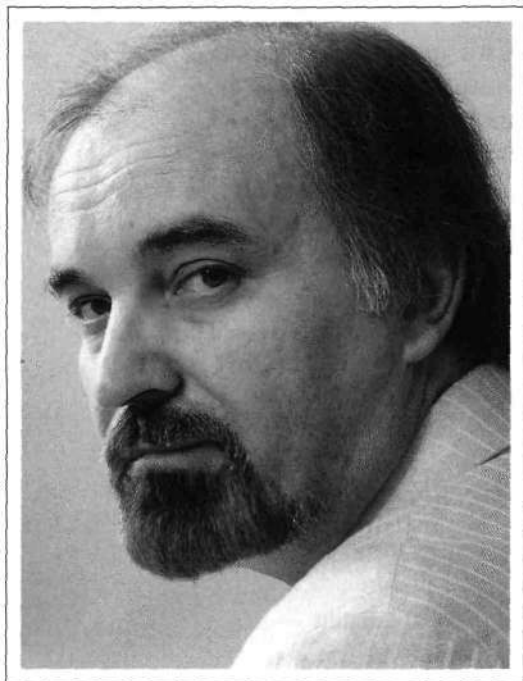


FLISAR, Evald



Evald Flisar, born in 1945 in Gerlinci, in north-eastern Slovenia, studied comparative literature in Ljubljana, English and English literature in London, and psychology in Australia. An inveterate globe-trotter, he has travelled in over eighty countries. Between travels he worked as an underground train driver in Sydney, Australia, and, among other things, as executive editor of the Marshall Cavendish *Encyclopaedia of Science and Technology* in London. He has written some highly praised travel books, a cult novel, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, 1986, reprinted five times, four other novels, two collections of short stories and ten stage plays, some of which have been produced to great acclaim in seventeen countries. He was awarded the Prešeren Fund Prize (the highest Slovene literary award) and the Grum Award for the best play of the year (*What about Leonardo?*). He is President of the Slovene Writers' Association and editor-in-chief of the literary magazine *Sodobnost*.

Evald Flisar se je rodil leta 1945 v Gerlincih v Prekmurju. V Ljubljani je študiral primerjalno književnost, v Londonu angleščino in angleško književnost, v Avstraliji psihologijo. Prepotoval je več kot osemdeset držav, med potovanji pa se je preživljal med drugim kot voznik podzemnega vlaka v Sydneyu in kot odgovorni urednik *Enciklopedije znanosti in tehnologije* v Londonu (pri založbi Marshall Cavendish). Napisal je nekaj visoko cenjenih potopisov, kultni roman *Čarovnikov vajenec*, 1986, ponatisnjen petkrat, štiri druge romane, dve zbirki kratke proze (*Lov na louca* in *Zgodbe s poti*), številne radijske igre in deset dram, od katerih so nekatere bile uspešno uprizorjene v sedemnajstih državah. Prejel je nagrado Prešernovega sklada in Grumovo nagrado za najboljšo slovensko dramo (*Kaj pa Leonardo?*). Je predsednik Društva slovenskih pisateljev in glavni urednik literarne revije *Sodobnost*.

EVALD FLISAR

Shorthand novels

1.

Good soldier Schweik

When I think of the fate of my uncle, Jaroslav Schweik, I can't escape a certain feeling of sorrow. Not because he was the favourite toy of the Great Cosmic Joker, but because of the circumstances which prevented him from avoiding what he called "the rapacious embrace of history". His aims were peace, love and gentle tolerance for all living beings – everything of which history usually robs us. "If I saw history riding towards me I would force it off the road and into the ditch," was his prophetic response to the taunts of his colleagues, who kept asking him when he would become a "historical figure" and so fulfil his mother's greatest desire.

As a city bus driver he was hardly in the best position to achieve historical significance; he would have to enter politics, the way into which had for some time been discreetly paved for him by his mother, my grandma. But he was not in the least impressed by her efforts to move him from a seat in the bus to a seat in parliament. "Not for me, politics," he told her once a year around Christmas. "Have you forgotten Lenin's words?" she would berate him. "The world is divided into those who do, and those to whom it is done."

Jaroslav Schweik became entangled in the undergrowth of our family tree more or less accidentally, thanks to my grandma's indiscretion during her visit to Prague. This was not in itself scandalous, but the trip (which was organised by the women's branch of the Socialist Workers Union) lasted only two days! On top of which my grandma was married, and already a mother of a three-year old boy who later became my father. But it was the time of

hippies and of free love, so no one made too much fuss, except my grandfather, of course. But he, too, was eventually pacified by God knows what devious means.

As soon as my grandma realised that her first-born would not amount to anything much, she placed her dreams of success squarely on the shoulders of the “Czech bastard”, as her second son was affectionately called by my grandfather until his death. Uncle Schweik soon realised that he could bear this burden only one way – by remaining “ordinary, completely ordinary”. But this was easier said than done. Bearing the surname of one of the most memorable characters in twentieth-century fiction was no help at all. To make matters worse, he had been given the forename of Schweik’s creator! (All thanks to my grandmother’s belief that this would make his quest for “historical greatness” easier!)

And because it never rains but it pours, he was plagued by such rotten luck that there was hardly a step he made which wasn’t the first step towards some kind of catastrophe – a definite proof, according to some in our family, that God likes to punish those who try hardest to live by his rules.

Uncle Schweik could not understand why we made such a fuss about what he saw as nothing more than the usual ups-and-downs of an ordinary man’s progress through life. To him, everything that crossed his path was merely “another of those things”, as he was wont to brush aside even the most shocking occurrence. His equanimity in the face of disaster startled most people who witnessed it. Once, when he was getting out of his car and opened the door into the path of a passing lorry, with the door promptly shorn off and dragged fifty yards down the road, his main concern was for the safety of the lorry driver.

“Are you sure you’re all right?” he asked him at least a dozen times, and would have repeated the question a dozen times more if the lorry driver hadn’t surrendered to a fit of rage and plunged his fist into the middle of uncle Schweik’s face. “He had every right to do so,” was the explanation my uncle gave to the police when they asked him if he would press charges. (In spite of the fact that he needed seven stitches and had to put up with loud ringing noises in his left ear for more than a year!)

Many of his disasters became popular talking points at dinner parties throughout the country. No wonder he was eventually offered television appearances in popular TV shows. He accepted the invitations as a matter of course, but turned out to be a great disappointment. Not only did he fail to register (let alone react to) the mocking tone of the presenters, thus depriving audiences of the amusement they had been led to expect, he even refused to admit that the long list of calamities read out to him in any way set him apart from anyone in the audience!

In every show his reply was the same: “We are sent to this world to practise patience and calm, and so prepare for the next one, which will not be as kind to us as the one we are so eager to denigrate.”

Once again the presenters would confront him with the most notorious examples of his accident-proness: how in the space of a single day he managed

to, 1. put out his back by bending down to pick up a pencil, 2. blow up his gas boiler by connecting the wires which made it overheat, and 3. flood his bathroom (not to mention the downstairs flat) by forgetting to close the tap.

And how on earth did he manage to trap in the bus door – by closing it too early – more passengers a week than other drivers did in a year? Not to mention the model ship he had been building inside a bottle over a period of years, only to have it turned to jelly by accidentally filling the bottle with acid. And what about the number of times he had been thrown off his feet by trying to repair an iron without first unplugging it?

“Well,” uncle Schweik always replied without getting upset, “I never bother about things like that. In fact, I never bother much about anything. If I did, I would quickly become dangerous to others. I am not bothered about being dangerous to myself. I became a bus driver because I enjoy getting people to their destinations. Historically, this is not very significant, but I derive just enough pleasure from it to call myself happy.”

Were there women in uncle Schweik's life? Nobody knows. There were rumours about his entanglements with various ladies, but never a shred of evidence that he as much as brushed against one accidentally, let alone made an effort to secure her favours. But thoughts of marriage must have been on his mind at least some of the time; once, applying for a loan at a bank, he was overheard answering the clerk's routine question, “Are you married?”, with a deeply felt, “I would like to be, but I've never been asked, and as for asking myself, I'm too shy.”

One way or another, things remained vague in this area of uncle Schweik's life. No one in the family, or outside it, felt inclined to hire a detective to find out what he was up to, and so the subject eventually faded from our conversations.

In any case we were never short of gossip material: quite unexpectedly, and to everybody's amazement, uncle Schweik was offered a part-time job with the National Broadcasting Corporation. No doubt a few crucial doors had been knocked at by my grandma, who may have hoped that her son would work his way up to the position of Director General, from where he could enter politics as effortlessly as if walking through revolving doors. After all he had appeared in enough TV shows for his calm and relaxed approach to be widely known, so it was – according to grandma – hardly surprising that the Corporation's health unit hired him to compose an anti-stress advice brochure which would tell overworked managers, producers and others how to relax.

Uncle Schweik found the request reasonable and hardly beyond his competence. And so eventually a glossy 80-page booklet was published, paid for by the licence fee, in which harrassed executives were instructed to “always ensure that they sit on the cheeks of their bottoms”, and to unwind by staring at a picture of the Alps, dreaming of hiking through green Alpine valleys with their favourite aunt, or, if that didn't work, take up origami. The booklet included a 21-stage diagram of how to make an origami bird; and it was this particular part of the brochure that made uncle Schweik, perhaps for the first

time in his life, unashamedly proud. Failing everything, harrassed executives were advised to dab their heads with lavender or sandalwood.

But his stress advice was not accepted with unreserved enthusiasm by everybody. Especially not his instructions on how to walk through revolving doors: "Move immediately into the available space. The door will automatically turn as you walk around – do not push. Exit the door as the opening becomes available. If you miss the moment you will have to repeat the process." It was reported that, during the presentation ceremony following the publication of the brochure, the reaction of some of the employees so distressed uncle Schweik that he later walked through revolving doors for ten minutes before an opening became available and he managed to beat a retreat.

For some time there were no further claims on uncle Schweik's talents, nor requests for statements which one newspaper described as a mixture of platitudes and uncanny wisdom. His last published statement was: "For all of us the only true destination is the feeling of calm." So he practiced his calm (with or without lavender, no one knows) by driving bus number 7 and getting people to work, shops, dentists, employment offices, mortuaries and home again.

But his own destination in life no longer seemed completely unquestionable. Something grim had started to hover about his person, as though the incident with the brochure had left him with a deep wound. Often his smiling face would resemble a mask of pain, and to more discerning passengers this was all too clearly visible. One day a sombre soft-spoken gentleman, who later turned out to be a regular passenger on bus number 7, patted uncle Schweik on the shoulder before alighting and said, "The most ungrateful thing in the world is to be genuinely good."

"Really?" uncle Schweik yelled at the top of his voice, startling all the passengers. Then, more quietly, he added: "Get off my bus and bugger off."

The astonishment of the soft-spoken gentleman was so complete that he practically fell out of the vehicle. The remaining passengers drew their heads between their shoulders until they resembled a contingent of seated tortoises. Few had the strength or inclination to swivel their heads far enough to see the soft-spoken (and rudely spoken to) passenger elbowing his way through the crowd on the pavement. Even fewer saw uncle Schweik running after him, or heard him shouting, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!"

But when uncle Schweik reappeared and climbed behind the wheel of the bus again, there wasn't a single passenger who did not notice that this was no longer the man they had known for years as the man most likely to get them to their destination. Some sinister change had descended on him – not only on him, but on their lives, on the city, on places far away, even beyond the mountains.

It was the mountains that uncle Schweik now regarded as the source of his calm, the shining snowy peaks which on a clear day he could see in the distance through the windscreen of his bus. As he stared at them (true to advice in his brochure), he gradually regained his old equanimity, and his

regular passengers ceased to avoid his eyes as they boarded or left the bus. Even the soft-spoken gentleman reappeared one day, behaving as if nothing had ever happened. And however curious everybody was to hear how he had been travelling to and from work, they all had the good sense not to ask him.

Things were normal again; people were reaching their destinations, and uncle Schweik once again enjoyed getting them there. Once or twice he was overheard whistling a merry a tune and seen by those sitting right behind him to jiggle up and down in his driver's seat to its rhythm.

But a feeling of tension did remain in the air. This was not so much tension between uncle Schweik and his passengers, it was more a shared sense of foreboding, as though something were getting ready to pounce on their destinies and alter them beyond recognition. Nobody knows whether uncle Schweik was more, or less aware of this feeling than his passengers. The only thing they could later describe with certainty was his astonishment at seeing a military tank appear on the road in front of the bus.

As a matter of fact this didn't come completely out of the blue; there had been rumours that the federal army might try to secure the international borders of the tiny breakaway Alpine republic. But hearing rumours and seeing tanks actually moving towards the city centre are two very different things. Without a second thought uncle Schweik swung his bus across the road, forcing the tank (which was only the first of many) to come to a clattering halt.

Accounts of what happened next diverge in one detail only: whether uncle Schweik *ran* or *walked* towards the machine which represented the power of the dying state. Some say that he swaggered not unlike John Wayne proceeding to shoot it out with a villain. Others claim that he rushed towards and climbed on to the tank like a large ungainly squirrel. But all agree that the young soldier manning the machine gun mounted on top of the tank had very little time to react. And the little time he did have, he wasted on trying to make sense of what was happening.

Then he was stabbed right through the heart with a large screwdriver which uncle Schweik always kept next to the driving wheel in case he needed to tighten a screw; he liked his bus to run smoothly and without undue rattling.

As the young soldier let go of the machine gun he had been gripping more out of fear than with any deadly intent, uncle Schweik lifted his slouching body and tossed it to the ground, where it landed with a thud and after some twitching remained lying still. Uncle Schweik slid down the side of the tank and started to kick the body. Only then did he pull the screwdriver out of the heart of the first casualty of the coming war.

"What have you done?" shouted the soft-spoken passenger as uncle Schweik started to walk back towards the bus. "You've murdered my son!"

He rushed towards the body on the ground, knelt down beside it and lifted the young man's head until it came to rest in his lap. He removed the helmet and ran his fingers through the curly hair of the Slovenian conscript who had

been ordered by his federal army commander to ride the tank into battle without being told against whom or why. As they watched the scene, passengers in the bus and soldiers manning tanks which had halted behind the first, realised that they had reached a point of no return.

Another person who realised that was my uncle Schweik.

"We must remain calm," he was heard muttering as he stood in front of the bus surveying the consequences of his intrusion into history. "We should be satisfied by helping each other get to our destinations; why do we always want more?"

As the boy's father walked towards him, uncle Schweik greeted him with the following words: "I want you to know that whatever you have decided to do to me, you have every right to do."

But the soft-spoken gentleman passed him without a word, without even looking at him. Then he passed the bus without raising his head to meet the eyes of his fellow passengers, with most of whom he had travelled to work and back home again for over twenty years, and proceeded to walk into the fields by the side of the road, not back towards the city but right across, towards distant villages, towards the mountains, away from it all, making slow but determined steps, without turning once, not even when one of the tank crew, who had misunderstood what was happening, sent a hail of bullets after him. He just slumped and came to rest in the fields, lying on his back, less than five hundred yards from his son, neither of them guilty of anything, for sometimes there is a war in which the innocent die and the guilty remain alive, trying to figure out what could have gone wrong, as much for them as for their victims.

Then the tank moved to push the bus off the road. And so my grandma's wish was fulfilled: Jaroslav Schweik, if only by failing to stop it, had written himself into history.

EVALD FLISAR

Stenografski romani

1.

Dobri vojak Švejck

Kadar razmišljam o usodi svojega strica Jaroslava Švejka, se težko izognem občutku žalosti. Ne zato, ker je stric že od rojstva bil najbolj priljubljena igrača Velikega kozmičnega šaljivca, ampak zaradi okoliščin, ki mu niso dovolile, da se izogne, kot je imel navado reči, "pohotnim rokam zgodovine". Njegovi cilji so bili mir, ljubezen in potrpežljiva prijaznost do vseh živih bitij – vse tisto, česar nas zgodovina ponavadi oropa. "Če bi se mi zgodovina pripeljala naproti, bi jo prisilil, da zapelje s ceste v jarek," je bil njegov standardni (in preroški!) odgovor na posmehljiva povpraševanja kolegov, kdaj namerava uresničiti željo svoje matere in postati "zgodovinska osebnost".

Kot voznik mestnega avtobusa seveda ni imel najboljših možnosti za kaj takega; moral bi se podati v politiko, kamor mu je ves čas diskretno utirala pot tudi njegova mati, moja babica. On pa je vztrajno zavračal njena prizadevanja, da ga preseli s sedeža v avtobusu na sedež v parlamentu. "Ni zame, politika," ji je povedal enkrat na leto okoli Božiča. "Si pozabil, kaj je rekel Lenin?" ga je vsakič oštela. "Svet je razdeljen na tiste, ki kaj storijo, in na one, ki jim je storjeno!"

Jaroslav Švejck se je zapletel v veje našega družinskega drevesa bolj ali manj po naključju, zahvaljujoč indiskretnosti

moje babice med njenim obiskom v Pragi. Samo po sebi to ni bilo škandalozno, toda izlet, ki ga je organizirala ženska sekcija Socialistične zveze, je trajal samo dva dni! Povrh tega je babica bila poročena, pa še mati triletnega fantka, ki je pozneje postal moj oče. Toda bil je čas hipijev in svobodne ljubezni, zato se nihče ni preveč razburjal, razen mojega dedka, seveda. A tudi njega je babica z bogve kakšnimi grožnjami na koncu utišala.

Kakor hitro je ugotovila, da iz njenega prvega otroka ne bo kaj dosti, je svoje sanje o uspehu natovorila "češkemu pankrtu", kot je moj dedek do svoje smrti imenoval njenega drugega sina. Stric Švejek je kmalu ugotovil, da lahko naloženo breme prenaša samo na en način – tako, da si prizadeva ostati "navaden, čisto navaden". To pa ni bilo ravno preprosto. Dejstvo, da mora nositi priimek enega najznamenitejših literarnih likov dvajsetega stoletja, mu je bilo vse prej kot v pomoč. Da bi stvar bila hujša, mu je mati, moja babica, dala celo ime Švejkovega avtorja! (In to v upanju, da bo zaradi tega njegova pot do "zgodovinske pomembnosti" lažja!).

Ker nesreča nikoli ne pride sama, ga je zraven spremljala še tako huda smola, da ni mogel narediti niti koraka, ki ne bi bil prvi korak na poti k večji ali manjši katastrofi – dokaz, so trdili nekateri v naši družini, da se Bog najraje znese nad tistimi, ki se najbolj trudijo, da bi živeli po njegovih pravilih.

Stric Švejek pa ni razumel, zakaj se v družini toliko razburjamo o stvareh, v katerih sam ni videl drugega kot "vzpone in padce v življenju navadnega človeka". Vse, kar mu je prekrizalo pot, je bilo pač "ena tistih stvari", kot je imel navado odmahniti z roko tudi ob najbolj šokantnem dogodku. Njegova sposobnost, da ostane miren sredi najhujše katastrofe, je osupnila večino ljudi, ki so ji bili priča. Ko je nekoč izstopal iz avta in je odprl vrata ravno v trenutku, ko je mimo pripeljal tovornjak, ki je vrata snel in z njimi rožljaj še petdeset metrov po cesti, je strica Švejka najbolj skrbela varnost voznika.

"Ste prepričani, da ste v redu?" ga je vprašal najmanj desetkrat. Vprašanje bi ponovil še desetkrat, če ne bi voznik tovornjaka podlegel napadu besa in udaril Švejka naravnost v obraz. "Imel je vso pravico, da to naredi," je ta pojasnil stvar policistom, ki so hoteli vedeti, ali bo napadalca tožil.

Mnoge njegove nezgode so postale priljubljena tema pogovorov v gostilnah in na delovnih mestih. Nič čudnega, da so mu kmalu ponudili nastope na popularnih televizijskih showih. Povabila je sprejel kot nekaj samoumevnega, toda na splošno je ljudi razočaral. Ne samo, da ni zaznal posmehljivega tona

moderatorjev (kaj šele, da bi nanj reagiral) in je tako gledalce prikrajšal za pričakovano zabavo – sploh ni bil pripravljen priznati, da je zaradi dolgega seznama kalamitet, ki so mu jih naštevali, kakor koli drugačen!

Njegov odgovor je bil na vsakem showu enak: "Na svet smo poslani zato, da se urimo v potrpežljivosti in spokojnosti. Tako se pripravljamo na naslednjega, ki ne bo tako prijazen do nas, kot je ta, ki ga skušamo očrniti ob vsaki priložnosti."

Vsakič znova so ga skušali moderatorji soočiti z najbolj razvpitimi primeri njegove nerodnosti: kako mu je v enem samem dnevu uspelo, da si, prvič, ob pobiranju svinčnika s tal izpahne križ; da mu, drugič, v kopalnici eksplodira bojler, ker je pri popravljanju narobe povezal dve žici; in da, tretjič, pozabi zapreti vodovodno pipo ter povzroči poplavo ne le pri sebi, ampak v treh stanovanjih pod sabo.

In kako neki mu kot šoferju mestnega avtobusa uspe ujeti v prehitro zaprta vrata več potnikov na teden kot vsem drugim šoferjem v vsem letu? Da ne govorimo o ladjici, ki jo je mukoma sestavljal znotraj steklenice več let, dokler je ni raztopil v žolco, ker je steklenico pomotoma napolnil s kislino. In če smo že pri tem, je morda pozabil, kolikokrat ga je vrglo skoraj do stropa, ker je skušal popraviti likalnik, ne da bi ga prej izklopil?

Stric Švejek je vsakič mirno odvrnil: "O takih rečeh si ne delam skrbi. Pravzaprav si ne delam skrbi o ničemer. Če bi si jih, bi dokaj hitro postal nevaren drugim. Da sem nevaren samemu sebi, me prav nič ne moti. Postal sem voznik avtobusa, ker uživam v tem, da ljudem pomagam priti do tja, kamor so namenjeni. To res ni zgodovinsko pomembno, prinese pa mi ravno dovolj zadovoljstva, da lahko rečem, da sem srečen."

So v življenju strica Švejeka bile tudi ženske? Nihče ne ve. Šušljalo se je sicer o njegovih zapletih s skrivnostnimi damami, toda dokazov ni bilo niti za to, da se je kakšne dotaknil pomotoma, kaj šele, da bi od nje pričakoval naklonjenost ali konkretne usluge. Toda misel na poroko je morala biti vsaj občasno v njegovi glavi; nekoč je uradnici v banki, kjer je prosil za posojilo, na rutinsko vprašanje, ali je poročen, odgovoril zelo iskreno in tako glasno, da so ga slišali celo na repu vrste: "Saj bi bil, pa me ni še nobena vprašala, jaz si pa nobene ne upam."

Tako ali drugače, na tem področju Švejkovega življenja so stvari ostale zavite v meglo. Nihče v družini ali zunaj nje ni čutil potrebe, da najame detektiva, ki bi poizvedel, kaj stric počenja, in tako se je tema sčasoma umaknila iz naših pogovorov.

Gradiva za opravljanje je bilo tudi brez tega dovolj. Popolnoma nepričakovano in v splošno osuplost so stricu Švejku ponudili honorarno delo pri nacionalni televiziji. Zanesljivo je v ozadju na nekaj ključnih vrat potrkala moja babica, ki je morebiti ugotovila, da bi stric lahko po tej poti prilezel do položaja direktorja televizije, od koder bi se lahko podal v politiko brez navora: kot da stopa skozi vrtljiva vrata. Navsezadnje je nastopil v dovolj televizijskih showih, da sta njegov notranji mir in sproščen odnos do večine stvari bila splošno znana. Zato je bilo, kot je rekla babica, le vprašanje časa, kdaj ga bo zdravstvena enota nacionalne televizije najela, da pripravi brošuro s proti-stresnimi nasveti, ki bi izčrpane direktorje, producente in druge poučila, kako se lahko sprostijo.

Stricu Švejku se je prošnja zdela razumna in nikakor ne zunaj meja njegovih sposobnosti. In tako je čez nekaj mesecev na stroške televizijske naročnine izšla bleščeča, 80 strani obsegajoča brošura, v kateri so od dela izčrpani televizijci našli nasvet, naj "zmeraj sedijo na mehkih delih zadnjice", naj se sprostijo tako, da strmijo v sliko ali fotografijo Alp in zraven sanjarijo, kako se sprehajajo po zelenih gorskih dolinah s svojo najljubšo teto, ali pa naj se, če to ne zaleže, lotijo origamija. Knjižica je vsebovala 21-stopenjski diagram, ki je prikazoval, kako izdelati origami ptiča; in prav to je bil del brošure, zaradi katerega je stric Švejk bil, mogoče prvič v svojem življenju, brez zadrege ponosen. Če ne bi zalegel nobeden od predlaganih načinov sproščanja, pa je brošura zaposlenim svetovala, naj si na glavo namažejo nekaj sivke ali sandalovine.

Njegovi nasveti niso navdušili vseh na televiziji. Nekatere so najbolj razburila njegova navodila, kako iti skozi vrtljiva vrata: "Tako se pomaknite v razpoložljiv prostor. Vrata se bodo avtomatično vrtela pred vami – ne porivajte jih. Izstopite, kakor hitro vam je na voljo izhod. Če tega ne storite pravočasno, se boste vrnili tja, kjer ste vstopili, in proces boste morali ponoviti."

Časopisi so zabeležili, da je med predstavitvijo publikacije odziv nekaterih uslužbencev televizije tako vznemiril strica Švejka, da je pozneje ponavljal proces hoje skozi vrtljiva vrata deset minut, preden mu je uspelo najti rapoložljiv prostor za izstop in pobegniti.

Po teh dogodkih nekaj časa ni bilo povpraševanja po Švejkovih talentih, pa tudi ne po njegovih izjavah, ki jih je eden od resnejših časopisov označil za mešanico banalnosti in skrivnostne modrosti. Njegova zadnja izjava je bila: "Za vsakogar

od nas je edina prava destinacija občutek notranjega miru." In tako je stric prakticaliral svoj notranji mir (s sivko ali brez nje, nihče ne ve) tako, da je vozil avtobus številka 7 in dostavljal ljudi na delovna mesta, v trgovine, k zobarjem, v šole, mrtvašnice in nazaj domov.

Njegova lastna destinacija v življenju pa naenkrat ni bila več tako nevrprašljiva, kot je bila dotlej. Začelo ga je obletavati nekaj mračnega; kot da mu je dogodek z brošuro zapustil globoko rano. Njegov nasmehljani obraz je dostikrat spominjal na krinko, za katero se je skrivala bolečina, ki je bila dojemljivejšim potnikom več kot očitna. Nekega dne ga je resnoben gospod z mehkim glasom, za katerega se je pozneje izkazalo, da je reden potnik na avtobusu številka 7, pred izstopom potrepljal po ramenu in rekel: "Najbolj nehvaležno na tem svetu je biti dober."

"A res?" je zavpil stric Švejk tako glasno, da so potniki v avtobusu poskočili. Potem je, nekoliko tiše, dodal: "Spravi se z mojega avtobusa in odjebi."

Osuplost prijaznega gospoda je bila tako popolna, da je dobesedno padel iz vozila. Preostali potniki so potegnili glave med ramena, dokler niso spominjali na kontingent sedežih želv. Redki so našli dovolj moči ali volje, da zasukajo glavo in z očmi sledijo prizadevanjem mehko govorečega (in grobo ogovorjenega) potnika, da si s komolci kar najhitreje utre pot skozi množico nakupovalcev na pločniku. Še manj jih je videlo, kako stric Švejk teče za njim, ali slišalo, kako vpije: "Žal mi je, žal mi je, žal mi je!"

Toda ko se je stric Švejk vrnil in splezal nazaj za volan, ni bilo v avtobusu nikogar, ki ne bi začutil, da to ni več človek, ki so mu dolga leta zaupali, da jih bo varno pripeljal do cilja. Zajela ga je zlovešča sprememba – in ne samo njega, tudi njih, in njihova življenja, njihovo mesto, vasi za gorami.

Gore so bile tiste, v katerih je stric Švejk po novem videl vir svojega notranjega miru – sijoči zasneženi vrhovi, ki jih je ob jasnem dnevu lahko opazoval v daljavi skozi vetrobran svojega avtobusa. S strmenjem vanje (skladno z nasveti v brošuri) si je postopoma spet pridobil svojo staro spokojnost, in njegovi redni potniki so nehali povešati oči, ko so vstopali in izstopali. Lepega dne se je pojavil celo mehko govoreči gospod in se obnašal, kot da se ni nič zgodilo, in čeprav je vse zanimalo, kako se je vozil v službo v času, ko ga ni bilo, ni bil nihče tako nespameten, da bi ga vprašal.

Stvari so bile spet normalne; ljudje so vedeli, da bodo pravočasno prišli do cilja, stric Švejk pa je ponovno užival v tem,

da jim pri tem pomaga. Enkrat ali dvakrat so tisti, ki so sedeli tik za njim, celo slišali, kako si tiho požvižgava veselo melodijo in se v njenem ritmu pozibava na sedežu gor in dol.

Toda občutek napetosti je vendarle ostal v zraku. To ni bila toliko napetost med Švejkom in njegovimi potniki kot skupna slutnja, da bo nekaj planilo na njihove usode in jih spremenilo tako zelo, da ne bodo več prepoznavne. Nihče ne ve, ali se je stric Švejk tega zavedal bolj ali manj od svojih potnikov. Edino, kar so lahko pozneje zanesljivo opisale priče, je bilo njegovo presenečenje, ko se je na cesti pred avtobusom pojavil tank.

Pravzaprav dogodek ni prišel kot strela z jasnega; že nekaj časa so se širile govorice, da bo skušala zvezna vojska zasesti mednarodne meje drobne alpske republike, ki je oznanila neodvisnost. Toda med govoricami in tanki, ki se resnično pomikajo proti središču mesta, je precejšnja razlika, zato se stric Švejk ni obotavljal, ampak je z nenadnim zasukom volana postavil avtobus čez cesto in prisilil tank, ki je bil le prvi v koloni, da se rožljaje ustavi.

Poročila o tem, kaj je sledilo, se razlikujejo samo v eni podrobnosti: ali je stric Švejk *stekel* ali *odkorakal* proti stroju, ki je predstavljal moč umirajoče države. Nekateri pravijo, da se je pozibal približno tako kot John Wayne, ki se odpravlja na obračun z zlikovcem. Drugi trdijo, da je pohitel proti tanku in splezal nanj kot velika nerodna veverica. Vsi pa se strinjajo, da mladi vojak, ki je stal za mitraljezom na vrhu tanka, ni imel dosti časa za reakcijo, in da je čas, ki ga je vendarle imel, zapravil za poskus, da dojamе, kaj se v resnici dogaja.

Potem ga je stric Švejk zabodel v srce z dolgim izvijačem, ki ga je hranil pod sedežem za primer, da bi moral kje zategniti kakšen vijak; hotel je namreč, da njegov avtobus teče gladko in brez nepotrebneга ropotanja.

Ko je mladi vojak izpustil mitraljez, ki se ga je krčevito oklepal bolj zaradi strahu kot s smrtonosnm namenom, je stric Švejk dvignil njegovo mlahavo telo in ga vrgel na cesto, kjer je pristalo s topim udarcem in po krajšem trzanju negibno obležalo. Stric Švejk je zdrsnil s tanka, skočil na telo in skakal po njem, dokler se ni naveličal. Šele potem je potegnil izvijač is srca prve žrtve prihajajoče vojne.

“Kaj si storil?” je zavpil mehko govoreči gospod, ko se je stric Švejk odpravil nazaj proti avtobusu. “Umoril si mi sina!”

Pognal se je proti truplu, pokleknil ob njem in si dvignil glavo mladega vojaka v naročje. Snel mu je čelado in s prsti podrsel skozi prepotene lase slovenskega nabornika, ki mu je

častnik v zvezni vojski ukazal, naj spleza na tank in gre v boj, ne da bi mu hotel povedati, proti komu ali zakaj. Ob pogledu na prizor so potniki v avtobusu in vojaki na tankih v koloni, ki se je ustavila, doumeli, da s te točke ni več poti nazaj.

To je sprevidel tudi Jaroslav Švejk.

“Ostati moramo mirni,” so ga slišali pridušeno govoriti, ko se je izpred avtobusa oziral po posledicah svojega posega v zgodovino. “Zadovoljiti bi se morali s tem, da drug drugemu pomagamo priti do tja, kamor smo namenjeni. Zakaj zmeraj hočemo več?”

Ko se je oče mrtvega vojaka odpravil proti njemu, ga je stric Švejk sprejel z besedami: “Kar koli si se odločil, da z mano storiš, imaš do tega pravico; hočem, da to veš.”

Toda sosed je šel mimo njega brez besed, niti pogledal ga ni. Potem je šel mimo avtobusa, ne da bi dvignil glavo in se ozrl v oči sopotnikov, s katerimi se je več kot dvajset let vozil v službo in domov, odpravil se je čez polje ob cesti, ne proti mestu ampak naravnost čez njive proti oddaljenim vasem, proti goram, proč, s počasnimi vendar odločnimi koraki, ne da bi se enkrat samkrat obrnil, niti takrat ne, ko je eden od vojakov na tankih, ki si je narobe razložil dogodek, poslal za njim rafal krogel. Samo zrušil se je in obmiroval sredi polja, ležeč na hrbtu, manj kot petsto metrov oddaljen od svojega sina, ne da bi kateri od njiju kar koli zakrivil, kajti včasih izbruhne vojna, v kateri umrejo nedolžni in preživijo krivi, ki potem skušajo ugotoviti, kaj je šlo narobe, ne le za njih ampak tudi za njihove žrtve.

Potem se je tank premaknil in porinil avtobus s ceste. Želja moje babice se je izpolnila: Jaroslav Švejk se je vpisal v zgodovino, pa čeprav le tako, da je ni mogel ustaviti.