

## THE TENUITY BETWEEN PROGRESSION AND REGRESSION IN BOHUMIL

### HRABAL'S TOO LOUD A SOLITUDE

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#### ABSTRACT

Haňt'a, the narrator of Czech writer Bohumil Hrabal's novella, *Too Loud a Solitude* (1976), often reflects on the duality of permanence and intangibility of ideas. This paper attempts to explore how the author resolves the tension between this duality through an understanding of the intermittency between progression and regression. First published in 1976 and translated in English by Michael Henry Heim, the short novel relates the story of an eclectic and dim-witted old man, Haňt'a, who works as a paper crusher in Prague. Haňt'a is portrayed as a recluse having an encyclopedic range of knowledge. He collects a huge number of rare and banned books by rescuing them from the compacting machine and thus goes against the book-censoring regime in his own unique way. To comprehend the nature of the resolution, progress and regress are seen in juxtaposition with the opposition between 'I' and 'other' as explicated by Julia Kristeva in her essay on abjection and with the opposition between order and disorder as discussed by Walter Benjamin in his work *Illuminations*.

Kristeva, in her essay on abjection, defines "abject" as "the jettisoned object", that which is "radically excluded" and "it lies outside, beyond the set" (*Powers of Horror* 2). She formulates that abjection violently revolts against a threat, which originates at the boundaries of outside and inside. This 'outside' and 'inside' is understood as 'I' and 'other'. This 'I' desires that the difference between the 'I' and the 'other' should remain extant. But abjection threatens the existence of the tenuous boundary between the two. Thus, abjection cannot be assimilated. But it is protected because of the certainty of its existence. Kristeva proposes that "the abject has only one quality of the object-that of being opposed to I" (1). This opposition with 'I' makes abject the jettisoned object, but it still is a part of 'I' and thus for Kristeva, "abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture" (2) Abject is what one rejects or banishes. But from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease to challenge its rejecter i.e. the subject "I". Combating this challenge is what safeguards the subject and primes culture. Culture is also primed by its literature. Books are intellectual products of a culture; these are produced and conserved in public and private spaces. In the novella, *Too Loud a Solitude*, Haňt'a lives in "a land that has known how to read and write for fifteen generations" and "where it was and still is a custom, an obsession to compact thoughts and images impatiently in the heads of the population" (Hrabal 3). But production and conservation of books is followed by their destruction and waste. Thus, as the fate of every created object is its destruction, books, after a period, are either naturally destroyed or are thrown away in trash.

**KEYWORDS:** Progression and Regression in Bohumil Hrabal's *Too Loud a Solitude*