by E. T. A. Hoffmann, intent on locating the source of uncanniness while simultaneously insisting on the folly and impossibility of the attempt. In the typical fashion of Freud, he ultimately brings it back to fear of castration, the removal of one's eyes becoming a castration stand-in. He interestingly does not consider the automaton, human doll Olympia, a source of uncanniness: "Because children play with their dolls as if they were alive, without the slightest feelings of repulsion or distress, uncertainty as to whether something is alive or inanimate cannot explain the feeling of uncanniness generated by Hoffmann's story, […] For Freud the doll

is relevant only insofar as it underlines the importance of a childhood context, and can be linked with the castration complex" (Kauppinen, 2000, p. 114).

This has been criticized, with claims that Olympia indeed is an exemplary representation of the uncanny; a doll so lifelike humans cannot distinguish whether she is real or not (pp. 113-120). Another famous human puppet is the monster of Frankenstein from Mary Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein* (1818). The monster is built from parts of dead human bodies and animated with 'a spark of life'. Faustian in his attempt to create life, Dr. Viktor Frankenstein[90] is seen as the prototypical mad scientist (Ball, 2011, p. 57) that Alex in turn resembles at the end of *Chladnou zemí*. The monster is imperfect in its form – quite different from Olympia, the monster is unnatural-looking, abnormally big and composite. In common with the puppets of *Chladnou zemí,* he is made from real human flesh.

This leads back to hesitation, and how teetering on the verge of not knowing whether something is real or unreal, creates an *unheimlich͵* uncanny sensation. The fear is not intellectual, in the sense that the uncanny feeling can be dispelled by a simple investigation and proof of life. The fact that the uncertainty may happen in the first place, and that, even after confirming the object's inanimate state, it may still invoke a fearful or unpleasant response is at the core of the uncanny nature of the human doll (Kauppinen, p. 118). "We recoil, not out of physical fear but because there is something about these creatures that is 'not right', that makes our flesh creep and, in the end, leaves us uncertain about the nature of our own humanity," (Ball, 2011, p. 120). The puppets offer no threat to the life of the narrator but instills a confrontation with the self.

Several elements distinguish Alex's dolls and these classical tales of the uncanny, when it comes to their human puppets: Like Olympia, they have no mind of their own, and are controlled by mechanics and the will of their creator. Like Frankenstein's monster, they consist of human remains, only simulating the movements of humans, not re-animated with *actual* life, whatever that may be in Shelley's novel. However, unlike Olympia, they can speak, but it is a canned speech, tapes of their confessions and tales as time witnesses from before they died or were murdered. Both Olympia and Frankenstein's monster are hubristic simulations of life, for which their creators are considered

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[90] In popularized iterations of the story through stage productions and film et cetera, not the actual character in Shelley's novel (Ball, 2011, p. 83)

responsible. Alex is equally responsible for his creations, but they differ in more than one aspect, an important one being their relation to history and memory.

The notion of rotting bodies and embalming is touched upon by Alex when he refers to the tradition of embalming communist state leaders, and the disastrous embalming of the first Czechoslovak general secretary Klement Gottwald, who, to the horror of Czechs and Slovaks, did indeed rot. Alex claims that it was in fact Luis Tupinabi who embalmed him faultily on request by Soviet authorities, because comparing Gottwald to Lenin or Stalin would be somehow ridiculous (p. 114). As such, Alex makes a claim about an actual historical event that is in no way verifiable, and doesn't affect the course of history greatly, but still implies play with and manipulation of historical fact, which is a recurring motif in *Chladnou zemí.*

As such, Alex' puppets have things in common both with classical tales of the uncanny as well as communist tradition. Frankenstein's monster struggles with the very human need for knowing where he is from, who he is – he is lacking a history. Alex' puppets are opposite in this regard – they are *only* history, they have in fact ceased to be human all together. They are not animated by life or, to follow Cartesian thought, animated by soul. Alex assures the narrator that, since it is an eastern tradition, he will soon get used to the embalmed bodies. Something that is tradition surely must mean that it is homely, *heimlich*, when in fact it is exactly *unheimlich*, uncanny. They are dolls made from biological material, simulating life through mechanics and recordings, which confronts basic notions of humanity, nature and memory at once.

With regards to memory, the recordings of the witnesses are significant. Coupled with the mechanistic and unnatural movements of the puppets, they constitute a central component of the puppets' performative functions. Their retellings of the horrors of the liquidation of Chatyň are painful reminders of the cruelty humans can inflict on each other. Although Holocaust museums often include these types of testimony (Radonic, 2011, pp. 356-357), usually in the form of written text or film recordings of witnesses, this rendition is different. By 'locating' the testimonies within these uncanny flesh-puppets, the stories embody horror in two ways at once – one way through the actual testimonies, and one through their embalmed bodies, proof of human suffering in a forever suspended state:

> Babka v šátku a dlouhý sukni sedí hned u dveří. Není živá. Ale jako bych měl za jejími brejličkami každou chvíli zahlídnout otevřený víčka a chytré oči. A tváři babí to škubne, hýbne rty. *Byla jsem ve sklepě s mámou a sestřičkou, dupali nad náma, sestřička chtěla křičet, tak jsem jí dala do pusy kus chleba, ať jí, ať mlčí. Držím jí ruku na puse, udusila se.*

> A pak už nemluví, jen naříká, kvílí, pořád. Alex odpojí drátky, vypne ji, [91] (p. 112)

Normally in *Chladnou zemí,* dialogue is rendered with regular font, without any markers such as hyphens or regular citation signs. The choice of putting the puppets' stories in italics further removes their statements from the living people in the story. Instead of live speech, it is dead, it is ghostly and distant, immutable. They can never edit their statement, answer anyone or interact. The statements become typographically marked, lifted out from the page.

Hesitation is a key point in understanding the source of unpleasantness in this part of the novel. In addition to the imminent threat of Alex with his disregard for life, there is a lingering unpleasantness in the bunker. Three levels of hesitation constitute this sensation. There is the hesitation regarding the puppets as being suspended in a non-life, described later by the narrator when he says that he knows a puppet of an old woman is dead, yet he expects her to open her eyes any minute (p. 112). Another hesitation is concerned with whether Alex is telling the truth when he claims that the people-turned-props voluntarily signed their contracts. This hesitation is finally relieved; the narrator asks him whether it is true that most of the old people asked to be included. His answer is witholding: "Většinou jo. Některý, […] Musíme být velicí ve snášení utrpení jiných," (p. 116)[92]. This is a moment of admittance of guilt that takes Alex from 'merely' mad scientist to actual murderer. Certainly Alex, in his willingness to murder living beings to honour the dead, has lost track of his humanity.

The very last point of hesitation is perhaps also the most unsettling. The narrator hesitates about whether the museum is amoral or not for a while: "[A] já mu chci vysvětlit, že tohle nemůže dělat, ale vlastně nevím… proč ne?" (p. 113)[93]. In many ways he does understand and sympathize with Alex and the Belarusians' goals. During the novel, the narrator laments that westerners keep educating him about his region's own history, tired of being looked down at for living within a topography of historical horror. His disorientation and discomfort shines through while he contemplates:

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[91] "An old lady in a scarf and long skirt is sitting right by the door. She's not alive but it's like any moment her eyelids are going to open behind her glasses. Her face twitches, lips move. *I was in the cellar with my mum and little sister, they were stamping around upstairs, my little sister was going to scream so I put a piece of bread in her mouth, to keep her quiet. I was holding my hand on her mouth and she suffocated. /* She stops talking and just starts groaning and wailing, on and on. Alex disconnect the wires, turns her off," (p. 127)

[92] "Most of them, yeah. Some, […] We must become great in enduring the suffering of others" (p. 132)

[93] "[And] I want to tell him, I can't do this, but I actually don't know, why not?" (p. 128)

> Příběhy tiše šeptané nebo vyprávěné přeskakujícími hlasy se proplétají s
> brečením a štkaním, motám se mezi nimi, co chvíli zakopnu o nějaké poházené
> nářadí, o vany, z nichž to páchne chemií a masem, motá se mi hlava z toho
> puchu, anebo se mi motá odporem k tomu, co tu s lidmi dělají, co to Alexe
> napadlo? To nesmí dělat.
> Ale pak mě hryzne pochybnost. Proč vlastně? Proč by to nesměl dělat? Chce
> stočit oči světa sem, do Ďáblovy dílny. Takhle se mu to povede, (p. 113)[94]

Being forced to link the horror to actual people he knows and cares about is what snaps him out of the grotesque romance with which he entertains Alex' ideas. This is not a moral choice, but a personal choice, and again the reader is reminded of the grey moral makeup of the narrator, despite his reactions of revulsion at the museum. It is linked to the revelation of Lebo's fate. The narrator's half-brother and healing leader of the Komenium has also been turned into a puppet, a museum prop. The portrayal of the Lebo-machine is the most horrific of all the puppets, not because of his story, which comparatively is less violent, but in the combined personal reaction from the narrator and the machinery's malfunctioning: "[Můj] Lebo kýve hlavou nahoru dolů, něco se zaseklo," [95] (p. 119). When the narrator finally sees the puppet of Lebo, he describes exactly what makes a doll uncanny – it was Lebo, yet it was not, he is sitting hunched over like he always did, dressed as he always was and yet, it is not Lebo – strange familiarity.

> Sedí tam, lehce předkloněný, tak jsem ho znal celý život, během těch večerů,
> kdy mluvil ke studentům Koménia, které tak léčil, vypadal takhle, sedí dokonce
> na pryčně sbité z latěk. Na sobě má černý oblek. Alexovi jde o autenticitu.
> Myslím, že tohle chtěl.
> Abych takhle uviděl Leba.
> Rolf mě sem dovedl. A já se měl posrat. Šéf, pan Neústupný, má totiž všechny
> karty v rukou.
> Jo, málem mě dostal. Málem jsem Leba pozdravil. Jenže on nežije.
> Uvědomím si, že pila už není slyšet, [96] (p. 117)

Alex arrives and 'turns on' Lebo, claiming that Lebo volunteered for the project. The recording starts sputtering like a broken record, and the narrator, horrified and in disbelief of Alex' claims, has finally had enough. While Alex is on the floor, tugging at wires to locate the technical problem, the narrator hits him over the head with a set of pliers.

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[94] "Stories softly whispered or told in cracking voices mix with sobs and moans. I stagger from one to the next, tripping over the tools littering the floor, vats reeking of chemicals and flesh. My head reels from the smell, or is it disgust at what they're doing here? What was Alex thinking? You can't do this to people. / But then I'm gnawed by doubt. Actually why shouldn't he? He wants the eyes of the world to turn here, and this'll do the trick," (pp. 128-129)

[95] "Lebo's head nods up and down, something's jammed" (p. 135)

[96] "He's sitting there, in a black suit, bent slightly forward, just like I knew him my whole life. All those evenings he spoke to the students of the Komenium, the ones he healed, he looked like this. He's even sitting on a bunk bed made of slats. Alex is all about authenticity. / I think this is what he wanted. / For me to see Lebo like this. / So I would shit my pants. So I'd know who's holding all the cards. / It almost worked. I almost said hello. / I realize I don't hear the saw any more," (p. 133)

Rolf, in his unstable state, also resembles the puppets – Freud linked the uncanny to fits of epilepsy and manifestations of insanity because "they give us […] a glimpse of humankind bereft of will but not of animation, a mere mindless machine" (Ball, 2011, p. 122). After hitting Alex, the narrator tries to get Rolf to come along, but he is too far gone. "Je to tu velký, šeptá, / Kecy! / Zůstanu s nima. Líbí se mi to. Blíž se nejde dostat. / K čemu? / K hrůze," [97] (p. 120). Rolf's loss of sanity and humanity is complete. This unhinged exchange makes for the final tableau before the narrator escapes back up the stairs, knocking over candles and burning it down. The narrator portrays it as accidental. The bunker thus becomes a literal burning pit underground, a neat representation of hell. Whether the narrator created it by purposefully setting fire to it, or Alex created it by forcing people into his mold of memory, the reader may decide for themselves.

The familiar made strange and hesitation on the line between dead/alive, real/unreal are showcased in the bunker scene in *Chladnou zemí*. The reader is met with scenes that invoke disgust and fear, but also stories of Actual World historical value. What one may question is the moral value of exposing the stories of the puppets. Alex's goal can be interpreted to be mainly to shock, not educate. The reader may have the same experience reading this novel. The framework for a didactic reading experience is there – discussions of memory, victimhood and state sanctioned discourse around trauma are afterall present in the novel. But this last splash of timewitness storytelling is flooded and overwhelmed, both by the narrator's personal visceral reactions to the space, and the repulsive and horrifying stories of the dolls. The fact that the space is inhabited by an active threat – Alex who threatens to cut the narrator up – also disrupts the reader's potential to reflect on the historical value the puppets may have in the AW. Instead, the space becomes a horrorscape from which the narrator only wishes to escape, and consequently, whether by accident or not, burn down.

6.2 *Strážci občanského dobra* – The End

6.2.1 The Colonization of the Other
The fear of and confrontation with the Other are staples of Gothic horror fiction (Aguirre, 2006, p. 15; Horner & Zlosnik, 2005, p. 1). An Other is whatever the observer may view as threateningly 'different than' themselves and because of the fear of the unknown will wish

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[97] "It's great here, he whispers. / Bullshit! / I'm staying with them. I like it. It's the closest you can get. / To what? / To horror," (p. 136)

to reject or dominate (Sharp, 2011, p. 2). Typically, it is understood as in a binary oppositional relationship, a distancing created between an 'us' and a 'them'. Often the perception of the othered says more about the characteristics we wish to reject from ourselves than any inherent truth about the 'them'-grouping (Bernasconi et al., 2012, p. 152). Othering is often related to minority groups such as queer people, people of colour and people of other religions in opposition to that of the perceived norm of the majority. As such, othering is also a part of discourse around discrimination, racism and bigotry (Sharp, p. 3).

In *Strážci občanského dobra,* Hůlová utilizes othering as a constituting factor of the way Komárková sees the people around her. Her attachment to ideas of tribalism and judging whole groups of people as one indicates to the reader the possibility of a reading of othering in the novel where racialized othering and Gothic horror-othering overlap. Viewing othering as merely a binary opposition between an 'us' and a 'them' can be simplistic, and thinkers like Sartre have developed theories that pluralise and fragment the Other as concept (Bernasconi et al., 2012, pp. 154-155). For this chapter, however, the understanding of othering is mainly reliant on the oppositional structures created in Komárková's mind with regards to the Romani, the Vietnamese, and the 'undependables' as Others. Rejection of what we dislike or fear the most about ourselves is typical material for horror stories, and as such, the othering present in this novel, touches upon a combination of Gothic horror-othering and a pressing contemporary political discourse in Czech Republic. How can we create a connection between the racist othering related to contemporary Czech discourse and the Gothic horror-othering of repression and fear? They both relate directly to the fear of the unknown, and very particularly in Komárková's case, a need to assert dominance.

The two minority groups that are pitted against each other in Komárková's mind are the Romani and the Vietnamese. In the actual Czech Republic of the AW, Vietnamese have been immigrating in different waves through bilateral agreements since the 1950's, with a particularly large group arriving between 1979-1985 (Svobodá & Janská, 2016, p. 123). Vietnamese constitute the third largest immigrant community in Czech Republic (p. 121). "Vietnamese who settled in the Czech Republic after the fall of communism often drew on community networks [...] Initially, [they] clustered in the country's border regions and mainly sold textiles, electronics, and groceries. From this period comes the common stereotype of a Vietnamese migrant as a 'stall-keeper,'" (p. 123), a stereotype a reader of *Strážci občanského dobra* will recognize immediately. Another stereotype connected to

Vietnamese immigrants that is also present in the novel is that Vietnamese children do above average in school and as a consequence this is linked to obedience and lack of individual will (p. 131). In general, Vietnamese immigrants, in contrast to other groups and communities, are considered a 'model' minority.

The Romani has a long historical presence in Europe, as well as an extensive history of alienation, discrimination and abuse. The current population in the Czech Republic mainly migrated from Slovakia after the war, and is estimated to consist of 150,000 and 400,000 individuals (Eckert, 2015, pp. 83-84). As with the example of Chanov, the suburb-ghetto to Most mentioned in 3.2.2, Romani have been made to live in sub-par housing areas and in forced ghettoization. This has to do with the authorities banning the nomadic lifestyle during the communist era (p. 84). Unlike the Vietnamese children, who are lauded for their achievements in school, Romani still receive sub-par education which leads to high rates of unemployment (Amnesty, 2009). "The label *nepřizpůsobiví* [plural] meaning 'those incapable of adjusting, assimilating, living by the cultural values of the majority and meeting educational standards' has been used exclusively in reference to the Roma," (Eckert, p. 85) in Czech media, a negative stereotype that Komárková believes wholeheartedly. In the novel, their arrival and history in the Czech lands is not mentioned.

The tension between the two minority groups in *Strážci občanského dobra* becomes a creative variation on a larger discourse that takes place in contemporary Czech Republic, where Vietnamese are often referred to as "good aliens" and the Romani as "bad aliens" (Klípa, 2014). Even though there are negative stereotypes such as connection to drug trafficking in the Vietnamese community, in general, Vietnamese immigrants are seen as more industrious, well assimilated and non-threatening than the Romani population. Komárková harnesses these stereotypes for her warped political cause, and Hůlová distorts the discourse, turning it into absurd street fights between children and adults representing different groups.

In the chapter 5.2.1, I related some of Komárková's judgements and thoughts on the Romani and the Vietnamese, and how they, in her mind, differ as peoples. In contradictory statements, she praises the Vietnamese for their loyalty and group mentality and at the same time chides the Romani for being tribal-minded and sticking to themselves. I will in the following give a more thorough description of how she others these groups in ways that simultaneously Other herself. I will also show how Krakov-as-

war-zone becomes a landscape 'colonized by the Other,' and takes the political satire to levels of horror.

The Vietnamese immigrants are the objects of exotification by Komárková. She cannot conceive of how the Vietnamese came to live the Czech Republic, and creates a mental image of an Oriental Other: "[…] místo Vietnamců v teplákovkách jsem si představovala bosonohý lidičky ve slamácích, co se nemotaj mezi horou falešnejch adidasek, ale na loďkách po rejžovým poli a pak jdou spát do hliněný chajdičky," (p. 94)[98]. In her mind, Komárková recontextualizes the Vietnamese into exotic, primitive beings, yet: "[n]othing is inherently exotic. The exotic is produced by a process which recontextualizes specifically in ways relative to us," (Bernasconi et al., p. 151). Komárková's lack of knowledge here creates, in her mind an exotic framework in which to place the Vietnamese. She never once describes an individual Vietnamese person as having any personality traits, thoughts, characteristics or even gives them a voice. As such, the Vietnamese group appears completely uniform, the only difference ever mentioned is age or gender. The process of exotification typically involves a Western person thinking well of a group but still considering it in need of 'guidance' from someone more well equipped, a thoroughly colonial thought (p. 152). This is exactly what Komárková does through her infiltration and leadership of the community.

Many statements made by the narrator in former chapters refer to her dislike of the Romani, but a few quotes demonstrating her thoughts on the population as primitive will follow here, in order to show how othering may function in this particular respect. The Romani are objectified in a way that completely strips them of humanity, and the narrator frequently refer to them as literal animals:

> Cikánky lasičky nosily tácky s panákama a vysušenej cigoš, co měl v koutku pusy přilepený cigáro, vytáhnul skřipky a pustil se do falešný muziky. Lidi hlava na hlavě začali poskakovat po pokoji jako medvědi a svlíkali svršky. Nějakej chlap zabořil jedný z lasiček hlavu mezi prsa, salva smíchu bouchla jako šampaňský, (p. 159)[99]

Towards the end of the novel both groups have aquired weapons and are shooting, but "[…v] černý čtvrti hlavně od cigošů, vzduchovkama stříleli s jásotem jako na jarmareční

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[98] "[...] instead of the Vietnamese wearing sweatpants, I imagined barefooted little people in straw hats who didn't stagger around mountains of fake Adidas, but in boats in rice fields and eventually went home to sleep in mud huts,"

[99] "The weasely Gypsy women were carrying trays with shots and a dried-out old Gypsy fella, who had a cigar glued to the corner of his mouth, pulled out a fiddle and started playing music out of tune. People started jumping around the room like bears in close quarters, pulling of their shirts. Some guy buried his face inbetween a weasel's bosoms, the laughter exploded like champagne,".

pouti. Závažnost situace jako by jim nedocházela," (p. 199)[100]. This simultaneously points to Komárková's view of the Romani as far more primitive than 'her' group, as well as underlining the gravity with which she treats the situation. Up until the point where the Romani move into Krakov, the narrator has actually not encountered many of them. She is confronted by their presence for the first time in Milada and Standas' flat in the black quarter and she reacts with abject fear: "Přitiskla jsem se ke stěně jako dítě co se ve strachu vrhá do svejch dlaní, že u ždi splynu jako v maskáčích s divokejma barvama," (p. 155)[101]. Her fear is here shown to be at a primal level, and also interestingly she brings up camouflage, both referencing the increase in militaristic imagery and the Indian tribal fantasy she engages in. In general, Komárková reiterates a swath of unsavory, stereotypical and racist AW beliefs about the Romani population in the novel. They rise to such a level of dehumanization that the Romani become extreme threats, primitive and animalistic. Her views echo the notions implicated in the term '*nepřizpůsobiví*', showing how she gobbles up a narrative fed to her by hearsay and her father.

The othering of groups in this way is not very interesting in and of itself in this novel, as it has already been thoroughly established that the narrator is both a bigot, unreliable and inconsistent in her opinions. The compelling part is how she distorts the othering by creating a second layer of tribalism through her Indian illusion. She defamiliarizes something that has already been defamiliarized. By this, I mean that she takes a space, the imaginary Krakov that still emulates a real, possibly even connoting a historical place, and on the first level of defamiliarization, talks of the space and the people as disturbing Others, a war zone between distorted representations of groups. Then she adds the layer of self-exotification where she herself is a part of an Indian tribe: "[Jsem] taky indiánka zvěd, co je zas něčemu na stopě. […] Schovala jsem se za keřem před oknem do obejváku a pozorovala jsem, co se vevnitř děje," (p. 158)[102]. In this quote, Komárková has just exited Milada and Standa's flat when she realized it was full of Romani. Referring to herself as an Indian scout connects the pioneers and the Indian tribe further.

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[100] "[...] in the black quarter it was mainly the gypsies, shooting air rifles in jubliation like it was a spring market. It seems like they did not grasp the gravity of the situation,".

[101] "I pressed myself against the wall like a child, hiding in my hands, hoping that I would blend into the wall like I was wearing camouflage,"

[102] "I was also an Indian scout, who once again was on the trail of something [...] I hid behind the bush in front of the living room window to see what was happening,".

Between these descriptions of the two groups, the narrator thus builds an utterly unfair fight in the mind of a reader, a fight between children in scouts' uniforms and bears, weasels and autonomous youths. The docility and innocence of the Vietnamese children starts waning as the conflict in Krakov escalates and as the narrator falls deeper into her fantastical version of reality. The uniform and uniform*ed* children march through the streets of Krakov singing pioneer songs. The militarized children who are "[…hrozily] pěstičkama, ve kterejch já už viděla šutráky a kovový tyče," [103] (p. 177) do indeed connote child soldiers and an exoticized Hitlerjugend. Komárková welcomes their increasing volatility, as the militia grows steadily in size, requiring high-level organization. The respective leaders of the mens' squad and the womens' squad, Lan and Wej, are only eight years old, but due to seniority, Komárková sees no problem with assigning them critical tasks when she is whisked away to Prague: "[...]Wej měl na starost zásobování a Lan koordinovala naše hlavní předáky," (p. 203)[104]. This quote indicates the absurd level of trust she places in two eight-year-old chilren and also shows to what extent the operation has grown into a militia unit at the end of the novel.

Krakov has become thoroughly "colonized by the Other" (cf. Aguirre 2005, p.17) at the end of *Strážci občanského dobra.* The final change turning the black quarter into a Gothic, liminal space, happens the moment Komárková understands that the Romani indeed have joined forces with the 'undependables' and now live there. The place that was formerly threatening has now become infected with her worst nightmare. This coincides with her turn in narrational mode (see 5.2.1), the moment her true delusion sets in. The pioneers are called fascists (p. 183) by the 'undependables'. Because of the story being told from the narrator's point of view, this does not bother her, as she is certain of her righteousness. However, the fact that she is actively racist towards the Romani population of Krakov II and called a fascist, points to the larger context of the treatment of Romani in the AW Czech Republic. There has been a surge of neo-Nazi activity in Czech Republic, and in particular anti-Romani activities have risen (ČTK, 2019; Eckert, 2015, pp. 84-85; Klípa, 2014). Komárková does not indicate any understanding that she is being linked to these types of behaviour or attitudes, but conveniently buries the negative associations under slogans of socialism, anti-capitalism, order, security and safety.

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[103] "[Their] threatening fists, in which I could already see rocks and metal rods,"
[104] "Wej was responsible for the supplies and Lan co-ordinated our chief leaders"

The development of the conflict turns Krakov into a militarized zone occupied by several othered groups in high tension confrontation. The tension between the 'undependables' and the pioneers keeps escalating, threats are issued, rocks and fire balls are thrown across the barrier. The narrator unsurprisingly blames the 'undependables' for the escalation of violence. The first life taken in the conflict rests on her troupe's shoulders however. A local young man[105] questions her, having neither sided with the 'undependables' nor the patriots: "O hrůzách kapitalismu mě nenechal říct ani tři věty a vlastně ani moji vlastní lidi za mejma zádama ne. Ratata. Ratatata. Ratata. A bylo po něm. Tomáš byl první," [106] (p. 200). This is the most specifically violent act recounted in the novel. The narrator is, as evident in the quote at least on the level of her narration, unaffected by this.

After Tomáš' death, the narrator is whisked away from the action on the trip to Prague on the way to Milada and Standa's art show. This breaks with the build-up of tension in the story, and the narrator starts describing driving through the Czech landscape and seeing the St. Vitus cathedral in Prague for the first time. As a reader, the break might appear absurd, and based on the textual evidence in the novel that she may in fact be institutionalized, might even suggest a dissociative episode. At the art show she receives two disturbing phone calls. First, Anděla calls, crying and screaming. She explains that the situation is starting to look bleak, and that the forces from Debrecen and Charkov[107] have bailed, before she is cut off. A moment later she receives a call from Lan and Wej who have barricaded themselves in a basement: "[o]bě děti brečely a jen si mezi sebou předávaly telefon, kloudnýho mi neřekly skoro nic. Chtěly od svý velitelky poradit, co maj dělat. Ale moc dobře to věděly samy. Poslední možnost je jenom jedna a všichni pionýráci se o ní učili," [108] (p. 206).

This is the last thing heard or said from Krakov: two eight-year-old children crying, desperately reaching out to their leader who, seemingly, asks them to sacrifice themselves for the cause, while she is away. Needless to say, the ending is ominous and unresolved. She merely states that "[j]ak to celý s Krakovem dopadlo, každej ví," (p. 206), "how it all came down in Krakov, everybody knows", which is obviously not true for the reader. The

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[105] Brother to one of her former classmates, no less.

[106] "He didn't let me say anything about the horrors of capitalism, and neither did the people standing behind me. Ratata. Ratatata. Ratata. And he was no more. Tomáš was the first to go,"

[107] Apparently the revolution has spread to the neighboring model towns, indicating how huge the project has become

[108] "Both children were crying and kept sending the phone back and forth between them, so I couldn't make out any sensible words. They wanted to confer with their leader about what they should do. But they knew that very well on their own. There was only one final possibility, and all the pioneers knew it by heart,"

reader is also not informed of any other specific deaths in Krakov, but as Tomáš is deemed the first, it is only fair to assume more casualties. The narrator insinuates that her father and Vojta are the only people she has left, which in addition indicates that Anděla, Lan, Wej and other members of her troupe are not in her life anymore.

Othering is a powerful tool when creating horror fiction. Komárková's level of delusion is hard to ascertain due to her having the narrative voice and thus, the power, but the extremely racialized grouping of the troupes, whether the Romani siding with the 'undependables' or the Vietnamese with the patriots, are strongly divided into two factions. Komárková becomes a manifestation of current racist and problematic views held in the Czech Republic, a worst-case scenario of pitting ethnicities against one another. This is yet another point towards this not being merely a historical novel, but one concerned with modern political concerns and thoughts, warped through a lens of horror that distorts the basic iterations of these views, throws them into absurd relief and creates an unfavourable and unpleasant mirror exorcise for readers that may have held similar, latent views about the minority groups that inhabit the AW Czech Republic.

6.2.2   Distorting the Gothic Heroine - Liminal Poetics

Having covered the groups of people that constitute the main competing forces in this othered liminal space, a last look at the narrator as a liminal character is in order. In a Gothic tale, "[...lines] of confrontation between good and evil are invariably drawn up early in the plot of the Gothic novel, and satisfactory resolution depends upon the clear re-establishment of acceptable boundaries," (Horner & Zlosnik, 2005, p. 1). In this novel, the central plot of Komárková's journey is exactly to create acceptable boundaries for herself, but the world she lives in resists this. The political and the personal is braided together in the character, as she is stuck in the perpetual fight against her surroundings. Komárková is a young woman fighting a transition – a political and a personal transition at once. As mentioned in 5.1.2, she is alienated from the world of adults. Her dislike of adulthood in several ways mirrors her dislike of the 'counter-revolution'. Stuck in a nostalgic past, she struggles to accept the new demands the world thrusts upon her; accepting capitalism and womanhood. She describes both sex and capitalism as monsters. She cannot connect politically or personally to whom might be her closes allies, the adults in the local communist party after 1989. She is repulsed at how people exploit the system and each other in a worse way than during communism, and she blames it on the corruption of adults and capitalism at the same time.

The last part of the novel comprises her time in the liminal stage, the expanded borderland that allows the Other access. The intertwining of her political resistance and her personal, pubescent struggle creates for an interesting and fruitful foray into the borderlands of Gothic horror theory. The previous sub-chapter looked into the otherness aspect and how that influences horror and her racialized othering of her surroundings. This sub-chapter will discuss Komárková as a liminal heroine fighting gendered expectations of her, and her refusal to adapt to the world of adulthood.

       She is repulsed by sex, as seen here when she walks in on Anděla and Masál, Anděla's lover and financial benefactor of the pioneers: "Jen se mi tak potvrdilo, že o nic nepřicházím, a to, že jsem frigidní, […] Ani jeden z těch dvou rudejch vytřeštěnejch obličejů, co se na mě vyděšeně obrátily, bych nechtěla nosit ani zadarmo. Ani ten neladnej pohyb, v kterým ustali, když skříply dveře, mě nelákal," (p. 168) [109]. The act seems monstrous to her, with descriptions of gaping mouths, awkward thrusting, red faces, Anděla and Masál indeed convey the impression of a two-headed monster rather than a couple making love. She accepts her personal lack of lust, but still succumbs referring to herself by the sexist and demaning term 'frigid' instead of reflecting upon it further. She refers to the oppression of living under capitalism in other monstrous terms: "[měla jsem] po takový době dolejzání za kapitalistickou hydrou právě dost," (p. 149)[110].

       The young heroine is a prototypical character in classical Gothic fiction. Often, she finds herself lost in a place or situation from which she struggles to extricate herself, threatened by evildoers or spectres (Ellis, 2012, p. 463). "Passive, weak and virginal [in some works] and passionate, strong and indipendent [in others]" (Abartis, 1979, p. 257), she is complex, and has been critizised and hailed by feminist theoreticians (Ellis, p. 457; Wisker, 2005, p. 237). One of the main traits that bind a lot of these young heroines together is exactly the fact that they are young – portrayed in the liminal process between youth and adulthood. The spectres and evildoes haunting them have been read as representations of sexuality, violent masculinity and adulthood made monstrous (Ellis, p. 463). The heroine's fight has thus been to come to terms with becoming a sexual being, succombing to the powers of adulthood and surrendering her innocence (p. 459). This reading is old-fashioned, dependent on psychoanalytical approaches, and also on the most

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[109] "Thus it was confirmed to me that I really am not missing out on anything and that I am indeed frigid [...]. I wouldn't want to be one of those red, gaping faces that turned towards me, even if you paid me. The inelegant movement that ceased as the door slid open did not entice me either,"
[110] "At that time I had had enough crawling for the capitalistic hydra".

formulaic of classical Gothic fiction. However, it does include an interesting point with regards to spatiality and liminality, youth and rebellion. Komárková is, in most ways, not a traditional Gothic heroine. She does not quiver at the sight of threatening structures nor does she have any romantic interest around her. However, as I have suggested these novels as potential Gothic horror narratives, an exploration of the traits that do link her to the Gothic heroine is in place.

Because of her alienation, Komárková despises the world of adults. As mentioned in 5.1.2, this encompasses the world of sex, alcohol and tobacco. She finds adults to be disearnest and hypocritical, ironic of course, as she herself is a master hypocrite. In addition to this, she refuses to adhere to the scripted gender requirements of caring about one's looks, something several of her female contemporaries tease her about. Her world is practical and pragmatic. Milada calls her "frigidní soudružka učitelka" [111] (p. 139), and Komárková asks what 'frigid' means, only to be laughed visciously at. She is berated for being precocious while not having access to the world of adulthood. This, to add to the humilitation, is directed at her by her younger sister who easily outmanouvered her in the carnal department from early teenage years.

In her lack of fellowship and understanding with adults (cf. the communist party after 1989, relationship with Milada and Standa, being fired from her supermarket job for being slow), Komárková re-establishes a connection to her childhood by reinventing the pioneer troupe of her youth. She engages children in her search for connection, underlining a longing for the past. The nostalgic aspects of dressing the children in uniforms from her youth, even getting her mother to sow new pioneer scarves for her troupe, shows to which extent she wishes to relive and reimagine her most successful years. Being a young communist child in the early 1980's was a joy for her – even when she struggled to make connections with her contemporaries, she had an entire all-encompassing societal belief backing her. She buys the Vietnamese children winterboots, and make sure they eat well when they have operations underway. Similarly, she is concerned for her nephew. She provides him with clothes and care as well, and is upset at "[…malej] ségřin kluk k tomu celý dopoledne poskakoval v počuranejch teplácích," [112] (p. 160). This concern for the kids can be a combination of identification and a possessive maternal instinct.

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[111] "Frigid comrade teacher", in demeaning reference to her sister's lecturing and precocious way of acting
[112] "My sister's kid, jumping around in pissed sweatpants all morning"

When she was little, playing Indian makebelief inspired by *Winnetou* was Komárková's absolute favourite passtime (p. 22) but it is a game that both Anděla (p. 108) and Milada (pp. 22, 51) resist. The female contemporary counterparts that she measures herself up against reject her wish to engage in childish fantasies. Her reaction is to force them to take her seriously by realizing the tribe through the pioneers. Anděla, the friend that she helped out in school with leftover clothes become her co-mother of the Vietnamese children (p. 172), and Milada and Standa become the representatives of the enemy tribe consisting of Romani and 'undependables' that are tainted by the Romani's otherness. The seed of the imaginary enemy Indians is planted early in her mind, and it is already linked to the Vidlička family when she is still in school:

> A pak jsem přemejšlela, jak se Vidličkovi vlastně do Krakova dostali nebo spíš proč je sem poslali, takovýhle lidi budovat socialistický město dobrovolně nepřijedou, a představovala jsem si Vidličku s tlupou vyholenejch indošů, jak přepadaj mý indoše kmene Hokama, co na týpku maj transparent Víc hlav víc ví. Jak jeho vyholený indoši v noci přepadaj spící vesnici a každýmu mýmu indiánovi bez slitování a úplně potichu vrážej kudlu do zad, (p. 33)[113]

This is her reaction to being treated rudely by Standa's mother on the International Womens' Day. Vidličková, a known dissident like her husband, closes the door on young Komárková just after reciting a socialist poem and handing her a carnation. The embarrassment and childish consternation of rejection stings her, but instead of delving into the hurt feelings, she keeps it to herself and instead creates an imagined opposition between her tribe and the ruthless dissident tribe. When the pioneers are realized in her adult years, one could view this as a way for Komárková to avenge the feelings of rejection and pain she suffered as a child.

An effect of Komárková's othering of the Vietnamese is the uniformity with which she treats them. Her first and main interactions are with the children, and as a consequence, the entire 'tribe' of Vietnamese are infantilized in her mind. As they all are perceived as one uniform group, the adults and the children are equalized and share the same traits. As such, the pioneers' parents are also part of the Vietnamese group that Komárková has constructed in her mind, and that means that they too symbolically are her children. Obeying, quiet, docile and industrious children that follow her command and do not question her authority or her plans. Her reigning over them provides her with a whole

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[113] "And then I pondered how the Vidlicka family had even come to Krakov, or rather, why they had been sent here, because people like them do not come voluntarily to build a socialist town. I imagined the Vidličkas together with a gang of shaven Indians, how they attacked my Indian tribe, Hokama, who has the motto "more heads think better than one" written on their tipi, and how the shaven Indians ambushed the sleeping village and stabbed each and every one of my Indians mercilessly in the back"

flock of children she could never have conceived otherwise. This is linked to her lack of sexual power in combination with her need to dominate the Other.

Komárková is, like many Gothic heroines, presumably a virgin. As such, she cannot become a mother the conventional way. A Gothic heroine's journey is often put to rest when she finds a man to protect her, and, implicitly, relieve her of her virginity. No such thing is in the cards for Komárková, but she eventually becomes a motherfigure to her troupe, her nephew and, in some respects, Anděla. By doing this, she upsets the status quo, especially by usurping Milada as a mother by having Vojta removed from his parents and put in the care of her own dad instead, with the prospect of turning him into a good little pioneer in the end. Pointing back to the re-establishment of acceptable boundaries as a necessary factor for a satisfactory ending, in *Strážci občanského dobra* no such thing is possible, and the reader is left wondering how Komárková's fate may turn out.

6.3   Summary

In this chapter I have claimed that these novels, in particular the last chapters of each, can be read as Gothic horror stories. Both novels can be seen showcasing modern variations on rather traditional topics of Gothic horror, ousting a purely historical-mimetic approach to interpretation of the works. In *Chladnou zemí*, the narrator must confront a cold and hostile landscape steeped in imagery of death and historical trauma. Chatyň is a graveyard, and the bunker in which Alex is preparing the human puppets is an underground Gothic laboratory, the rooms are chambers of tabooed tinkering with dead bodies. The puppets themselves constitute a rather novel interpretation of the classical uncanny doll. Confronting the simultaneous fear of its being alive and being dead, the timewitness puppets create a link between oral history and memory that is perverted and eclipses the potentially noble goals of memory. *Strážci občanského dobra* also offers up a landscape that changes and turns increasingly inhospitable. Unlike the narrator of *Chladnou zemí,* the narrator in *Strážci občanského dobra* is a central agent behind creating this landscape. By othering the Vietnamese and the Romani to the extent that no one longer is human or worthwhile, she creates a fantasy land of tribe versus tribe. The confused imagery that oscillates between militaristic and primitive-fantastical bleeds together and lets the reader enter her liminal Gothic hometown as it emerges in her mind. She herself can also be interpreted as a classical Gothic figure – the virginal heroine trapped in a transformation of the body. Usurping her sister's position as mother to Vojta, Komárková distorts the

heroine figure by becoming a villain and monster. Instead of freeing herself and emerging on the 'other side', Komárková gets stuck in the limen – and becomes forever trapped in a mental distortion.

7 Concluding remarks

In this thesis I have undertaken a reading of *Chladnou zemí* and *Strážci občanského dobra,* a reading very much influenced by the reactions and remarks made by Czech literary critics and several different scholars. What I wanted to do at the outset was to challenge the general opinions and ideas that lingered around these novels – that they are concerned mostly, if not exclusively, with history and that their absurd conclusions are unearned and weaken the works. This last observation is particularly true for critics of Hůlová, whose novel has been treated as the less accomplished of the two, possibly due to Topol's heightened status in Czech literary discourse. In order to unpack the aspects of these novels that were less developed among critics, I characterized this as a 'sense of unreality', something ephemeral and indescribable – and attempted to describe it. My research question has been: *In what way* and *to what end* does the interplay between representations of reality and unreality distort and affect the relationship to history and genre in the novels *Chladnou zemí* (2009) and *Strážci občanského dobra* (2010)?

By applying Possible Worlds theory along with Gothic horror scholarship, I claim to have accessed two possible fictional worlds that carry within them a tension between the real and the unreal. They make the reader question the stories at many turns, whether the veracity of the narrators' accounts, the factuality of historical events described or the descriptions of the fictional worlds themselves. The unravelling begins subtly and picks up speed as the novels near their concluding pages. If we entertain the notion that we may take Gothic horror seriously as a genre and allow it to be an interesting staple of modern cultural life, instead of relegating it to the corners of 'formulaic' and 'camp', we may discover wonderful and whimsical stories that make us wonder and question the state of things. Reading horror stories is not merely a cathartic impulse to remind ourselves that we are alive and safe, it may very well be pleasurable in and of itself to challenge serious topics of history. Horror distorts, as does humour, and they are closely connected in their ability to consider things anew – the line between revulsion and raucous laughter is a fine one. As such, I do not disagree with the notion that *Strážci občanského dobra* can be read as a satire – I just believe there is even more to be gained by mining the coal-rich ground of Krakov for the Gothic humans and spaces that linger there. I also do not dismiss World War II as a main motif and topic of *Chladnou zemí,* I merely suggest that mechanical human puppets might not tell us much of actual historical horrors but rather horrors of our own distortion of history.

What Jáchym Topol and Petra Hůlová accomplish in these novels is to tamper with the reader's expectations – so much so, that some critics dismiss the novels as unrealistic. Unrealistic is here understood as something negative, something 'not serious'. Personally, this is exactly the reason the novels delighted me in the first place. The novels mix genres, meld Actual World places with fictional places, and invent new Czech history, unburdened by reality. Readers are invited into imaginative worlds where unexpected things happen in historical or mundane spaces, spaces that come alive with Gothic imagery – not only spectres of history.

My interest here has been to shed light upon different ways of reading modern novels set in a very recent past. Readers are inclined to understand the worlds represented as our own, unless textually incentivized otherwise. What these authors do is to create a niggling sensation of dislocation that grows – undermining a reader's perceived knowledge of the space. Understanding the novels as depictions of history or historical spaces is faulty. Relegating them uniquely to the genre-specific Gothic horror will also lead to incomplete conclusions. Instead, the teetering on the brink is what makes these novels interesting. They might comment on historical 'truths' or eras and might give colourful and different descriptions of times and discourses that are recognizable to many readers. At the same time the novels take some of the most basic fears of the human – the eternal return, the fear of the Other, the confrontation with the irrational self – and turn them into specific and original concepts through the Vietnamese childrens' militia and the Alex's mechanical human puppets. Czech and World War II history become backdrops onto which the authors can distort, disrupt and maim the notion of a cohesive and agreed-upon representation of historical fact. This is achieved through the creation of unstable fictional possible worlds.

8 Literature

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