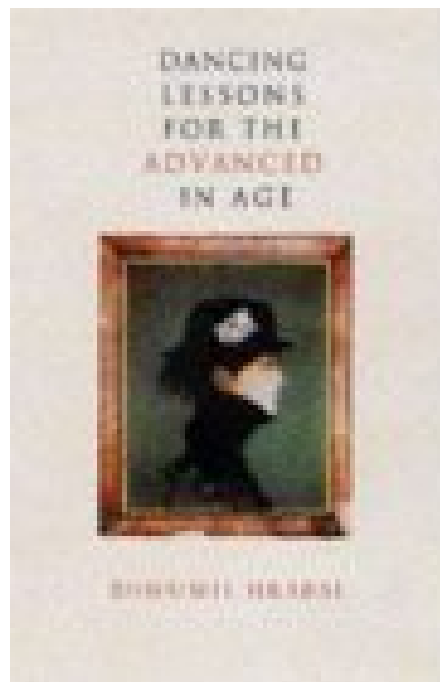




Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age

Bohumil Hrabal

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Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age

Bohumil Hrabal

Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age Bohumil Hrabal

Rake, drunkard, aesthete, gossip, raconteur extraordinaire: the narrator of Bohumil Hrabal's rambling, rambunctious masterpiece *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age* is all these and more. Speaking to a group of sunbathing women who remind him of lovers past, this elderly roué tells the story of his life—or at least unburdens himself of a lifetime's worth of stories. Thus we learn of amatory conquests (and humiliations), of scandals both private and public, of military adventures and domestic feuds, of what things were like "in the days of the monarchy" and how they've changed since. As the book tumbles restlessly forward, and the comic tone takes on darker shadings, we realize we are listening to a man talking as much out of desperation as from exuberance.

Hrabal, one of the great Czech writers of the twentieth century, as well as an inveterate haunter of Prague's pubs and football stadiums, developed a unique method which he termed "palavering," whereby characters gab and soliloquize with abandon. Part drunken boast, part soul-rending confession, part metaphysical poem on the nature of love and time, this astonishing novel (which unfolds in a single monumental sentence) shows why he has earned the admiration of such writers as Milan Kundera, John Banville, and Louise Erdrich.

Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age Details

Date : Published May 1st 1998 by Harvill Press (first published 1964)

ISBN : 9781860462153

Author : Bohumil Hrabal

Format : Paperback 128 pages

Genre : Fiction, European Literature, Czech Literature, Literature, Novels

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From Reader Review Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age for online ebook

Lee says

Good-natured, a little randy, very much free-associative, a waltz of clauses strung together, periodless, though the idea that it's one sentence is a farce, unless "one sentence" is defined as tons of natural end-of-thought stopping/transition spots (deep breaths) marked by commas instead of periods, which, as in Saramago's stuff, particularly *Blindness*, effectively keeps eyes on pages, propels readers ahead, this sense of ceaselessly continuing created by a comma instead of a full stop, you see, I enjoyed this as much as the other Hrabal I've read -- *Too Loud a Solitude* -- expressing this enjoyment audibly with a few snorts and quiet little cackle-type noises, nothing too boisterous, while walking and reading this one, especially not while wearing khakis, I wouldn't have wanted to wet myself, the stain would be obvious, but if a number one while walking and reading and wearing khakis were unavoidable thanks to mirth, I would carry on heroically, walking and reading with this stain upon the sweet spot where my legs meet, smiling to young ladies all the while, confident, albeit surely semi-deranged in a harmless way, which is how this book proceeds, that is, with a good-natured narrator who likes the ladies, who the ladies like in return, who conceives of himself heroically despite nothing occurring that's too dramatic, who leavens his levity with a storytelling instinct honed over a lifetime that knows to slip in brutalities, especially shamed folks hanging themselves with towels, mothers hacking away at their hanged daughters, the sort of things that people apparently liked to hear before they outsourced storytelling to radio and TV and Tarantino, this book is the sort of thing that reminds me a little of my grandpa once hydrocephalic dementia kicked in, the innocent confabulatory flow, fact and fiction intermixed, every instance of a lifetime in *play*, with emphasis added to stress enjoyment despite imminent end, the final full stop Hrabal's "sentence"-length novella purposefully fails to include, perhaps as a bit of palavering rebellion against the contrivance of ends in general, or the idea that death is an end at all

Mariano Hortal says

Publicado en <http://lecturaylocura.com/clases-de-b...>

“Clases de baile para mayores” de Bohumil Hrabal. Un insolente y divertido libertino

Bohumil Hrabal (1914-1997) es un escritor checo cuya obra se caracteriza “por una visión satírica de la realidad y la importancia que confiere a sus aspectos absurdos”. “Considerado uno de los más grandes autores del siglo XX en su lengua por su facilidad narrativa y el uso alternativo del humor y la tragedia en un mismo plano.” Nórdica nos trae ahora una de sus obras emblemáticas, “Clases de bailes para señoras” donde un anciano cuenta sus batallitas a una señorita con todo lujo de detalles.

Para entender su estilo y su forma de escribir me voy a basar en tres fuentes, en primer lugar la opinión del escritor británico Julian Barnes:

“Hrabal es un novelista muy sofisticado, con un gran gusto por el humor y una sutil ternura en los detalles.” De esta frase hay tres datos importantes a tener en cuenta: sutileza en los detalles, gusto por el humor y lo sofisticado de su propuesta.

Como segunda fuente vamos a utilizar al propio autor que en la novela que me ocupa hoy dice lo siguiente en el prólogo:

“Pienso que las expresiones idiomáticas poco ortodoxas a las que he recurrido en la construcción de Clases

de Baile para mayores son necesarias en la misma medida, en la prosa contemporánea se aprecia un deslizamiento en la selección en la figura del héroe. Creo que existe un continuo trasvase entre la lengua coloquial y las jergas, y que un nivel idiomático presupone la existencia del otro. Las jergas, más que la lengua coloquial, tienen un interés en el idioma académico, puesto que se basan en saltarse las reglas establecidas mediante la creatividad, buscando un efecto de sorpresa y singularidad, para cogerte desprevenido.[...]"

Su defensa a ultranza de la jerga idiomática como elemento desestabilizador del orden establecido le ayuda a desplazar la figura de un héroe atípico, como es en este caso el insolente, tierno, divertido anciano que nos cuenta las típicas batallas de los abuelos. La tercera fuente es mi propia experiencia observadora: Hrabal plantea una narración en primera persona que es un flujo continuo de pensamientos, de anécdotas y experiencias que se van sucediendo a lo largo de toda la narración; no utiliza el diálogo, pero se sabe que está narrándoselo a alguien.

A pesar de la apariencia poco amigable (no hay apenas puntos y apartes) la narración avanza con solidez y resulta bastante adictiva ya que Hrabal es capaz de aderezarla con todo tipo de detalles que la enriquecen, tal es el caso de su descripción de lugares en los que nuestro querido anciano ha estado; en ese momento es cuando acentúa el uso de los adjetivos para exaltar el colorido de lugares tan exóticos como Hungría:

"[...] y me fui a hacer mundo, a Hungría ¡qué delicia!... en Sopron había una hermosa fábrica de cerveza, un edificio rojo y blanco con ventanas verdes como las tirolesas, y todo estaba alicatado, junto a cada una de las ventanas había una escalera de hierro para que los bomberos, en caso de incendio, pudieran subir y bajar con facilidad, como los monos aquellos de Dresde... y Budapest, ¡qué maravilla de ciudad!, una calle blanca con ventanas rojas y otra toda verde con ventanas amarillas; las había azules, doradas y con pintas; incluso durante la guerra se hacía un pan tan blanco como si fueran bollos...[...]"

Todo esto salpicado de momentos metaliterarios donde reflexiona sobre el verdadero fin de la poesía en particular; el símil, desde luego, ayuda a entenderlo además de sacarnos una sonrisa:

"[...] por ello el poeta Bondy me decía que la verdadera poesía debe ser dolorosa, como si uno olvidara la cuchilla de afeitar en un pañuelo y, al sonarse, la nariz se cortara con ella, que un buen libro no es el que sirve al lector para mejor conciliar el sueño, sino que, por el contrario, debe sacarle de la cama para que corra, tal como está, en calzoncillos, a propinarle unos coscorriones al señor escritor...[...]"

En este vendaval de grandilocuencia, no duda en atribuirse las palabras de su teniente Hovorka a la hora de conquistar a una mujer, esa sutileza en los detalles de la que hablaba anteriormente:

"[...] ¡Chicos!, decía el teniente Hovorka, "a una mujer así hay que tratarla con suavidad, como si uno estuviera afilando un lápiz: eso con las mujeres es más eficaz que sacarles la bayoneta; [...]"

Y hace gala continuamente del humor, hasta cuando le llegaron a incluir en el parte de bajas, ¡estando él presente!

"[...] y me sucedió a mí que un día, al pasar revista, leyendo el parte de bajas, me señalaron entre los caídos: todo coincidía, incluso la fecha de nacimiento, conque dije en voz alta: "¡Pero si yo estoy vivo!", a lo que me cayeron dos semanas de arresto por hablar durante el pase de revista; [...]"

Es en el epílogo donde adivinamos por fin a quién está narrando sus peripecias; es entonces cuando el gran escritor checo hace gala de una mayor profusión lírica; en efecto, su escena final es de un gusto ciertamente conmovedor, un colofón extraordinario a esta pequeña sorpresa literaria.

[...] y empezó a lavarse, y el anciano, que se había pasado toda la tarde contándole historias, en ese instante quedó como fulminado, su rodilla doblada, presa de unas manos anudadas, mirando más allá de ella, hierático, arrebatado, tierno, mientras ella le hacía ese regalo que solamente una mujer puede hacer a un hombre, lavándose, a la caída del día, para unos ojos emocionados..."

Los textos provienen de la traducción del checo de Jitka Mlejnková y Alberto Ortiz de "Clases de baile para mayores" de Bohumil Hrabal para la editorial Nórdica.

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(view spoiler)

Lisa says

At work I sit down in a chair and people come to me, sometimes drunk or maybe just schizophrenic, or both, and they talk to me or at me while I putz around the desk and drawers and hunt for pens, Can you give me 3 dollars for the bus? and a promise to pay me back on the first of the month, I always cave, it's amazing how you can train your eyes on someone without actually listening, maybe hearing but not listening, and then from the hum comes a lightning-bolt thought that makes you stop and wonder how much you've missed out on while you glanced furtively at the clock and thought about your lunch, because genius can be hidden in the unlikeliest of places, hidden in the folds of grey matter under the grey rags of the homeless man sitting in front of me, and if it wasn't for the talk talk talk that I'm used to, so different from the crickety creaky silence of other lonely lives, maybe I wouldn't get Bohumil Hrabal or should I say his shoemaker, if I didn't sit with him every day, the past sneaking into the present, lascivious thoughts of women and unwelcome details of bowel movements washing over me, sometimes I radio-edit them out as I go, their cigarettes are unfiltered too so who am I to complain, free association sounds suspiciously like literary code for ADD, it's no *Too Loud a Solitude* but it'll while away the time just fine, and get your creative juices flowing besides, it's almost too easy, no periods to speak of because it's pregnant with half-baked ideas, when I think how many great minds are dismissed as rambling drunks it makes my head spin and maybe one day I'll be sitting on a bar stool talking like a damn fool, ogling the bartenders and buying them shots so I can stay past closing time, we've come full circle, even the advanced in age are allowed to dance, and here is the manual that shows you how to trip across your words and dance into the twilight of your life with your head held high, pants falling down, in case anyone cares to listen, forever and ever amen

Praj says

The delicate swirls of bubbles that dash to greet the robust rim of the glass, the bashful flour that audaciously rises to an aromatic marvel and the musical notes of the hammer as it drums the quiescent nails into colourful leather, only if they had words attached to their expeditions could we have then known the chronicles of a far-fetched yeast and a wooden caricature of an yet unborn shoe. Aren't we lucky to be humans, to be able to knit words into our experiences? Isn't life beautiful even with all its flaws? Untouched memories that nestle cozily in forgotten sentiments, lingering nostalgia that hides its viciousness behind the surreal veil of pleasantries, morph into an enlightening flow between a man and his alternative search for therapeutic consolations. Everyone is a story teller. Some carve, some orate and some discover a home to their lost words at the dusk of their lives. Yet, stories are somehow formed and lessons are bestowed step by step to the listeners who sway in these choreographed audible melodies, dancing to the tunes of splendor madness that transcends into the spontaneity of "palaverers".

Hrabal says, "Human being is always mistaken in his point of view on the world, but that the world in which he lives, its underlying truth as a context of facts, cannot be mistaken."

When the romanticism of the world seduces the melancholic acrobats of realism, imaginary tales are woven cheerfully indulging the severity of the past into an absolute tenderness of an aesthetic heroism. Have you

ever noticed the face of the person who ecstatically recites nostalgic tales? At some stage in those various gradations of the sound bites, an infectious smile gets crafted on the narrator's face that eventually finds a way to be plastered on your face and long after the stories fade in the moody air, the words remain powerfully glued like that smile. Jirka must have sported the identical contagious grin when he began telling his wondrous tales to a bunch of beauties lazing in the sun. Inspired by Bohumil's Uncle Pepin, Jirka's stories brought the pub alive with flamboyant memories that highlighted a harsh realism of a revolutionary era of the Austro-Hungarian landscape and the succeeding historical events with refined emotions. The noisy clatter of the Perko typewriter that Hrabal loved listening to as he poured his heart out resounded in the divine melodies of Jirka's world.

"The world is a beautiful place don't you think? Not because it is but because I see it that way, the way Pushkin saw it in that movie, poor Pushkin, to die in a duel, and so young, his last poems gushing from a bullet hole in his head, I could tell from the picture that he admired the European Renaissance too, he had fantastic muttonchops, you know the whiskers our own Franz Joseph wore, and Strauss the composer,..."

Jirka's prose becomes an animated medium through which Bohumil depicts the chronological Austro-Hungarian revolution into diversified sovereignty. The reminiscence of a fading imperialist monarchy lingers in the ruins of pious love that had been washed by wantonness and glamour of money. The partisan of the Church refrained from sins but they were not saints. Bohumil impishly mocking the law of the Church by describing the Holy Trinity as a ***"carrier pigeon to communicate"***; debates how the Church and the religious elites had insisted on "curbing passion" and restricting the liberation of human or rather sexual desires bringing nothing but sadness in the end. The discrepancies that prevailed in the society, the absurdities on the war front and the hypocritical approach to sexual aspirations, the suicide and other criminal exploits shine fiercely through Jirka's words as the sun touches the supple skin of his gorgeous audience.

"Javanese cinnamon is better than Ceylonese cinnamon is good in mulled wine and fruit....."

A soldier who became a shoemaker and then found a concrete place in the vocation of brewery, Jirka was in love with his work, no matter its station. In his stories one can unearth meticulous recollection of the fermentation processes on how the yeast and hops made a wondrous marriage that resulted in one of the finest brew in Europe. For a sturdy soldier with a sensitive heart, he sure did make good quality shoes. As a charmer with fine hands, Jirka could have enticed the Prime Minister's daughter, but he was a gentleman and there could have been bad consequences and Mr. Batista would not approve it at all. Isn't Jirka a hero? For he knows ***"how a real man trembles like a frog about to leap whenever he sees a beautiful woman"*** and yet he maintained his sexual hygiene. Hrabal, amuses the reader with such exquisite sentences that find prominent place in this fanfare of miscellaneous characters and simultaneous stories. Furthermore, it gets outright comical when Jirka lambasts that even though progress is good for mankind, when it comes to his favourite bread, butter and beer, the damn technology is to be slowed down. (***"Why will no one see that progress may be good for making people people, but for bread and butter and beer it's the plague, they've got to slow down their damn technology"***). Given that Hrabal scripted Jirka before the Communist occupation in 1968, Jirka and his opinions were not subjected to censorship, fortunately.

"A certain poet by the name of Bondy once told me people have strange ideas about what writing poetry means, they think it's like going for water with a bucket or that poets just lift up their eyes unto the heavens and the heavenly hosts rain down verses upon them.....he had such a head on his shoulders that even today the professors go gaga over him...."

The free-thinkers who question the authoritative Church, the social democrats who widely indulge in the quintessential “chicken v/s egg” debate, place Charles Darwin on the pedestal. Egon Bondy was one of the dearest pal of Bohumil, a free-thinker, a poet who questioned every conservative regulation propelled amongst the societal more, Hrabal portraying his friend writes, ***“Bondy the poet- he wrote poetry only in the toilet with a poetry board on his kneed and a notebook on the pastry board.....”*** .

Through Jirka's insightful eyes, Bondy who forever travels with his two babies pushing their buggy, elucidates why poets love to drink and meditate and how are blessed with sudden prophetic intellectual enlightenment. Hrabal puts forth the religion v/s atheist argumentative skilfully inferring how politics and writing go hand-in hand, no matter the pursued resistance.

In this mesmerizing monologue, the 70-yr old Jirka who now quite often visits the cemetery and wonder why don't working people sing songs anymore becomes Hrabal's beloved palaverer who immensely appreciates the feminine charisma. After all, it is only the poets who think of death and "old fogies" like him think of women. Jirka's narratives not only bring surreal grandeur to his life but make the reader feel alive and sense the utmost sentiment of belonging in a place where beauty was discovered everywhere.

Mrabab said of his palaverers, “Thanks to their madness, transcend themselves through experiment and spontaneity and through their ridiculousness they achieve a kind of grandeur, because they end up where no one expected them or expects them.”

So, as the delicate aroma of the fragrant dough rising from its humid stupor fills the kitchen , I put on my new pair of shoes and wordlessly listen to the melody of a chilled lager cascading into a crystalline maze , the frothy allure embracing the steamy bliss that springs from the soft warm bread waving the mischievous beer bubbles a long farewell and when the butter melts into a golden stream, I leisurely pin my ears onto Jirka while clinking my glass to his amusing anecdotes and letting out a heartfelt gratitude to the literary art of Hrabal Bohumil and his dearest pal, Egon Bondy.

Vasko Genev says

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Petya says

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Thomas says

The whole book is one sentence. And even then it doesn't end with a period.

Dajana says

Opomenuli su me za glasno smejanje u biblioteci :D

'To je bilo zbog toga što je tada svako hteo da izgleda kao kompozitor ili pesnik, danas je sve to naopa?ke,
svaki pisac ho?e da na fotografiji izgleda kao dripac'

Jonfaith says

Mother of God, isn't life breathtakingly beautiful.

Joel bought me this book several years ago. It appeared so disjointed that I never truly considered it. Today
the world was revealed as damp and overcast; reconciling myself to those conditions, Manchester United lost
to City 6-1 and I slumped, to be polite. Reaching out, I heartily stumbled upstairs to scan our shelves and
returned with Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age, coincidentally just as my wife was browsing
reviews of such on this wicked site. That was wonky weird. I read the book in a pair of sittings and while it

isn't explosive, it is a meandering monologue for the ages. It reminds me of Moscow To The End of the Line, but Hrabal's novella is better.

Lyubov says

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Pat says

Lezioni di ballo per anziani e progrediti uscì, dopo le sforbiciate da parte della redazione, tagliato di oltre la metà. Il dattiloscritto originale non sopravvisse, ma il redattore affermò che Hrabal aveva utilizzato i passaggi falciati come base di un'altra opera, e che nella versione definitiva non c'era più nulla «*delle lezioni di ballo che erano state per parecchie pagine la cornice tematica*». Tra i dettagli perduti ricordava il più affascinante: «*come, dopo la fine della lezione di ballo, il narratore accompagna il proprio partner al manicomio e lì, alla luce della luna, in un'altana e sui vialetti bianchi dell'istituto ripetono le figure che avevano imparato quella sera*».

Il vecchio calzolaio che ama le “sventolone” e la vita si racconta.

Ed è novella dell'inverosimile, resa credibile dall'assenza di punti fermi. Impossibile interrompere o modificare il ritmo. È un flusso inarrestabile, senza meta, con uditorio singolare: un'impalpabile signorina che ascolta senza mai replicare; è sovversione, scompiglio, è esplosione di frammenti narrativi. È folgorante e mutevole follia. E ancora è caleidoscopico turbinio di figure scentrate, di sentimenti amplificati. È colata di passioni incontenibili, poetiche o prepotenti.

Sedetevi comodamente, aprite il libro, e lasciate parlare Hrabal.

“i liberi pensatori rinfacciavano alla chiesa che Cristo, se era Dio, perché allora poi teneva commercio con una donna caduta? e io gli dico, c'è poco da fare, davanti a una bella sventolona non riesco a resistere nemmeno io, immaginatevi quindi Gesù Cristo che all'epoca era anche un gran bel pezzo d'uomo, tipo Conar Tolnes, in fondo aveva trent'anni e, insomma, quella Maria Maddalena, anche se di professione faceva la squaldrina nei locali, ugualmente era riuscita a guadagnarsi la santità e aveva ottenuto il favore dei cieli e non aveva tradito Cristo e coi capelli gli aveva asciugato il sangue, e quel poverino se ne stava appeso alla croce perché aveva annunciato il progresso sociale e che tutte le persone sono uguali tra loro, e sua mamma era crollata in lacrime e Maria Maddalena l'aveva consolata, e io mi chiedo, dove sono tutte le belle sventolone del tempo andato? sono morte e di loro nulla è rimasto, però la cara Mariuccia Maddalena continuerà per sempre a intenerire i cuoricini poetici, e questo era stato anche il destino di quel gran bel pezzo d'uomo che aveva studiato da falegname, lui sapeva segare travi e assi, e di punto in bianco aveva abbandonato ogni cosa e era andato a insegnare alla gente che l'amore effettivo per il prossimo non vuol dire far capriole con una signorina su un canapè, ma invece dare subito una mano a chi in quel momento ne ha bisogno”

Seemita says

This little novella can, at once, be discarded as a long, never-ending chapter on corporeal pursuits from the life book of a mindless rambler, a libidinous exhorter, a senile raconteur. And for some part, one might be right in doing so. If disaster has struck you due to your prolonged exposure to the skin junk processed and reprocessed on electronic and print media, you might not be cajoled to hold back even for a second from trashing this, their way.

But despite my reservations, I sat next to this babbler and listened. And as he wed thoughts with words, opinions with ridicule, humor with cantankerousness and malice with gravity, all within an unrelenting, single sentence spanning 110 pages, my jaws dropped; just not at the sight of his audacity to obscenely titillate his listener's senses but also at the reservoir of concern churning tirelessly underneath this doltish kitsch.

No? You don't believe me? Hear this:

"...when I was serving in the most elegant army in the world I told our medical officer, Doctor, I said, I've got a weak heart, but all he said was, So have I, boy, and if we had a hundred thousand like you we could conquer the world, and he put me into the highest category, so I was a hero..."

Just an aberration, is it? Well then, how about this?

"...or the Russians, who are jetting the world so fast that they have to put their brakes the moment they take off and one speed engineer says that the time is near when a jet will see its own tail flying around the earth and passengers won't even have a chance to sit down before arrival, they might as well stay home.."

'Oh, he is mild', did you say? Not when you come across this:

"...oh it's nice enough when two young people rush upto each other and clasp hands and whatever else there is to clasp, though that kind of thing is more exciting to clothed nations, naked nations are less lecherous..."

And he certainly doesn't try to be approving when he declares:

"...once tried to do splits with a beauty in the Catholic House and gave myself a hernia, which isn't so bad for a man makes anything look good..."

A feeling of rebellious delight comes upon me on encountering souls that purposely bleat or act comic in the worldly eyes just so they can enrage every cell of their innards and rack every remnant to life, launching them as missiles, oozing precision and inflicting damage out of every inked word onto a world reeling under war, oppression, anarchy, discrimination and injustice.

And you can rest your doubts of misogynist jibes dotting this work should they come disturbing you courtesy the lascivious nature of this unnamed narrator. The enthusiastic inclusion of many snapshots, depicting women in equal roles of freedom and power, the bread-earner and decision-maker, cements the earnestness with which Hrabal offers his disdain, not without tints of hope. Like the unsettling maxim, '**So it goes**' in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, there is a chilling adage sewn in this work as well,

“.. so, I was the hero..”

While it appears he penned these 5 words from a room painted in the darkest shades of satire (and rightfully so), I might have to disappoint him for buying it, on face value. And to draw him into my team and stopping short of antagonizing him, I might just turn his quote, on him, in sly uproar:

“...I’d pray all night for God to come and empty a cartload of wood on top of him, which must be why Bondy the poet says that real poetry must hurt, as you’d forgotten you wrapped a razor blade in your handkerchief and you blow your nose, no book worth its salt is meant to put you to sleep, it’s meant to make you jump out of bed in your underwear and run and beat the author’s brains out...”

Paul says

This novella is in fact a single sentence, which gives it a breathless feel. It is the recollections of a man in his 70s told to a group of young women who are sunbathing. It is a telling of stories, most of them bawdy. They are about the narrator’s profession (shoemaking), his time in the army, but most of all his love life. There are lots of references to the European Renaissance, but if you are expecting references to Da Vinci or Michelangelo you’d be out of luck; it’s a euphemism for sex!

Hrabal has the reputation of being one of the great Czech writers of the twentieth century and he has influenced many who have followed such as Kundera and Havel. Many of his characters are “wise fools” delivering their profundities in story form. One of Hrabal’s favourite occupations was telling tales in his local inn; the book reads like that as well.

There is humour in the tale, but it is repetitive. It did remind me of some of the flights of conversation you get from those with dementia (in the middle stages). A tale from times past (sometimes a fragment) that is disassociated from what came before or after. I think whether you enjoy this book depends on how you feel about the narrator. If you find him irritating (like Holden Caulfield) you will quickly get bored. Admittedly some of it was amusing. The question is do you want to spend time listening to some old bloke telling you about the amorous adventures of his youth. If the answer is no, best to avoid I think!

Héctor Genta says

Prisencolinensinainciusol

Gli scrittori: ci sono i modernisti, i minimalisti, i realisti, i postmodernisti... e poi c’è Hrabal. Lui è uno scrittore a parte.

I libri di Hrabal: *Una solitudine troppo rumorosa*, *Treni strettamente sorvegliati*, *Ho servito il re d’Inghilterra...* e poi c’è *Lezioni di ballo per anziani e progrediti*, un libro a parte di uno scrittore a parte. Uno stralunato monologo senza fiato e senza punti, un collage che mette insieme la trascrizione dei ricordi alcolici dello zio dell’autore (i *Protocolli*) con frammenti provenienti da un altro testo (*I dolori del vecchio Werther*) e altre storie ancora. Collage successivamente riveduto e corretto e dal quale sono state espunte diverse parti, tra le quali proprio quella che dà il titolo al libro. Solo questo basterebbe a spiegare la bizzarria dell’opera.

Non un flusso di coscienza alla Joyce, come si potrebbe pensare, ma il tentativo di mettere su carta il parlato della gente comune, quel misto di banalità, opinioni, sbruffonerie e strafalcioni che costituiscono l'essenza della chiacchiera da bar o da strada. A questo proposito potremmo arrischiare un paragone, tanto ardito quanto irriverente, tra il lavoro di Michelangelo nello scolpire *i Prigioni* e quello di Hrabal nelle *Lezioni di ballo*: il primo procede per sottrazione, toglie marmo per liberare, per arrivare a realizzare la sua idea, lo scrittore ceco invece compie il percorso inverso procedendo per accumulazione, aggiungendo cioè personaggi e voci al coro fino a stordire il lettore.

La storia prende le mosse dal protagonista che va a sbirciare nel giardino di un vicino dove "certe belle sventolone" sono intente a prendere il sole in costume da bagno, sventolone alle grazie delle quali non sembra immune neppure il curato del posto. Episodio minimo, ma pretesto per stappare la bottiglia dei ricordi e dei pensieri che saltano fuori con l'effervescenza di una schiuma troppo a lungo costretta al chiuso. Il protagonista, si diceva, è un settantenne, ex-calzolaio, ex-maltatore, ex soldato "dell'esercito più bello del mondo", un tipo tronfio e dall'ego strabordante, un "adoratore del rinascimento europeo" che racconta le sue gesta con l'intento di mostrare come sia risultato "il vincitore" in ognuna delle sue imprese.

L'Austria Felix è la sua Arcadia, il mondo perduto al confronto del quale il presente è un piano inclinato verso una decadenza irreversibile; il punto di vista è quello della gente comune, che sogna in grande ma poi guarda alle piccole cose. Nei tempi attuali "gli ideali prendono a vacillare", dice il protagonista, ma il fatto è che si tratta di ideali quanto meno discutibili...

I passaggi della narrazione sono legati tra loro da fili logici sottilissimi: a volte per analogia, a volte per contrasto, altre per semplice associazione d'idee. Difficile orientarsi in mezzo a una trama del genere, tra episodi surreali (come quelli dell'uomo con la mano di ferro e del raddrizzatore di nasi) e citazioni da libri immaginari come quello dei sogni di Anna Novakovna e quello del signor Batista sull'igiene sessuale.

L'autore non risparmia nessuno e anche Cristo, Edison, i poeti Bondy e Havlíček finiscono trasformati in personaggi ordinari, che bevono e si comportano proprio come tutti gli altri.

In questo libro Hrabal diverte e si diverte, al punto che al lettore disorientato e frustrato nella sua ricerca di sottotesti e chiavi interpretative più o meno nascoste, non resterà altro che alzare bandiera bianca. Non è questa, a mio avviso, la strada per avvicinarsi a *Lezioni di ballo*. Provate invece ad accomodarvi in poltrona, magari in compagnia di un bel boccale di birra, e lasciatevi affascinare dal flusso affabulatorio del grande scrittore, dalle storielle di sbronze, risse, pisciate e sventolone che agitano le pagine di questo libro e che spesso si concludono con morali improbabili. Vi assicuro che ne varrà la pena.
