

"The texts of the Czech writer Michal Ajvaz are evidence not only of a clever imagination, but also of a mind that savors the difficulty of reading—a mind for which language is not merely a vehicle for the delivery of information, but an integral part of the very world it is trying to communicate. Reading such a world means stepping inside it, letting it infect you, bruise, scrape, poison and obsess you.

Visitors who have gotten their fill of the golems, witches, and Kafka caricatures that populate Prague's postcard stands will find in Ajvaz a new mythical geography; in his 1993 novel *The Other City*, a lovely hymn to his hometown, Ajvaz repopulates Prague with his own ghosts, eccentrics, talking animals, and statues, and he moves in the peripheries—the gray housing developments and forlorn, yet somehow cozy, pubs on the city's edges—as much as over the tourist-beaten paths of the Old Town. On his wanderings, Ajvaz's first-person narrator begins to notice more and more chinks in his familiar surroundings, until a whole "other city" begins to open up, overlapping our workaday world but invisible to us. *The Other City* is a guidebook to this invisibility, reminding us that we see least clearly what is most familiar. Only when we remove objects from "the network of purposes" that entangle them will we awaken to the possibility of seeing them anew; only then will libraries turn into jungles, only then will we notice hatchways leading inside statues and ocean waves lapping at our bedspreads. Prague's "other city" becomes for Ajvaz an emblem of all the worlds we are blind to because we are caught in our own habits of seeing."

*Jonathan Bolton, CONTEXT*

"The novel is reminiscent of Surrealism in the way it departs from common experience and 'common sense,' attacks logical rules and customs, and takes things out of their familiar contexts. It is, however, a work more of invention and intellectual game than of spontaneous imagination. The ornamental imagery becomes fixed in obsessive formulae and configurations, and this is somewhat disproportionate to how it eludes definite, accepted meanings, and moves to other possibilities and worlds, which are protean and ever emerging, and to how it calls upon us to accept another cosmos. The setting is a textual maze from which there is no escape and whose ultimate meaning remains forever inaccessible, since the ultimate contexts are never emphasized."

*Ceska Literatura*