

Translation as Provocation: On the Translations of Bohumil Hrabal

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ABSTRACT

This study applies Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory to examine how translation, publishing practices, and censorship shaped the Hungarian reception of Bohumil Hrabal. For Jauss, meaning emerges not only from the text but through the historical interaction between text and reader. Hrabal complicates this dynamic by deliberately cultivating textual disorder, producing multiple, often contradictory versions through self-censorship, state censorship, and samizdat dissemination. For Czech readers, this instability – encountered directly in competing editions – became central to the reading experience.

In Hungary, however, Hrabal's works reached readers in translations that presented a more orderly, accessible author. Hungarian editions generally omitted commentaries, variants, and supplements, muting the interpretive challenges of his oeuvre. This simplified image canonized Hrabal as a reader-friendly writer valued for enjoyment rather than for intertextual or philological complexity. In comparison, Italian editions, with their editorial notes, preserved more of this complexity than Hungarian ones.

The case of *Too Loud a Solitude* illustrates the issue. Czech samizdat versions retained politically charged passages that official editions altered, while Hungarian translations introduced additional distortions, from slight mistranslations to omitted supplements. These changes rarely impeded enjoyment but further distanced Hrabal from his Czech reception context.

The essay argues that Hrabal's embrace of incompleteness, multiplicity, and textual instability was central to his undermining of the stable authorial role. Yet in Hungary, editorial simplification canonized him in a conflict-free form, increasing popularity while diminishing the destabilizing force essential to his work. From a reception-theory perspective, this shows how translation and publishing mediate not only access to foreign texts but also the very image of the author.

KEYWORDS

Bohumil Hrabal, translatology, reception theory, censorship, samizdat

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I.

In his study titled *The Theory of Reception*, Hans Robert Jauss writes: “Literary hermeneutics has expanded the principle of the history of effects, which states that a work cannot be understood without considering its effects, to the correlative principle of reception history, which does not start from the work and its truth but from the understanding consciousness as the subject of aesthetic experience. Therefore, it requires an active sense of horizon separation (not a passive sense of horizon merging). This interaction of effect and reception is most often described today as the effect being the element defined by the text, and the reception being the element defined by the recipient.” (JAUSS 1997: 18, 19)

Jauss presupposes the existence of two actors in reading: the work (along with its history), which can only exert its effect through the reader, and the reader, who performs the reception and the act of understanding on the text that exerts the effect.

In my observation, this principle is not only applicable to Bohumil Hrabal’s influence in Hungary, but it also allows for some significant conclusions regarding it. The fact that this transaction occurs between the text and the reader allows for a room for manoeuvre for translators and publishing practices that mediate foreign literary traditions, shaping the very text, that will exert its effect on the foreign reader. Moreover, in this case, even before the translation could change the text, we face a philological disorder, with multiple differing variants of the text spreading as samizdat, or official censored edition. Even in Czech, Hrabal’s texts many times face the problem, what is the nature of their relationship to the author itself – if they are to be considered working versions, or publishable ones. Hrabal’s writing methods do not attempt to settle the philological chaos, yet, on the other hand, he himself maintains his role as an ironical author in his very texts.

Beyond the inevitable distorting effects of literary translations, and the deliberate philological chaos created and maintained by Hrabal, there are two well-known problematic points regarding Hrabal’s reception that pose difficulties even in the native linguistic environment. On the one hand, his works, with a few late exceptions, are not written in the era in which they are published. On the other hand, even for texts that appear relatively contemporaneously, it is difficult to determine who they are actually written for (ČEŠKA 2015: 1275). Both problems are underpinned by the variable activity of state control. In Jauss’s model, we can find a well-defined place for these two factors, as both strive – one consciously and the other subjected to the general rules of translation, including temporal and situational delay – to shape the horizon of reader expectations through modifications made to the texts.

II.

Hrabal’s influence on Hungarian literature and readership could never have come about without his works translated into Hungarian and the efforts of the publishers who released them. The translators and the publisher simultaneously mediated and shaped his impact. Today, not only is every significant and autonomous work by Hrabal available in Hungarian, but most of these have also been reissued multiple times, which is noteworthy in itself for a Czech writer. Based on this, it can be stated that Hrabal has been canonized in some form; his translated texts have become part of Hungarian reading culture. Knowing the temporal sensitivity and commentary needs of the Czechs (ČEŠKA 2015: 1273–1276), it is noteworthy, that the texts translated over thirty years

ago are published repeatedly by Hungarian publishers without revisions or editorial comments. This also means that, compared to his Czech editions, Hrabal can speak to Hungarian readers with unparalleled directness; however, in the case of such a dynamically intertextual corpus, this causes distortions in the interpretation of the texts that later influences the development of reader horizons and the dynamics of text reception. We won't see any significant distortions, and certainly not misinterpretation, but it is noticeable that Hungarian publishing and translation practices tend to blunt the edges of Hrabal's texts that arise from their actuality.

The same image in the original state of the texts intended for the Czech audience is much less orderly, and it is highly likely that this did not deviate much from the writer's intentions. In Hrabal's case, the philological confusion that arises as a by-product of creative processes plays a doubly important role since the reader can confront it in Czech at the most banal levels of the act of reading, on the shelves of bookstores. This – the easy access to heterogenous versions – creates a secondary layer of creative chaos that surprisingly harmonizes with the reflexive primary layers appearing in the texts and trying to undermine an established author's image. Thus, before the act of reading begins, the reader is confronted with multiple versions and variations of the same text. This chaos, which I believe can be seen not only as intentional but also as particularly favorable from the perspective of the author's role, is minimized by foreign editions, including the Hungarian ones. Less enigmatically put: the Hungarian editions – considering them separately from the translation work – suggest through the institutionalized forms of literature, such as published books. Hrabal from this perspective is an orderly, aesthetically acceptable, reader-friendly writer, an "author" in the sense of Barthes' famous essay, an idea Hrabal himself tries to undermine. In this essay Barthes writes: "The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us" (BARTHES 1977: 143). According to this image, Hrabal, the author holds the keys of the interpretation of his own texts, that are orderly and homogenous and thus can be canonized without controversy. It is important to note, however, that it is unrealistic to expect a Hungarian translator or publisher to present a more intricate oeuvre to their readers: this simplification can be seen an obligatory by-product of the distortions caused by translations, even if it seems more like a philological problem in nature. In this case, it is at most striking evidence that in the case of early postmodern texts, the creative processes of literature, the publishing practices and the act of reading do not sharply separate from each other.

However, paradoxically enough, the understanding of the "accessible, reader-friendly author" is less supported by Hungarian editions than by Czech or even Italian ones. In Hungarian editions, we see neither explanatory notes nor commentaries, as if finding the appropriate audience for these texts has never posed a problem in Hungary, which is at least surprising compared to Czech practice. Also foreign Italian editions do not leave interpretation entirely up to the reader either. We will see that this is not because the Hungarian reader is more prepared than the Czech or the Italian, but that Hrabal has been integrated into the literary tradition differently. This means that in Hungary, Hrabal is the Czech author whose textual references arising from temporality and allusions do not need to be understood for his texts to be enjoyable, and the primary function of his texts is enjoyability.

To illustrate the differences between the Czech, Hungarian, and Italian editions and to identify the distorting factors that may play a role in Hrabal's Hungarian reception, we need to examine the Czech and Hungarian editions of *Too Loud a Solitude* without claiming completeness. It is

important to clarify from the outset that the genealogy of the texts examined here is not generally characteristic of all texts by Hrabal, but it shows a certain attitude, that supported the textual heterogeneity of the same single story. In general, the distorting effects of the temporal delay in reception are present in almost all of his texts – namely, that they do not reach their audience in the era in which they are created. However, in the case of *Příliš hlučná samota*, we can also speak of other disruptive factors.

III.

Since Hrabal's first appearances before the general public, a certain philological disorder has characterized him, which can be seen as partially coerced (ČEŠKA 2015: 1271). In the early stages of his popularity during the 1960s, this manifests itself in a kind of indifference related to the temporality of reception aesthetics, which can be attributed more to randomness and possesses a certain anecdotal quality in itself: the author, who wrote for a long time for the drawer publishes his manuscripts in reverse chronological order as demand for them increases (PELÁN 2015: 43–44). This kind of negligence was not intentional in the 1960s, but looking back from the 1970s, Hrabal seems to forge a virtue out of necessity, becoming an increasingly valuable factor regarding the need for authorial self-definition. Also in the 1970s, in the first years of normalization, censorship intensified, introducing a completely new element into this context. After the intervention of 1968, Hrabal found himself in a position where he could not publish, a situation only ended by a self-critical interview he gave in 1975. After this, he had the opportunity to publish for two separate audiences: for the dissent in samizdat form and for the general public after thorough censorship, which in this case means that the state allowed the author to self-censor – even if some argue with the “self-made” nature of this (JANKOVIČ 1994: 246; MAZAL 2004: 209).

In the slightly more than half a decade ending in 1975, Hrabal not only continued to write but also significantly changed his writing strategies. The most striking sign of this, attributed to the rapid deterioration of public conditions and the intensification of oppression, is that his prose takes on a more introspective and pessimistic hue. This period is almost universally evaluated as a break in any periodization, yet it is during this half-decade in Hrabal's oeuvre that the changes occur which allow his early total realism to increasingly make room for primitive postmodern traits, as well as existential self-reflection, which from then on accompanies his prose. From the author's perspective, it is actually only partially a regression; in the early stages of Hrabal's writing career – though for entirely different reasons – he had become accustomed to writing for the drawer. Considering the output and significant changes of the two periods, I find it conceivable that these “quiet” years may have been creatively beneficial for him. It is telling that alongside significant changes, he wrote two outstanding texts during this time: *I Served the King of England* and *Too Loud a Solitude*. The genealogy of the latter and its intricate Czech and Hungarian editions clearly demonstrate how the philological chaos born out of necessity became a virtue in Hrabal's oeuvre. Not insignificantly, this was in harmony with the new, early postmodern readers' expectations that increasingly unfolded from the 1970s, while not sharply breaking with previous authorial tendencies of Hrabal himself.

In the first half of the 1990s, when the multi-volume edition of the writer's collected works appears, the editors themselves face the problem that publishing a single, reader-friendly ver-

sion¹ of *Příliš hlučná samota* would not provide a complete picture of the text, as by then the two known main samizdat versions also show significant differences (JANKOVIČ 1994: 243–257). The editors decided to publish this text together with two additional manuscript variations, which are considered complete, in a separate volume. They did not even make a significant mistake in this, as it can be interpreted as an insight into Hrabal's literary workshop, which as a motif by then was already present in his works.

IV.

The ninth volume of the collected works highlights that, from a philological perspective, it is advisable to divide the life of the text into three phases. The first is the phase of the text's birth, which inherently produces multiple variations and versions. The last two variations found in the volume published in the *Pražská imaginace* series can be considered two manuscripts created during this first phase. This is the period when the widely known text is just being born, and it ranges from 1973 to 1976 (JANKOVIČ 1994: 243).

Aside from minor differences in motifs, the narrative structure of the two texts is similar, although the reader may encounter greater differences in their style and form. The latter is written using colloquial language, the so-called “obecná čeština”, just like Hrabal's earlier texts, as the use of this linguistic register became one of the writer's well-known stylistic tools in the 1960s. The second variation is generally written in free verse, organized into stanzas, with minor stylistic modifications and a more extensive elaboration of some other thoughts. In this phase of the text's birth, Hrabal rejects both versions and considers the one that appears first in the book, written in a more formal language, to be final. The reason for this can be found in the tonal shift characteristic of the era; the author attempts to diverge not only in the chosen theme but also in its form from his earlier optimistic texts, thus intentionally choosing the version written in “anxiety-laden official language.” (JANKOVIČ 1994: 243) In 1994 when all three versions of the text are published under the care of *Pražská imaginace*, the second phase of the text's genealogy can be considered as closed.

From here on, I will refer to the individual variations using the numbering used by Jankovič, designating the free verse version as the second, the colloquial language version as the third, and the one that is last in terms of completion, which the wider public knows as *Příliš hlučná samota*, as the first.

I will have to add some remarks to describe the second phase of the text's birth. In this period, from 1976 to 1994, the previously mentioned first variation is circulated in samizdat, and after a significant transformation, it is officially published in 1981 under the title *Kluby poezie*. It is very important to note, that this is a collage made out of two texts, of which one is the censored version of *Příliš hlučná samota*. We do not have a precise answer as to why Hrabal decided that if he could only publish these two texts in a censored form, he would create a third, a text collage that can be considered a separate autonomous text from them. This version is reissued in the Czech

¹ As it makes this case more followable, I will use the terminology variation–version, where the variations are the three forms of *Příliš hlučná samota*, and a version is anything autonomously published ranging from samizdat to censored edition. This terminology is a diminished one of Susanna Roth's and loosely based on Milan Jankovič's (SEMINARA 2018: 138).

Republic after the disappearance of censorship, despite the fact that both texts contained within it strongly bear the marks of censorship. What can be proven is that the effects of censorship are also visible in the selected passages of the collage thus created. However, this somewhat autonomous text collage is a peculiarity that only the Czechs possess; it does not appear in Hungarian, and the Hrabal research dedicates only a few mentions to it. In my comparison, I will use a reissue published in 2010 and treat it as an autonomous text, as an artifact of the effect of censorship on the text, based on Jiří Pelán's thought, who mentions that it is telling that Hrabal saw it worthy to be published (PELÁN 2015: 90).

Kluby poezie is also important for the Hungarian reader because after the first Hungarian edition, until 2025, every reissue designates this censored, heavily transformed version as original. All these versions, the samizdat, and the censored one contribute at a different level of reading to keep up the secondary genealogical phase of the text. It is not completely finished, yet it could not be considered completely unfinished either – unknowingly it is dynamically changed by the readers and censors in this phase.

During the second phase, parallel to the spread of samizdat, the translations are created that most foreign readers become familiar with. In the case of *Příliš hlučná samota*, it is true for nearly all early translations that they present a completely different original, but in reality, they use one of the samizdat versions (JANKOVIČ 1994: 248, 249). Thus, in this phase, in the first half of the 1980s, these translations could not be made used an ultima manus edition. I have to add, that this principle in Hrabal's case, should be treated with significant reservations, which is in harmony with the literary expectations transitioning from modernism to postmodernism. As I mentioned earlier, Hrabal supposedly acts in accordance with Barthes' theory about the end of the authorship, without which there is no basis for a strong notion of an ultima manus. Even mentioning this, the conflict does not exist at this moment because the phase of the text's birth, up until the first regular publication in 1989, cannot be considered even partially closed – the closure in this case is represented by the publication of a version that approaches an ultima manus as closely as possible, which Jankovič describes as bearing the "demand for completeness" (JANKOVIČ 1994: 243).

The first Hungarian edition appears in the second phase of the genealogy of the work in chronological terms, in 1985, under the title *Gyöngéd barbárok*, and contains two texts created in the first half of the 1970s: In Hungarian the *Gyöngéd barbár* and the aforementioned *Tűlságosan zajos magány*. It designates the aforementioned *Kluby poezie* as the original, but it is obvious, that uses the samizdat editions of the two texts.

If we disregard the second phase of the text's genealogy, which lasts roughly from 1976, the spread of the first samizdat, until arguably 1989 or 1994, the first official publication, we can see that after 1989, Hrabal supplements the then roughly 15-year-old samizdat, which has been spreading unofficially, with two additions: a motto from Goethe (or in the case of the 3rd version another one (HRABAL 1994: 172) and a few pages of free verse titled *Adaggio lamentoso*. Other editions, such as the ninth edition of the collected works referred to as *SsBH* (*Sebrané spisy Bohumila Hrabala*), consider the short piece titled *Zpráva o pitvě vlastní mrtvolý* as the authentic supplement to the text (JANKOVIČ 1994: 249–253). All these appendices that are still missing from the Hungarian editions today, share the common characteristic of attempting to provide the reader with a unique interpretive key, and most likely are in accordance with the editorial notes from the 1960s (ČEŠKA 2015: 1273).

Despite their significance, I would not dedicate further special attention to these appendices and their role in reception. My investigation will focus on the variations, translations, and

the impact of censorship on reception. To this end, I have selected three clauses from the text, through their variations and Italian and Hungarian translations, to illustrate the complexity that lies behind the easily readable authorial image of Hrabal. The selection of sentences was based on the criterion that they contain statements that were overly ambiguous during the years of normalization or directly contradicted the state's official ideology.

V.

V.1.

The first examined sentence appears on the first pages of the text. In the Czech variation, written with a “demand for completeness”, it reads: “... takže Koniášové celého světa marně pálejí knihy, a zdali ty knihy zaznamenaly něco, co platí, je slyšet jen tichý smích pálených knih, protože pořádná knížka vždycky ukazuje jinam a ven” (HRABAL 1994: 9). In this sentence, the author thematizes book burning and the attempts to eradicate human knowledge, identifying the world's book burners with Antonín Koniáš, whose name is proverbially intertwined with book burning in Czech culture. This serves, on the one hand, to emphasize the guiding motif of the text – the protagonist's job is to compress old books into paper bales in a paper collection – and on the other hand, it holds double relevance for Hrabal in the 1970s. It could be interpreted as if Hrabal was condemning state censorship and book destructions. At the time of writing, Hrabal could not publish officially, and by 1970, four different books of his had already been confiscated and destroyed in the printing house (ČEŠKA 2015: 1272). The phrase “Koniášové celého světa” may also refer to the connection with communism, reminding part of the slogan, in Czech “proletáři všech zemí” (ČEŠKA 2015: 1278). As Jakub Češka points out, a similar referential relationship operates concerning the young opposition: after Hrabal's public self-criticism, the young poet Ivan Martin Jirous holds a book burning at Kampa, which he refers to as an “Autodafé”, where he burns Hrabal's books while using freely some religious symbols. It is also worth mentioning that the aforementioned sentence from Hrabal can only be read in this form in samizdat until 1989, meaning its target audience consisted of readers who might have known about Jirous's actions—incidentally, in the description associated with him, Jirous himself praises samizdat over the “hardcover” officially published books (ČEŠKA 2015: 1277). In the other two manuscript variations, this sentence fragment is almost completely identical. In the second variation, the author's longer elaboration clarifies that at an earlier stage of writing, Hrabal was only accusing the state power of book burning: “... a tak vlastně když Koniáš a ti Koniášové celého světa docela zbytečně pálejí a pod policejní kontrolou dávají do stoupy papíren tištěný knihy...” (HRABAL 1994: 174).

Surprisingly, this sentence was not left out entirely from the officially published *Kluby poezie* from 1981 either. However, the censored version carefully narrows the possible references of the sentence to a single layer of meaning, as by changing the verb tense, Koniáš's symbolic role is simplified to a mere historical event devoid of any contemporary relevance, presenting the destruction of books as a phenomenon of the distant past. In this form, the sentence reads: “Takže Koniášové marně pálili knihy, je slyšet jen tichý smích pálených knih, protože pořádní knížka vždycky ukazuje jinam a ven” (HRABAL 2010: 9). This version also lacks the phrase “Koniášové celého světa”, which supports Češka's idea (ČEŠKA 2015: 1278) that it could easily be interpreted as a reference to the communist slogan.

V.2.

The second sentence appears in the sixth chapter of the book, in the 1994 edition, in this form: “Hromovou ranou se mi zjevil Arthur Schopenhauer, že nejvyšší zákon je láska a ta láska je soucit, pochopil jsem, proč tak Arthur nenáviděl siláckého Hegela, byl jsem ale rád, že ani Hegel, ani Schopenhauer nebyli velitelé protivných vojsk, protože ti dva by vedli válku takovou, jako ji vedou dva krysí klany ve všech kanálech a kloakách pražského podzemí” (HRABAL 1994: 46). The same sentence appears in the free verse version with minimal modifications, quoting Schopenhauer in German (in original “Alle Liebe ist Mitleid”, I suppose here Hrabal’s poetic self-exploited the contraposing of similar forms of *Liebe–Leid*; HRABAL 1994: 127) and further on not comparing the tension between the two philosophers to total war, simply cutting the thought with three dots. The second, colloquial language variation of the sentence does not differ in content but has a completely different formulation and line of thought (HRABAL 1994: 194).

In the *Kluby poezie* text version, this passage is radically shortened, reading only: “Hromovou ranou mi zjevil Arthur Schopenhauer, že nejvyšší zákon je láska a ta láska je soucit” (HRABAL 2010: 93). There is no mention of Hegel, nor is there any reference to the rivalry with Schopenhauer. Here, we can again assume that questioning Hegel’s ideology may have seemed too problematic for communist censorship, which is why Schopenhauer was only allowed to be quoted completely out of context. Pelán states, based on Roth, that these topics were generally held as too sensitive (PELÁN 2015: 89). By doing this, Hrabal loses the poetically significant opportunity to build a contrast between the image of Schopenhauer proclaiming love and that of leading total war.

V.3.

The third sentence is even shorter and appears in the sixth chapter of the text, but only in the first and free verse variations: “... Jak mi o tom napsal krásně pan Sartre a ještě líp pan Camus...” (HRABAL 1994: 56). In both variations, there are no significant differences in this sentence fragment. In the censored version, the only change is the removal of the intensified adverb, making Sartre and Camus appear as equals: “... Jak o tom krásně napsal pan Sartre a Camus” (HRABAL 2010: 113). We can assume that the censorship was sensitive to the implication that in this comparison, Camus “says something better” than the party-loyal Sartre.

Thus, in the comparison of the extracted sentences from the Czech variations, it is evident that censorship aimed for two things, aside of the ones listed earlier by Jiří Pelán: first, to shorten Hrabal’s sentences wherever possible, and second, to avoid any motifs that openly contradicted the official doctrine.

VI.

The Hungarian and Italian translations of the work are clearly based on the previously referred to text variation publishable in samizdat. Interestingly, at the time of their appearance – 1985 for the Hungarian translation, 1987 for the Italian one – this variation was not yet available to the Czech general public and was circulating in samizdat form, making the precise source problem-

atic to define. In both translations, it is true that they present another work that could be officially published as the original, which in the Hungarian case is the 1981 publication of *Kluby poezie*. This translation has undergone several reissues, and in the most recent, 2025 edition, it no longer refers to this original but to an official publication after the regime change; however, this is merely a minor correction, evidently not even true and does not affect the text as a whole. The Hungarian version still lacks the motto and the authorial supplement following the text (whether the *Adaggio lamentoso* or the *Zpráva o pitvě vlastní mrtvoly*). The omission of these can be considered a philological error, as it is generally characteristic that Hrabal's texts published in Hungarian also contain a motto; Hrabal was fond of providing his texts with such "interpretive keys", as I mentioned earlier. The significance of the accompanying texts can be traced back to a problem closely related to reception aesthetics. As I already mentioned, Hrabal's Czech editors strongly recommended the publication of supplementary texts and prefaces even in the first editions of the 1960s, as without them, it is difficult to determine the readership they are addressing (ČEŠKA 2015: 1273). In contrast to the opinion of the Czech editors, the absence of these did not likely hinder the Hungarian audience, as evidenced by the fact that the text has been reissued more than five times over four decades.

From the translated sentences, we can see that even minor translation errors did not disturb the readership in Hungary. The aforementioned first sentence appears in the Hungarian translation as: "... úgyhogy a világ Kóniásai hiába égetik a könyveket, és ha azok valami örök érvényűt tartalmaznak, csak az égő könyvek csendes nevetését hallani, mert egy valamirevaló könyv mindig máshová és kifelé mutat" (HRABAL 1985: 8).

In this sentence, it is evident that the translator skillfully preserves the reference to "the workers of the world," yet inexplicably translates Koniáš as a biblical name, creating a signifier without a signified. The Hungarian translator also took a proactive approach to the translation of names elsewhere, translating "do Stagiry" (HRABAL 1994: 59) as "Sztageiroszba" (HRABAL 1985: 67), or "Frantík Šturm" (HRABAL 1994: 69, 230) as "Frantík Šturma" (HRABAL 1985: 77) in nominative, which are difficult to explain. It is hard to imagine that these minor errors were intentional, but Milan Jankovič notes that Hrabal himself occasionally mismanaged names in the original texts (JANKOVIČ 1994: 247).

The use of the conjunction "és" at the beginning of an explanatory subordinate clause may seem like a minor oddity, at least sounding stranger than in the Czech original, but as in the previous case, a deviation from the norm in a Hrabal translation can also be considered a virtue. The Italian translation of the same sentence differs at one important point, as the Italian publisher opted for a footnote explanation of the name Koniáš (HRABAL 2014: 4).

In the case of the translations of the other two sentences, no significant differences can be observed. Between "Mennydörgésként jelent meg előttem Arthur Schopenhauer" and "Con un tuono mi apparve Arthur Schopenhauer," (HRABAL 2014: 49) the Hungarian version creates an oxymoron as a result of translating „to appear as thunder,” while in the Czech original, the instrumental case likely corresponds more to the Italian "con un tuono", meaning "followed by the sound of thunder".

In the sentence employing the Sartre–Camus comparison, a slight difference is noticeable: the Hungarian version uses "szépen-még szebben" (HRABAL 1985: 62), while the Italian uses "bene-ancora meglio" (HRABAL 2014: 61), whereas the Czech original employs the less consistent "krásně-líp" (HRABAL 1994: 56). It is possible that this part indicates that the Italian and Hungarian translations were working from different samizdat editions, but it is more likely that it is sim-

ply a matter of translation attitude or adherence to the rules of the target language. Unfortunately, it is impossible to draw a trend from this single word, yet it tempts me to jokingly note, that this suggests Hrabal's Hungarian reading emphasizes the "beautiful", the Italian reading emphasizes the "correct", while the Czech original highlights the inconsistency.

VII.

Hrabal's works are thus characterized by the presentation of a creator's chaos articulated at different levels, a conscious authorial decision to deconstruct the traditional Central European or Czech writer's role as the author of the national literature, by continually presenting unfinished works to his readers, with each new work further reinforcing the unfinished status of the previous ones. This approach significantly contributes to the early explorations of Czech postmodernism, even if the authors following Hrabal do not necessarily present their creative methods with such deep intimacy to their readers. In comparing the texts made accessible to the readership through the writer's contributions, it is evident that the author intended a kind of indefinite definitiveness, an unfinished completeness, of which certain traits the Hungarian readership cannot avoid, even if they receive a much more polished, easily canonizable image of Hrabal through the Hungarian translations. This exact indefinite definitiveness undermines Hrabal's role as an author in the sense of Roland Barthes.

The textual passages through which Hrabal enters into a polemical relationship, or one might say, launches an attack against a well-defined national literature, are not only thematic, as can be seen in the complex yet clear intertwining of his nearly thirty-year oeuvre. Beyond thematic elements in the Czech original, this intention is manifested in the restriction of language use to the Prague dialect and the incorrect, colloquial use of punctuation that follows spoken language. In my opinion intentionally unveiling his writing methods to this extent and questioning his own role as an author was another of his methods to redefine Czech literature. In this case we can see, as Hrabal involves the reader (and censorship) himself into the creative process just by not concluding it for almost one and a half decade.

I have also shown that the Hrabal text that ultimately reaches the Hungarian reader has been significantly tamed and rendered conflict-free by numerous circumstances, which can be attributed either to the rational decisions of the translator and publisher or to the unbridgeable linguistic differences. It is not reasonable to expect a publisher, even for authors with a large audience like Bohumil Hrabal, to diligently reveal and publish multiple working versions of the same texts through rigorous philological work. In fact, the birth phases of *Příliš hlučná samota* intended to be introduced to the Czech audience are already fading from the public consciousness among their native readers. Even the Czech centenary Hrabal editions have been provided with explanatory notes and editorial prefaces for Czech readers.

From the short samples used here, several important conclusions can be drawn from the perspective of reception theory. It is surprising that the Hungarian editions do not intend to provide any assistance to Hrabal's readers; the editions of *Tűlságosan zajos magány* not only lack the motto and supplementary texts to this day but also refrain from correcting mistranslated proper names or poetic images. In the case of Italian translation, aside the one analyzed in this study, there is one more, published by Mondadori, in the collected works, by the title *Opere scelte*, where the translator did some textual changes to the first text (SEMINARA 2018: 137).

According to Jauss's theory of reception, the relationship is not between the author and the reader but between the text and the reader, and thus a repeatedly published text, such as *Tűlságosan zajos magány*, can represent value even in this philologically deficient form, especially if it aligns with the author's self-constructed image that emphasizes imperfection.

The reason why the Hungarian reader does not demand corrections to the philological problems discussed here can be partly explained by the fact that the text has become part of the Hungarian reader's tradition in this form. As a piece of art, it is like the Venus of Milo: it doesn't look like it was intended to be, but everyone knows it as it is. Umberto Eco's words about the Venus seem to be applicable for this case: "The Venus is now 'beautiful' as it is, and thus we consider it a model international work that unites the personality of an artist, the magic of time, and the history of the work's reception" (Eco 2013: 271). But this remark also means something else. However, in contrast to Jauss's conception, Eco's words reflect a static state. Hrabal's influence – this is evident not only in the texts examined here – has undoubtedly been immense on the Hungarian reader, but with his unquestioned canonization, he has lost his writings' inherently dynamic nature. The Hrabal who would entice the Hungarian reader to a more prepared reading, just as he does with the Czechs, may no longer find understanding ears.

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