

PAUL CHATENOU, A FRENCHMAN IN IRELAND

A WANDERING SPIRIT

In the forward of his book Paul Chatenoud thanks Homer, Montaigne, Freud, Proust, Istrati, Lacan and Brassens, who show him the path of the wandering life. At the end of the path, it was a green gate opening toward an Irish cottage. Paul settle there with his library, but his spirit is still wandering, during the long talks with his visitors, in front of a turf fire.

■ Paul Chatenoud never came in Alsace. The only people he knows from this area are the young soldiers that he trains for few months at Nancy before they leave for Algeria. Half of his platoon was from Martinique, the other half from Alsace. "Their temperaments are completely opposite. I have good relation with both side, but it was a hard job between the exuberance of the first ones and the serious of the other ones" says Paul Chatenoud. But he adds "I learnt a lot about men, getting people from totally different backgrounds or behaviour to live together day and night". The anecdote seems light according to principle which rules this rubric 'character' for more than ten years: features of people who have a strong link with Alsace.

"HE IS LIKE AN OLD CHINESE WISEMAN WHO HAS BEEN THROUGH QUITE A LOT OF DIFFICULTIES"



Paul Chatenoud: The anecdotes herein, whether real or imagined, serve only to convey with more force both my philosophy and perception of life.

It does not matter; every rule has its exception. And it will be a pity to miss such a character; Paul Chatenoud is not an ordinary man. He has been living for twenty five years in the wild north-western part of Ireland. In his cottage, he welcomes people from different countries, and during the long delayed breakfast, he practises the art of Socrates' maieutique: to

give birth to the thoughts which lie deep in everyone. This morning, end of March, it was Stephen Plunkett and his wife who were sharing breakfast with us, among the twenty different famous homemade jams and marmalade. Plunkett? An historic name in Ireland. Stephen is the grand-nephew of Joseph Plunkett, one of the leaders

of the 1916 Easter uprising, at the Great Post Office in Dublin, and one of the writer of the declaration of Independence of the Irish Republic, and shot by the British.

- 'Before being a revolutionary, my great-uncle was a poet'. Stephen told us while eating his eggs and bacon.
 - 'The poets are all revolutionaries, because they start to jostle the established order of the words'.
- Answers Paul Chatenoud with philosophy.

Should that story happen few months before, it would probably be featured in his book that Paul Chatenoud published last summer. (Le Regard du Ventriloque). As says one of his Parisian readers: "Paul is like an old Chinese wiseman who after so many difficulties, gives

us with humour a true message of love and friendship. The book doesn't please everybody. Some of his journalists friends don't appreciate that he was not more compassionate after September 2001, when *Le Monde* writes: "We are all Americans". I am not American because two towers fell. I would be rather Japanese in 1945, Vietnamese in 1965, Chilian in 1973, or Iraki in 2003. Protest Paul Chatenoud.

WHAT COULD BE WORSE TO LOOSE YOUR MOTHER AT TWO AN HALF YEARS OLD

The reactions about his book which touch him the most are those who write to him: "I never think of that from that angle."

Paul was born in Morocco. His father wounded at "le chemin des dames" during the First World War, emigrated there after the war. Paul is number five of six children. His mother died when he was two and half years old. An American aircraft fighter crashed near her. "What could be worst?" says Paul. From that day, the little boy who cannot understand that such a little plane could make such a big hole, is afraid of nothing. But he is haunted by the crater where his mother disappeared, and has spent his life to "sublimate the reality of this hole".

Back in France for his secondary school, he quickly get the nostalgia of the freedom he enjoys in the wild of the Moroccan countryside. At 17, he returns to Morocco, and find a job in a steamship agency in Casablanca. Quickly enough he get bored by the administratif work, he resigns despite the subsequent increase of his salary and a promises of a brilliant future in the Company. "I go back to Paris to write my book", says Paul. "I will never read your book", answer the director. He was right: the book was only published half a century later.

At 24 years old, paul Chatenoud goes back to University at La Sorbonne to study philosophy and becomes friend with Vladimir Jankélévitch, and for two years follows the Lacan' seminaire.

"AT LACAN'S SEMINAIRE, I NEVER TOOK NOTES, I LET THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE FLOW IN TO ME"

"Contrary to most of his listeners, I never took notes, I let the whole experience flow into me. I believe and I understood and appreciate him more than many of those cribblers who were hanging on every word. It was only much later that I discovered that Pythagoras forbade his students to take notes. Now I understand why."

After his studies of philosophy, he became export manager of a

Company of machinery and came to Donegal for the first time. New turn: In 1978 he opened the first book shop about music in Paris, near Notre Dame. "Far from meeting writers, he more often meets authors enquiring as to how their books are selling. Fade up to manage. I am a creator". He rent a cottage in Donegal to write his book. New turn again: « Situated a hundred meter metres from the ocean, the salt air ate away at everything. I had come to rebuild the world and all I did was repainting things."

THE FINANCIAL NECESSITY BROUGHT ME TO RECEIVE CUSTOMERS. IT WAS SALUTARY.

Back to Paris, a phone call invited him to a wedding. It is during this short journey that he found an old farm on a hill overlooking the ocean. He buys it and repairs it with the help of local people. The philosopher-bookshop keeper went through difficult times: divorce, sell of the bookshop and his flat. He spent the next ten years between Donegal and Paris. When he settles definitively in Ardara, he has no money left: "After some works I open a Bed and Breakfast. The decision was not easy. I came here to be alone with my books, how will I manage to have solitude with visitors? The financial necessity being a law, I have no choice. Like very often in life this necessity become very salutary". His first customers are a couple on a motorbike from Provence. They make him a fantastic advertising.

Since that time very rarely are the customers who don't appreciate the place and his owner. They are welcome by Christopher the robin. And by a buttock in a fire place, sculpted by a local artist in a bogoak which stays for 5.000 years in the water. "How will be your bottom in 5 000 years" ask Paul with provocation. Most of the time, the ice is broken.



The Green Gate, a Place blessed by the gods, In the XII century a convent was there according to the parish archives.