

A few words on the Italian translation of *Příliš hlučná samota*



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RÉSUMÉ

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The article shortly presents an overview of the two versions of the Italian translation of Bohumil Hrabal's *Příliš hlučná samota*. Starting by taking into account the complex philological questions of its genesis and editorial fortunes in its home country, I will then examine the Italian translation by Sergio Corduas for Einaudi (1987) and its revised version (by the same translator) for the Meridiani Mondadori edition (2003) in comparison with the text edited in *Sebrané spisy Bohumila Hrabala* (1994).

KEYWORDS

Bohumil Hrabal; *Příliš hlučná samota*; *Una solitudine troppo rumorosa*; Sergio Corduas; translations, Einaudi editore; I Meridiani Mondadori; *Kluby poezie*; samizdat.

The aim of this article is to synthetically discuss some interesting aspects of the Italian translation of *Příliš hlučná samota*, first published by Einaudi in 1987 as *Una solitudine troppo rumorosa*, and revised in Bohumil Hrabal's *Opere scelte* (Selected works, Mondadori 2003). Both translation and revision were conducted by bohemist and Czech literature professor Sergio Corduas on the basis of the same Czech source, *Příliš hlučná samota*, yet the two Italian texts actually differ in ways that a textologist would call significant. The 2003 Mondadori edition is entirely based on the 1994 Pražská imaginace critical edition of *Příliš hlučná samota* in the ninth volume of *Sebrané spisy Bohumila Hrabala*, while the source text of the 1987 Einaudi edition has never been clearly identified. Therefore the purpose of my research is to explore it in its context of origin, keeping its Mondadori double and *SSBH* as reference points, and try to reconstruct its hypothetical source text.

Mine is neither an attempt to provide a complete philological investigation of Hrabal's (*Příliš*) *Hlučná samota* in its original Czech forms, nor it is a proposal of a critical interpretation of the Italian translation seen as a parallel cultural product to its author's original conception. Such premise is mandatory, for when speaking of Hrabal and especially his *Samota* it is particularly hard to trace a defined chronological



line of the different *variations*, *variants* and *versions*¹ of one text, whose result being a general confusion and critical speculations often based on axiomatic assumptions. Nevertheless, I believe it equally necessary to try and gather as much reliable information as possible about both the Czech and Italian context, in order to contemplate the consequent hypotheses within a reasonable margin of probability. Similarly, an overview of some basic historical information about the original text is needed prior to any attempt to analyse its fate in Italy, since it directly affected the first and most widely diffused Italian translation of that text. Moreover, it particularly suits my purpose, since the research I had to do was almost entirely of a philological kind.

For those who prefer evidence-based work and are reluctant to accept information if not well documented, Hrabal's production is a source of great dissatisfaction. The hectic writing of a considerable number of texts and a tendency to re-write, vary and often disperse them is as much a specific character of the Moravian author's poetics from its beginnings in the 1940s as it is a consequence of his personal history in a changing political context.

For my actual purpose, I am only interested in the time span covering the period from the first appearance of the text *Příliš hlučná samota* to 1987, year of publication of Corduas' translation.

The first and fundamental textual reference and source of information about the chronology of our chosen text is the ninth volume of *Sebrané spisy Bohumila Hrabala: Hlučná samota* (Hrabal 1994). It collects all three *variations*² of Hrabal's *Samota*: the prose *Příliš hlučná samota* opens the volume and constitutes a section of its own; *Hlučná samota — text první variace* in verse, and the prose *II. Variace* represent the section *Texty první a druhé variace — pracovní verze*. A note from the editor of the volume Milan Jankovič (Hrabal 1994, pp. 243–257) gives an account of the editorial process, starting from its problematic dating, through the selection of one textual variant among the at least two existing of the third variation, to the editorial corrections, and motivates the choice to open the volume precisely with the third variation, regarded by the editors as the nearest to 'the author's will',³ despite being the last to have been written in chronological order. Although the editors' reflections and conclusions are made evident in the first place by the structure of the volume and could be needing further discussion,⁴ what are crucial characters of this edition in general and distin-

1 I deliberately quote Susanna Roth's words *variaci*, *varianta*, *verze* (a chapter' title in Roth 1993, pp. 84–91). Since it is not my intention here to discuss the preexisting terminology used by scholars about linguistic, stylistic, content-related elements in Hrabal's production of varying texts, I will adopt terms that I see best fit from a textological point of view, or I will just quote the terms other authors used. Milan Jankovič in his editorial note to the ninth volume of *SSBH* uses the word *text* almost as a synonym of *varianta*, while much more frequent is *variaci*, as specifically referring to the name Hrabal gave to the three texts contained in the volume's typewritten source.

2 As the author defines them; the editors of *SSBH* adopted the term and used it to refer to the three main different textual variants of *Hlučná samota*.

3 'Rozhodli jsme se pro otisknutí rukopisu, který se prokazatelně vrací k původní autorské vůli [...]' (Hrabal 1994, p. 244).

4 'Nejprve je připomenuta verze, která je více *dotvořená*. Teprve za ni jsme zařadili verze "*přípravné*", ač vlastně nešlo v pravém slova smyslu o žádnou přípravu, ale o cestu. Cesta



guish it from all the other editions of Hrabal's texts⁵ are its textological content and its internal organisation. Every text is given a code and, as already mentioned, in this particular instance the editing process is described in detail. This provides useful information not only about the texts themselves — texts that nowadays, after over two decades from the completion of *SSBH* are far more difficult to find in their physical and original form — but also about the texts that are *not* included in that edition, and yet were thoroughly examined and compared with one another. This philological approach gives every researcher the possibility to at least outline the distinctive elements of those that the editors of *SSBH* considered as blind alleys for their purpose. As far as I am concerned, it constitutes a basic support for my research.

The source of the third variation that Jankovič chose for publication is grouped in a file of typewritten texts containing all three variations: *Hlučná samota. text červenec 1976 in verse, II. Variace* and *Příliš hlučná samota. text Červenec 1976*. Apart from the clear difference between the first variation in verse and the others in prose, the second and the third variation are radically divergent as of linguistic, stylistic and content-related elements. While *II. Variace* is written in *hovorová čeština*, and consequently presents a different phrasing that imitates tones and pauses of the spoken language, *Příliš hlučná samota* is written in *spisovná čeština*, the literary language that Hrabal himself called 'úzkostlivá řeč' (Hrabal 1994, p. 253). Above all the two prosaic variations differ in the ending: in the *II. Variace* the protagonist commits suicide, in the third variation he only imagines it in a dream.

The date of July 1976 for all three texts is accepted because auctorial despite being conventional: the editor imagines the date of origin of *Hlučná samota* to be about 1973–1974, as stated by Hrabal himself, yet he assumes that the three different variations weren't written all at once (Hrabal 1994, p. 243). The editor then lists and describes alternative versions of that same text from 1976, printed editions preceding

není pro Hrabala cestou k *definitivnosti* [...] Je to ovšem také cesta k *jistotě náhlého prozření*. K této *polaritě* nás přivádějí Hrabalovy texty na každém kroku. Chtěli jsme ji nějak připomenout i v přípravě této edice, nesetřít stopy tvůrčího hledání a *zápasu*, zároveň však nabídnout čtenáři *bezpečnou orientaci*. Vedle standardního způsobu textové přípravy té "klasické", v našem případě úvodní variace, jsme zachovali jistou "nedodělanost" *přípravných* dvou variací' (Hrabal 1994, p. 244, emphasis mine). I believe that this excerpt offers an example of the editor's critical point of view on Hrabal's three variations. Thus, the editorial note deviates from the hypothetical *neutrality* of a philological job, and clearly merges into the sphere of interpretation. A similar example resides in the editors' approach to *Kluby poezie* (Hrabal 1994, p. 246; Hrabal 1995, p. 405).

- 5 Including the most recent ones. An example is the currently underway project of Hrabal's *Spisy* published by Mladá fronta and directed by Jiří Pelán. In his editorial note, Pelán states that 'Nová řada tyto Sebrané spisy nenahrazuje, ale textologicky z nich [*SSBH*] čerpá a odvolává se na ně' (Hrabal 2015, p. 402); 'Podrobnosti o rukopisech i třech verzích detailně zpracoval Milan Jankovič v *SSBH* 9. Autorský komentář přetiskujeme na s. 402–405' (Hrabal 2015, p. 473). I believe *SSBH* to be the only possible source for new editions of Hrabal's text, for a double reason: on one side it offers a valuable philological record of the editorial work conducted on the manuscripts (in Hrabal's instance they are always typewritten texts), on the other, it offers — sadly — the only remaining evidence of many of Hrabal's original texts.



SSBH (Odeon 1989; Odeon — Klub čtenářů 1992) and finally samizdat editions: *Expedice* 1977, *Popelnice* 1978, *Krameriova expedice* 1978 and 1979, *Pražská imaginace* 1987,⁶ the first to collate all three variations together and most similar to the source typewritten text of the *SSBH* volume (Hrabal 1994, p. 244). Jankovič also informs the readers about an alternative version of the third variation *Příliš hlučná samota*, differing from the one printed in *SSBH* in some specific places that according to the editor also signal its later composition. Jankovič is convinced that this alternative version, that he calls the ‘verze s vítěznými potkany’ or the ‘potkaní varianta’ must have been written just shortly after the ‘verze s vítěznými krysy’ or ‘krysí varianta’. He explains that the dating this text cannot be other than unclear, but the hypothesis of its being later than the ‘krysí varianta’ (black rats winning over brown ones) is supported by external circumstances such as the diffusion of four versions of the black rats variant against only one with brown rats. Anyway he believes the changes generated in the third variation are not compromising, and considers both as authentic (Hrabal 1994, p. 245). The alternative variation’s distinctive elements are conveniently described in the editor’s note (Hrabal 1994, pp. 243, 245–246) and can be summarized as follows:

- Haňtá’s press is mechanical and not hydraulical (this character can be found in many places of the book starting from the first page);
- brown rats (potkani) win over black rats (krysy) in the rodents war (in the third chapter);
- an excerpt about the gypsy fire is added (in the fourth chapter);
- the ending is slightly longer, and it doesn’t mention the name ‘Ilonka’.

Both excerpts of the gypsy fire and the ending are quoted from a samizdat text borrowed from Josef Zumr, about which the editor gives no further information than: ‘[...] doplňujemě text *Příliš hlučné samoty* podle samizdatového vydání (formátu A4 z roku 1976) zapůjčeného J. Zumrem’ (Hrabal 1994, p. 245).

I excluded from my research the printed editions of the third variation as a whole for being later than Corduas’ translation for Einaudi, and focused on the typewritten source text (i.e. the printed text of *SSBH* volume 9), its alternative version, and of course the samizdat editions. Neither could I delete from my list of possibilities *Kluby poezie*, a collage of excerpts cut from *Příliš hlučná samota* and *Něžný barbar*⁷ alternatively and published in 1981 by *Mladá fronta*. It shows all four distinctive elements of the alternative version to the third variation in a similar, albeit not identical form. Jankovič obviously mentions it in his editorial note, but considers that ‘knižní vydání *Klubů poezie* [...] je však natolik celkově nespolehlivé

6 According to Jitka Hanáková, *Edice českého samizdatu*, 1997, *Příliš hlučná samota* was also printed among the *Rukopisy VBF* in 1978.

7 *Něžný barbar* has a similar history to that of *Příliš hlučná samota*. It was probably written about 1973, then firstly diffused as a samizdat in 1974 and as a printed book in an exile edition in 1981 (without any place or date, but in fact *Index*, Köln 1981). Only in 1990 was it officially published in Czechoslovakia by Odeon, Praha.

a ničí původní autorův text ideovými zásahy v takové míře, že se k němu nehodláme vracet' (Hrabal 1994, p. 246).⁸

Sergio Corduas took on the endeavour to work on a text with quite a disorienting history *before* it was officially published in its home country, and actually participated in the diffusion and success of Czech literature in Italy during the Eighties. The reaction of public and critics to Hrabal's masterpiece (one among many) was immediate — it earned its author the Elba prize in 1987 — and Corduas' translation has been reprinted several times up to the year 2014⁹ (and will probably be reprinted again in the future).

Yet Italy was not the first, nor the only country to officially publish Hrabal's books (and among them *Příliš hlučná samota*) before 1989, and to thus let them sneak through the curtain of censorship of normalised Czechoslovakia. Nor was the Italian translation the only one to be affected by the eventful history of (*Příliš hlučná samota*).¹⁰ Max Keller's French translation *Une trop bruyante solitude*¹¹ was the first to appear in Western Europe in 1983, while the English translation *Too loud a solitude*¹² by Michael Henry Heim was published on the magazine *Cross Currents* in the United States in 1986. There are uncertainties, though, about the translators' choices: both translations seem to draw upon more than one variation of *Hlučná samota*, eventually mixing them and producing in fact a *deviation* from each of the roads their author had put

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- 8 The editorial history of *Kluby poezie* is maybe even more interesting than *Samota's*. In that same editorial note, Jankovič states that 'při jiné příležitosti bychom raději připomněli knižně nevydaný strojopis *Klub poezie* z roku 1978, který ovšem s touto edicí přímo nesouvisí' (Hrabal 1994, p. 246). *Klub poezie* is in fact the title of a text published in the 16th volume of *SSBH* in 1995, a volume that in the words of its editors Karel Dostál and Václav Kadlec 'obsahuje texty, které autor sestříhal z textů jiných pisatelů, nejčastěji anonymních, a přijal tyto texty "za své"' (Hrabal 1995, p. 401). Further on, in their commentary to *Klub poezie*, they add: 'Vznik celého textu byl vynucen poměry těch let — a dokumentace oněch poměrů je patrně hlavním důvodem pro zařazení *Klubu poezie* do kompletu Spisů' (ibid., p. 405). The editors evidently consider *Klub poezie* as a minor, stranger text to Hrabal's production, assembled *à propos* for publication (yet never published), and only worth it because of its being a testimony of a politically corrupted historical period. They believe its revised and published version *Kluby poezie* to be even worse. Yet the 1978 text of *Klub poezie* remained and remains unpublished, for the 16th volume of *SSBH* only contains, with the title of *Klub poezie*, the text of *Kluby poezie*.
- 9 An ebook version was also released in 2014. While the Italian text in Einaudi hasn't been changed at all from 1987 to 2014, the graphics of the edition varied four times, in 1991, 1999, 2006, 2014. From 1999, a text of personal memories written by Giorgio Pressburger (who in 1992 wrote and directed a theatre adaptation of *Una solitudine troppo rumorosa*), *Dopo Hrabal, una rumorosa solitudine* [After Hrabal, a loud solitude] opens the volume.
- 10 Milan Jankovič rightfully mentions the French, Italian, German, Spanish, English translations of *Příliš hlučná samota* to be worth attention, especially regarding their endings (Hrabal 1994, p. 246).
- 11 Hrabal, Bohumil: *Une trop bruyante solitude: roman*, transl. by Max Keller. Robert Laffont, Paris 1983.
- 12 Hrabal, Bohumil: *Too loud a solitude*, transl. by Michael Henry Heim. *Cross Currents*. A Yearbook of Central Europe Culture, 1986, n. 5, pp. 278–332 <quod.lib.umich.edu/c/crossc/ANW0935.1986.001/290:25?rgn=full+text;view=image;q1=5++1986> [March 15th, 2018].



them on — a factor that makes it sensibly harder to retrace the history of the translated text. The French first edition contains a postface and an analysis of the textual variants by Susanna Roth that stand behind the translator's choice to use two source texts — the second and third variation, — in order to insert the negative ending of the second variation (the protagonist commits suicide) in lieu of the third variation ending (the protagonist only dreams of committing suicide). The English translation appears to be, so to say, second-hand, as it was not conducted on a Czech source, and presents the second variation's ending. It is not my intent to discuss other translations here, but the problems connected with the French and English texts helps me to frame the context in which the Italian translation took its first steps. The examples of Susanna Roth's commentary and M. H. Heim's short preface to his translation are useful to understand that behind the translators' sharp preference for the sad ending probably stood a criticism towards the political situation of Czechoslovakia at the time. In her note to the French translation, Roth substantially justifies Keller's choice to offer the readers Hrabal's text in its original, uncensored version, that she evidently believes to be nearer to the author's original concept (Hrabal 1983, pp. 130–135), which is an issue also discussed in her *Hlučná samota a hořké štěstí Bohumila Hrabala* (Roth 1993; *Laute Einsamkeit und bitteres Glück: Zur poetischen Welt von Bohumil Hrabals Prosa*, 1986). Heim's thoughts are made clear in his preface:

Bohumil Hrabal's Too Loud a Solitude [Příliš hlučná samota] was written in the late 70's. In 1982 the state-controlled publishing house Mladá fronta decided to bring out an abbreviated version of it under the title The Poetry Clubs [Kluby poesie]. To prevent readers from making undesirable interpretations, the editors removed all ambiguous passages, even the grammatical tenses were shifted to make the story appear in a time frame as detached from today as possible. In the effort to preclude the possibility that readers would take Hrabal's story about the pulping of old books as a critique of life in present day Czechoslovakia, the official promotion of the abbreviated version made a special point of declaring that its protagonists represented another, earlier era when 'life was different'. Only the Prague 'Padlock Edition' issued on the carbon copies, has made the full original text of Hrabal's story available to readers. It is this typewritten edition which was used for the English translation printed here (Hrabal 1986, p. 278).

Apart from the inaccurate or missing information about Hrabal's work (or maybe just thanks to them), it is presumable that one motivating force behind Heim's translation could be the same criticism for the censorship policies enacted in the Czech normalisation.

The Italian text presents none of these problems: Corduas' first translation was unequivocally conducted on a Czech text of the third variation (as of course was its revised version), it respects the structure and the content of *Příliš hlučná samota*, including its ending, its phrasing and interpunction. As regards the Einaudi edition as a whole, the text of the third variation, which is furnished with fifteen explanatory notes, is followed by another Hrabal's text, *Adagio lamentoso*,¹³ and by a double appen-

13 In 1981 Hrabal wrote that the poem *Adagio lamentoso* concluded and completed *Příliš hlučná samota*. The text is unsurprisingly the result of a series of textual variants probably writ-



dix: *Hrabaliana*, the translator's commentary to the text (dated september 7th, 1987) and *Intervista con un Pierrot incrudito*, a written interview with the author (dated september 14th, 1987). The explanatory notes have the purpose of informing the reader about direct references in Hrabal's text without straying from the pillars of western knowledge: they are about biblical quotes *hidden* in the text flow, philosophical works or ideas that the translator believed to be fundamental motives of the story (Kant, Seneca). Historical or cultural references are rare and functional to an immediate understanding: Corduas names K. H. Mácha as the greatest Czech poet and signals that an Italian translation of his *Máj* already exists; he explains the fictional character of Kája Mařík, protagonist of the children books series, the historical figure of Antonín Koniáš (related to the books burning during the recatholisation of Bohemia in the 18th century), the Tuzex crown, the topographical indication of the gate of Poříčí. Apart from the most common ones already having an equivalent in Italian, Corduas chooses to leave Czech proper nouns, names of places and typicalities in their original form (diacritics included): he translates 'Staroměstské náměstí' in 'piazza della città vecchia', but for example leaves the original 'Karlák' instead of translating a more comprehensible 'Karlovo náměstí', with its Italian equivalent 'piazza Carlo', probably because of the protagonist's familiarity with it; pubs and taverns names are translated when they have a clear meaning or derive from a common noun, like 'Černý pivovar' — 'Birreria nera', 'Dolní hospoda' — 'Osteria di sotto'. On the other side, in the Einaudi editions the pubs names derived from proper nouns are sometimes translated, sometimes not, in an apparent random choice: one can read 'U Čížků', 'U Jarolímků' and at the same time 'Hofman', 'Hausman'.

In the Mondadori edition, *Una solitudine* strikes at first glance because of its position: the text stands alone in the central part of the chronologically ordered volume, creating an evident pause after the section dedicated to the years 1970–1973 and anticipating that presenting texts from 1975–1979. As regards the other texts contained in the Einaudi edition, *Intervista con un Pierrot incrudito* is kept by the Meridiani editors and located in the second to last section of the volume, which is dedicated to interviews, while *Adagio lamentoso* closes the volume in a section on its own. The translation of *Příliš hlučná samota* was revised, as already stated, following the SSBH text, yet (apart from the differences that constitute the core of this contribution) no radical translational interventions were conducted on Corduas' translation but some mainly concerning the text's homogeneity. For example, pubs names derived from proper nouns lacking an Italian equivalent are uniformly left in the original, yet singular form ('Hofman', 'Vlachovka', 'Jarolímek', 'Čížek', 'Horký', and 'Carlo IV', 'Re Venceslaov', 'Città di Rokycany'). Names derived from common nouns are usually translated: 'Ztracená varta' becomes 'Casa del Diavolo' [The devil's house]. Moreover, the Meridiani Mondadori 2003 contains a section of Notes and Informations that Annalisa Cosentino edited about each text and which shortly but precisely reconstructs the documented history of Hrabal's works in the volume. As regards *Una solitudine*, it offers 30 total annotations to the text, that include and rectify Corduas' original notes, and adds references to the numerous Lao-tsu quotes, geo-topographical clarifications, historical information.

ten in the first half of the 1970s, the majority of which was already lost when the editors of SSBH prepared its edition in the 8th volume (1993).



The questions and problems that Corduas had to answer and overcome in translation thus appear to be of a different nature than those discussed, for example, by Susanna Roth or hinted at by Heim in the languages they respectively chose, and probably derive from the translator's background in the field of Italian Czech studies.

Una solitudine troppo rumorosa was not the first Hrabal's title to reach Italy. The Italian readers were introduced to the works of Bohumil Hrabal when Ela Ripellino translated *Inzerát na dům, ve kterém už nechci bydlet* (*Inserzione per una casa in cui non voglio più abitare*), published in 1968 by Einaudi.¹⁴ After that, other Italian translations of Hrabal's works were published during the 1980s and followed Ripellino's example in providing the edition with a comment text.¹⁵

Sergio Corduas was among Ripellino's pupils when studying Russian and Czech literature in Rome in the '60s, and acquired some aspects of his teacher's stylistic, his approach to literary translation (like the awareness that a sound knowledge of both language and cultural-literary context is a basic requisite of literary translation), besides a deep interest in Czech culture, that became his primary target in life. He travelled to Czechoslovakia during his university years and after, in 1971 obtained an appointment at Ca'Foscari University in Venice and then the rank of associate professor. His activity as a translator was regular during the 1970s and the 1980s (he translated works by J. Mukařovský, R. Kalivoda, J. Hašek, J. L. Fischer, K. Teige, L. Klíma, J. Seifert), and he collaborated with periodicals, among which was *In forma di parole* [In the form of words], where he published his own transla-

14 Hrabal, Bohumil: *Inserzione per una casa in cui non voglio più abitare*, transl. by Ela Ripellino, with an Introduction by Angelo Maria Ripellino. I coralli, Einaudi, Torino 1968 [last reprint 2008]. The edition also included an introduction essay: in this case, Angelo Maria Ripellino offered the unaware Italian public an overview of Hrabal's literary context within his life experiences, of the *pábitel* character, which he translated as *sbruffone* (braggart, boaster, but the term crystallized as *stramparlone*, a neologism introduced in the Meridiani Mondadori edition, 2003) and of some cardinal elements of his poetics (the city of Prague, the peculiar use of language, references to Franz Kafka, Jaroslav Hašek and Surrealism). Ripellino's introduction was shadowed by a strong criticism towards the suffocating cultural atmosphere of communist Czechoslovakia, where Hrabal had to live and create. In his opinion, '*pábitelé* with their dull dreams and their boastfulness resist the bloated, Pangloss-like activists, the champions of Everything-is-better-if-it's-Communist [...]' (Hrabal 1968, p. 10, translation mine). Hrabal's work is thus seen primarily as a reaction to 'that time that we hope has waned forever, the rusty furniture of a world that was no life but a dump of rubbish, "rumišťě", the unhealthy atmosphere of a haunted house, where he refuses to live anymore' (Hrabal 1968, p. 12, translation mine).

15 The only Hrabal's text translated in Italian in the 1970s is *Pábitelé: Vuol vedere Praga d'oro?*, transl. by Hana Kubištová Casadei. Longanesi, Milano 1973. In the 80, in addition to *Una solitudine*, also appeared: *Treni strettamente sorvegliati* [*Ostře sledované vlaky*], ed. and transl. by Sergio Corduas, ill. Aleš Jiránek, with the appendix *Hrabal, ferroviere di Dio* and the interview with B. Hrabal *L'ironia praghese*. Edizioni e/o, Roma 1982; *Ho servito il re d'Inghilterra* [*Obsluhoval jsem anglického krále*], transl., ed., postface by Giuseppe Dierna. Edizioni e/o, Roma 1986; *La tonsura* [*Postřižiny*], transl., ed., postface by Giuseppe Dierna. Edizioni e/o, Roma 1987.

tions of many Czech authors and often commented them in peculiar texts sometimes written in the form of a letter.¹⁶

It was in fact among Corduas' contributions to that magazine that I found the first reference to a planned translation of Hrabal's *Samota*. In the text appended to his translation of *Ostře sledované vlaky*, Corduas quoted a few words from the first translated page of *Příliš hlučná samota* and in the related annotation stated that a translation of that text written in 1976 and still unreleased in Czechoslovakia was being prepared for *Elitropia* — *In forma di parole* ('*Příliš hlučná samota*, inedito, 1976, in preparazione presso le edizioni Elitropia — *In forma di parole*, C.P. 421, Reggio Emilia', Hrabal 1982, p. 94). Being this first mention so early compared to the actual publication of the book, I searched the magazine's issues to ascertain whether an Italian translation — or more probably part of it — signed by Corduas already existed. In at least two issues dating 1983 and 1984 I found reference to an underway translation of Hrabal's *Samota* and *Adagio lamentoso* to be inserted with other Czech texts in an anthology whose project was called 'Bohemarius'. After that, I couldn't find any other mention either of Hrabal's *Samota*, or of the *Bohemarius*. I thus supposed that since in 1985 the publishing house of *In forma di parole* changed and so did its later projects, the *Bohemarius* was never completed.¹⁷

16 In his letters to the authors whose texts he translates, Corduas often reflects upon the difficult reception of some aspects of the Czech culture deeply bond to literature and philosophy: 'Já však stejně nemohu zamlčet, že Vám zde rozumí a porozumí (chci říci: nějak, v zásadě) jen málo lidí' (Corduas, Sergio: Vladimíru Holanovi. *In forma di parole*, 1980, n. 1, *Elitropia*, Reggio Emilia 1980, pp. 121–127 /p. 126/. Similarly see Corduas, Sergio: Ladislavu Klímovi. *In forma di lettera a Ladislav Klíma. In forma di parole*, 1980, n. 2, *Elitropia*, Reggio Emilia 1980, pp. 193–205; Corduas, Sergio: Lettere, frammenti, labirinti. *In forma di parole*, 1981, n. 3, *Elitropia*, Reggio Emilia 1981, pp. 51–63 (an ironical-philosophical exchange between Corduas and his ideal projection of Jan Amos Komenský that includes a reflection on the role of the translator).

17 A factor that could back up this hypothesis is that in 1982 and 2010 Corduas produced two very similar texts about the Golem, the Robot and Švejk as both representing a Czech cultural entity and having a universal character (Golem, Robot, Švejk [1982]. In: *Sborník prací filozofické Fakulty brněnské univerzity*, XLIV, D 42, 1995, Masarykova univerzita v Brně, 1996, pp. 23–37; Golem, robot, Švejk: jejich světovost a jejich českost. In: Lenka Jungmannová /ed./: *Česká literatura rozhraní a okraje*. UČL AV ČR — Akropolis, Praha 2010, pp. 437–444). In the first, older one, I found reference to a *Bohemarius* as a 1983 issue of *In forma di parole* (therefore of future publication compared with the year of Corduas' essay), but was not able to retrieve the text Corduas mentioned because it was not in any 1983 issue of the periodical, nor in any other following issue that I could check (up to 1985). On the other hand, the reference didn't appear in Corduas' 2010 text. In his *Lettera al dottor Kafka* (*In forma di parole*, 1983/1), Corduas says to be about to commit himself to the translation of Hrabal's *Samota*. In *12 poesie di Jaroslav Seifert* (*In forma di parole*, 1984/3), the magazine editors Rolando Gualerzi and Gianni Scalia comment Corduas' translation of twelve poems by the Nobel prize award winner Jaroslav Seifert mentioning the preparation of a 'Bohemarius' in order to honour the Czech literature and culture. After that, the only mention of the *Bohemarius* I found on Corduas' page of the Ca'Foscari university website, as a research still in progress: <www.unive.it/data/persona/5590979/curriculum> [march 15th, 2018].



Once persuaded enough that I wouldn't find an early Italian translation of *Hlučná samota*, I got back to the Einaudi edition. The 1987 book shows unreliability starting from the verso of its title page: it reports the original title of '*Kluby poezie: Příliš hlučná samota*', copyright 1981. The same title appears in the 1991 and 1999 reprints, while from 2006 on, the title page verso reports as original title: '*Inzerát na dům, ve kterém už nechci bydlet*, Mladá fronta, Praha 1965'; then the years 1968 and 2002 are added as copyright references, with the specification of the first edition collection: 'I coralli 1968'. In other words, it was not possible to even backtrack a minimum of the editorial process of *Příliš hlučná samota* Italian translation, for the information provided by the publisher was inaccurate at the beginning (no such book as *Kluby poezie: Příliš hlučná samota* ever existed) and became totally wrong as time went by (in the last reprints the information reported refers to another book altogether, the first Italian translation of one of Hrabal's works).¹⁸ In his appendix *Hrabaliana*, Corduas outlines his ideas about Hrabal's text and mainly his poetics in general: the elements of vision and analogy in Hrabal's writing, philosophy, art and other literary references. He also summarizes in a few words the progression of the Czech text from its original form of a poem to a prose text written in a 'Prague spoken language'; he adds that the narrative-poetic text written in a literary language that he translated is its third version, finally 'agreed upon by Hrabal with himself' and brought to him directly by Susanna Roth, who corrected the original text in Corduas' possession so that we could enjoy the *real* third version (Hrabal 1987, p. 109, italics are Corduas'). No date is mentioned about either the moment when Corduas acquired an original text (or if Einaudi did it for him — Corduas doesn't even define his notion of *original text*), or the time Susanna Roth brought him a *corrected* version or *corrected* his old one for him to translate.

I then turned to the Mondadori edition. I thought that I would compare it with the Einaudi book, trying to trace all the features that could differentiate them while referring to *SSBH* as the Czech original, and hopefully look for a Czech textual variant that would coincide with Corduas' text.¹⁹ Fortunately, this was considerably simplified when my attention was drawn by the ending of the Mondadori edition. As mentioned above, all the preexisting translations of Hrabal's works were revised for the Meridiani collection on the basis of *SSBH*. However, *Una solitudine troppo rumorosa* is the only text in the Meridiani volume to show a note by the translator directly following the ending and presenting an alternative one, to which an explanatory comment is attached. In his note, Corduas affirms that the translation follows the source text of *SSBH* like all the others, yet the Einaudi 1987 edition presented a different ending, and since that version was brought and recommended to the translator in 1986 by Susanna Roth (on the basis of a typewritten text she was given by the author), the greatest expert and a close friend of Hrabal's, and the author himself gave his permission²⁰ to publish it, the reader would decide which Hrabal's variant he or she likes the most (Hrabal 2003, p. 1255). Corduas' statement partially confirmed, partially

18 See note n. 15.

19 I didn't have the chance to ask professor Corduas about the source text of his translation, for he is unwell and hospitalised at the moment.

20 'I remember that he [Hrabal] looked at me with an amused smile, lifted his beer and with an easygoing look of his he said: "Imprimatur!"' (Hrabal 2003, p. 1255).

contradicted the information I had gathered so far. The timing of the translation was not clarified at all, because more than once had Corduas mentioned to be working on *Una solitudine* well before 1986. It is possible that Susanna Roth delivered another typewritten text to him, one that she had *corrected*, as Corduas himself said, but it is as probable that Corduas translated, and maybe later changed following Roth's advice, the same version of Hrabal's text that he owned already in approx. 1982, when he had first mentioned it and quoted a couple of lines from the first page of his translation (Hrabal 1982, p. 94). On the other side, it confirmed the translator's previous statement to have worked on a version of the third variation — that must not necessarily be the one believed by *SSBH* editors to be the best or most representative of the author's conception, and yet could actually be auctorial: since *SSBH* editors declared the two versions to be very near, Sergio Corduas truly couldn't know before 1994. The element of the separated ending is clarifying: it immediately reminds of the alternative later version of the third variation documented in *SSBH* and of that of *Kluby poezie* (Hrabal 1981, pp. 128–129), which almost coincide. I examined the two endings in comparison with the Italian translation and found that Corduas' text accurately matched the quoted paragraph of the alternative ending, but added a few lines that seemed to come right from *Kluby poezie*. Nevertheless, although *Kluby poezie* along with its year of publication stood as a reference in the verso page of the Einaudi editions of *Una solitudine troppo rumorosa*, I kept it out of the list of possible source texts of the Italian translation because its structure and many other diverging linguistic aspects excluded the possibility that Corduas could have worked on it in order to precisely reconstruct the text of *Příliš hlučná samota*. The only remaining step was to search for the other elements listed by Milan Jankovič as distinctive of the alternative version of the third variation, and as expected they were all reflected in Corduas translation for Einaudi (our 'potkaní varianta'), as were all revised and changed in the Mondadori edition (our 'krysí varianta'): Haňt'a's mechanical press (pressa meccanica) can be found in every place where in the Meridiani collection the hydraulic press (pressa idraulica) is mentioned; in chapter 3 (Hrabal 1987, p. 21) brown rats (potkani, surmolotti) win over black rats (krysy, ratti); the excerpt of the gypsy fire can be found in chapter 4 and it's identical to that presented in the editor's note in *SSBH* (Hrabal 1994, p. 245; Hrabal 1987, p. 39).

Since it was not (and still isn't) clear *when* exactly did Corduas acquire the source text for his translation, or when exactly the auctorial alternative version was released (both alternative variations and *Adagio lamentoso* seem to have been written around 1976), it is impossible to deduce whether Corduas worked on an original typewritten text as he said or, for example, on a samizdat. During my research I had the opportunity to see the source text used by the editors of *SSBH*, vol. 9, that includes all three variations plus an introduction text dated 1981 (Hrabal 1994, pp. 248–253) and is stored in the Literární archiv Památníku národního písemnictví, but the alternative text mentioned by Jankovič was nowhere to be found, so that I could only compare the Italian translation with the elements the editor of *SSBH* vol. 9 provided. I could also examine some of the main samizdat editions of *Příliš hlučná samota*, conserved in the Libri Prohibiti library, including Expedice 1977, Popelnice 1978, Pražská imagínace 1987 and many copies and duplicates. Unfortunately, I couldn't consult either the Krameriova expedice texts, or the Rukopisy VBF samizdat.



Exploring the samizdat editions I discovered that all the distinctive elements of the alternative variation and of the Einaudi translation could be traced in the Popelnice samizdat from 1978, and I noticed that its ending was exactly identical to that in Corduas' translation, thus differing from the alternative version described by Jankovič as well as *Kluby poezie*. It is interesting to notice that the Popelnice samizdat only contains *Příliš hlučná samota* text, while in other editions, such as Expedice, or the Index printed book from 1980, the third variation is followed by *Adagio lamentoso*; finally the Pražská imaginace samizdat, as well as the original typewritten file, contains all three variations but no *Adagio*. Another peculiarity is that in the appendix *Hrabaliana*, Corduas clearly distinguishes Haňta's press as mechanical and not hydraulic (Hrabal 1987, p. 108), so it is impossible to believe that he didn't know both third variations of Hrabal's text by then.

There is no evidence that could lead to the undoubtable identification of one auctorial source text, but a few considerations could be pondered as a conclusion: Sergio Corduas probably worked on a text that he had known for many years before its first Italian publication in 1987; such text was probably an alternative version of the third variation *Příliš hlučná samota* that he could have acquired as an original typewritten auctorial text (about which we know nothing but what stated by Milan Jankovič), or a samizdat edition (Popelnice, or a copy having it as a matrix), or modified on the basis of Susanna Roth's corrections (who then probably referred to the alternative auctorial third variation).

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