

## Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age (New York Review Books Classics)

By Bohumil Hrabal



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### Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age (New York Review Books Classics) By Bohumil Hrabal

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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.



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**Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The unnamed narrator of this comic rant proclaims that any book worth its salt is "meant to make you jump out of bed in your underwear and run and beat the author's brains out." Czech novelist Hrabal (*Closely Watched Trains*) very nearly fills that peculiar bill in this humorous and breathless affair, which is told in one never-ending sentence—a technique that just may make readers pay him the ultimate compliment by looking around for handy blunt objects. The narrator, a scurrilous old man who claims to have been a shoemaker and a brewer, approaches six sunbathing women and embarks on a rambling monologue about his past loves, the past in general and his "magic hands for what we called contessa shoes." He enjoys telling scandalous tales about his betters, including the one about the old emperor looking up women's skirts. Hrabal, who has been cited as a major literary influence by Milan Kundera and Ivan Klima, among others, is generally considered the most revered living Czech author. It's easy to see why. As this novel (originally published in Czechoslovakia in 1964) plays around with Czech history, juxtaposing the public life of the country with the private life of the narrator, Hrabal displays abounding energy and a rambunctious wit.

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From [Booklist](#)

Hrabal, one of the foremost contemporary Czech writers, has devised a provocative little novel for special readers. In a breathless monologue—in fact, in one unbroken sentence—an old shoemaker spouts off to a captive audience of young women about his life and ideas. From political history ("his son, the crown prince, was forced to marry Princess Stephanie of Belgium, but he was wild for Vetsera's body, she had these gigantic breasts and eyes" ) to morality ("Christ wanted us to love our neighbors, he wanted discipline, not love on the sofa the way some mealy-brained idiots would have it" ), the old man perambulates over a wide range of territory, spreading recollections and opinions far and wide. For readers who appreciate language for its own sake, this short book is fertile ground; for those who need a firm plot as anchorage, they had best turn elsewhere. For active foreign-literature collections. *Brad Hooper*

Review

. " . . what Hrabal has created is an informal history of the indomitable Czech spirit. And perhaps. . . the human spirit."

-"The Times "(London)

"Hrabal, to my mind, is one of the greatest living European prose writers." --Philip Roth, 1990

""Dancing Lessons" unfurls as a single, sometimes maddening sentence. The gambit works. Something about that slab of wordage carries the eye forward, promising an intensity simply unattainable by your regularly punctuated novel." --Ed Park, "The New York Times Book Review"

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**Mary Flynn:**

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**Nancy Deanda:**

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**Michael Hale:**

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