


Tatjana Angerer

Matevž Šmale

MOJ STRIC MY UNCLE



mag. Marina Gradišnik

V sklopu razstave *Iz muzejskih zbirk* tokrat predstavljamo zgodbo dr. Matevža Šmalca (1888–1960), ki je izhajal iz ribniške vrvarske družine. Bil je prevajalec, esejist, literarni kritik, jezikoslovec, prvi tajnik Slovenske univerze. Spomine na strica Matevža je za nas zbrala in zapisala njegova nečakinja, gospa Tatjana Angerer. Ohranjanje spominov skozi osebne pripovedi je za muzejsko delo dragoceno, saj predmeti iz muzejskih zbirk s pomočjo zgodb oživijo skupaj z ljudmi in časom, ko so bili le-ti v uporabi. Pri dopolnjevanju muzejske zbirke Šmalc so sodelovali: Marija Bavdaž, Andrej Šmalc, Ivana Dolenc, Mateja Šmalc in Tatjana Angerer, za kar se vsem iskreno zahvaljujem. Vsi omenjeni so ne le predmetno, ampak tudi s svojim izjemnim darom pripovedovanja pomagali pri razumevanju časa in življenja ne samo v njihovi družini, marveč tudi v kraju samem.

In še nekaj besed o avtorici ...

Tatjana Angerer je kot učiteljica in biologinja napisala več učbenikov za biologijo in spoznavanje narave ter knjig z izobraževalno vsebino, kot so: *Vsak dan zdravilne rastline*, *Čisava župa, pisana pogača in še kaj*, *Pismo naslednji generaciji*, *Okusni letni časi: 4 x 15 jedilnikov za zdravje* idr. V njeni bibliografiji najdemo tudi številna dela za mladino in otroke, med njimi naj omenim le nekatere: *Pripovedka za rojstno noč*, *Davidov pravljичni vrt*, *Od pšenice do potice*.

Svoje spomine na otroštvo in starše pa je prvič strnila v knjigi *Židovska 8*, kjer je opisala zgodbo hiše, za katero sama pravi, da so v njej shranjeni eni od lepših spominov njenega otroštva. To je bila hiša v Mariboru, od koder je bil doma njen oče. Njena mama pa je bila Šmalčeva iz Ribnice, sestra dr. Mateža Šmalca, ki se je izšolala za učiteljico in večji del svoje aktivne dobe službovala kot učiteljica v Strugah. V 60-ih letih 20. stoletja se je Tatjana Angerer preselila v Ribnico, kjer je poučevala na osnovni šoli. V tem času je spletla še tesnejše vezi s krajem in z družino samo. Ravno v tem obdobju so se oblikovali tudi spomini, ki jih je strnila v pričujočih zapisih.

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The current exhibition *From Museum Collections* presents the story of Dr Matevž Šmalc (1888–1960), who was born in Ribnica, in a rope-maker family. He was a translator, essayist, literary critic, linguist and the first secretary of the University of Slovenia. The memories of 'uncle Matevž' have been collected and written down for the Museum by his niece, Ms Tatjana Angerer. Preserving memories through personal narratives is very important for museum work, as the stories bring to life the items presented as part of museum exhibitions together with the people and the time when the objects were in use. Individuals who helped build up the Šmalc family museum collection were Marija Bavdaž, Andrej Šmalc, Ivana Dolenc, Mateja Šmalc and Tatjana Angerer, for which I would like to give all of them my heartfelt thanks. Their contribution was not only in terms of the donated objects, but also through their remarkable gift of storytelling, which helped understand the times and the way of life not only in their family, but also in Ribnica as such.

And a few words about the author...


As a teacher and biologist Tatjana Angerer authored several textbooks for the biology and the nature study school subjects, as well as books with an educational content such as: *Medicinal plants for Everyday Life*, *The Sour Whey Soup*, *a Colourful Cake and the Like*, *A Letter to the Next Generation*, *Tasty Seasons: 4 x 15 Menus for Health* etc. Her bibliography includes a number of works for the youth and children – to name just a few: *A Story for the Birth Night*, *David's Fairytale Garden*, *From Wheat to Potica Cake*.

She collected the memories of her childhood and her parents for the first time in the book *The House at Židovska 8*, wherein she told the story of the house, which

she described as the house where some of the most beautiful memories of her childhood were kept. This was a house in the Slovenian town of Maribor, where her father was from. Her mother was a member of the Šmalc family from Ribnica, Dr Matevž Šmalc's sister; she trained to be a teacher and spent the greater part of her professional career as a teacher in the village of Struge near Ribnica. In the 1960s, Tatjana Angerer moved to Ribnica, where she was a teacher at the local primary school. During this time, she established close ties with both this area and her family. And it was during this period that the memories were made which she collected and which you are now able to read about here.

Marina Gradišnik, MA

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Tatjana Angerer

Matevž Šmale

MOJ STRIC

Prvi del stričevega življenjepisa mi je povedala moja mati; približno takole:

September 1888. Pri Zalarjevih je zavekal novorojenec. Fant.

“Prišel je nekoliko prej, kot so pričakovali. Sam je kasneje malo zares in malo za šalo rekel, da zaradi prevelike radovednosti. Krstili so ga za Matevža. Prvorojenec je takrat skoraj povsod v naših krajih dobil ime po očetu, prvorojenka pa po materi.”

Mlada mati je že nekaj dni po porodu spet gospodinjila, skrbela za otroka in pomagala možu v delavnici. V letih, ki so sledila, je rodila še enajst otrok, a preživeli so samo štirje: Matevž, Polde, Štefka in Tone.

Matevž je bil bister, zelo zvedav, svojeglav in trmast otrok. Učitelji so hitro odkrili njegovo izredno nadarjenost in slo po znanju in kmalu je bilo tudi staršem jasno, da mora Matevž naprej v šole.

Sprva v gimnazijo v Ljubljano, a zaradi velike gorečnosti za slovenstvo, naprednih idej in kljubovalnosti so ga po tretjem razredu izključili iz vseh avstrijskih srednjih šol. Zato je odšel na Sušak, kjer je zaključil gimnazijo in z odliko maturiral.

Prav tisto leto je za posledicami ošpic umrla šestletna sestra Pavla, in Matevž, ki ga je njena smrt zelo prizadela, je resno razmišljal o študiju medicine. Rekel je, da ga vleče v raziskovalno smer. A gimnazijski profesor italijanščine in francoščine na Sušaku je odkril njegovo zares nenavadno nadarjenost za jezike, in prizadeval si je tako dolgo, da ga je prepričal in usmeril v študij romanistike. On mu je tudi utrl pot na univerzo v Firencah.

Po prvem semestru je moral k vojakom, in ko je odslužil vojaški rok, je odšel študirat na Dunaj.

Iz gole radovednosti; Firenze je že poznal in hotel je spoznati še Dunaj in Almo mater skoraj vseh takratnih slovenskih izobražencev, je rekel.

Takrat se je med študenti kot blisk razširila novica s francoskega konzulata o možnosti študija francoščine na Sorboni, za kar je bila razpisana štipendija. A treba je bilo opraviti preizkus.

Matevž je poskusil in ga briljantno opravil. Takoj je dobil štipendijo in odšel v Pariz na Sorbono. Kasneje je spet odšel na Dunaj, kjer je študij leta 1915 zaključil z doktoratom.

Po promociji se je prišel spočit domov in se spet srečal z nekaterimi prijatelji in znanci. Med njimi je bila tudi Pakiževa Mimi, takrat najlepše ribniško dekle, je rekla moja mati.

Matevž se je do ušes zagledal vanjo in kmalu sta se poročila. Ob neki priliki je smehljaje se rekel: "Mimi je Prešernova Urška, jaz sem pa povodni mož."

A njun zakon je trajal le kratek čas. Že po štirih letih je Mimi umrla. Za tuberkulozo, so rekli.

Matevž se ni nikoli več poročil. Živel je samotarsko, bohemsko življenje. Stanoval je v gostilnah in hotelih. V Ljubljani najdlje v hotelu Slon, na kosilo ali večerjo pa hodil v restavracijo Šestica.

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Iz uradnih podatkov o njegovih zaposlitvah in delu odseva njegov nemirni duh in obenem tudi obseg njegovih sposobnosti in širina njegovega znanja.

V prvi svetovni vojni je bil ranjen in se je dalj časa zdravil v različnih bolnišnicah. Leta 1918 je bil imenovan za prosvetno propagandnega referenta pri Narodnem svetu v Ljubljani, že naslednjega leta pa je odšel kot dopisnik v Ženevo. Tu je skupaj s sodelavci sestavil odprto pismo na predsednika ZDA W. Wilsona glede Slovenskega primorja. Leta 1919 je postal tiskovni referent pri Deželni vladi za Slovenijo, nato glavni urednik Klagenfurter Nachrichten in urednik Draupost v Mariboru, bil je tolmač pri razmejitveni komisiji (Jugoslavija–Italija–Avstrija) in nato sekretar na univerzi v Ljubljani, do kazenske upokojitve 1933 (zaradi podpore študentom pri demonstracijah). Odšel je v Pariz in tam pri radiu Pariz pripravil program slovenskih oddaj, pri katerih je bil urednik in napovedovalec. Po rehabilitaciji leta 1946 je postal izredni profesor in upravnik znanstvene pisarne pri SAZU, član komisij (terminološka, Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika, etimološki slovar, Slovenski pravopis).

Sodeloval je pri angleški izdaji Julijska krajina za pariško mirovno konferenco.

Ves čas je deloval tudi publicistično: prevajal (predvsem za gledališče), pisal eseje, komentarje in razprave.

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Večer življenja je stric preživel pri nas. In tako sva imela čas, ki ga je v aktivnem obdobju za kogar koli od nas imel le malo.

Bila sem obremenjena, a obenem privilegirana. Pripovedoval mi je o svojem življenju, o svojih pogledih nanj in pripoved je pogosto opremil z originalnimi, iskrivimi in včasih zelo zapletenimi domislicami, ki jih, žal, ne znam ponoviti po njegovo.

Kar sem si zapomnila, bom zato povedala po svoje. Prišel je praznih rok. Brez prtljage. Breme, ki ga je pripeljalo, je bilo v njem. A o tem ni nikoli govoril. Čutila sem, da noče, zato ga o boleznih nisem nikoli spraševala. Bil je do skrajnosti potrpežljiv.

Nikoli ni tožil. Le roke so govorile. Kadar je bilo hudo, so trepetale.

Ko sem mu v sobi, ki je bila 'jedilnica za praznična kosila' in obenem soba za goste, za pregradno steno pripravljala posteljo, je nenadoma rekel:

“Saj mi boš dala tiste rjuhe od naše mame, kajne? Tiste lanene, za katere je naša mati v Lambergarcah lan sejala, ga potem sama predla in rjuhe je tudi sama sešila. Le stkali so blago v Loškem Potoku. Štefa, tvoja mama, jih še ima in mi jih je zmeraj dala, kadar sem spal pri vas.”

Vedela sem. Mama, ki je bila takrat dalj časa v bolnišnici, mi je to posebej naročila.

Z eno sem pregnila žimnico, drugo sem dala pod bombažno prevleko odeje.

Zadovoljen je legel in z obema rokama dolgo gladil za moje doje-manje grobi laneni rjuhi; a razumela sem. Na lanenih nitih so lebdeli nezamenljivi prstni odtisi njegove matere, moje stare mame. Sicer vnet zagovornik številnih novih idej je bil tudi zvest privrženec slovenske tradicije.

Nekoč zvečer, ko sem utrujena od dneva sedla k njegovi postelji, me je prijel za roko in začutila sem, da bi rad govoril.

In mi je kar zletelo iz ust: “Stric, jezikoslovec si, daj, povej mi kaj o jezikih, ki jih poznaš.”

Oči so se mu zasvetile, ozračje se je zjasnilo od nekakšnega optimizma in prostor je izgubil meje; raztegnil se je v stričevo jezikovno vesolje.

“Jeziki so kot živa bitja,” je zlogoval. “Koreni besed so geni jezikov. Ko zasleduješ korene, odkrivaš sorodstva. In ljudstvo, ki se je razhajalo, je na korene besed obešalo različne priveske, odvisne od značaja ljudi, od njihovega razpoloženja in okoliščin, v kakršnih so živeli. In vsaka skupina ljudi je po svoje izgovarjala glasove, jih po svoje obarvala in besede po svoje naglašala. Tako so nastajali jeziki.”

Nadaljeval je: “Nekateri jeziki so samozavestni, zelo samostojni in skoraj brez tujih vplivov, kot njihovi 'stvarniki'. Taki so največkrat prastari jeziki. Na primer sanskrt. Pa tudi nemščina,” je dodal po kratkem premisleku. “Sanskrt je seveda nenadkriljivo enkraten,” je poudaril. Za ta jezik je bil stric takrat edini uradni sodni prevajalec, mi je povedala mati.

Po kratkem presledku je dodal:

“Mladi jeziki so manj samozavestni, a veliko očitneje kažejo značaj svojega ljudstva. Turški jezik na primer je bojevit, srbsščina je epska, najina materinščina” – to je rekel posebno mehko – “pa lirična.”

Obmolknil je in videlo se mu je, da je utrujen. Tako sva tisti večer zaključila.

Ugasnila sem luč, prostor se je skrčil v bolniško sobo in tiho sem odšla iz nje.

Minilo je kar nekaj z delom, vsakdanjimi skrbmi in s težavami napolnjenega časa.

Takrat mi je veliko pomagal stričev mladostni prijatelj in naš hišni zdravnik, dr. Janez Oražem.

Kadar sem bila v službi, je večkrat veliko dalj, kakor je bilo treba, ostajal pri stricu. Kramljala sta v pristnem ribniškem narečju in obujala spomine.

Ko je nekega popoldneva dr. Oražem spet odhajal, mi je pri vratih šepnil: "Pogovori Matevžu zelo pomagajo. Daj, izmišljaj si teme in pusti ga pripovedovati."

In tako so sporadični klepeti postali bolj ali manj redni. A o sebi ni rad govoril. Kar mi je povedal, sem morala z zvijačami izvleči iz njega. Vse drugo pa je rad in včasih zelo duhovito pripovedoval. Vseh pogovorov se seveda ne spomnim. Številni so zbledeli in izginili iz spomina. Drugi so razcefrani in nedokončani; a nekaj jih je, ki so se trdno zasidrili v mojih možganskih shrambah. Te naj zapišem.

Nekega večera je beseda nanesla na slovenski pravopis. "Mar niste leta 1950 vsi uredniki pravopisa kot skupina dobili Prešernovo nagrado?" sem ga vprašala.

Zamahnil je z roko. O tem sploh ni hotel govoriti. Pač pa mi je v zvezi s pripravljanjem pravopisa kot anekdoto povedal le, da so se dolgo pregovarjali, kako bi v slovenščini pisali 'abonma'. On – promoviran

romanist – je zagovarjal obliko 'abonman', a vsi preostali so bili proti. In tako je obveljala oblika abonma.

"A penati smo potem v gostilni 'Pri kolovratu', kjer smo se sestajali, tej besedi posvetili cel večer in debata je bila izjemno duhovita. Skoraj gledališka predstava," je rekel in obraz se mu je razjasnil ob spominih.

"Pa mi povej kaj o penatih," sem zamoledovala. "Zakaj ste si pravzaprav izbrali tako ime?"

"A veš, kdo so bili penati?" je odgovoril z vprašanjem.

"Vem, rimski hišni bogovi."

"Premalo," je odsekal.

"Bili so bogovi hišnih shramb, kjer so spravljene vsemogoče zaloge, in obenem so to bili tudi bogovi, ki so v rimskem templju boginje Veste skupaj z vestalkami varovali večni ogenj. A zdaj razumeš, zakaj smo si izbrali to ime?"

"Po tem, kar si povedal, ni težko razumeti," sem odvrnila. "Kdo vse pa je bil – zraven tebe – še med penati?"

"Vseh ti niti ne bi našteval, ampak ti zagotovo poznaš biologa Pavla Grošlja, profesorja Alfreda Šerka, dr. Janeza Plečnika pa Otona Župančiča in Iga Grudna. Zelo pisana družčina smo bili. V gostilni Pri kolovratu smo imeli stalno rezervirano mizo. Kdor je prišel, je sedel tja in čakal, kdo še pride. Prišel je, kdor je pač imel čas in željo. Danes ta, drugič drugi."

"O čem ste pa razpravljali na svojih sestankih?"

Zasmejal se je: "O vsem mogočem, o vsem, kar se je nabiralo, kar se je nabiralo v naših možganskih penusih (penus, lat. 'shramba'). In to je bila zelo pisana krama, če upoštevaš stroke, usmerjenost in duhovno naravnost članov, in še aktualna dogajanja doma in po svetu."

"Pa ste kdaj kaj zapisali?"

"Le zakaj bi?"

"To so bili debatni večeri za naš užitek, ne za javnost," je pribil.

Tako sva zaključila za tisti večer.

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"Ne prižgi luči!" je zaprosil, ko sem vstopila.

"Kajne, da je danes polna luna," je napol vprašal, napol ugotovil. Sploh ni čakal odgovora.

"Čutim jo," je rekel. "Zmeraj jo čutim."

Pogledala sem na koledar in z začudenjem ugotovila, da je res.

"Kako pa to čutiš?" sem vprašala.

"Ja, noč ima drugačno barvo," je rekel, "in če je človek občutljiv, čuti plimo sokov v telesu, kar pomeni več življenjske energije."

Sedla sem k postelji in rekla: "Če je tako, se bova pa danes malo dalj pogovarjala."

"Prav," je rekel. "O čem pa?"

"Na primer o knjigah. Povej mi, kaj ti rad bereš."

Obmolknil je.

Brazda nad njegovim nosnim korenem se je poglobila, oči je napol zagrnil z vekami. Čez čas je rekel:

"Ne gre samo za to, da NEKAJ rad bereš. BRANJE samo po sebi je lahko tisto, kar RAD počneš – najmanj iz treh vzrokov.

Prvi je življenjska potreba, drugi je sla po znanju, tretji pa je užitek.

Iz potrebe bi moral vsaj vsak izobraženec prebrati Sveto pismo, ker je koncentrat človeške modrosti. Sla po znanju ne zagradi vsakega. Mene je z vso silo. In veš, kaj sem vse življenje skoraj obsedeno rad prebiral? Leksikone in enciklopedije. Najboljši, najbolj temeljit leksikon je Larousse.

Za užitek sem najraje bral – VSE. Znova in znova pa sem prebiral gledališke komade. V njih uživaš ne le jezik, ampak tudi čas, prostor, razpoloženje in gibanje. In v številnih je pogosto veliko humorja. Take sem tudi najraje prevajal. Veseloigre. Komedije. Da se ljudje lahko zabavajo. Zuckmayerjev 'Veseli vinograd' sem celo prestavil na naša dolnjska tla in v našo govorico; uprizoritev je močno razburila hinavske, na videz pretirano sramežljive in svetohlinske nazadnjake; dvignila je veliko prahu. A pustiva to," je zamahnil z roko.

Obrnil se je k zidu in mi zaželel lahko noč. Tiho sem zaprla vrata za seboj.

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Dolgo sem odlašala in vprašanje, ki me je spremljalo že, odkar sem odrasla, sem vedno znova odlagala.

A po dveh, treh mesecih je bilo očitno, da stricu pojemajo moči. Zato sem se nekega popoldneva, ko je že s težavo pojedel vsakdanjo porcijo črnih oliv, ki jih je imel posebno rad, opogumila in vprašala. "Stric, povej mi, prosim, zakaj pravzaprav so te leta 1933, komaj petinštiridesetletnega, upokojili? Vem, napredno usmerjen in razborit upornik si bil zmeraj, kadar je šlo za kakršno koli pravičnost na katerem koli področju. A za tako zgodnjo upokojitev si že moral ušpičiti nekaj večjega."

Kar planilo je iz njega:

"To, vidiš, napravi pa politika. Privlačna in nepogrešljiva je. Ko se te dotakne, ne moreš mimo nje. In postaviš se na tisto stran, za katero ti tvoja vest pravi, da je pravična.

Začelo se je s šestojanuarsko diktaturo. V tem času so hoteli okrniti ljubljansko univerzo. Nepopolno medicinsko fakulteto so hoteli ukiniti, filozofsko pa odcepiti od univerze. Sledile so študentske demonstracije in višek je bila svetosavska demonstracija leta 1932. Jaz sem bil takrat univerzitetni tajnik in – saj me poznaš – na strani študentov. Ob tradicionalni proslavi na univerzi sem jih podprl, ko so razobesili prepovedano slovensko zastavo. Policija je demonstracije zatrla, mene pa so upokojili."

Utihnil je in se zamislil. Čez čas je dodal:

"Veš, univerzitetni senat je trikrat poskušal doseči mojo rehabilitacijo. Brez uspeha. Rehabilitiran sem bil šele leta 1946. Postal sem šef znanstvene pisarne pri SAZU. To sem še zdaj in bom, kot kaže, do konca."

Čas je tekel in najini pogovori so postajali zmeraj redkejši in krajši.

Potem le še stiski rok, dokler ni tistega mirnega majskega večera (27. 5. 1960) dr. Janez Oražem sklonjen prišel iz bolniške sobe, mi molče pokimal in mi stisnil roko. Oba sva molče sprejela neizbežno. In preden je stric dokončno odšel iz realnega sveta v irednost, me je prešinilo: Ne more vendar oditi praznih rok! Skoraj podzavestno sem vzela škarje, odrezala košček grobe lanene rjuhe in mu ga skrivaj potisnila v krsto.

Odleglo mi je. Zazdelo se mi je, da je od vsega, kar sem storila zanj, to najpomembnejše.

Epilog

Ko sem zaključila z doživetim, me je prevzel nemir. Na vsak način sem želela o stricu in okoliščinah, v katerih je živel, zvedeti kaj več.

Začela sem iskati in res sem izvrtala nekaj stvari; največ sem odkrila v papirnati zapuščini svoje matere. Zdaj vem. Penati so bili najpomembnejša družčina slovenskih intelektualcev med obema svetovnima vojnama. Med njimi so bili univerzitetni profesorji, glasbeniki, literati, gledališčniki in seveda jezikoslovci vseh mogočih smeri. Vsi so bili vneti narodnjaki, goreli so tudi za vse splošnoveljavne človeške vrednote. Znali

so se šaliti in veseliti, a tudi resno razpravljati in glasno zagovarjati svoja stališča.

Poliglot – obvladal je vse svetovne jezike in še nekaj drugih, živi leksikon, duhovit humorist, publicist, prevajalec in esteta, pa tudi jedek komentator, v privatnem življenju pa skromen samotar, dr. Matej Šmalc, je bil med najbolj stalnimi člani te družčine.

Njegova specialnost je bila fonetika. In ljubil je svoje narečje. Poleg njega so bili še literarni zgodovinarji Ivan Prijatelj, Avgust Pirjevec, Joža Glonar, patolog in anatom Janez Plečnik, nevropsihiater Alfred Šerko, biolog Pavel Grošel, pesnik in dramaturg Pavel Golia, pesniki Oton Župančič, Igo Gruden in Fran Albreht, pisatelj Ciril Kosmač, glasbeniki Marjan Kozina, Niko Štritof (direktor Opere), Slavko Osterc, pisatelj in kritik Juš Kozak in še nekaj bolj ali manj stalnih oziroma priložnostnih članov, med njimi včasih celo pisateljica Alma Karlin in pesnica Lili Novy. In še in še. Skoraj vsa kulturna elita.

Vsi so bili goreči privrženci slovenstva. Razpravljali so o splošno-kulturnih, literarnih, etičnih in perečih političnih vprašanjih. Debate so bile pogosto zelo živahne, polemične. Plečnik in Šerko sta, podprta z razgovori pri penatskem omizju, poslovenila latinske anatomske izraze.

Tomaz Bizilj, takratni gostilničar "Pri kolovratu", je skrbno pazil, da se priložnostni gostje niso usedli za mizo pri peči. Bila je rezervirana za penate. Pri njej so se zbirali ves čas, dokler je družčina obstajala.

•••

Jaz sem strica Matevža še v njegovi aktivni dobi natančneje spoznala, ko sem študirala za izpit iz paleontologije. Predavanja – bogu bodi potoženo – so bila skrajno dolgočasna in poslušala sem jih le, kolikor je bilo najbolj nujno. Ker nismo takrat imeli nobenega učbenika, sem hodila ta predmet študirat v NUK. Knjižnica pa je bila samo lučaj oddaljena od stričevega delovnega mesta. Znanstvene pisarne SAZU na Novem trgu št. 2. In tako sem prvič skoraj podzavestno na poti iz NUK-a zavila k njemu.

Bil je veselo presenečen.

"Od kod pa ti prihajaš?" je vprašal.

Povedala sem mu.

In ko je izvedel, zakaj hodim v NUK, je vprašal:

"Kaj si pa danes preštudirala?"

"Razvojno linijo polža mureksa," sem rekla.

Takrat se je utrgal plaz. Kar stresel je iz rokava – mogoče in nemo-goče stvari o tem morskem polžku. O tem, kako so jih lovili in gojili – zaradi škrlata seveda. Zelo natančno o tem, kako so to barvilo pridobivali, ves postopek barvanja svile z njim, razcvet in poti tihotapstva s škrlatom in antične cene v denarju in zlatu.

"In ti vse kar takole veš, čeprav to ni tvoja stroka?" sem vprašala.

Zasmejal se je. "Ja," je rekel. "Vse je stvar zanimanja. Zanima me prav vse, kar se je in kar se na svetu dogaja."

"In vse si zapomniš?"

"Tudi to je stvar zanimanja. Kar te res zanima, si zapomniš."

Tako je šlo z mojim študijem paleontologije naprej. Ko sem iz NUK-a prišla k njemu, je najprej vprašal:

“No, kaj je bilo pa danes na vrsti?”

Ko sem povedala, je sledila natančna in zanimiva zgodba.

Študij paleontologije pri stricu se je močno poznal pri mojem izpitu. Profesor, ki je verjetno opazil, da sem bila pri predavanjih bolj redka gostja, je bil očitno presenečen nad mojim znanjem.


Spominskemu zapisu o dr. Mateju Šmalcu pa bi nekaj manjkalo, če ne bi omenila, kar sem odkrila o njegovem literarnem ustvarjanju. Uradni podatki o tem niso popolni. Njegova bibliografija izpred druge svetovne vojne ni zbrana. V tem času je precej pisal pod psevdonimi. Leta 1920 je kot Ben Akiba pisal o politični usmerjenosti Ivana Tavčarja, napisal je zanimive študije o heraldiki, skrit pod psevdonimom Spectator je pisal o versajski mirovni pogodbi, v revije je pisal o angleških in francoskih literatih in prevajal literarna dela iz številnih svetovnih jezikov. Kot šef znanstvene pisarne SAZU je med drugim organiziral predavanja tujih znanstvenikov v Sloveniji, slovenskih pa v drugih državah. V tujih leksikonih in enciklopedijah je zasledoval objave iz slovenskega in jugoslovanskega prostora, zbiral gesla iz teh tem in poročal o njih.

A dr. Matej Šmalc ni bil ne častihlepen ne lakomen. Javna priznanja mu niso bila mar. Vse, kar je delal, je počel iz zanimanja in ker ga je veselilo in zadovoljevalo.

Ljubljanska družčina penatov in z njimi seveda tudi dr. Matej Šmalc, v mladih letih v Ribnici znan kot Zalarjev Matevž, še čakajo na delo zagnanega literarnozgodovinskega raziskovalca. Upajmo, da se je že rodil. Morda celo v Ribnici.

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5. Josip Vidmar: Obrazi
6. Igo Gruden: Dvanajsta ura



Tatjana Angerer

Matevž Šmale

MY UNCLE

I was told about the first part of my uncle's life by my mother; this is what she told me:

September 1888. A baby had just been born into the Zalar family. A boy.

“He arrived a bit earlier than expected. He said himself at a later time half jokingly that this was the case because of his excessive curiosity. He was christened 'Matevž'. Where we were from, almost every firstborn boy was back then named after his father and every firstborn girl after her mother.”

The new mom was back at work a few short days after giving birth, doing household chores, taking care of the child and helping her husband in the workshop. In the years after, she gave birth to eleven more children, but only four of them survived: Matevž, Polde, Štefka and Tone.

Matevž was a smart, very curious, headstrong and stubborn child. It did not take his teachers very long to discover his remarkable talent and desire for knowledge and his parents soon realised it was essential for Matevž to carry on with his education.

Initially he went to the grammar school in Ljubljana, however, on account of his zealous support for the Slovene nation, his progressive ideas and defiance he was expelled from all Austrian secondary schools after completing his third year at school. He therefore relocated to Sušak, where he completed grammar school and graduated with distinction.

That same year, Matevž's six-year old sister Pavla died of measles and Matevž, who was hit hard by her death, was seriously thinking about studying medicine. He said himself that he was interested in doing research. However, his Italian and French teacher at the grammar school in Sušak discovered Matevž's truly extraordinary talent for languages and he per-

sisted until he persuaded Matevž into deciding on Romance studies. He was the one who paved Matevž's way to the university in Florence. After the first semester, Matevž had to join the army and as soon as he completed his military service, he went to study in Vienna.

He did this out of curiosity. He said that he was familiar with Florence and he now wanted to get to know Vienna and the alma mater of almost all of his contemporary Slovene intellectuals.

At that time, the news from the French consulate spread like fire among the students about the opportunity of studying French at the Sorbonne, for which a scholarship would be awarded. However, to get it, it was necessary to pass a test.

Matevž gave it a go and passed the test with flying colours. He was given the scholarship straight away and he left for Paris to study at the Sorbonne. At a later time, he went back to Vienna, where he completed his studies with a doctorate in 1915.

After the commencement, he returned home to wind down and met up with some of his friends and acquaintances again. One of them was Mimi Pakiž, according to my mother the most beautiful girl in Ribnica at the time.

Matevž fell head over heels in love with her and they got married not long after. He once said smilingly: "Mimi is France Prešeren's Urška and I'm the water man*."

However, their marriage lasted only a short time. A mere four years later, Mimi died. Of tuberculosis, they said.

* The Water Man is the first Slovene ballad, written by Slovenia's best known poet France Prešeren. It is a narration about Urška, a flirt from Ljubljana that ended in the hands of a handsome man who happened to be a water man.

Matevž never got married again. He lived a solitary, bohemian life. He stayed in restaurants and hotels. While in Ljubljana, it was Hotel Slon that he stayed at the longest, and as for eating lunch or dinner, he would often go to the well-known restaurant Šestica.

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The official data on his employment and work reflects his restless spirit and at the same time the extent of his competence and his broad knowledge.

He was wounded during the First World War and spent a lot of time afterwards in various hospitals getting treatment. In 1918, he was appointed the education-propagation officer at the National Council in Ljubljana and then left for Geneva as a correspondent only a year later. While there, he drew up an open letter to the US President W. Wilson together with his colleagues regarding the coastal region of Slovenia. In 1919, he became the press officer at the Provincial Government for Slovenia, then the chief editor of *Klagenfurter Nachrichten* and the editor of *Draupost* in Maribor; he was an interpreter for the boundary delimitation commission (Yugoslavia - Italy - Austria) and after that the Secretary of the University of Ljubljana, until he was forced to retire in 1933 as a punishment for having supported students during the student demonstrations. He then left to Paris, where he was involved in preparing Slovenian broadcasts as the editor and presenter. After being rehabilitated in 1946, he became an associate professor and manager of the scientific office of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, a member of several committees (on terminology, the Dictionary of the Standard Slovene Language, the etymology dictionary, the Slovene Normative Guide).

He participated in preparation of the English edition of Venezia Giulia for the Paris Peace Conference.

Throughout this time, he was very active publications-wise: he did translations (for theatre in particular), wrote essays, commentaries and discussions.

•••

My uncle spent his old age at our place. And so we had time to spend together, which previously, during his active period, he had had little of for any of us.

I felt overloaded, but at the same time privileged. He would tell me about his life, about his views of life and would often spice his stories up by adding original, witty and sometimes very complicated remarks, which, unfortunately, I am not able to repeat word for word.

Thus, I will tell what I can remember in my own words.

He came empty-handed. Without any luggage. The burden that made him come was inside of him. But he would never talk about it. I felt he did not want to and therefore I never asked him about his illness. He was as patient as it gets.

He never complained. Only his hands would give the pain away. When things got hard, they were trembling.

When I was getting his bed ready behind the partition in the room that was 'a dining room for festive meals' and at the same time a guest room, he said all of a sudden:

“You'll give me those sheets, those that belonged to our mother, won't you? The linen ones, which our mother sowed flax in the field for, then span it and also sewed the sheets herself. The only thing she didn't do on her own was weaving, she had them woven in Loški Potok. Štefa, your mother, still has the sheets and she would always give them to me whenever I slept at your place”.

I knew this. My mum, who was in hospital at a time for quite a while, had told me to do so specifically.

I used one to cover the mattress and put the other one under the cotton blanket cover.

He lay down satisfied and kept stroking the linen sheets, which I felt were quite coarse, with both of his hands for a long time; but I understood. The flax threads bore traces, unmistakable fingerprints of his mother, my grandmother. The otherwise ardent supporter of numerous new ideas was also a faithful follower of the Slovene tradition.

One evening, when I sat down next to his bed, tired after a long day, he grabbed me by the hand and I could feel he needed to talk.

I said before I could stop myself: “Uncle, you're a linguist, come on, tell me a bit about the languages you know.”

His eyes lit up, the atmosphere lightened with some sort of optimism and it felt like the room had lost any boundaries; it expanded into my uncle's linguistic universe.

“Languages are like living creatures,” he said speaking slowly. “The root words constitute the genes of languages. When you look at the roots closely, you can uncover linguistic kinship. And the nation which was going its separate ways would put various affixes onto the roots, depending on the

nature of the people, their moods and the circumstances they were living in. And each individual group of people pronounced the sounds in their own way, gave them their own distinctive note and put the accent as they deemed appropriate. This is how languages were created.”

He continued: “Some languages are self-confident, very independent and with almost no foreign influences, just like their 'creators'. These are mostly ancient languages. For example Sanskrit. And also German,” he added after thinking about it for a bit. “Sanskrit is certainly unsurpassed in its uniqueness,” he emphasised. My uncle was the only official sworn translator for this language at the time, according to my mother.

After a short pause, he added:

“Young languages are less self-confident, yet they show the character of their people in a much more obvious way. Turkish language, for example, is feisty, Serbian is epic, and our mother tongue” – he said this in an especially tender way – “is lyrical.”

He fell silent and I could see he was tired. So we called it a night.

I turned off the light, the room shrunk back into being a sickroom and I left quietly.

A fair bit of time passed, days spent doing the work and filled with everyday concerns and problems.

At the time, my uncle's childhood friend and our family doctor, Dr Janez Oražem, was of great help.

While I was at work, he would keep my uncle company, often much longer than was necessary. They chatted in an authentic Ribnica dialect and reminisced about the bygone times.

When he was leaving one afternoon, standing at the door, doctor

Oražem whispered: “Talking really does Matevž a lot of good. Do think of things to talk about and let him tell stories.”

And so these sporadic chats of ours become more or less regular. But he did not like talking about himself. What he did tell me, it was only because I had managed to get it out of him using wiles. As for anything else, he loved talking about it, often in a very witty way. Of course, I don't remember all of our conversations. Quite a few of them have faded and disappeared from my memory. Others are fragmented and unfinished; but there are a few that are firmly anchored in my brain. And these are the ones I am going to write down.

One evening our conversation turned to the Slovene Normative Guide. “Wasn't it that in 1950 all of you Normative Guide editors were awarded the Prešeren Award as a team?” I asked him.

He waved his hand dismissively. He would not talk about it all. The only thing he did tell me with regard to preparing the normative guide was an anecdote about how they had argued for a long time about how to spell 'abonma' (the Slovenian expression for a season ticket) in Slovenian. He – a distinguished expert in Romance languages – was in favour of the 'abonman' spelling version, whereas everybody else was against it. And so the 'abonma' spelling version won.

“But us, the Penates, as we were called, then devoted the whole evening to this word in the inn 'At the Spinning Wheel', where we were in the habit of meeting, and the whole discussion was extremely witty. Almost like a theater performance,” he said and his face lit up at the thought.

“Do tell me something about the Penates,” I begged him. “Why did you actually choose this name?”

“Do you know who the Penates were?” he answered by asking me a question.

“I do know. Roman household deities.”

“Not enough,” he said abruptly.

“They were the deities of the storeroom, where all sorts of supplies were stored, and at the same time they were also the deities whose chief duty along with the Vestals was to keep alight the eternal fire in the Roman temple of Vesta. Do you understand now why we have chosen this particular name?”

“From everything you've just told me, it's not difficult to understand,” I replied. “Who was – besides you – member of the Penates?”

“I won't name every single one of them, but you must know the biologist Pavel Grošelj, Professor Alfred Šerko, Dr Janez Plečnik and also Oton Zupančič and Igo Gruden. We were a motley crew. There was a table reserved for us at in the inn 'At the Spinning Wheel' at all times. Whoever came, sat down there and waited for some others to come too. If you had time to spare and felt like it, you went there. One day it was this one, another day someone else.”

“What did you talk about during your meetings?”

He laughed: “About everything, anything that had been weighing us down, accumulating in our brain penes (penus, Latin 'a repository for provisions'). You can imagine these were very diverse topics, considering the different disciplines, orientation and spiritual preferences of the members, as well as the current affairs at home and elsewhere in the world.”

“But have you ever written anything down?”

“Why would we?”

“These were discussions for our own pleasure, not for the public,” he added.

And then we called it a night.

•••

“Don't turn on the light,” he asked me when I entered the room.

“It's full moon today, isn't it,” he half asked, half realised himself. He did not even wait for me to answer.

“I can feel it,” he said. “I always feel it.”

I looked at the calendar and found this to be true to my astonishment.

“How can you feel this?” I asked.

“Well, the night has got a different colour,” he said, “and if you are sensitive, you can feel the tide of the juices inside your body, which means more life energy.”

I sat down next to his bed and said: “If this is so, we'll talk a bit longer today.”

“Okay,” he said. “What about?”

“About books, for example. Tell me what you like reading.”

He fell silent.

The furrow over his nose ridge deepened, the eyelids half covering his eyes. After a while he said:

“It is not about loving to read SOMETHING. READING itself can be what you like doing – for at least three reasons.

The first reason is the intrinsic need, the second one the desire for knowledge and the third one pleasure.

Based on the need, every educated person should read the Bible, because this is where human wisdom is concentrated. Not everyone is driven by lust for knowledge. But I myself couldn't have been more. And you know what I have loved reading all of my life almost obsessively? Lexicons and encyclopaedias. The best, the most thorough lexicon of all is Larousse.

And as for pleasure, I liked reading most...well, JUST ABOUT ANYTHING. Again and again I would read theatre pieces. Reading them you can enjoy not only the language, but also the time, the space, the mood and the movement. And in many of them there is a lot of humour. These are the kinds of texts I loved translating most. Farces. Comedies. So that people can have some fun. I even changed the setting of Zuckmayer's 'The Merry Vineyard' to Dolenjska and changed the language to the local dialect; the performance greatly upset the hypocritical, seemingly overly shy and sanctimonious conservatives; it caused quite a stir. But let's leave it at this," he waved his hand dismissively.

He turned to face the wall and wished me good night. I quietly closed the door behind me.

•••

I kept putting off the question, which had been with me for as long as I was I had been an adult.

But after two or three months, it was obvious that the uncle was growing weaker. So one afternoon, when he was already having difficulty

eating his everyday portion of black olives, which he loved so much, I mustered up the courage and asked. "Uncle, tell me, please, why you were forced to retire in 1933, when you were only forty-five? I know, you've always been a progressive and hot-tempered rebel whenever any sort of justice in any field was concerned. But for retirement at such an early age you must have done something much bigger."

He burst out:

"This, you see, is what politics does. It is appealing and indispensable. When it touches you, you cannot go past it. And then you act in favour of whichever side your conscience tells you it's decent.

It all started with The 6 January Dictatorship. At the time, they wanted to trim down the University of Ljubljana. They wanted to abolish the incomplete Faculty of Medicine, and to separate the Faculty of Arts from the university. This was followed by student demonstrations, which reached a climax with the Svetosavlje demonstration in 1932. I was the university secretary at the time and I – you know me – aligned myself with the students. At the traditional celebration at the university I supported them when they hung out the prohibited Slovenian flag. The police suppressed the demonstrations and I was retired."

He fell silent and pondered for a bit. After a while, he added:

"You know, the university senate tried to rehabilitate me three times. To no avail. I wasn't rehabilitated until 1946. I became the head of the scientific office at the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, which I still am, and – by the looks of it – will stay to the end."

Time went by and our conversations were getting rarer and shorter. Towards the end the only thing left was squeezing one another's

hands, until that peaceful evening in May (27.5.1960), when doctor Janez Oražem came walking out of the sickroom with his shoulders bowed, nodded silently at me and shook my hand. We both tacitly accepted the inevitable. And before my uncle finally went from the real world into unreality, it occurred to me: I mustn't let him leave empty-handed! Almost unconsciously, I took the scissors, cut a piece of the coarse linen sheets and secretly put it into the coffin.

I was relieved. I felt that of all the things I had ever done for him, this was the most important one.

Epilogue

When I processed everything that I had experienced, I became restless. I wanted to find out more about my uncle and the circumstances of his life at any cost.

I started researching and I did manage to dig up a few things; I discovered most from my mother's paper legacy. Now I know. The Penates were the most important group of Slovenian intellectuals in the interwar years. They included university professors, musicians, writers, theatricals and, of course, linguists of every possible movement. All of them were enthusiastic patriots and also avid supporters of general human values. They would crack jokes and enjoy themselves, but also have serious debates and vigorously defend their positions.

A polyglot – he mastered all the world's major languages and then some, a walking encyclopaedia, a very witty person, a publicist, translator and aesthete, as well as a caustic commentator, and in his personal life a modest recluse, all of this was Dr Matevž Šmalc, one of the most permanent members of the Penates group.

His area of expertise was phonetics. And he loved his own dialect. Besides him the group members included literary historians Ivan Prijatelj, Avgust Pirjevec, Joža Glonar, the pathologist and anatomist Janez Plečnik, the neuropsychiatrist Alfred Šerko, biologist Pavel Grošelj, the poet and stage director Pavel Golia, poets Oton Župančič, Igo Gruden and Fran Albreht, the writer Ciril Kosmač, the musicians Marjan Kozina, Niko Štritof (the managing director of the Opera), Slavko Osterc, the writer and critic Juš Kozak and some more or less permanent or ad hoc members, at times even the writer Alma Karlin and the poetess Lili Novy. And many others. Almost the whole cultural elite.

All of them were ardent supporters of the Slovene national movement. They would discuss culture-related, literary, ethical and pressing political issues. Their discussions were often very lively and polemical. Plečnik and Šerko, encouraged by the conversations held among the Penates, translated the Latin anatomy terms into Slovene.

Thomaž Bizilj, the then innkeeper of 'At the Spinning Wheel', was very vigilant in making sure that no other occasional guests would sit down at the table next to the masonry stove. It was reserved for the Penates. They would get together at this table regularly for as long as the group existed.

...

I had got to know Uncle Matevž better even some time before that, during his active years, when I was studying for my paleontology exam. The lectures were unfortunately awfully boring, so I only attended them whenever this was absolutely necessary. As we had no textbook at the time, I would study at the National and University Library. The library was only a stone's throw away from my uncle's job, the Scientific Office of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts on Novi trg 2. And leaving the library the first time around, I almost unconsciously ended up at my uncles' office.

He was pleasantly surprised.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

I told him.

And when he found out why I was in the habit of going to the library, he asked:

"What have you been studying today?"

"The evolution of the murex sea snail," I told him.

And then there was no stopping him. He tossed off all sorts of probable and improbable things about the sea snails. About how they were caught and raised – because of the royal purple, of course. A lot of detailed information about how the dye was obtained, about the whole process of dyeing silk with it, about the heyday of smuggling and the smuggling routes, as well as about ancient prices in cash and gold.

"And you know all of this just like that, although this is not your field of expertise?" I asked him.

He laughed. "Yes," he said.

"Everything is a matter of having an interest in it. I'm interested in anything there is and everything that's happening in the world."

"And you memorise all of it?"

"Again, this is a matter of interest. Whatever you are really interested in you keep in your mind."

And so I carried on with my paleontology studies. Whenever I went to see him at his office on the way from the library, he would first ask:

"So, what have you been working on today?"

When I told him, he would always tell me an interesting story in great detail.

Learning paleontology from my uncle really affected my exam results. The professor, who probably noticed I had not been attending the lectures all that often, was obviously surprised by my knowledge.

An important part would be missing from my memories of Dr Matevž Šmačič if I did not mention what I have discovered about the results of his literary endeavours. Official data about it is by no means complete. His bibliography from the pre-Second World War period has not been compiled. During that time, he was using a number of pseudonyms. In 1920, he wrote about the political orientation of Ivan Tavčar as Ben Akiba, he wrote some interesting studies on heraldry, under the pseudonym Spectator he wrote about the Treaty of Versailles, he wrote about the English and French writers for various journals and he translated literary works from a number of world languages. As the head of the scientific office of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts he, inter alia, organized lectures

by foreign scientists in Slovenia, and by Slovenian scientists in other countries. He followed the publications of contributions by authors from Slovenia and Yugoslavia in foreign lexicons and encyclopaedias, collected the headwords from the topics discussed and reported on them.

However, he was neither overly ambitious, nor was he greedy. He did not care much for public recognition. Everything he did was purely out of interest, because it brought him pleasure and satisfaction.

The Ljubljana-based Penates group, including Dr Matevž Šmalc, in Ribnica once known as Zalarjev Matevž, are still waiting to be researched by an enthusiastic researcher of literary history. Hopefully he or she has already been born. Perhaps even in Ribnica.

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