

World War II achieved a kind of post-Communist catharsis. Thompson, who covered the story for *Mladina*, was very moved by the event and treats it with great sensitivity.

Thompson's Yugoslavia is a fragile entity, what he calls a paper house. Its inhabitants, however, are strong and mostly they are survivors. Some are politicians, whom the author generally depicts uncharitably; most others are sympathetic people who tell him their stories on buses, in coffee shops and so on. Their sense of history is often largely mythological. Thompson's book is useful as a companion to media reports on the continuing conflicts in former Yugoslavia. It tells many stories, but only confirms how very complex — even incomprehensible — life and death in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural country can be.

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Paul Parin. *Es ist Krieg und wir gehen hin. Bei den jugoslawischen Partisanen*. Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991. 286 pp. ISBN: 3-87134-029-4.

Paul Parin. *Untrügliche Zeichen von Veränderung: Jahre in Slowenien*. [1st ed., 1980.] 3rd ed. Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1992. 188 pp. ISBN: 3-434-50012-X.

In 1945, Paul Parin watched as a top official of socialist Montenegro distributed coupons redeemable for operations. It was amusing that the naive peasants would then trade the coupons with friends and relatives for the operations of their choice, or that they would use them simply to have themselves x-rayed, which was held to bring magical cures. But the political side of these coupons — their distribution as a means of keeping power in a politically primitive society — serves to remind the reader of the vast amount of political content in these two works. A central theme of both of them is the nature of politics in Yugoslavia, and Parin's ultimate disillusionment with changing it for the better. The last line on the coupons, alas, seems to have been laughed out of existence before its mission was fulfilled: "smrt fašizmu, sloboda narodu."

Paul Parin, a psychiatrist in Zürich, both informs and entertains the reader in these two detailed autobiographical studies of the time he spent in Slovenia, Montenegro, and Serbia. Viewed together, the works contain a wealth of material on at least three major themes: first, an account of the Partisan war by a foreigner; second, the complex relationship between socialism's failure in Yugoslavia and a sympathetic foreigner's disillusionment with the country as a whole; and third, the relationship of an upper-class Swiss to Slovenia, the land of his birth.

*Es ist Krieg* is the story of a team of Swiss doctors who served with Tito's army from October, 1944 until the fall of 1945. Parin and the other six physicians had at their disposal some left-over funds of the CSS (Centrale Sanitaire Suisse), which had been founded some years earlier to give medical assistance to the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. Their month-long journey to the front—by truck, cruise ship, train,

and landing craft is described in some detail, as are the intrigues that accompanied their journey. The seven left-oriented doctors had to clear numerous military and bureaucratic hurdles to get out of Switzerland. They also had to rustle up surgical instruments, secure the help of the British intelligence and diplomatic services, and sort out reliable contacts from among the many Yugoslavs vying for their attention. This part of the book reads like a spy thriller but has the air of full authenticity.

The group of doctors performed a wide range of tasks in its year in action. The authorities, then and on subsequent "reunion" visits, showered the Swiss with praise for the high quality of their work. Among other things the hard-working doctors performed appendectomies and amputations, operated on head wounds, pulled teeth, and fought typhus and typhoid. They served first on the island of Badija, near Korčula, and then at Meljine in Montenegro. Right after the war they worked in the northeast of the country, in Pančevo, Bela Crkva, Smederevo, and Sombor. One of them spent much of his time actually "u šumi" ["in the forest"] with a shock brigade.

The information in these books on the war itself, if ably presented, is mostly standard fare. We witness praise for the Red Army and Stalin, and the singing of the Internationale mingles with snippets of the *gusla* and *kolos* in the background. Parin is at his best when he delves into personalities and individual human tragedies. For instance, he paints a stunning portrait of the swaggering, rough Montenegrin doctor in charge of the hospital at Meljine. This Radoš, from his boots and red star to his enormous moustache, with his ready pistol and his close clan ties, became for Parin a sort of prototypical Balkan figure.

And Parin's elegant description of the revolutionary enthusiasm of the "liberated people" is very forceful, whether one shares his point of view or not:

The people are there, and the entire people is free! The *narod* lets its fires burn into the night; it is no longer afraid. There is no *četnik*, no fascist far and wide, no officer with his gold. The lords, the *gospodari* with the polished boots and moustaches—they have fled. *Drugovi i drugarice*, we have become comrades. And, *bože moj*, God is there too, and he does not need any incense or candles or gold. His priest is with us, with cross, pistol, and *petokraka*. The masters have been driven off, and the people have liberated themselves.

He also analyzes in some detail the "war neurosis" known as "Partisan's disease." Soldiers recently withdrawn from combat would fall into hysterical "trances" and begin to scream and fight imaginary enemies. Although the ailment sounds like some sort of post-traumatic stress disorder, it only affected volunteers and the less educated soldiers. Parin believes that, in contrast to other victims of war-related nervous disorders, many Partisans simply could not or would not stop fighting. The causes for this lay in the nature of the people, of the war, and of the community, but not in the fear of military discipline or lack of chances to escape the conflict.

Moving now to the second theme, we note that Parin depicts the doctors' motivations as rather uniform and simple. Parin describes his colleagues and himself as "critical socialists" with an anarchic bent, or as independent sympathizers with the communist cause. At any rate, the oft-repeated key is that the war against Hitler and Mussolini, of which the communists had proven to be the most reliable executors, represented a continuation of the struggle begun and lost in Spain in the previous decade. At least one of the doctors was a veteran of that earlier war. Parin stresses that they went to Yugoslavia out of solidarity with the cause of the oppressed; that he admits later to a great deal of disappointment with later developments in Yugoslavia is no surprise, since he even states that "[w]e kept discipline when we ourselves regarded it as right; every command was a transgression against our dignity." Such idealism could not long flourish in the construction of a socialist society.

Parin's Slovene roots seem to have had little to do with his decision to go to Yugoslavia. He certainly made no effort to work with the Slovene resistance; rather he concentrated on learning Serbian (which his colleagues assumed he could automatically understand!) and serving where the Partisan command sent him.

Perhaps as a prelude to his ultimate disappointment, the author often presents the Partisans in a positive light. Although war is the peak of "chaos and irrationality," the Communists still manage to keep the hospital relatively well supplied. Of course, they drew heavily upon appropriations and Italian booty as well as donations. But the foreigners notice remarkably little red tape ("Bürokram"), Party interference in hospital affairs, or officially sanctioned revenge-taking. Parin is impressed by the amount of free discussion at various levels of decision-making and by the tendency of ordinary patients and soldiers to organize into discussion circles and make their voices heard. Since the Partisans established a *modus vivendi* with Franciscan monks and even held a wedding on Badija, there was at least some tolerance of religious differences. Finally the author notes that the important fundamental regulation forbidding the aggravation of ethnic tensions was scrupulously enforced. Examples confirm his assertion, although at the same time the very severity of the punishments points to the intractability of the national problems.

By the end of the volume, Parin laments that Yugoslavia had become a "strange" or "unknown" land to him. This happens not simply due to the "neo-Stalinist," "national-fascist" machinations of Slobodan Milošević, whose rise to power and shameful inflammation of the Kosovo problem Parin pillories again and again. Actually, the disappointment began immediately after the war. Parin witnesses the beginnings of a nomenklatura. He winces as increasing numbers of careerists steal the fruits of the revolution. As official arrogance grows, the interference in hospital management increases too, as does the forceful recruitment of "volunteers" for road- and rail-building projects and the like.

Still, there is another crucial cause of the failure of Yugoslav socialism. It is to be found in the vaguely defined Balkan mentality with which the

Swiss wrestle from the start of their service. When Parin writes that “Balkan customs had proven themselves stronger than socialist consciousness,” he is referring not to the burdensome condition of illiteracy and poverty, but to a whole system of life he found both alien and politically harmful. The political struggles of clans were carried over into the socialist period. The hospital staff often stood around smoking and chatting as doctors were forced to carry patients to and from the operating room. Many important daily tasks were denigrated as “women’s work.” The “favorite profession of the Montenegrins” — and the main preoccupation of their “colonel-idiots” — was overseeing the labor of others, checking up on people and cruelly cajoling them to work. (The term he uses repeatedly is *nadzirati*.) Italians were to be kept for slave labor after the war, since they were held to be much more diligent than the local population. Reports of a battle between Albanian recruits and their Serbian officers, and of rivalries between Dalmatians and Montenegrins, point ominously to stubborn national discord. Summary executions and boundless enthusiasm for fighting suggest that “the handicraft of war” may be “the most important virtue” in the Balkans. Parin even laments that “communism would better fit [some place like] Italy, because the people of Romagna are not so primitive as to believe that communists do not have to work.” These regional customs, then, form a mindset which hinders the development of the “new man,” even after the “old man” and his many generations of experiences and prejudices had been officially banished.

*Es ist Krieg* does not contain a great deal of information on Slovenia, since Parin did not visit it during the war. But he does mention the localized development of the Slovene resistance. The Slovenes were not obliged to accept all of the regulations of the other partisan forces. One result of this autonomy was the absence of the “sexual taboo” forbidding amatory relations between fighters. Parin gives this distinction a lot of the credit for the far less frequent occurrence of the “Partisan disease” among the Slovene forces.

Of Parin’s repeated contacts with Yugoslavia, only those with Slovenia born political fruit and continue till today. In 1989 the Swiss doctors wanted to make a public protest against growing Serbian chauvinism. Through to the efforts of Drava publishers and of Delo, they succeeded in publishing a long interview critical of the Milošević regime.

An examination of the second work, *Zeichen*, takes us much deeper into the heart of a Slovene émigré in Switzerland. Several stays in Slovenia figure in the book, a collection of eight narratives based on Parin’s personal experiences. But neither the heady times in the land of his birth nor the fate of his family’s holdings there is the real subject of the stories: rather it is living, breathing Slovenia that is central. Parin affords us little glimpses back into various chapters of Slovenia’s past. As he does so, we are duly informed that it was his early years amidst the welter of peoples, customs, religions, and clanking weapons that imbued him with the drive to study psychology in combination with ethnology. That which motivated the

author, however, also succeeds in fascinating the reader, through simple tales of real people, told with a sympathetic, earthy touch.

Shortly before World War I, Parin's grandparents bought his father a castle called Noviklošter, near Žalec in the Savinja Valley. Parin was born there in 1916; in the 1930's he studied in Graz, where he witnessed the rise of right-wing radicalism and anti-Semitism. In 1938 he moved to Switzerland to study medicine, and his family escaped from Yugoslavia in the chaos of the April 1941 invasion to join him there.

Actually, the Parin family already had long-standing connections to Switzerland. His grandfather had earned enough money there to begin his climb to the position of leading coffee importer in Austria-Hungary (humorously described in the story "Ein Regen in Trieste und der Aufstieg einer Familie"). Parin's father was a pupil at a Swiss boarding school, and Parin himself had had Swiss tutors as a child. These links, plus the disappointing if frank admission "I never learned Slovene" yield the conclusion that Parin cannot be considered a Slovene, even if he is a son of the Savinja, or, more precisely, of the Habsburg Monarchy. The castle, occupied by the Gestapo during the war, was attacked and repaired by the Partisans. The estate was divided up after 1945.

These stories are both pleasant and quite informative. *Zeichen* is an excellent companion volume to *Es ist Krieg* because it presents a lot of supplementary information about World War II on Slovene soil. The longest single narrative, "Vier Herrn Pfarrer" ("Four Priests"), centers on the war years. The clerics' stories are related without cynicism, although Parin points out unflattering aspects of Slovene religious life, such as the complacency of spiritual leaders who bend to popular whims and to the secular authorities. He also exposes the hypocrisy of one priest's cohabitation with his housekeeper. But in one way or another, many villagers, including priests, found a way to help the Partisans even if they did not go off to join them in the forest. Sadly, though, the laws of war seem to demand irrational sacrifice: the reader, for instance, knows that the woman Lenčka, summarily executed by the Partisans for fraternizing with the enemy, was using her intimate contacts to get information for the local residents on what farms were to be ransacked next.

*Zeichen* also treats the Slovenes' perceptions of themselves and their place in the world. Students of folklore and of rural Europe in general will find the long passages on church festivals, the rhythms of the seasons, and the sufferings and strivings of individual peasants very useful.

Parin's memories of his youth are etched with a sense of being threatened as a foreigner in Noviklošter, as a Jew in Europe, and as a Slovene in Yugoslavia. This awareness of persecution, however, is not shared by all Slovenes, who live seemingly isolated in their peasant communities. But they do harbor a feeling of being distinct. This is due partly to Slovenia's position in the fruitful intersection of East and West, Slavdom and Germandom, Rome and the wilderness to the north. But it is also due to differences inhering in the people themselves. "Outsiders" such as Serbs, Montenegrins, and Bosnian Muslims stand out both physically and

culturally. The Montenegrin farm and factory laborers in the area are known for their wild drinking and coarse antics about town, while the Slovenes are presented as diligent and too disciplined even to slip little bribes to Serbian gendarmes and judges.

Parin is describing local conceptions of a prison camp in southern Yugoslavia, which effectively symbolizes for the Slovenes the strange and inhospitable nature of the Balkans:

Here in our land the people were poor, but every Sunday they went to church and then to the pub; there was an orderliness... But down there are found was only a barren rocky wasteland, the burning sun in the summer and blizzards in the winter, the cruel Serbian overseers with long bayonets. On Sundays they brought around gypsies and other nasty womenfolk. The prisoners and the soldiers alike would descend upon them, and it was hoped that this would distract them from bashing in the skulls of their overseers.

One may criticize the books in several ways. How accurate are the stories in *Zeichen* and to what extent are they based on hearsay? Parin could not possibly have witnessed all of the events described. And about the rather sanguine depiction of the Partisans at war, detractors may say that the author's political convictions led him to exaggerate the positive aspects of the Communists' efforts. In addition, it is sad to note that Parin's admonitions about the Serbian government's maltreatment of Albanians now seem out of date (though probably not for long); Bosnia is barely mentioned in the books, and Croatia even less, so that they cannot be considered works of topical commentary.

Ultimately, Parin's experiences in Yugoslavia show him to be a sympathetic and informed observer of the Slovenes, a talented doctor, and a political idealist. He ruffled feathers in Slovenia recently when he announced that the castles of the Savinja area had three times brought him happiness: as he was growing up in one, when he saw that they were being beautifully restored—and when he saw them burning forty-five years ago! “I consider it good,” he told an audience of well-wishers, “that Slovenia is about to be its own employer for the first time in its history.” Parin thus appears as excited about the independence movement in Slovenia as he is dismayed by the hyper-nationalist hysteria which has seized Serbia.

Politically, Parin is wise enough to admit that he “brought [his own] revolution along” with him on his wartime stay, and that his ideas are not the same ones that were realized in Petrograd or in socialist Yugoslavia. He writes with such force and vigorous detail that we can well sense his deep disillusionment with the country's new apparatchiks who perverted socialism by “hoping for a good job, quoting Stalin and Tito, and talking about the next party conference like kids about Santa Claus.”

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