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Experts

Translated by Martin Chalmers

Paul Parin, Doctor of Medicine, Honorary Doctorate. Until 1990 private psychoanalytical practice. 1934-43 studied medicine at the universities of Graz, Zagreb and Zürich. 1943 state examination and takes doctorate (Abdominal tuberculosis among children). 1943-44 Assistant physician in the Surgery Department of the Ospedale Civico, Lugano. 1944 Member of the First Surgical Mission of the Centrale Sanitaire Suisse with the Yugoslav Army of Liberation. 1946-52 specialises as neurologist and trains as psychoanalyst (with Prof. Rudolf Brun). 1949 Member of the International Psychoanalytical Association, Swiss Section. 1952-90 specialist in neurology. Opens his psychoanalytical practice in Zürich with the psychiatrists Goldy Matthèy and Fritz Morgenthaler. 1954-71 six research trips to West Africa with Goldy Matthèy and Fritz Morgenthaler; establishment and development of ethnopsychanalysis as scientific method. 1958 co-founder of the Psychoanalytic Seminar in Zürich (PSZ), teaches there until 1983. 1967-70 President of the Swiss Psychoanalytic Association. Publications include *Das Blüten aufgerissener Wunden. Ethnopsychanalytische Überlegungen zu den Kriegen im ehemaligen Jugoslawien* [The bleeding of wounds torn open. Ethnopsychanalytic reflections on the wars in the Former Yugoslavia] in *Aufrisse*, 13.3. 1992. Stories include *Karakul* (1993); *Der Traum von Ségou* (2001). Honours and prizes include Literature Prize of Zürich Canton, 1986; Prize of the International Erich Fried Society for Language and Literature, 1992; Sigmund Freud Prize for Scholarly Prose, 1997; International Sigmund Freud Prize of the City of Vienna, 1999; Honorary doctorate of the University of Klagenfurt, 1995.

Dr Paul Parin born a Swiss citizen in Polzela (today Slovenia), married to the psychoanalyst Goldy Matthèy (until her death in 1997), no natural children, one adult elective son.

The Rebel

Ethnopsychanalyst

Ethnopsychanalysis, put briefly, is the application of the psychoanalytic method to ethnology (or anthropology), the linking of the two. Sigmund Freud had already anticipated this link in his 1912 essay *Totem and Taboo*. There followed various attempts in Europe and America to develop psychologically oriented research into other cultures. This was tantamount to a revolution, because while the older generation of ethnologists or anthropologists carried out meticulous investigations of cultures, peoples, tribes, they did so almost exclusively in the traditional scientific way, that is, entirely quantitatively. Persons or even individuals only briefly got a word in and then purely as informants. Ethnopsychanalysis on the other hand attached great importance precisely to the actual words spoken, to conversation and stories. What emerged from such studies goes far beyond any comparative studies. "It was only ethnopsychanalysis which combined a theory of the subject with the existing knowledge of the different cultures to establish a new science of human beings and of their great diversity of ways of life and possibilities." (P. Parin). The triumvirate of Paul Parin, Goldy Matthèy and Fritz Morgenthaler were pioneers in the field. In the 1950's and 60's they were the first psychoanalysts from German-speaking Europe, who on their field trips tested, applied and evaluated the psychoanalytic technique as a research method. In their ethnopsychanalytic studies of the Dogon and the Agni in West Africa they wanted to prove, that it is not only possible to use psychoanalysis to understand other cultures but - and this was particularly important - that it intensifies the comparative view of one's own and other cultures, makes understanding more profound. The approach of the Zürich group differed from others in Europe and America, in that the former understood psychoanalysis as a psychology of conflict, as an instrument for the differentiated observation and analysis of social structures. The role of the psychoanalyst was understood as being critical of society, as a subversive activity (Paul Parin), as shaking up the unconscious (Goldy Matthèy). It was not surprising that their work which otherwise had attracted only the attention of professionals suddenly became famous. The movement of 68 celebrated it as a tool for the critique of society; people were divided into Dogon and Agni according to their characteristics and peculiarities, the findings of ethnopsychanalysis seemed to suggest the possibility of other freer forms and relations between individual and society. In the case of Paul Parin

and Goldy Matthèy the approach had a great deal to do with their experiences in the anti-Fascist struggle and with the attempt to combine Marxist and psychoanalytic theory.

Paul Parin is a kind of dinosaur. Behind him and beside him empires and republics have collapsed; his political attitudes and scholarly work arose in this context, were shaped by it as much as by a curious growing up after two years confined in a plaster bed. There was a talent for observation in the family and it had already helped found a vast family fortune. As a young man, his grandfather, after five years in Switzerland, is said to have returned to Trieste with his savings under his shirt. There, employed by a shipping agency, he had made a chance and very important observation at the harbour. The cargo of a Brazilian coffee freighter was being unloaded in pouring rain. The coffee beans went mouldy on the next stage of their journey and were spoiled by the time they reached the consignees in Vienna and Budapest. His grandfather put up a dry warehouse, made protective tarpaulins available and guaranteed to get the coffee to its destination in perfect condition. In a few years he controlled the transport of coffee throughout the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, founded a network of insurance companies, opened countless breweries and financed the gas-lighting of towns. He had his oldest son educated in England, and the youngest, Parin's father, at a boys' school in Geneva. One far-reaching decision was the rather peripheral matter of the purchase in 1899, for 500 francs, of Swiss citizenship in a village in the Ticino. With that all his descendants were automatically Swiss. The sons, assimilated Jews, became playboys, car drivers and balloon navigators, big game hunters and trophy collectors in India and on the Upper Nile. Because of his increasing pallor, Parin's father had an estate in Slovenia bought for him, a former Dominican monastery dating from the 15th century. It was looked after by an estate manager, served primarily as a place of relaxation, but after his father's marriage to an equally wealthy woman from the Jewish *haute bourgeoisie* it became the permanent family residence. In 1916 Paolo Giulio Fortunato Parin, known as Paul, was born there, the son of a big landowner, at Novikloster, in Polzela, where Central Europe and the Balkans meet. Until 1918 Novikloster was in the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, then in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, from 1945 in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and since 1992 it is part of the Republic of Slovenia. Here Paul Parin grew up, together with an older sister and a younger brother. The family lived as befitted their rank, with hunting

and parties, and from the proceeds of property and assets, hop growing, forestry, fishery and from the work of landless day-labourers. The children were taught by Austrian tutors and brought up by Swiss governesses. His father was a republican of liberal views and an implacable patriarch. The children had to be intelligent, well-educated and well-mannered, had to make good headway and then go to university, that was assumed without discussion. Parin relates: "At university in Zagreb I did sport in the morning, I rode, played tennis, in the afternoon I went to the Central Library - a wonderful art nouveau building - and there I read in German all the Marxist classics and all the writings of Sigmund Freud, after that I was with friends and artists until two in the morning." Prepared in this way he brought refugees to safety at night and in 1938 continued his medical studies in Zürich. In 1941 Parin's parent fled to Switzerland before the German army. The Gestapo took over Novikloster, until it was set alight by partisans. Fifty years later Parin said about the place: "The castles of the area have given me pleasure three times in my life: as a child, when I grew up in such a castle, then when they were finally set alight, and today, when they are being restored with an expert knowledge of art."

In 1939 he meets Goldy Matthèy, born in 1911 in Graz (Austria), the daughter of a wealthy and later impoverished Swiss family. She had just returned from the Spanish Civil War, where she had organised the central laboratory of the medical service of the International Brigades. In Zürich she set up a small haematology laboratory, from which in the years that followed she herself, Paul and her brother, who was studying medicine with Paul, lived. Paul Parin very much admired the independent and intrepid woman. He, too, would gladly have gone to Spain: "But they had no need of medical students in the International Brigades, nor of a soldier who limps - I've always limped as a result of the hip joint dislocation I was born with." In 1944 Paul and Goldy grasped the opportunity to go to Yugoslavia as volunteers, where they took charge of the Partisans' main hospital. Paul Parin worked as a plastic surgeon.

After the end of the war Goldy returned to Yugoslavia once again, at first without Paul, to build up, with Fritz Morgenthaler and others, the general hospital in Prijedor in northern Bosnia, for which funds had been collected in Switzerland. The lifelong friendship and collaboration of the three, dates from this time. Morgenthaler was born in 1919, his father was a well-known impressionist

painter, his mother a midwife and famous doll-maker. Morgenthaler finished his medical studies in 1945 and, like Paul Parin and Goldy Matthèy, trained as a psychoanalyst, after which he joined the other two to set up a psychoanalytic practice in Zürich. The three friends carried it on for almost a lifetime, went on research trips together, and discussed, described and published their research findings together. In addition to ethnopschoanalysis Morgenthaler's main scholarly interest was the psychoanalytic theory of sexuality, in particular of male homosexuality. Apart from that he was a trained juggler and an outstanding painter.

Morgenthaler died in 1984.

Goldy Parin was not only expert as an X-ray assistant, a psychoanalyst and a haematologist, she had also trained as a potter and could sing a great variety of chansons and partisan songs, accompanying herself on the guitar. She died in 1997. Paul Parin could ride, as a boy he had been taught to shoot by a lesbian countess, he was able to drive teams of horses and coaches, he could plough, knew and still knows a great deal about agriculture, cattle breeding and the production of beer.

Elisabeth and I have our appointment with him at three o'clock. He lives in a solid old pale sandstone apartment block on the busy lake side promenade road close to the opera. A brass plate next to the street door announces the practice of Dr med. Parin, the doorplate at the apartment on the ground floor still has all three names: Parin, Morgenthaler, Parin-Matthèy. I ring the bell. Soon the blurred shape of an approaching figure can be made out through the ribbed frosted glass. The door opens wide, and before us, slightly hunched, stands a slim, elderly man, who greets us with perfect old Austrian courtesy. To our relief this already changes to unselfconscious warmth as he takes our coats. Dr Parin shows us into his study. He limps with his right leg, but overcomes the permanent difference in height with such rhythmic skill, that it became just his own way of walking.

The apartment is astonishingly large, there are seven or eight rooms leading off the wide hall. Later, well after midnight we are shown round. The parquet creaks, it is laid in a different pattern in each room. Africa is present everywhere in the shape of wall hangings, ancestor figures, animal sculptures. In between them there are souvenirs and art works primarily from Europe. In the kitchen two walls are

covered with photos, newspaper cuttings, drawings, letters, with objects of every kind. Paul Parin points to one thing, then another, but above all he likes to mention the name Goldy as often as possible. The bereaved are like lovers.

They opened the practice in 1952, the couple moved in together, not marrying until 1955, they lived here for forty five years. The apartment shows all the signs of intensive use.

The study was once the consulting room. We sit down on the venerable couch. Bauhaus desk and Bauhaus chairs are old and are simply there, just like the mechanical typewriter and the black, monstrous old telephone with its many switching buttons which established connections with identical apparatuses in the other rooms. A photo of Goldy Matthèy hangs on the wall, an African female wooden sculpture stands in the bookcase. Conspicuous are two paintings by Morgenthaler. The larger one shows an African savannah landscape with suggested zebras and a beast of prey which can only be suspected, expressive and painted with a sure hand, reduced to a small scale and with flat areas of broken lilac colours, greens and ochres. Next to it a small engraving by Goya, which shows a winged horse. The wallpaper is yellowed and matches the pictures very well in tone. On the little table in front of us a pack of plain Gitanes. There are several ash trays ready, in each one a chrome extinguisher.

Paul Parin lights a cigarette, he blows the smoke into the air and says with an openness I haven't encountered before: "Interrupt me, if necessary, because first of all I've got so much material in my head, and second, because I'm so old..." We promise. "Well I'll tell you a little about the origins of ethnopschoanalysis, which was not something we invented of course, but we were the first to try it out in practice. It happened more by accident than anything else. All three of us had always wanted to go to Africa, it was a childhood dream. And we had a friend in Africa, Heinrich Naumann, and one day he invited us. He was German and had come to Switzerland as a political emigre, had trained here as a surgeon and after eleven years was ordered to leave the country - which by the way is still police practice today. He was stateless, left wing, militantly irreligious, but there was nothing else for him to do, except go to Africa to a mission hospital run by the Basel Mission, a venerable Protestant organisation. We decided to visit him. We drove across the Sahara to West Africa in an old army jeep. We did it for pleasure,

as tourists, if you like, and I had planned to carry out a very small piece of research when we arrived. Something to do with psychosomatics, but that was impossible, because the laboratory was not at all as well-equipped as I had imagined. And so we discovered, that it's much easier to have a conversation about psychology with the hospital staff, than to do psychosomatic research there. After this trip we decided two things. First, that we wanted to go to West Africa again, and second, that we would study anthropology. Studying by ourselves we learned the essentials and then at intervals of a few years travelled back to West Africa several times, making a total of six ethnopsychanalytic trips.”

Paul Parin puts his stub in the extinguisher and continues: “On the first two trips we did what can also be called empathetic observation, we collected conspicuous ways of behaving, systematised them and with the help of an investigative technique of comparative character analysis - derived from Wilhelm Reich - evaluated them psychoanalytically. At first the research still included a considerable number of members of various traditional societies and cultures of West Africa, later we concentrated on a distinct group. Our initial findings were so interesting, that they encouraged us to undertake further trips. We were of course very well aware, that our frame of reference was a very specific and indeed arbitrary one, that the personality forming conflicts are different from one culture to another and that we inevitably observed as Westerners. So we tried to describe various possible modes of functioning of the human psyche and did not exclude the possibility, that some of these were perhaps less developed in our culture, occur rarely or have remained undiscovered, whereas among other peoples they are present as extremely important functions... So that was the first two trips in the fifties. Not until the third one - 1959 to 60 - to the Dogon - did we apply psychoanalysis as a sociological-psychological research instrument, as ethnopsychanalysis. The term incidentally is not ours, but was coined by Georges Devereux, a Hungarian emigre - I knew him quite well - he was an anthropologist and then did an analysis with Géza Róheim. He in turn was a geographer, anthropologist and psychoanalyst, had done his analysis with Sándor Ferenczi and had to emigrate to the United States at the end of the nineteen thirties... I mention all that not as a digression, but to point out, the extent to which psychoanalysis as well as ethnopsychanalysis were affected by emigration and exile. As Swiss citizens, the three of us had the good fortune of relative personal and scholarly continuity. We were particularly well-prepared for the

third trip, we went through one hundred and fifty six publications, some of them are in the bookcase over there, the dark green volumes...” Dr Parin points to a foot and a half of book spines. “We studied them, but without getting the faintest idea, what sort of people we were going to encounter. Not a single person in them was described as an active, thinking, feeling, speaking subject, never mind introduced to the reader. And so because we were so well-prepared, we applied to the Swiss National Fund for support, quite symbolically, because in order to be independent, we financed all our research trips ourselves. We applied for a modest ten per cent of our costs but we were unable to make the brain physiologist, who was in charge of the National Fund at the time, understand what ethnopsychonalysis is. He sent us to a sociologist, he examined the thing for two hours, then we got the money and travelled to Mali, to the Dogon. For us it was a wonderful thing, to liberate psychoanalysis from its medicalisation - after the Second World War it functioned to a large extent merely as applied psychotherapy - to turn it into the scientific study of mankind once again. And it worked! Instead, as in the healing process, of creating ego, where previously there was id, we tried to recognise ego, which develops out of the id quite differently from the way it does with us. We carried out one hour psychoanalytic explorations with individuals, up to forty sessions per person. In the beginning it was difficult, sensibly we dispensed with some of our rites - we were later criticised by other psychoanalysts, because our analysands sat and didn't lie down, and, in particular, because we paid them - but our main concern was to succeed. The distancing was in any case virtually absolute. The necessary distance of the analyst - also to himself - was of course definitely promoted by the mutual strangeness.”

Paul Parin smiles cryptically and lights a Gitane: “And out of that came the book *Die Weissen denken zu viel* [White People Think Too Much]. It was a report, really, and not much noticed at first, then it became a kind of cult book for the 68 student movement. And then in 1966 we also applied the psychoanalytic approach with the Agni in Ivory Coast. Unlike our study of the Dogon, in which our main focus was on the individual and the individual's psychic structure, with the Agni we were particularly interested in the interaction of individual and social structures. We wanted to make the individual in the context of his culture transparent and at the same time - this was an important part of the aims of our research - make a contribution to the relationship between psychoanalysis and social sciences. We were also, of course, always concerned with a social theory.

Out that came the book *Fürchte deinen Nächsten wie dich selbst* [Fear Your Neighbour as Yourself]. Suhrkamp first published it, through the good offices of Alexander Mitscherlich. Our editor, by the way, who then became our friend, was Karl Markus Michel, who died recently. We always just called him Carlos. He was one of the intellectuals of 68 and had the best long coat in the whole of Frankfurt. The book at any rate then appeared looking very beautiful and was terrifically expensive for those days. It cost sixty marks. In my opinion it's the much better book, because by this point we knew considerably more than in 1960. But it wasn't appreciated as much, because to European tastes the Agni are unlikeable people, whereas the Dogon are terrifically likeable."

While we make fresh tea together in the kitchen and cut a cake which a lady recently brought as a present, Paul Parin tells us about the difference between the Dogon and the Agni. "The contrast was considerable, not only as far as the matrilineal clan order of the Agni and the patriarchal extended family of the Dogon was concerned. The Agni are inhabitants of the rain forest, the Dogon live on the dry steppe. While the Agni produce coffee and cocoa for the world market in a plantation economy using labourers from elsewhere, the Dogon are subsistence farmers, grow millet and sell only a little on the local markets. They are heathens with a rich, distinctive, solid mythic-religious-economic social order. The Agni, on the other hand, are Christians with heathen-animistic elements. The fact that their ancestors were warrior raiders with highly organised aggressive kingdoms, also plays a dominant role in the present-day life of the plantation owners. Among the Agni all social performance is achieved almost exclusively by means of force, of fear and punishment. Among the Dogon social performances are carried out voluntarily, the Dogon do not know force as a political or pedagogic means. Those in outline are the differences whose various consequences we described in detail in our books."

Afterwards, in his study Paul Parin says: "Because we were getting older we then transferred our researches to our own people. Our ability to undertake exhausting journeys and to learn other languages, even superficially, had declined so greatly... The method, of recognising conflicts typical of a culture with the help of psychoanalysis - which we had learned studying the Dogon - also proved successful in the complex conditions of industrialised states and the capitalist economy. In 1980 I began to write stories, and since 1990, the point at which we

finally gave up the psychoanalytic practice, I have devoted myself more intensively to writing. A new book of stories has just come out incidentally.”

He reaches for the blue pack of cigarettes. He gently blows away the smoke. “We were always critics of ‘mainstream psychoanalysis’, particularly where it neglects and ignores the psychoanalytic critique of civilisation as Freud established it, that is, that social conditions inscribe themselves deep in the inner life of individuals. Many colleagues have disagreed with that. They are for painless adjustment. But psychoanalysis is not conceived as a means of repair and adjustment! And I very much regret, that hardly any of the more recent theoretical texts still contain any reference to the subversive potential, to the pleasure deriving from the power of the sexual drives, from their capacity to burst conventions. That’s just as wrong as the 68 movement, when it elevated Wilhelm Reich’s theory of drives to a behavioural norm - even in the education of children. The theory of drives is a working hypothesis, really. Today I have to say, that not only was this way of handling sexual theory rash and childish - it was based on a misunderstanding of psychoanalysis - the socio-political force of psychoanalysis was also overestimated. Not least by us. That’s what we worked on. That was our motive. I would say of myself, I was and am an undogmatic socialist. Goldy was a moral anarchist. Neither of us was ever in a party, we preferred an anarchistic model of society with as little institutional power as possible. Utopia? We didn’t hope for one, we observed it.”

(Translated by Martin Chalmers)