

Title: Resistance and Dissidence: Hrabal's *Velká cena*

Author: Daniel Pratt, University of Chicago

Bohumil Hrabal (1914-1997) has usually been classified as a Czech dissident, linking him with writers such as Havel and Vančura. Certainly, like those two, Hrabal's works were censored and sometimes only published abroad, if published at all. However, certain pieces, especially *Velká cena* and its published and unpublished other versions, show the term dissident to be problematic. Dubbing Hrabal a dissident assumes that he was also *pro-West*, falling into the false dichotomy that what is against communism is for the West. To avoid such an assumption, it would be more appropriate to dub Hrabal a resistor: one who resisted not only communist censorship, but also the false myths of a perfect West. This distinction is crucial to the future of research about such figures: a dissident can vanish once that which he opposed disappears, since he is defined in opposition to that structure; a resistor still has a valuable voice in any age, as he is not limited to a single opposition.

To fully examine this idea, this author has been invited to examine Hrabal's manuscripts in Prague in September. *Velká cena* and its rewrites will ground the above ideas in specific works and show the extent of Hrabal's resistance. In the rewrites of the story, including a short film, Hrabal critiques both Czechoslovaks and foreigners in different degrees. Because the story remains essentially the same, but the emphasis of critique changes in each version, they will provide excellent data to investigate how Hrabal maintained distance from both the Communists and the West.

By using the distinction between a dissident and a resistor, Hrabal can be reexamined without limiting him to a position opposed to a single contemporaneous political structure. Instead other meanings of his work can be explored and his own voice be allowed to speak.