

*Priznanje*

# SAMORASTNIKI



ZALOŽBA OBZORJA MARIBOR 1969



**Prežihov Voranc (1893–1950)**

The pseudonym of Lovro Kuhar, Prežihov Voranc (“Larry from Prežih”) was an active Communist who had to flee Yugoslavia after King Alexander proclaimed the royal dictatorship in 1929. Both the Italians and the Nazis interned him during World War II, the latter in a concentration camp where his health was ruined. His best works are his novels and stories dealing with the life of Slovenes in Carinthia before, during and after World War I. Especially outstanding for their uncompromising mix of reality and idealism are the stories in *Samorastniki* (*The Self-Sown*, 1940). In many ways Prežih was a “self-sown” man himself: self-taught, independent, fiercely proud. The Slovene text is from Prežihov Voranc, *Samorastniki* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1969); the English from Prežihov Voranc, *The Self-Sown: Bi-Lingual Edition of a Slovene Classic*, tr. and introduction Irma M. Ozbalt (New Orleans: Prometej, 1983) 89–103.



*Samorastniki*

Meti in Ožbeju so leta enolično minevala.

Petega sina so krstili za Vida.

Čez dve leti se je rodila Burga.

Dve leti po Burgi je prišel Primož na svet.

Tri leta za Primožem se je zlegel Til.

In tri leta po Tilu se je našla še najmlajša, Nana.

Ko se je zlegla Nana, je najstarejši, Gal, izpolnil dvajseto leto.

Devet pankrtov... Devet Hudabivnikov, devet Karničnikov... Vsi lepi, zdravi otroci.

Okrog Mete in njenih devetih pankrtov so nastajale cele legende in so se širila razna prerokovanja. Nekateri so se bali šibe božje, če bo stvar ostala pri številu devet. Drugi so s strahom predvidevali novih rojstev in so se bali sodnega dne, ako jih bo dvanajst; tretji so se spet tresli, da bognasvaruj, ako bi se ta živa zibelka zazibala trinajstič...

Meti so rekali ljudje: "Pankrtska mati!" ali "Pankrtnica", otrokom pa na splošno: "Hudabivški pankrtniki", pozneje pa tudi "Hudabivški samorastniki"; bajta, v kateri je ta drosa živela, je bila znana pod imenom "Pankrtska kajža".

Čim bolj se je Ožbej staral, tem bolj je pil, tem večji sirotej je bil. Na Karnicah je bil zmeraj bolj v napotje, zato je večino svojih, zmeraj bolj pogostih pijanosti prespal pri Meti. Prihajal je k njej ves potolčen, smrdljiv in nemaren; Meta ga je sprejemala, čistila, zdravila in negovala kakor velikega otroka.

Po takih prespanih, omotičnih pijanostih je Ožbeja zmeraj navdajala neka mehkoča. Posedal je z otroki, ki so bili še pri hiši, jih poljubljal in objokoval, sam sebe pa preklinjal, da ga je morala čestokrat Meta tolažiti.

"Ne maraj, Ožbej, vdaj se v božjo voljo, smo pač nesrečniki vsi skupaj."

"Jaz sem kriv vse te nesreče! Ali razumite me: jaz sem med dvema mlinskima kamnoma—na eni strani Meta, na drugi strani pa Karnice, moj oče. Dolgo sem omahoval, dokler me ni stisnilo, da se nisem mogel ganiti. Danes pa—kar je dejano, je dejano, sirotej sem, amažnik na duhu in na telesu, carapa, brez odločnosti in volje. Moj oče je čisto drugačen mož in ti, Meta, si čisto drugačna..."

Mali pankrti so ga nemo poslušali ter iskali odgovora pri materi.

Ta ga je potem tešila:

"Vse se bo še preložilo, nič še ni zamujenega, Ožbej."



*The Self-Sown (Excerpt)*

Years passed by monotonously for Meta and Ožbej. Their fifth son was named Vid. Two years later a daughter, Burga, was born. Two years after Burga came Primož. Three years after Primož, Til appeared.

And three years after Til, Nana, the youngest, joined them.

When Nana was born, the oldest, Gal, turned twenty.

Nine bastards. Nine Hudabivniks, nine Karničniks. All of them healthy, beautiful children.

Around Meta and her nine bastards all sorts of legends were woven, all kinds of predictions were spreading. Some people were afraid of God's vengeance if things stopped at the number nine. Others fearfully predicted new births and were afraid of Doomsday if the number grew up to twelve; still others trembled that—God forbid!—this living cradle might swing for the thirteenth time.

Meta was nicknamed the “bastard mother” or the “bastard woman”, and the children were generally known as “those Hudabivnik bastards”, and later also as “those Hudabivnik self-sown”; the house in which the whole brood was living was named the “bastard shanty”.

The older Ožbej grew, the more he drank, and the more pathetic he became. At Karnice he was considered more and more a nuisance, so he slept off most of his drunken spells at Meta's. He kept coming to her place all bruised, smelly and neglected; Meta took him in, cleaned him up, nursed him and looked after him as if he were a big babe. Every time he recovered from his drunken dizziness, Ožbej was overcome with softness. He sat around with whichever of his children was still living at home, and he kept kissing and caressing them, cursing himself so much that Meta often had to console him: “Never mind, Ožbej, accept God's will. We are together nothing but a miserable bunch of losers.”

“I am the cause of all this misery! But you must all get me right: I am caught between two mill-stones—Meta on one side and on the other Karnice, my father. For a long time I wasn't able to decide; finally I got pushed against the wall and couldn't budge any more. Now, what's done is done, I am a miserable man, a wreck, body and soul, a coward without guts, without willpower. My father is quite a different man, and you, Meta, you are quite different, too.”

The little bastards listened to him in silence, searching for the answer in their mother's face.

Meta then soothed him: “It will all turn out right, nothing is lost yet, Ožbej.”



“Da, toda vzeti se morava in vse bo še dobro! Karnice ne morejo biti več moje, kar nič ne dé. Vzeti kako kajžo v najem in živeti skupaj. Če bom hotel, mi morajo dovoliti ženitev. Toliko vas je že, da bo soseska le vesela, če boste imeli pravega očeta. In tega ciganskega življenja bo potem konec.”

Po vsaki taki težki pijanosti se je Ožbej poslavljal od svoje družine z besedami:

“Da, o pustu se vzameva.”

Do pusta tako, potem pa je začel:

“Po veliki noči se vzameva.” In tako dalje.

Meta je morala skoraj sama preživljati svojo droso. In to je bilo sila težko, kajti pri bajti jih je bilo zmeraj najmanj četvero; eden je bil v zibelki, drugi je komaj shodil, tretji je že hlačal in četrti je postajal goden za prvo pastirsko službo. Tako je bilo skoraj petnajst let.

Meta je morala delati tako rekoč noč in dan; poleti je hodila na dnine, pozimi je predla doma, pletla slamnice, jerbace in koše, delala leseno orodje, žlice, kuhlje, solnike, žličnike, z eno besedo: prijela je za vsako delo, ki ji je prišlo pod roke. In ni bilo dela, ki mu ne bi bila kos! Soseska jo je poznala kot najboljšo dninarico, ki ji nobena pot ni bila predaleč, nobeno vreme pregrdo. Kljub temu, da je jemala otroke s seboj, se je ob velikem delu soseska zanjo pipala. Z najmlajšim v zibelki na glavi pa še dva, tri hlačarje ob sebi je odhajala ob prvi zori na delo in prihajala ponoči domov. Njena pridnost je bila skoraj nadčloveška. Edino tej pridnosti, ki je je zmožna le tako velika materinska ljubezen, kakršno je nosila v sebi Meta, se je bilo zahvaliti, da je tako velika družina odraščala brez prevelikega pomanjkanja, da so vsi otroci odraščali zdravih udov in zdrave pameti.

Ob takem večnem nadčloveškem boju je v soseski od leta do leta rasel Metin ugled. Po malem je javno mnenje prehajalo na njeno stran. Ljudje so se zmeraj bolj spotikali nad trdovratnostjo starega Karničnika, ki je še vedno strastno nasprotoval zakonski zvezi med Ožbejem in Meto. Da bi svojo voljo laže uveljavljal, je še sam ravnal posestvo, čeprav je mlajši sin že postal polnoleten.



“Yes, but we have to get married and then every thing will be all right! I can’t claim Karnice any more, but that doesn’t matter. To find a cottage, rent it, and live there. If I want it, they have to give me permission to marry. There are so many of you already that the community will be only too glad to see that you have a real father. And that will be the end of this gypsy life.”

After each such period of drinking and sobering, Ožbej left his family with the words: “Yes, at Shrovetide we are getting married.”\*

This he kept up until Shrove Tuesday, and after that he began: “After Easter we are getting married.” And so on.

Meta had to support her flock nearly entirely on her own. And that was extremely hard, since there were always at least four children in the house; one was in the cradle, the second one had just barely learned to walk, the third was wearing his first pair of pants and the fourth was getting ready for his first job as a shepherd. It went like that for almost fifteen years.

Meta had to work practically day and night. In the summer, she toiled as a day laborer in the fields; in the winter, she worked at home, spinning, weaving mats, baskets and hampers; she made wooden utensils, spoons, salt shakers, wall racks—in a word, she undertook any job that she could find. And there was not a single one that she could not master! She was known in the neighborhood as the best laborer, who did not find any distance too big, any weather too unpleasant. In spite of the fact that she always brought her children along, people were fighting for her services when seasonal work was pressing. She left her home at dawn, with her youngest one sleeping in the cradle on her head and two or three toddlers trotting along beside her, and she returned late at night. Her persistent effort was nearly superhuman. Meta’s readiness for hard work, stemming out of her enormous love for her children, was the sole reason that her large family grew up without too much privation and that all her children were healthy and bright. Meta’s eternal superhuman fight for existence earned her the respect of her neighbors, which grew from year to year. Step by step, public opinion turned in her favour. People became more and more critical of the old Karničnik’s obstinacy, which he continued to display in his opposition to the marriage between Ožbej and Meta. In order to have things going his way for sure, he continued to manage the estate in spite of the fact that his younger son had already come of age.

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\* It was the custom to celebrate weddings between Christmas and Ash Wednesday, since Lent was the time of penance and fasting.



Meta je dolga leta še sanjala o kajži, najprej o eni izmed karniških, tako velikih, da bi se njena družina preredita doma, potem pa o kakršni koli bajti, samo da bi ji življenje postalo znosnejše; te sanje pa je sčasoma pokopala. Večkrat je bila zadelj tega talovna, mislila je na svojo nesrečo in ni mogla razumeti, zakaj mora ravno njo tako tepsti življenje. Te misli pa so zginile, ko se je spomnila otrok. Velike, težke in neodložljive materinske dolžnosti so jo še z večjo silo gnale na delo za vsakdanji kruh. V tej vsakdanji borbi je nikdar ni zapustila zavest, da se ji godi krivica, da trpi po nedolžnem, da se je nad njo storil velik greh; zaradi te zavesti je postala zaprta, skoraj zakrknjena do ostalega sveta. Vendar ni povzročiteljev svoje nesreče sovražila, pač pa hladno prezirala. In ta prezir, ki je gradil med njo in ostalim svetom vedno višji plot, jo je na drugi strani družil z njeno žvotjo v zmeraj močnejšo skupnost. Imela je svoj lasten svet, v katerem je bilo malo svetlih dni in se je sprijaznila s to usodo, kakor je mogla in vedela. Zakona z Ožbejem si je zdaj želela le še zaradi soseske, zaradi otrok, ki bi s tem dobili priznanega očeta, da bi vsaj po šegi postali enakovredni ljudje.

Soseska ni mogla razumeti, kako je Meta pri takem življenju in pri tolikih otrocih ohranila svojo lepoto; še potem, ko je zlegla že devet otrok, je bila še zmeraj zravnana, gladkih lic, živih oči, le njene kretnje so zaradi neskončnega garanja postale manj gibčne.

Lepi so bili tudi vsi njeni otroci, vsi visoko zrasli, ravni, močni, žarečih oči, kar so vse imeli od nje. Metina samosvojost se je zmeraj bolj oprijemala otrok. Pri njih je bila mati vse, podoba očeta Ožbeja je le medlela v njihovih dušah in počasi popolnoma izginjala. Niso bili bojazljivi ali ljudi so se izogibali in niso nikomur zaupali ter se vedli kot trdibučneži. Če jih je kdo iz nagajivosti vprašal, čigavi so, so odgovarjali, ko so še komaj znali obračati jezik:

“Hudabivški pankrti smo!”

“Ali niste karniški?”

“To pa že kar!” so se neprijazno odrezali.

Zato jim je soseska po malem začela rekati tudi “samorastniki”. Ko so komaj zlezli iz gnezda, so morali že v službe za pastirje; pasli so po vseh belanskih globačah, po planinah Obirja, Pece in Olševe. Meta je vsakemu



For many long years Meta continued dreaming of a cottage, first of one belonging to Karnice, one of those big ones surrounded by enough land to support her whole family, and after that of any cottage whatsoever, just so that her life would be a little more bearable; by and by, she buried these dreams. Because of all this, she was often gloomy, thinking about her misfortune, and she could not understand why she had to be the one to be punished by life so harshly. All these thoughts, however, disappeared as soon as she remembered her children. Her enormous, difficult and immediate duties of motherhood pushed her with even greater force into the struggle for family bread. In this day-to-day battle she never for a moment forgot that an injustice had been perpetrated on her, that she was suffering without being guilty, that a great sin had been committed against her; knowing this, she became a loner, nearly a recluse, shunning the outside world. Nevertheless, she did not hate those who were the cause of her misfortune, she despised them. This very contempt, which was building a higher and higher fence between herself and the rest of the world, bound her tighter and tighter to her brood. She lived in her own world, in which there were few bright days, and she accepted her fate as best she could. She now wished to marry Ožbej only for the sake of the community, for the sake of her children, who would in this way acquire a father, so that they could become equal to other people, at least according to the old customs.

The community could not understand how it was possible that Meta had retained her beauty in spite of such a life and in spite of so many children. Even after she had borne nine children, she still walked erect, and her cheeks were smooth, her eyes lively; only her gestures had become a little less lively as a result of incessant labor.

All of her children were beautiful as well, all of them slender and walking tall, all strong, with bright shining eyes, and all of those features which they had inherited from their mother. Step by step Meta's self-sufficiency became part of her children's characters as well. For them their mother was everything; the image of their father Ožbej hovered somewhere in the background of their conscience, slowly fading away. They were not shy, but they shunned other people, and they trusted nobody; they generally acted tough. If someone tried to tease them and asked them which house they belonged to, they would all answer as soon as they knew how to speak: "We are the Hudabivnik bastards!" "Aren't you from Karnice?" "Oh, sure!" they would cut off angrily.

Therefore, by and by, the community began to call them "the self-sown". As soon as they crawled out of their nests, they had to leave home and take jobs as shepherds; they herded cattle and sheep all over the ravines of Bela, all over the slopes of the Obir, Peca, and Olševa mountains. Every



naredila za popotnico velik križ na čelo, pod pazduho mu je stisnila par novih cokel, ki jih je sama napravila za novega odhajača, za slovo pa mu je še rekla:

“Zdaj greš v boj za kruh! Ta boj bo težak, ali premagal ga boš, če ne boš pozabil, da si moj, da si Hudabivnikov...”

In če se je odhajač cmeril, kar je pomenilo, da se čuti še nebogljenca in preslabotnega pred svetom, mu je mati rekla:

“Gal, ne pomaga nič, doma sta še dva, ki čakata na kruh.”

Potem je v presledkih šlo dalje:

“Gaber—Mohor—Ožbej—Vid—Burga—Primož... doma sta še dva—so še trije, nič ne pomaga!”

In slehernikrat se je cmerač ali cmeravka spričo materinega resno otožnega obraza prenehal kisati in pogumno nastopil pot v neznani svet, kjer se bije bridki boj za kruh...

Zunaj v svetu so iz pastirjev postajali iberžniki, mali hlapci, drvarji, dninarji, kovači, knapi, iz pastiric kravarice, dekcle. Meta je vpeljala tako, da so vsako leto na belo nedeljo prihajali k njej. Iz teh obiskov se je razvil nekak hudabivški shod, o katerem se je še dolgo govorilo po vsej dolini, ko je Meta že davno bila pod zemljo in niso Hudabivniki imeli nikogar več, pri komer bi se mogli shajati in kamor so prihajali kot na kako božjo pot. Ob takih prilikah je Meta videla vse otroke zbrane pri sebi, za otroke same pa je bila to tudi edina priložnost, da so se videli med seboj. Te šege so se držali do materine smrti. Prihajali so k njej, ko je bila že vsa siva, vsa sključena od dela, prevar in trpljenja, ko ni od njene lepote ostalo nič več drugega kot njene globoke, svetle oči...

Vsako belo nedeljo je bila kajža polna pisank, polna klobas in mesa, polna stolnikov, kipljenikov, miznikov in raznih drugih potic, ki so jih otroci prihranili za mater. Marsikatera kmetica je hlapcu ali dekli pri odhodu stisnila poseben dar v culo z besedami:

“To je za Meto...”

In kadar je Meta tako sedela sredi otrok, je prišlo nad njo, da jim je mnogo govorila, čeprav je bila sicer redkobesedna.

“Zdaj, ko ste vsi zbrani pri meni, me poslušajte, kaj vam povem jaz—vaša mati,—pankrtska mati. Devetero pankrtov vas je. Karnice so zavrgle



time one of her children was about to leave home, Meta would make a large sign of the cross on his forehead, and she would push a pair of brand new clogs under his arm. She always made them herself for every child that was leaving. Seeing each one of them off, she would say: "Now you are heading into the battle for your daily bread! The battle will be hard, but you'll overcome and succeed, if you don't forget that you are mine, that you are a Hudabivnik."

And if the child who was leaving started whimpering, which meant that he felt too young, too helpless, and too weak to confront the world, his mother told him: "It can't be helped, Gal, there are two more at home who are waiting for their piece of bread."

And this went on, in short intervals: "Gaber-Mohor-Ožbej-Vid-Burga-Primož. there are two more at home—three more, it can't be helped!"

Every time the cry-baby, be it a boy or a girl, would look at his mother's serious and sad face, he would stop whining, and he would bravely undertake his journey into the unknown world where the bitter battle for bread was being fought.

Out in the world, they first became shepherds, then farm-hands, servants, lumberjacks, day laborers, blacksmiths, miners; shepherdesses became dairy maids and house servants. Meta established the custom of yearly family gatherings at her place on Low Sunday. These visits developed into some sort of Hudabivnik conventions, which people in the valley talked about long after Meta had been dead and buried and the young Hudabivniks had no one left to come home to and visit, long after the shrine to which they had journeyed like pilgrims was no longer there. On such occasions Meta saw all her children gathered around her, and for the children this was the only opportunity to see one another. They kept up the custom until their mother's death. They kept coming long after Meta's hair had turned grey, after her body had stooped under the weight of hard work, deceptions and pain, after nothing remained of her beauty but her deep shining eyes. Every Low Sunday the cottage was filled with Easter eggs, sausages and meat, full of brown bread, buckwheat dumplings, white bread and all kinds of cakes which the children had saved and brought to their mother. Many a farmer's wife had pushed an extra gift into the hands of her servant or maid who was about to leave for his yearly visit with his mother, and said: "Here, this is for Meta."

Seated among her children, Meta would often feel an urge to talk a lot, although she was generally a woman of few words.

"Now that you are all gathered here around me, now you listen to me, listen to what I have to tell you—I, your mother—the Bastard Mother. There are nine of you, bastards. Karnice disowned me, and disowned You



mene, zavrgle so tudi vas. Karnice so zavrgle tudi vašega očeta—zato se ne smete hudovati nanj, kajti Karnice so ga zavrgle zadelj mene, zadelj vas. Vidite me, kako sedim med vami, moje roke vidite, ki so od ognja in dela tako zrezane, da niso bile zmožne rahlega božanja; moje srce je tako posušeno, da ne čuti nobenih drugih skomin razen ljubezni do vas, do svoje krvi.—Kadar boste odrasli, branite svojo pankrtsko čast, kjer koli boste hodili. Ko zmanjka mene, ne boste imeli malo toplejše kamre, kamor bi lahko stopili... Zato ste pa povsod doma. Ker niso Karnice vaše, je vaša vsa Podjuna, so vaše vse gore, vse globače, vse skale in vaša so polja, ki jih zdaj prekopavate s svojimi rokami...”

Hudabivniki so jo poslušali kot zamaknjeni.

Meta jim je govorila dalje:

Z vami je tako: vi niste kakor drugi otroci—vi ste samorastniki. Vi se niste odzibali po zibelkah, vaše zibelke so razgoni, brazde, zare, kjer vas je žgalo sonce in vas je močil dež. Ob teh zibelkah so vam popevale tutujke in prepelice, svetila vam je strela, budil vas je grom... Zato ste ko samorastniki. Sami ste se izlevili, brez goje, kot zgubljena samorastna setev v razgonu. Kakor se samorastnik zgrabi z okolico, tako se morate tudi vi, Hudabivniki, zgrabiti z življenjem. Kjer stojite, poženite korenike. Ne dajte se teptati od drugih, ne prenašajte ponižno krivic, ali tudi vi ne prizadevajte nikomur, nobenemu bližnjemu kakih krivic.—Poglejte, mene so položili na martrnico, ko še dobro vedela nisem, kaj je svet. Mogoče bodo polagali tudi vas. Tedaj stisnite zobe in si mislite, da ste samorastniki—da ste Hudabivniki. Zdaj, po meni, vas je devet, čez petdeset let vas bo lahko že sto, čez sto let vas bo petkrat, desetkrat toliko. Potem si boste združeni lahko priborili svojo enakovrednost, svoje pravice...”

Leto za letom je Meta vlivala otrokom vero vase in jih učila spoznavati in zaničevati krivico in greh; ta vera se je v njih utrjevala, nosili so jo s seboj po podjunskem produ, po gorskih koritih, ta vera se je zraščala s tuljenjem vetrov po slemenih, z bučanjem globač, s sanjami polj, zlivala se je s šepetom jezerskih gladin, z neskončnim šumom dravskih valov...



as well. Karnice disowned your father also—therefore you mustn't hold any grudge against him; he was rejected because of me, because of You. You can see me, how I am sitting here among you, you see my hands which have been scarred by fire and hard work, so that I have never been able to caress you gently; my heart is so dried out that it is incapable of any other feeling but that of love for you, my own flesh and blood. When you grow up, defend your bastards' pride wherever you might roam. When I am gone, you will not have another warm place where you could stop for a while. Therefore, your home is everywhere. Since Karnice is not yours, the whole of Podjuna belongs to you, yours are all the mountains, all the ravines, all the stones, yours are the fields which you are now digging up with your hands."

The Hudabivniks listened, spellbound.

Meta went on: "It is like this with you: you are not like other children—you are the self-sown. When you were babies you were not rocked in cradles; your cradles were the ditches and furrows in the fields, as well as paddocks in which you were burned by the sun or soaked by the rain. Around these cradles doves and partridges sang you lullabies, lightning flashed above you and thunder kept you awake. Therefore you are self-sown. You were born without anyone's help, nobody pampered you, you grew like self-sown seeds, gone astray into the ditch beside the field. And just as the self-sown crop has to fight with its surroundings in order to survive, so must you, the Hudabivniks, accept the fight for survival. Wherever you happen to stand, shoot your roots into the soil. Don't allow anyone to trample you down, don't be humble and don't swallow any injustices, but at the same time do not inflict injustices on others, on your fellow-men.—Look at me, they had thrown me on the torture bench before I even knew what the world was about. Maybe they will throw you down, too. If so, grit your teeth and remember that you are the self-sown—that you are the Hudabivniks. There are nine of you now, after me. In fifty years there might already be a hundred of you, in a hundred years five, ten times as many. Then you will be able to fight all together and get your equality, your rights."

Year after year, Meta poured self-confidence into her children's hearts, and she taught them to recognize and despise injustice and sin; this faith grew firm in her children, and they carried it with them, along the gravel paths of Podjuna, through the ravines and the precipices; this faith merged with the howling of the winds over the mountain ridges, with the dreams of the fields, with the whispering of the lake waters, with the ceaseless murmuring of the Drava waves.

*Irma M. Ozbalt*