

Contemporary Slovenian Literature

DUŠAN ČATER

Pop's Drunk Again

Beletrina\*

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“I am a man of passion.  
I have loved, I still do.  
I have not killed.”

*Dušan Čater*



**Dušan Čater** was born in 1968 in Celje. He studied journalism and sociology at the University of Ljubljana and worked as editor for the Karantanija publishing house and as a columnist for several magazines. Since 1995, he has been a free-lance writer. His literary works have been published in all major Slovenian literary magazines. Books: *Flash Royal* (1994; last year published also in Croatia), *Imitacija* (1996), *Resnični umori* (1997), *Patosi* (1999), *Ata je spet pijan* (2002). Furthermore, he has published several books for children and monographs on Marilyn Monroe, Madonna and Giacomo Casanova. Currently, he is the editor of the Balcanis magazine, for which he also translates texts from Croatian. Dušan Čater ranks among the most recognizable and ambitious young Slovenian writers. His novel *Ata je spet pijan* is further proof of this fact: the book has already been translated into Croatian and Serbian.

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## FROM MESSIAH TO DEBT COLLECTOR

*(an excerpt from the accompanying essay)*

*by Mitja Čander, editor*

The character of a misunderstood genius, subjected to humiliation and doomed to a life in isolation, has obsessed generation after generation of Slovenian writers. This vision of an author's situation appears to be what they perceive as the prevailing reality of their social position and intimate determination. It is a landscape they wish to explore, to test its boundaries and perhaps finds authentic mooring points. Hence the quixotic social engagement, the erotic debauchery, the compelling need to verbally esthetize whatever happens, the bouts of heavy drinking and all the other things done by writers-as-Slovenian-literary-heroes, from behind whose backs their real-life creators peek. But no matter how far the framework of myth is transgressed, individualism deepened, excess exacerbated, their stories still remain gloomy, shot through with rays of the setting sun as it were, while their protagonists fail sadly even when emerging as moral winners - and this is far from unimportant. The archetypal image of a writer proficient in the use of national mythology multiplies into often unusual variations, united by the tragedy of mental excess; these are elements which blend in well with the expectations of the nation. At this point, excess becomes the author's sacrifice for the good of the community, his or her existential and creative deviation becomes a sacrificial rite. The glow of an end in torment, an ecstatic fixation on nothingness at the end of the horizon radiates from the writer-as-protagonist in Slovenian literature. The thought of the end, of a lonely death, has a special patina echoing the significance attributed to literature in the Slovenian tradition, where it is seen as the flower of language, more prestigious than even the dreamed-of state.

But the dream of a Slovenian state has already come true, so, presumably, the nation no longer needs sacrificial victims to weave the fabric of community founded merely on language, that is to say, on the symbolic level. The

state has deprived the image of a writer of some of its historical magnitude, and at the same time, has ceased to compel the author to assume this long-familiar role. But if the national patina is peeled off the character of the author (frequent in pre-secession literature), there still remains the inner skeleton, an intense being, always persecuted, yet valiantly struggling for survival. The intensity is usually attributed to the adversity, sometimes downright impossibility, of the circumstances under which the Slovenian tradition historically developed. Yet there seems to be something more profound in these creative projections of the fates of writers. Some kind of masochism, opposition to the fates, a permanent basking in the future glory of the works which will survive their authors and vindicate the lives they were forced to lead, constrained by the pettiness of their herd. In particular the prose writers who became prominent in the 1990s often deal with the self-image of an author; they are no less interested in their own status than their forerunners. Among them, Dušan Čater has dedicated himself to portraying the character of an author with particular frequency and passion. While wordsmiths feature prominently also in his other works, *Ata je spet pijan (Pop's Drunk Again)* seems to be the novel in which his truly fresh and convincing approach to this familiar topic really comes to the fore. Čater's latest novel thus seems to be, in addition to everything else, a meta-fictional commentary, as worn as this designation may be.

Čater's writer, like most others, is a person from the margins of society, with no regular income. In the views of the other inhabitants of his building, he is the only one capable of such disgraceful behavior as throwing empty bottles out the window. He can not even bear to think about conforming to the rites of the herd. Also because he goes on being an idealist, in his fashion, a believer in the reality of the heightened states of awareness which provide decidedly lively departures from an otherwise drab existence. Hence the unrest which drives pop Čatko into forever new adventures, from Orto Bar in Ljubljana to the Czech town of Pardubice. Here new zones open up, where the old image of the troubled author acquires new undertones. Čater strives to present the familiar excessiveness and marginality shorn of their tragic aura, setting the perspective of self-reflection at a distance from genius and the social and metaphysical paranoia, though even in this vision

of the world there happen things which penetrate deeply. Pop Čatko is the long familiar excessive marginal type in a new, or at least different, guise. The difference is seen on three fronts: in the domains of his social life, love life, and creative writing.

Čatko certainly does not move in the circles of the social elite, at least not those who wield real power. His milieu consists of eccentrics of all kinds, bohemians intent on beating the established order of conventional behavior and values. In addition to his usual pranks, Čatko decides to take some sort of social action; his adventurous spirit and the lure of money make him look for employment. The job he opts for is not some menial work or even humanitarian agitation, but the anything but lofty calling of a debt collector. In a nutshell: getting back money owed - dirty, profane work, to say nothing of the danger which accompanies Čatko's team's "routine" operations. Debt collecting, Pop's only social obligation, is the expression of a certain frivolity which has replaced the old vision of writers' vocation being to save mankind. In Pop's world, the mob represents the real politics, the gloves-off exercising of elementary superiority over a fellow human being. Our debt collector is afraid of the vindictiveness of the mob, but what can the mob do compared to the apparatus of politics, the legal form of theft, as experienced by Čatko's writer-protagonist. His teaming up with the bad guys is in a way a refutation of the logic of the victim, an attempt to go over to the winners, to the demons of power dancing on the edge of the abyss. It is a resolution to fight fiercely in a world which has long since dispensed with Ideals and Values. Being a warrior in such circumstances demands the agility of a cat, the ability to bounce back and strike out. The danger is no less than in the time of Cankar, but the distinguished sacrifice of an author is apparently no longer sufficient. The investment of the genius' suffering, with which he was to pay for the freedom to indulge in excess, is all used up. Pop Čatko enters into manly battle like an armed nomad, on the lookout for his window of opportunity, for the trace of an experience which will seem authentic, really genuine in the chaotic world of his hallucinations. I can not shake the impression that the benevolent narrator is having a private joke at the expense of the reader's sedate expectations when he mentions that what he does for a living is collect debts. A lusty, ecstatic undermining of the icon

of a suffering man of letters. He doesn't want any part in this game, he refuses to take on the burden of guilt and humiliation. His love of life and his sensual unrest are too powerful antidotes to the tragically oriented daydreaming. To be an adventurer in the urban maze, among the hallucinations with islands of the known and submerged landscapes of the unknown. In a world increasingly dispersed, devoid of great ideas which would furnish at least a mask of clarity. In such a world any Messianism is condemned to being just futile eccentricity with the pathos of self-pity.

I.

Orto bar was crowded. Full of people I knew, intermingled with some that I didn't. Dostojevski sat by the bar, alone. On the bar top in front of him stood a bottle of wine and a liter of mineral water. That's not entirely true. The bottle of wine was just about empty, and the bottle of mineral water had barely been touched. He waved me over. I sat down next to him.

"How's it going?" I asked him in greeting.

"Great," he said, though I could've figured that out by myself.

Dejo came up and asked me if I wanted a glass. I nodded. He found it self-evident, or maybe took it for granted that I'd be joining Dostojevski in enjoying his wine. When I got a glass, Dostojevski ordered another liter from Dejo.

"Wow!" I said, and he launched into an explanation of how he'd got the welfare benefits by way of his late mother, and, check this out, six months' back payment too.

"So drink!" said Dostojevski.

We had to drink to that. There was no other way. We clinked glasses. Dejo placed another bottle in front of us.

"This one's on me," he said.

Fucking hell, that's Orto for you. A thing like that can only happen to you in Orto. There's quite a number of watering holes where I'd spent entire days and nights, where I'd shed tons of money, and never once got a drink on the house, honest. Or was addressed by name and all that. But in Orto, that's something perfectly normal. I mean, getting a drink on the house every now and then, if only you spend enough time at the bar. And that's the way it should be.

Dostojevski was sloshed nice and proper. In moments like these – which, if truth be told, are fairly frequent – something extraordinary happens to his tongue. It, like, goes numb. The consequence being that it gets very hard to make out what he's saying. The noises issuing from his mouth and throat are

so garbled and incomprehensible it's like listening to a deaf-mute. But there's another thing that I find absolutely hysterical. In situations like these, when his tongue's like paralyzed and all that, Dostojevski grows his most voluble. More garrulous than at any other time. He insists on taking part in every single discussion though he's incapable of getting a single intelligible word out, let alone compose a lucid or coherent sentence.

"Sometimes it feels real good to drink oneself stupid," he's told me many times, explaining why his tongue gets so numb.

What the fuck. It's never bothered me much, honest, it hasn't.

Like I said, we drank to things. To everything. To meeting, to hanging out together, and in the end to it being Thursday. Why not? Dostojevski was already pretty stupid, as he calls it, and I was well on my way to becoming just that. We eyed young women. There were quite a few of them around, most of them in the standard rocker kit. On the upper floor, which is actually the third floor and which had only been open for about a year, there was a concert on. I didn't know who was playing, who was busting their balls on stage, so I looked around the walls, trying to spot a poster or something. I couldn't see one, and Dostojevski had no idea who was playing either.

"Some fippies," he mumbled.

I didn't feel like any hippies. Of any sort. Not the old classic ones, not the new age kind. It all seemed like the same crap. We poured two more glasses. We clinked and then I instructed Dostojevski to show his face in the WC in a couple of minutes, knock on the booth door and identify himself. He nodded and I wended my way to the basement, to the john. A line had formed outside the ladies'. It always does, and I always like that. I really don't mind checking out a few good-looking girls desperately trying to control their bladders before I take a leak—or a crap, as the case may be. It's little things like that, if I may put it that way, that make me use the john in Orto pretty often. I went into a booth. Someone had spilled a drink on the lid of the flush tank, so I lowered the toilet seat cover and, with my pants still on, sat on it to wipe it off a bit, then I got up and tipped out some dream dust on it. I hadn't managed to cut it yet when there came a knock on the door.

“It’s me,” Dostojevski mumbled relatively indistinctly.

“Me who?” I screwed around with his head a little.

“Come on—me, Dostojevski!”

“Dostojevski?”

“Yeah, well, you know it’s me, you fuck!”

“Prove it,” I said.

“Dostoevsky, Fyodor Michailovich,” he said, announcing it with a Russian accent and intelligibly enough. “Born on November the second, eighteen twenty-one in Moscow. Presumably. As a member of the circle of Utopian Socialists, I was sentenced to death by the imperial authorities, but was granted a pardon at the last moment and thrown into jail in Omsk. From there I was sent to Siberia and only allowed to return to St. Petersburg in fifty-nine. You want more?”

“I do,” I said. Dostojevski studies Slavonic languages, and loves them, too. He could have recited this data about this particular gentleman also in Russian, but that would’ve probably made no sense at all because I wouldn’t have understood a word.

“I build my novels around interesting plots, predominantly related to murder and the justice system, with the aim of portraying the psychological and ethical facets of human nature. Mostly, I present the psychological aspect through inner monologue, while I develop the moral, ethical and philosophical issues in dialogues, in debates between two protagonists who most frequently seek justice in a court of law, and so on. You want more?”

“I do!”

“My most celebrated works include ...”

“Okay, okay! Such words will suffice,” I said, wanting to sound a bit smart and erudite in turn. I admired him, I truly did. And a point of interest: The things he knows by heart, like that about Fyodor, he can reel off quite clearly no matter how *stupid* he is, but other, ad lib stuff, no way. I unlocked the booth door for him. Dostojevski entered, relocked the door behind him, and immediately kneeled down to the line I’d managed to produce. He’d come equipped with a banknote already rolled up, and in a jiffy, he blew the lovely coke.

“Hey,” I said. “That was meant for two. I was going to cut it in half,” I said, meaning the line, of course.

“So cut another one,” said Dostojevski and, what the fuck, what else could I do but quickly cut a similar dose for myself.

## II.

The break of dawn found me riding alone toward Pardubice. Riding some fucking train that stopped at literally every footbridge. And it jolted me about on that hard seat until it had rattled out of place practically every bone in my body, to say nothing of the effect it had on my insides. I couldn't even drink the beer I'd brought along for supplies, because every time I attempted to take a sip I'd spill some on myself with all that bouncing about on the damn rails. I felt slightly concerned about Dostojevski, about having left him in a bar back there, sleeping with his head on the bar top. But there was really nothing I could do. I hadn't been able to wake him in any way. Even the waiter had tried to help, but to no avail. Dostojevski was, like, unconscious, honest. He was still breathing and all that, so the waiter assured me he'd be just fine and that I should go home and sleep it off, but fuck it, it turned out that I didn't know the way to Natka's place, drunk as I was and this being my first time in Prague, and also generally having no sense of direction whatsoever. I couldn't call her on her cell phone either because I didn't have her number, while Dostojevski had a cell phone the likes of which I'd never seen before. I didn't even know how to unlock the keypad, let alone search through the phone book, the call register and all that. And honestly, I swear on my son's life, it had been impossible to wake him. And to just sit there, silently with the waiter because, fuck it, I don't speak Czech and he doesn't speak English, and drink beer, which I already had coming out my ears ... Well, I didn't feel like that either. So I went through Dostojevski's pockets, took out his wallet, stashed the big banknotes, the deutsche marks and all that, left him some change, I mean, for a beer, a train, a taxi etc., and went out into the street. Don't get me wrong, I didn't steal from Dostojevski, I just did what I did out of the pure goodness of my heart, to prevent somebody else from picking his pockets. Because—say this small change is stolen from him. It's still better than losing everything, right? And the next time we meet, he's very likely to be very very happy and extremely grateful for my

gesture when I hand him his money back, because he'll have thought that he'd really lost all the money. See?

Okay.

I barely managed to find the railroad station. I twisted my tongue trying to explain the notion of train to passersby, *train*, *vlyak*, as I thought they called it, *chuchu* and things like that. After walking for like an hour I found myself at a station, not the central one, though, not where Dostojevski and I had alighted when we arrived in Prague. This station was much smaller, and the trains waiting on the tracks were antediluvian. I got on the one for Pardubice, or so I was assured, opened a beer and proceeded to spill it all over myself, like I said. Not on purpose, mind you. I arrived in Pardubice when the sun was already high in the sky, called a taxi—whose number I did have—to take me back to the dorm, was there practically alone because everybody else must have gone to either the tournament or the university, crawled into my bed and slept, slept, slept.

I woke up soaking wet. But not with my hair plastered onto my sweaty face, as if from a nightmare and all that, but wet about my body, particularly around the middle. I had peed myself, my dears. I had pissed in my pants, my dear Quakers, I had wet my bed. Like a fucking child. And all because of that Czech beer. A thing that hadn't happened to me for ten years at least, honest. I jumped up, stripped off my soaking, stinking rags in disgust, stuffed them into a plastic bag, yanked the sheet off the bed and hung it out the window sill, turned the mattress over, and lit a cigarette. Man, did I have a headache! The first puff of smoke crept directly into my cerebellum and refused to leave, and I thought I'd go nuts with the pain. I moaned out loud, god. I sat on the bed and tried to smoke as slowly as possible, which proved to be a fucking tough task. The thing is, my nerves demanded lots of smoke and then some more, and in the shortest possible time, while my body naturally rejected this same thing with determination. Not a very pleasant feeling, if you've ever had the honor of experiencing it yourself. Thus I sat there on that piss-soggy bed, slowly blowing smoke toward the ceiling, but every time I'd look up I'd get such a stab of pain in the back of my head I thought I'd go nuts. Suddenly a wave of nausea came over me, and I flipped the cigarette nonchalantly out the window. I had a flashback to some event of

recent days, and like the fittest and healthiest person in the world, an athlete and all that, like a tiger, I leaped to the window and looked down, to make sure there was no hay stack right under the window, or maybe a child playing with gasoline or going blind on absinthe. One such incident with an open window was quite enough for me, if you know what I mean. Thankfully, there was nothing below the window but a gravel road, and on the other side of that road, right across from my window, my eyes met a sight that took the edge off my nausea. A tavern. The sign on it said *Jozef*, and that's probably what it was called. So life's not going to be that dismal in this Pardubice, I thought to myself, and felt a sudden overwhelming, irrepressible desire to visit that public house across the road. I looked at the time. It was almost five. So I took a towel, soap and some other toiletries out of my duffel bag, which I hadn't unpacked yet, wrapped myself in the terry cloth and stepped out into the hall. And there ... I had no idea how to get to the showers, nor whether there even were any showers. I started off blindly. The door of the room next to mine and Dostojevski's was locked, which meant that Mi?o and Mare were still at the tournament, still playing a match. Can you imagine that, my dear Quakers, five hours sitting at a table, with your eyes glued to a chessboard. And—and this is the most admirable thing of all, at least for me it is, what the fuck—five hours of concentration, of being completely immersed. Five hours, man. I'd never make it, honest, I wouldn't.

I got lucky with the showers. I'd gone in the right direction, and the showers were not all taken, as often happens. I slid into one of the stalls, adjusted the temperature of the water and let it gush all over me. It felt good. Beneficial. The aching pain in my head disappeared miraculously, well, not entirely, but I nonetheless felt much better, well enough at least to start whistling some stupid tune. I spent quite some time in that shower, completely lathered up, rinsed off and all that, and then the irrepressible desire to visit my friend Jozef across the road urged me irrepressibly on. So I quickly dried off, wrapped myself in the towel again, and went back to my room. I dressed, in fresh clothes, lest someone think that I went out amongst people in piss-soaked rags, slipped on my sandals, dug the brilliantine out of my bag, and again made for the lavatories down the hall. As I stood in front of

the mirror applying brilliantine to my wet hair, I continued to whistle that stupid tune. Then I pushed my face close to the mirror, examined my facial hair to see if I needed a shave, well, I did, but I didn't feel like going to so much trouble, so I made a quick detour to the toilet, took a leak, and hey presto! back to my room. There I tore a leaf out of the notepad I'd brought along just in case I had an attack of literature and also to impress Mi?o, right, and wrote a note:

*“Dear Dostojevski, my friend and roommate for better and for worse!  
Look out the window. I'm there!”*

## III.

Žužemberk met me with countless lights. Literally. I mean, nobody counted them and all that, but who could blame them for not counting, there were that many they were countless alright, especially around the old town castle. This ruin greeted me from afar, beckoning to me to come to its rampart for a shot of rum with diet soda. But, fuck it, I had no time for things like that. For sentimentality, memories and innate loves that with time turn into habit. No time. I parked in front of the only apartment building I knew, cut a line, just so, for strength and courage, and dashed up the stairs to the third floor. I wasn't sure I'd find anyone in the apartment, and frankly, I didn't care one way or the other. I mean, I'd rather there was no one there than find the blue ribbon with POLICE printed on it across the door and the lock sealed, or maybe even some crime scene detectives inside the apartment, the Holmes and the Poirots, looking through their magnifying glasses for possible prints left behind by the murderers. Well, at least there was none of that. No seal on the door, no detectives. They'd probably had enough time to turn the place inside out and realize yet again that it was another shot in the dark, that they had no single trace of evidence, except... Fuck it, that's why I was standing in front of the door to that apartment.

I rang the bell. I knocked and rang the bell.

Ring-ring. Knock-knock and again ring-ring. I heard movement on the other side of the door, and in the peephole, as D. calls it, I saw an eye watching me. Then the key scraped, and none other than she herself appeared in the door.

"I've been expecting you," she said. "Come on in!"

She stepped back from the door, checking with a quick look up and down the hall that we hadn't been seen. She pulled me into the apartment and quickly locked up behind me.

"Take a seat," she said, motioning toward the kitchen table where I'd sat before.

Confused, and not only because of the dope, I sat down and looked at her. I pulled my gun out from under my belt and laid it on the table.

"I came to kill you," I said.

"I know, I've been expecting you!"

I mean, she was fucking nuts. We looked each other in the eye and kept nodding. She stood there in front of me, dressed in a nightgown, waiting to die. And a thing like that, my dear Quakers, was too much even for me. After a while when nothing happened, she said:

"I'll make some coffee, okay?"

I nodded.

"Or would you rather have something stronger? I have some home-made schnapps," she said.

I nodded again. Her calm really blew my mind. She left the kitchen and I heard her open a squeaky cabinet door in the other room. High as I was, it occurred to me, check this out, that it would need oiling. That cabinet door. I mean, hey. She soon returned with a bottle of colorless liquid. She opened it and took a glass out of the sink. She poured a shot.

"Here you go," she said.

I nodded and accepted the glass. I took a sip. It was one good schnapps. I knocked it back and put the glass on the table, and she poured me another. I thought she was trying to get me drunk. But I didn't care. Again I lifted the glass and knocked it back. She poured again and sat down across the table from me. I lit a cigarette.

"May I?" she asked, motioning toward my pack of cigarettes.

I nodded. She took out a cigarette, put it in her mouth and lit it. It was nice to behold. She had a fine way of smoking. And an even finer sight was how her enormous breasts rose when she inhaled, giving me a mighty tingling feeling down below.

"The police were here for several days," she started. "They ransacked the place and questioned me for hours. I didn't remember anything," she said, winking significantly at me with the last words. "I told them I'd had a seizure and that I couldn't remember a thing!"

She looked me straight in the eye, and I averted my eyes. It's not pleasant, my dear Quakers, to look a person in the eye just before you kill them, you can take my word for it.

"I saw your picture on television, that time you hurt the son of that politician. And in the paper and ... you were everywhere, Dušan. And I went to the library and took out your book. I have it on my bedstand, honest. I like it! I like the part where ... Where you're cutting across Tivoli Park with a bag of pills and vitamins and you come across a woman who's having an epileptic fit and you offer her vitamins, ha-ha-ha. That's good, yeah," she blabbered, "like you were writing about me."

I still didn't want to meet her eye and tried to remember which book that could be. I didn't remember ever having written anything like that.

"And how you supported her head though you were ..."

"Okay, okay," I cut her short. "I came here to kill you!"

"I know," she said again. "I've been expecting you!" Man, she was really fucking demented. "So, couldn't that wait a bit?"

I looked at her. Now I no longer averted my eyes. I wanted to make her abundant flesh creep a bit. She was smoking, and her boobs rose and fell by half a meter, hey. I liked her. I grinned.

"It can wait," I said and raised the glass.

"Great," she said. "Go on, tell me, what was the deal with that politician? What was he doing in your building?"

I was beginning to feel a little better. I even thought of doing another line. I shrugged at her question.

"It's obvious what he was doing there, isn't it? There's whoring everywhere, Dušan, take my word for it!"

Hey, man, now she's adopted a maternal attitude to me, I thought. She's really in the bag and up the pole. I kept nodding and grinning.

"It's been that way since the beginning of time, Dušan. Go on, have another one, ha-ha, to steady your hand, ha-ha," she came out with a combination of yokel common sense and black humor, and poured me another shot. "Yeah, yeah, they're all whore masters, and politics is nothing but a whore. You know what's the difference between electricity and politics? Huh? Politics is a whore, and electricity ... Oh, darn, I forget ... Wait, electricity is ... electricity's a whore that ... Right, a whore you can't touch, and politics ... Oh, I can't remember, but it's funny and ... It turns out in the end there's no difference."

I mean, it was really funny, no denying that. She got up and went to the sink. She took out a glass, rinsed it and put it down on the table next to the bottle of schnapps. She sat down, wriggled into a comfortable position, pushed out her enormous chest and said:

"Go on, pour me a drink, will you? I'm a bit nervous, you know?"

Naturally, I poured her one. And one for myself, because I was nervous too. She raised her glass and clinked it against mine. We drank to each other's health, man. She smiled sweetly as we did this, and I, really on edge with the situation and all, grabbed my gun nervously to finish, goddamit, what I had in mind and what I'd come to do in the first place. I aimed it at her. My hand shook like some damn country butcher's.

"Are you in such a hurry?" she asked with a lump in her throat.

I stared at her for a while and then rested my befuddled and weary head on my hand, which still held the gun. For a short time I even closed my eyes. I could hear nothing but her deep breathing and a clock ticking somewhere in the room. I opened my eyes again, looked at her and realized that I really was in no hurry at all. After all, I had the whole night before my flight. I shook my head no.

"That's good," she said and downed the glass she was still holding. Then she got out of her chair and went to the bedroom. A short while later some music came pouring out. Slow music, heartbreaking. Pathetic, corny. I finished my drink and poured another. For both of us. She came back from the bedroom and stopped in the doorway. She was twisting a rag in her hands and looking at me. Then she asked:

"What's going to happen to this apartment now, Dušan?"

I mean, talk about banal! The wench knows she's got one night left to live at the most, and she wants to know about the apartment? I mean, come on!

"I don't know," I said, and I wasn't lying.

"Are you guys going to take it back, because, now that ..." Her voice trailed off. Then she continued, a bit lower: "Now that Uroš is gone ..."

Another thing that got me down. Another fact. That is ... Until then I hadn't even known the name of the kid we'd killed. I hadn't even known whom we'd killed.

"What's your name?" I asked her.

She told me. A stupid hick name. I nodded at her. She came up to me and proffered her hand. She really had bats in her belfry. Then she sat down across the table from me again and—my, what a sight—stuffed the rag she'd been twisting in her hands down her gargantuan bosom. I quickly downed my drink. She yammered on endlessly:

"Now you'll never get your money back, no way. Were you thinking of claiming it from his family? They think it's their apartment now. But ... ha-ha, if they knew what happened, they wouldn't want it, would they, Dušan? And I," she said, and made a zipping motion across her mouth to show that it was sealed, "I'm keeping my mouth shut. But they tried, you know, Dušan, they tried to make me leave by force, though they never gave a penny for this place, while I contributed quite a lot, you know. But now this loan ... Neither my family nor his family have that kind of money. Oh, darn, what's going to happen now, Dušan?"

"I don't know," I said, and to be honest, I couldn't care less. Now there were only two things going through my mind. Her enormous boobs and another line. I don't know why I got up and went to the bathroom to cut a line, but that's what I did. I locked myself in the fucking john, and cut a line on the water tank as though I was ashamed of my deeds in front of her. In front of the woman I'd come to kill. As though I'd never snorted coke at that kitchen table. Hey, man. And another thing: She could've easily run from the apartment, fuck it, and called the cops, or simply taken my gun, which I'd left on the table, and blown my brains out. I have no idea why I did that. Maybe I was stoned out of my mind by the schnapps and coke and the wine I'd been drinking all day, or maybe I just didn't give a damn about what happened to me and all that. I don't know, my dear Quakers, I really don't. To cut to the chase—when I returned, sniffing, my head aching so badly I thought it would burst, she was dancing in the bedroom. With her arms spread wide she twirled around the bed, while her loose nightgown revealed more than was sensible.

I stepped up to her and threw her on the bed. Her nightgown opened without my assistance, displaying her two enormous melons, a truly magnificent sight, with two huge, pink, hard nipples, and the rag stuffed in between. My vision blurred. I buried my head between her boobs, blew the

stupid rag out of the way and shook my head between her hooters until I had to come up for air. I rolled off her, and she first opened her nightgown and then pulled down my pants and my underwear to my knees. She got on top of me, mounting my larger-than-ever erection, and started riding me so hard it made her watermelons bounce up and down at least half a meter. I squeezed them, kneaded them, pulled her nipples until she cried out loud and bounced and bounced and bounced. Then I rolled her off of me and got her under me without pulling out. Like a maniac I rammed into her and groaned, I don't know who was louder, me or her. Either way, that was the noisiest fuck of my life. It was well into the night and the whole damn town of Žužemberk must've heard us. We yelled and huffed and puffed in a fucking frenzy. When she came, she sank her nails into my back, and I ejaculated all over her slightly pudgy stomach. I rolled off her and lay as still as a corpse. She scooped up my sperm from her stomach and spread it over me, covering my chest with it, then licking it off. As she did this, her boobs engulfed me, so that I felt like sticking it between her jugs, but my dick was too dead. I raised myself and took the coke out of my pants, which were now around my ankles. For a hard-on, I told myself, though my head ached like I had a thousand washing machines on spin cycle inside it. I sat on the edge of the bed to cut a line on the nightstand, but she laid a hand on my shoulder and said:

"Is that it?"

I looked at her and nodded, even though I didn't even know what *it* was.

"Can I have some too?"

I nodded and she raised herself and looked over my shoulder to see what I was doing.

"Oh, heck, do it on my tit," she said.

I turned around and stared at her enormous boobs. The thought crossed my mind that a line across her entire boob would put me six feet under, it would blow out my black heart. Yet I couldn't help myself; I threw her back on the bed and actually started shaping two thin, long lines on one of her jugs. I even made an effort to curve them nicely around her pink nipple, one on each side. Then I took a banknote from my pants, rolled it up and offered her the first snort, the choice of lines. She chose the slightly smaller one. It

went like clockwork. I mean, she had no difficulty whatsoever bending down to her boob, because her jugs were so enormous—I just couldn't get past this adjective. Then I bent over the other line and snorted it right up. And then ... All I remember is that after that I licked up whatever remained of *it* on her enooooormous boob and ... I don't know whether I fell asleep or simply passed out cold. I was swallowed by darkness! Probably the darkness from around the lit-up Žužemberk.

It was a white darkness. It was a hallucination of a white horse. Loose and free. It galloped on green highlands at an altitude of some three thousand meters, its thick tail streaming out behind it. It raced on the very edge of a precipice. Far below a muddy river meandered. It snaked between the mountains of a range stretching southward for kilometers. Its strong current had carved a gorge in the rock, and it dropped precipitously toward some far-off villages of which my white delusion knew nothing. There, on the very top of the highlands, outside a dilapidated wooden shack, not exactly adorned by laundry drying on a rusty wire, yet it was there, there stood an old, toothless Indian with a tattered what-used-to-be-a-hat on his long, grizzled hair. The horse came up to him and the old man caressed its white mane gently and spoke to him. Then he extracted a small piece of something from his pocket and offered it to the horse. The white horse neighed and hastily munched the proffered tidbit. Then the old Indian entered his shack and chewed a few green leaves that looked like tea. It was getting dark and the white hallucination was slowly covered by darkness. The wind could be heard howling in the mountains, and the old Indian sank into a slumber, while his eyes gazed at the starry sky visible through a tear in the roof. He got up once during the night and stuck his grizzled head, now hatless, through the door. In the dark, only a patch of white was visible, which was probably the horse, and the old Indian lay back down on his creaking bed. When day broke, he opened his eyes and saw through the hole in the roof thousands upon thousands of birds, condors, sailing on their enormous wings above his ramshackle shed. He saw them circle and swoop, and he knew what had happened. He got up, put what used to be a hat on his head,

and went outdoors. Then he sat down by the dead white horse outside his shack, on the top of the highlands, on the very edge of the precipice. He sat by the dead white horse, stuffed a few green tea-like leaves into his mouth, and told the horse a story: "Once there was a sun. He was the first, the only and the strongest sun. And because he soon grew bored, he decided to get married. He descended to the highlands and asked the snake to be his wife. The snake, coiled up, agreed and kept him company for a few days before the wedding. But even when fully extended, the snake was no less artful than when coiled, and she kept evading the sun and going her own ways, and every time the sun asked her not to run away from him, she hissed dangerously and, together with her coiled up sisters, showed him two fangs full of venom. Disappointed, the sun descended lower, down to the rainforest by the Big River, and asked a female jaguar for her paw in marriage. The female jaguar accepted, and for a while she and the sun were inseparable. The earth got as hot at that time as the inside of a volcano, and the trees started dying one after another. The female jaguar was a calculating creature, she wanted her paradise back, with its copious rain and its abundance of food, so she called off the wedding. Saddened, the sun rose back into the sky, high, high in the sky, high above the Big River and high above the highlands, above the artful snake and her sisters. He mourned there at the very end of the sky, when a beautiful round moon floated up to him. She asked the sun why he was so said, and the sun told her his story. The moon was so shaken by his story that she offered to become his wife. Soon they were married and made a happy couple, complementing each other as they still do to this day, and ever since that time we've had day and night on Earth. And day and night and day and night." Then the old Indian spit out the chewed leaves, took out a small piece of something from his pocket and swallowed it. He lay down next to the horse and fell asleep forever. In the sky a strong sun shone, below which its envoys, the condors, circled and swooped down to collect their dues.

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## REVIEWS

“Through the fate of a debt collector, through a burlesque reversal of character, Čater humorously portrays, street-poetry style, existential states that are both unique and universal. /.../ Čater has quite a few great forerunners in his field, Carver, Bukowski and Yerofeyev, to name just a few, so he is by no means alone.”

Tanja Lesničar-Pučko, *Dnevnik*

“A mixture of parody, satire, violence and roman-a-clef, the novel speaks of a young author in the uncertain world of crime. It is a picturesque, ironic commentary on the scene, written in the distinct Beletrina style.”

Uroš Črnigoj, *TV Slovenija*

“Čater describes a world which has expelled him in order to re-establish some sort of order, which is in itself the nature of a sacrificial victim. /.../ After all, the entire novel is really a nostalgic narrative.”

Gašper Troha, *Večer*

“Unlike that of other Slovenian authors dealing with this subject, Čater’s writing is incredibly light-hearted, witty, funny and smooth.”

Vesna Jurca Tadel, *Dnevnik*

“He is one of the rare, possibly archaic, types who live what they write about. And write about what they live. Plus imagination.”

Vesa Milek, *Delo*