

## LIFE IS ELSEWHERE?<sup>1</sup>

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**Key words:** contemporary Czech fiction, ‘places with a mystery’, place in literary studies, Daniela Hodrová, Josef Pánek, Matěj Hořava, Anna Cima

**Summary:** The article analyses the specific concept of the ‘place with a mystery’ developed in the works of Daniela Hodrová and applies it to the novels of contemporary Czech authors, Josef Pánek, Matěj Hořava and Anna Cima. The aim of the article is to establish the connection between the novels in terms of the shift in meaning and the symbolism of the ‘places with a mystery’, which may be the foundations of the new existentialist branch of the contemporary Czech fiction.

## ŽIVOT JE DRUGDJE?

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**Ključne riječi:** suvremena češka književnost, ‘mjesto s tajnom’, mjesto u književnoj teoriji, Daniela Hodrová, Josef Pánek, Matěj Hořava, Anna Cima

**Sažetak:** Članak donosi analizu specifičnog koncepta ‘mjesto s tajnom’ koji je u svojim djelima razvila češka teoretičarka Daniela Hodrová te se on primjenjuje na romane suvremenih čeških autora Josefa Páneka, Matěja Hořave i Anne Cime. Cilj analize je uspostaviti vezu između romana u smislu pomaka u značenju i simbolizmu ‘mjesto s tajnom’ koji može predstavljati temelje novog oblika egzistencijalizma u suvremenoj češkoj književnosti.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of the article is a reference to Milan Kundera’s 1973 novel, which follows the life of a poet Jaromil from his conception to his deathbed. Kundera’s novel can be interpreted in different ways, one of which is that it represents author’s self-reflection, which makes the existentialist dilemma the axis around which the novel evolves. As the article deals with the new form of existentialism in the works of a young generation of Czech authors, the reference to one of the greatest modern existentialist writers seemed appropriate.

## 1. Introduction

The new millennium brought the change of generations and new trends onto the Czech literary scene. One of the trends was the focus on so called 'great historical themes', artistic reflection of unsolved problems and traumas of the Czech social and historical surroundings of the 20th century – the Second World War, afterwar period and the expatriation of German population, persecution in the Stalin era of the 1950s, and the normalisation period<sup>2</sup>. On the other side, there appeared a great number of prose works, mostly by the authors of the younger generation, which were situated in foreign lands and exotic settings. This tendency was connected mostly with the generation of authors who after the Velvet Revolution got a chance to travel to far places behind the borders of the Czech Republic, and to the generation of even younger authors for whom it was already normal to spend a part of their university studies or working period abroad. However, these texts did not form a uniform field, exotic and foreign places functioned differently in respective texts – as an attractive outside setting, as a subject of gaining knowledge about other cultures, or as characteristic features of the postmodern fabulation (Fialová, 2014: 351).

Author Jaroslav Rudiš situated his prose works in Central and Western European settings (*The Heavens Under Berlin (Nebe pod Berlínem)* (2002), *The End of Punk in Helsinki (Konec punku v Helsinkách)* (2010)), more far away and up till then not very often evoked places, like Asia, i.e. the exotic surroundings of Mongolia or Siberia were often the settings of Petra Hůlová's prose works (*All This Belongs to Me (Paměť mojí babičce)* (2002)<sup>3</sup>, *Circus les Memoires (Cirkus Les Memoires)* (2005), *Tajga Station (Stanice Tajga)* (2008)), as well as those of Martin Ryšavý, and Hana Andronikova (*The Sound of the Sundial (Zvuk slunečních hodin)* (2001)<sup>4</sup>, *Heaven Has No Ground (Nebe nemá dno)* (2010)<sup>5</sup>) situated her prose works in India and South America.<sup>6</sup> This branch of the first decade of the 21st century Czech fiction, according to Fialová, also embraces the prose works of the middle generation of authors and evocation of their exile experience.

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<sup>2</sup> The period after the fall of the Prague Spring in the summer of 1968 until the beginning of the Velvet Revolution. This period was marked by a great wave of emigration, political persecution and strict control of all aspects of political and social life, as well as culture itself.

<sup>3</sup> English translation by Alex Zucker (2009).

<sup>4</sup> English translation by David Short (2015).

<sup>5</sup> English translation by Roman Kostovski (2023).

<sup>6</sup> English titles of novels which were not published in English translation were adopted from official web pages of the author/publisher or from literary reviews.

Exotic places in the novels of the first decade of the 21st century often served as metaphors of transitional societies (as in i.e. novels of Petra Hůlová<sup>7</sup>) or introduction to the customs and inhabitants of faraway cultures, as is the case of the novels of i.e. Martin Ryšavý.

This preoccupation with faraway and exotic places in the past decade continues in the works of several young authors (Matěj Hořava, Josef Pánek, Anna Cima...). This article aims to determine the shift in the function of exotic settings in selected texts, which differ greatly in terms of narration and stylistic approaches, but, as we will show, share a significant number of motifs and symbolic representations. Escape or a journey from the well-known domestic surroundings to Indian megalopolis, a village in the Romanian Banat region, or the crowded streets of Tokyo's neighbourhood of Shibuya, propels the protagonists, 'modern nomads', to self-reflection, search for a human in a globalised world and exploration of truly foreign and exotic worlds inside themselves.

## 2. Spatiality in Literature. Space versus Place

After the long period of preoccupation with time in humanities, space and spatiality started gaining attention in late 20th century due to globalisation, postmodern capitalism and the Internet, and space started to be understood as the analytical category, constructive principle of social relations and representation strategy (Brkić, 2013: 116). This change is now known as the 'spatial turn'. Spatial literary studies and literary geography are growing and evolving fields, sometimes clashing in interpretation of their area of investigation and view of rootedness in literary theory<sup>8</sup>. However, in this article I will not rely on the findings of neither of them, but on the study of meaning and poetics of individual places in literature by Czech literary theoretician Daniela Hodrová.

The word 'space', argues Hodrová, is overwhelmingly materialistic and thus seems not to be dependent on the subject. This is why she chooses the term 'place', in which the subject already seems to be incorporated, and almost extorts the existence of a complement – without a subject or some kind of action the place itself is non-existent – it is created through the person that has found him/herself in that place, or through the action that takes place there. In the relation to such concept of the place, space can be seen as a collection, network of places which, in the same way as the individual place,

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<sup>7</sup> For further elaboration of this specific feature of Hůlová's novels please see my article "Life on the Margin – the Stranger/the Other in Petra Hůlová's Fiction" (2020).

<sup>8</sup> For further argumentation please see Tally, Robert T.'s essay "Spatial Literary Studies versus Literary Geography?" (2019).

comes to existence only through subjects and actions. These relations, continues Hodrová, are so close, that their components cannot be separated one from another: "...subjects (in literary works characters) merge with places, character is a place, which is characteristic for the character (i.e. continuum of places he/she passes through), carries the place (places) within him/herself, creates it like a spider creates his web, or in other words – the place becomes alive via certain character, begins to exist through him/her." (Hodrová, 1994: 10)

However, not all places are to the same extent interconnected with the subject – the most apparent places that merge with the subject are 'places with a mystery'. Such places are more apparent carriers of memory than common everyday places. While the everyday, profane place is defined as collective, shared location, and is thus the place of dialogue, a 'place with a mystery' is the place of individual human experience, dialogue is intercepted by monologues, internal soliloquys, or silence. In the history of literature, such places were i.e. a castle, world, heaven, mountain, forest, wilderness, house, city, inner-self, text, and so on. All such places share one characteristic – their structure contains the elements of the labyrinth (in itself a 'place with a mystery' as well), a place so obviously unsorted, lacking some kind of order, and thus escaping definition and comprehension (Hodrová, 1994: 10-12).

Places in literature have metaphorical character (Hodrová, 1997: 15). The very process of metaphorisation always has its individual and superindividual component – in certain times and societies, but also genres, certain places-topoi became the subject of characteristic metaphorical processes, argues Hodrová<sup>9</sup>. As a result of the metaphorisation and mythologisation processes, the understanding of a certain place in literary works shifts. This redefinition of the meaning of a certain place does not have to be radical in relation to its meaning in earlier literary periods or past literary movements or ideologies, the place changes due to a different context and 'wraps itself in new meanings' (Hodrová, 1997: 17).

Place in literary works, as viewed by Daniela Hodrová, can be understood on the basis of the opposition static – dynamic (Hodrová, 1997: 18). Static spaces are, i.e. houses, or rooms, and a dynamic space is i.e. a journey. Journey does not only relate to overcoming of physical distance, it is also the act of remembering – a journey inside oneself – search for and reconstruction of previously visited places and the subject him/herself. In this way, the linearity, related to the topos of the journey, is questioned and superseded, and often has a shape/character of a spiral or a circle.

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<sup>9</sup> She here lists i.e. the topos of a cabin in the period of Czech national revival, or Prague in the novels from the the turn of the 19th into the 20th century (see Hodrová, 1997: 15).

Static places are more characteristic for poetry and plays, while in prose works they are considered unusual and noteworthy, in terms that the narrator 'puts in motion' such places. The character of the place is also related to the type of a character who dwells in such a place or is moving within such a place, place in significant amount determines the character and the character determines the place (Hodrová, 1997: 18). Probably the best illustration of this relation is Proust's *In Search for a Lost Time* – here the hero is 'on a journey'. In the novel itself the hero 'on a journey' (and along with him the dynamic topos of the journey) is confronted with previously visited places and characters connected to those places. The problem related to hero's identity is the overcoming of the distance between different spatially and temporally remote places. Key to overcoming these distances is the act of remembering, which could also be referred to as the 'journey within' (Hodrová, 1997:19).

This logically asks for the definition of the 'place within', which according to Daniela Hodrová is not a place in terms of some obviously defined and closed place – it is a process, a journey (Hodrová, 1994: 190). And every journey to the 'place within' is in a sense a way back – to something one has lost, forgotten, overlooked.

A room, as a static place, lies on the border between the inside and the outside – landscape, city, world. Its position (we can here expand the understanding of a room to a house, building) is specific, open and closed, through windows and doors the outside world sneaks in, on the other side, person hides from the outside world in one's room, it can be a place of observation and reflection of the world, or a place of seclusion and self-reflection (Hodrová, 1997: 219). It is important whether the room/house is familiar to the subject-inhabitant and he/she controls it completely, or the room/house is unfamiliar to the subject and he/she is a guest and tries to understand its secrets. Thus, the familiar room/house is in its way an 'extended body' of the inhabitant, and also a niche of the 'body' of the city, while the unfamiliar room/house is perceived by the inhabitant as a 'foreign body'. If we perceive the subject as the entity composed of all places he/she had been at, the room becomes a part of the subject's body and soul (Hodrová, 1997: 217).

For the purpose of the analysis ahead, I will also mention here the topos of wilderness, which Hodrová defines as relative, in terms of its distance from the starting point. It is a remote place, not only in terms of spatial or temporal distance, but also in its natural and social character and customs far away from the starting point of the authors view or a hero's journey, from his/her home. It is a place beyond, outside, away, only in relation to the starting point. The distance does not in any sense have to be

great – it can be only a remote place or unknown place at the border of the civilised, known world. The topos of wilderness is strongly connected with the topos of the journey. Motivation for the journey itself can be different – from seeking adventures and exploring new worlds, to a conflict with the world, social class, sense of alienation and disillusionment.

### 3. 'Places With a Mystery' and the New Generation of Czech Writers

Three very differently tuned novels which will be the focus of my analysis – *Love in Times of Global Climate Changes (Láska v době globálních klimatických změn)* (2017) by Josef Pánek, *Distilled Spirit: Stories from the Banat (Pálenka: Prózy z Banátu)* (2014) by Matěj Hořava, and *I Wake Up in Shibuya (Probudím se na Šibuji)* (2018) by Anna Cima, are related by the most obvious characteristic – they are all situated in faraway or remote places – India, Japan, and Romanian Banat region, a sort of a Europe's end. The main protagonists are willingly, unwillingly or indifferently disconnected with the world they understand and are familiar with. Thus, all three novels are evidently linked with the topos of the journey. Albeit the motivations for the journey are different, we will see that the journey itself has the same purpose and the same result.

The narration of the main protagonist in the first person in the novels of Anna Cima and Matěj Hořava, and partly in Josef Pánek's as well, underlines the impression of the search for one's own journey back to oneself, to one's own centre, definition of the novels' heroes/heroine in the labyrinth of the world and a shift closer to the heaven within one's heart. I would also like to mention here, that the first person narration in Josef Pánek's novel occurs in the passages where the hero of the novel reflects about his past, while otherwise in the novel we have a narration in the second person of plural, which allows the author to generalise the feeling of unrootedness as a global problem: „And now imagine that you are not me, and that you are not you, and that it is about you, and that you are really sorry about it, you, imagine. Right.“ (Pánek, 2017: 35)<sup>10</sup>

The narration method in the novel *Love in Times of Global Climate Changes*, situated in Indian Bangalore, where the hero travels to attend a scientific symposium, is as the megalopolis itself – hysterical, confused and lacks firm temporal positioning. It is the choice of the noisy, unknown and in its way a bit scary setting, which enhances the impression of alienation of the main character in a world which became a global village: „...When you find

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All quotations from the novels have been translated by the author of the article. The original text in Czech goes as follows: „A tak si představte, že ty nejsem já, a vy nejste vy, a že jde o vás, a že vás to fakt mrzí, vás, představte si to. Jo.“

yourself in Bangalore, India, you get scared of the racket, filth, car horns, smell, which you cannot identify, overcrowdedness, a complete sense of not belonging, you are at the most broken and the most inhospitable place in the world, and so far you still do not realize it, no...“ (Pánek, 2017: 7)<sup>11</sup> The feeling of uncertainty and hysteria is even more intensified by the hotel space in which the hero is residing, the most significant characteristic of which is the fact that windows do not open, you cannot look outside, breathe in the air, as if the hero has been sentenced to a claustrophobic space not only of the hotel, but also his own thoughts. There is only one window handle in the entire hotel which the hero is frantically trying to obtain, only to find out in the end that behind the window stands a dirty wall (into which, he remarks, he stares as if into a mirror) and more noise – all external units of air-conditioning machines from the entire hotel. When he finally succeeds in obtaining a room on the last floor of the hotel, above the roofs of the surrounding buildings and full of light, he faces the opaque impenetrable sky, green and grey smog which he cannot escape.

The city outside the hotel represents a maze for the hero, in which he walks in circles in a desperate attempt to find a girl that caught his eye on his first day in Bangalore, because she wore jeans and as such stood out from the girls in saris, as almost an unreal presence. All around him is delirious – colours, smells, traffic, and all this directs his thoughts back to his own past, to the centre of Europe. Back in his hotel room, in a conversation with the mysterious Indian girl, who represents his alter-ego of a sort, he begins a journey through his own past, faces his own prejudices, complexes stemming from the loss of home, his own unrooted existence in the world in which the hardest task of all is finding another human being. Impression of walking around in circles (in the same way as he walks the streets of the city outside) is even more intensified by a constant repetition or returns to firmly rooted prejudices – „As if no one told you, before you took a trip to India, that black women are dirty and they stink?“ (Pánek, 2017: 74)<sup>12</sup> The traffic and the noise outside, at the end of a civilised world, correspond at the same time to his inner chaos, and are a contrast to his feeling of solitude.

His descent into wilderness, in the words of Daniela Hodrová, pushes the hero to self-reflection, to the process of which the world he has so far travelled, Australia, South America, mother Europe, turns into the symbol of degenerated civilisation and the concept of wilderness starts to change. In

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11 „...když se ocitnete v Bangalore, Indii, vyděsíte se randálu, špíny, troubení, smradu. který nerozlišíte, přelidněnosta, totálního pocitu vykořeněnosti, jste na nejrozbitějším a nejhospitalnějších místech na světě, a vy to ještě neznáte, ne...“

12 „Nefíkali ti snad, než jsi odjel do Indie, že černý ženský jsou špinavý a smrděj?“

the contact with the end of the world of a sort, the hero grasps the extent of xenophobia and alienation of the modern Western civilisation and Europe itself becomes the wilderness, and its centre and home, the Czech Republic, in the era of multimedia and electronic communications, a foreign, faraway country. Evocation of his first trip outside the borders of Czechoslovakia after the Velvet Revolution, his first contact with the civilised Europe, which he almost did not survive, enhances the feeling of the faulty assessment of the basic human needs (in Paris he had to escape three homeless guys who were after his sandwich, Island greeted him with rough weather and high prices, which both forced him to test his own strength to the extremes) and he begins to question the whole concept of the modern civilised man, his values and belief in progress, and in the end he reaches the conclusion that what humanity really needs is to take a step back, return to its own basics: “Indian behind the bar does not look right next to this beer, to this bar, to the glasses, to things that do not belong to India, because they exported it all to them and forced it all on them, and thus chained them to it all, because it is simple and safe and easily consumed, the same as the bus driver does not look right behind that bus steering wheel, the same as the taxi driver, at whom the Hungarian shouted, Where are you driving, you black idiot!, does not look right in the taxi. But you have no one to shout at, that is why at least, you realise, you’re shouting inside at yourself.” (Pánek, 2017: 154)<sup>13</sup> That is why he must run away from that place, and fast, because he cannot stand it there anymore – because of the traffic and noise in his own head, and not from the outside.

The journey of the teacher of Czech, ‘a fanatic of solitude’, to Romanian Banat region where he teaches Czech to children of Czech population situated in the region, from the novel by Matěj Hořava *Distilled Spirit: Stories from Banat*, is in its way also a descent into the wilderness – customs and the way of life in Banat seem not to have changed in the past two hundred years. Separation of the hero from the known world in this fragmentary novel has a sort of a therapeutic function – to forget the traumas he left at home. However, all things around him, fragments and motifs of Banat everyday life, take him back to past traumas which he sincerely wanted to get rid of. Journey ahead thus becomes a journey back, and progress turns into decline: “In Bavarian diaries and in a Banat diary it was no longer possible to decipher not a whiff of reality, not a whiff of the present, not a

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„Ind za barem ale nepatří k tomu pivu, k tomu baru, ke sklenicím, k tomu, co nepatří do Indie, protože jim to exportovali a vnutili a tím k tomu přikovali, protože to je jednoduché a bezpečné a snadno se spotřebovává, stejně jako řidič autobusu nepatří k volantů autobusu, stejně jako taxikář, na kterého Mad’ar řval, Kam řidiš, ty černej idiote!, k taxiků. Ale vy nemáte na koho řvát, proto aspoň, uvědomíte si, řvete v duchu sám na sebe.“

hint of *here* and *now*, smells, people, words: all was just coming back from that old life, from that life from which I was running away: dreams, faces, heaviness, feelings: all of that somewhere in the distance, stuck behind the humps of Šumava, stuck behind the banks of Morava and Dyje...“ (Hořava, 2014: 90)<sup>14</sup>

The hero often mentions that he is running away from something, fleeing, but he as well, like the hero of the aforementioned novel, seems to be running in circles – again and again he is returning to old tracks and roads. ‘The curse of recollection’, as he calls it, of a piece of loathed land somewhere far away follows him around and catches up with him even in the remote and unwelcoming wilderness. Fragments of traumas from the past are slowly coming together into a mosaic of the life before the life in the self-chosen Banat exile. Strange and rough place, as was mentioned before, Balkan wilderness in which time stands still, here as well is the metaphor of the chaotic place within the hero. Wilderness outside is dangerous because almost every little thing – leaves, wind, crowns of acacias and mulberry trees – lead back to memories the hero is trying to gain superiority over – and that is why he hides and locks himself in a big white house with azure blue window shutters which help him “to disconnect from the world even more”. Thus, the narrator defends himself from the prospective of the world outside barging into the world within, hides himself from the world, and at the same time, paradoxically, limits himself to the very life in memories. The Banat region, customs of the locals and their anecdotes, which are by no means marginal part of the novel, function as the setting, and not as the representation of a foreign culture, because in the frame of the narration, a far greater emphasis is put more on the details, which, just like in Proust, lead him on a faraway journey, which at the same time is the journey that brings him back to what he left behind – they lead him back home: “And there it was: this pain and sudden awareness of reality that has for eight years been overshadowed by foreign places and foreign languages and foreign faces... this taste took me back to the past, it threw me a bare kilometre from here, to a house in which I had lived with the only being who had ever been ready to connect its life with mine; if I could move, in a few minutes I would be standing by that house that for a long time has not been neither her nor my home...” (Hořava, 2014: 71-72)<sup>15</sup>

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14 „V denících bavorských a v deníku banátském nešlo už odhalit ani závan skutečnosti, ani závan přítomnosti, ani náznak *tady* a *ted'*, barvy, vůně, lidí, slova: vše se jen vracelo z toho starého života, z toho života, před kterým jsem přechal? sny, tváře, tíha, city: to vše kdesi v dáli, uvízlé na hrby Šumavy, uvízlé na břehy Moravy a Dyje...”

15 „A pak to přišlo: ta bolest a náhlé povědomí o skutečnosti, kterou mi osm let zastíraly cizí kraje a cizí řeči a cizí tváře... ta chut' mě vrátila zpět; vrhla mě pouhý kilometr odsud, do

Journey of both protagonists is a journey back, to the Czech Republic and to past journeys, which were also failed attempts of distancing from the problematic past, and this past is the only firm constant which persists in the lives of the heroes. Fleeing from the past is in cases of both protagonists characterised also by the fleeing from their mother tongue: "...you never got rid of your older racist brother, of your best Neo-Nazi childhood friend, of your 1. mother tongue. And what is it worth that you have learned a 2. mother tongue, that you have English accent. What is it worth that you can speak English like a punk and immediately after that like a university professor, professional English. Still and still it is only your 2. mother tongue." (Pánek, 2017: 45)<sup>16</sup>. The hero of *Distilled Spirit* also mentions that he is trying to avoid speaking in his mother tongue – this motif can also be explained by the need to get away from the past, traumas, by the effort to start all over again.

The novel by Anna Cima *I Wake Up in Shibuya*, inspired, among else, by the genres of detective and fantasy novel, apart from the aforementioned descent into wilderness, in this case the wilderness of a modern and for Europeans incomprehensible Tokyo, is related to the other two novels also by the motif of walking around in circles and the motif of return. In the novel itself we follow two narrative lines – a story of the narrator, young Japanologist Jana Kupková in the present, and a story of the narrator and the main protagonist Jana mysteriously ‘stuck’ in the Tokyo’s neighbourhood of Shibuya some seven years ago, when she visited Japan with a friend. Already at the beginning of the narration, Jana mentions that she feels like two different people.

Despite of the fact that here we deal with the open space of a city neighbourhood, it represents a static and closed place – the heroine cannot cross the border of the neighbourhood, she is in a way imprisoned there. Whichever path she takes, she ends up back at the sculpture of the dog Hachiko. The feeling of alienation is emphasised by the fact that nobody sees her: “Here people walk with their eyes stuck to the pavement. They see nothing and no one. Women in kimonos, salarymen in suits, children in school uniforms, girls in checked skirts, hip-hoppers, visual-kei guys, all

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toho domu, kde jsem bydlíval s jedinou bytostí, která kdy byla ochotná spojit svůj život s mým; kdyby se mohl pohnout, za pár minut bych mohl stát u toho domu, který dávno není domovem ani jejím, ani mým...”

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„...jako vy nikdy jste se nezbavil svého staršího bratra, rasisty, svého nejlepšího přítele z dětství, neonacisty, vaší 1. rodné řeči. A co je vám platné, že jste se naučil 2. rodnou řeč, že umíte přízvuky angličtiny. Co je vám platné, že anglický mluvíte jako prase a pak hned jako univerzitní doktor, odborným anglickým jazykem. Ještě pořád a pořád a pořád je to jen vaše 2. rodná řeč.“

mixed here in a gigantic tea cup, and among them me, lost Czech girl, invisible Jana Kupková. Maybe it is not that they don't see me. Maybe nobody sees nobody here.“ (Cima, 2018: 50-51)<sup>17</sup>

The world around Shibuya Jana perceives through the shop window of a bookstore or a manga shop. The window here functions as a possibility to look at the world outside, but that world nevertheless stays unreachable for the heroine. The window in the novel also occurs as a central motif of the photographs taken by Akira, brother of Prague Jana's Japanese friend. Here they also symbolise things we cannot reach, touch, things that are at the same time close and far away. This symbol further develops into a metaphor of human relationships and the feeling of alienation from the world around, and also as a view into another dimension, another perspective of the things that take place behind the window.

About the Japan itself and about its culture we learn more from Prague Jana from the other narrative line and from the translation of the Japanese novel (which represents an individual narrative line of a sort) than from Jana who without a set goal wonders around Tokyo's Shibuya – here as well, the place around the heroine is the metaphor of the place within – the effort to understand one's own place in a neverendingly accelerating world.

Jana in Shibuya contemplates about what she actually is and reaches the conclusion that she is the idea of Jana from seven years ago, and thus becomes her own past, a memory of her own self, she merges with the idea of Prague Jana, emerged into the study of Japanese culture seven years later. In this context, the interest of Prague Jana in the story of Japanese writer Kawashito – named Separation – a story about the dissociation of the writer into two parts – becomes abundantly clear and connects the two main story lines.

#### 4. Conclusion

Three analysed novels that we dealt with in this article, although apparently stylistically very diverse and in terms of poetics overtly unrelated, however, share the same preoccupation with the existentialist conundrum of the world we live in. The hysterical narration of Josef Pánek, sophisticated and suggestive lyrical narration of Matěj Hořava and the appealing narrative of Anna Cima, which can also be read as a popular mystery novel, share the

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„Lidi tu chodě s pohledama upíchnutejma do chodníku. Nevidí nic a nikoho. Ženský v kimonech, salarymani v oblécích, děti ve školních uniformách, holky v nakasaných sukničkách, hip-hopeři, visual-kei týpci, všichni se tu míchají v obrovským hrnku na čaj a mezi tím chodím já, ztracená Češka, neviditelná Jana Kupková. Možná to není tak, že oni nevidí mě. Možná tu nikdo nevidí nikoho.“

same fixation on the motifs of wilderness, journey, ‘the journey within’, confined or static places, all as symbols of contemplation and reflection. In comparison to the novels from the earlier decade, which considered the wilderness, foreign and exotic places as the grounds for the exploration of the differences between what one knows and what is new to him/her, the texts of the new generation of Czech authors focus on what they failed to recognize or did not know about oneself. In that sense, the motif of the window – being the metaphor of the inability to accept the differences stemming from one’s own rootedness in stereotypes and false comfort zones (Josef Pánek), or means of ongoing alienation from the troubling past and traumas (Matěj Hořava), or willingness, but flawed by uncertainty to reach out to the world beyond one’s own understanding (Anna Cima), reflect the ongoing preoccupations of the new generation. The texts themselves are not the journeys in search for adventure and exotic places, and the wildernesses in them ‘wrap themselves in new meanings’ – the heroes/heroine, although so far away, reach out to themselves, voluntarily or involuntarily, in the limited spaces of hotel rooms, dislocated houses in dislocated regions or metropolitan neighbourhoods, in which they experience the most frightening, the most real and the greatest adventure of all – facing the mysteries within themselves.

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