

**THE
WARRIOR'S
HONOR**

Ethnic War and the

Modern Conscience

Michael Ignatieff

METROPOLITAN BOOKS
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY NEW YORK

Empire, and Mr. Deasy's study is decorated with the iconography of empire and British union: a tintype of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, and sporting prints of famous English horses. Mr. Deasy identifies with this iconography of Protestant imperial power: he baits the young teacher and calls him a Fenian, while the young teacher bites his tongue and conjures up in his mind all the saviors incarnated in the Protestant conquest: the Catholic corpses left behind by Cromwell's bloody passage through Ireland. This is history at its most suffocating: the blood-soaked myth that forecloses all benign possibilities. "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right": Mr. Deasy intones all the adamant slogans of resistance to home rule and Irish national independence. But there are darker myths imprisoning Mr. Deasy and his kind. He waves his finger at the young teacher: "Mark my words . . . England is in the hands of the Jews. In all the highest places: her finance, her press. . . . Old England is dying." Having dropped the coins of the young teacher's pay into his hands, Mr. Deasy makes a little joke. Why is it, he asks, that Ireland "has the honor of being the only country which never persecuted the Jews?" "Why, sir?" "Because she never let them in."

The Jews have sinned against the light, Mr. Deasy instructs him, and history—which is moving toward the manifestation of the glory of God—has proved it so.

To which Stephen Dedalus—Joyce's protagonist in *Ulysses*—famously replies: "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake."

History was not just the anti-Semitic philistinism and crabbed imperial arrogance of the Irish Protestant ascendancy—as deposited in the foul sediment of one turn-of-the-century schoolmaster's brain. There was a "Fenian" version to escape as well. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the nationalist

The Nightmare from Which We Are Trying to Awake

I

A DISILLUSIONED YOUNG TEACHER in a turn-of-the-century Dublin school is struggling through a history lesson with adolescent pupils who are just as bored as he is. He asks them the name of the ancient battle where Pyrrhus won his Pyrrhic victory, and as they mumble the wrong answers, his mind begins to wander. Why is history so suffocating? Is it nothing more than a lesson in futility and folly? Is this what his pupils unconsciously know as they yawn at their desks? Is this why they hang on the silence, waiting for the bell to deliver them back to the noise of the playground and the still unenclosed possibilities of youth?

After his pupils flood out into the school yard, the young teacher goes to his headmaster's study to collect his weekly wages. Turn-of-the-century Ireland is still very much in the British

Davin tells Dedalus, "Try to be one of us. In heart you are an Irishman," when Dedalus announces, "This race and this country and this life produced me. I shall express myself as I am." To Davin's protest, "A man's country comes first. Ireland first, Stevie. You can be a poet or mystic after," Dedalus replies with cold anger: "Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow."

Joyce's writing is a long rebuke to versions of history as heritage, as roots and belonging, as comfort, refuge, and home. His was the opposite claim: You could be yourself only if you escaped home, if you struggled awake from the dreams of your ancestors. For Joyce the artist, coming awake meant finding a language of his own against the compulsion of linguistic tradition and inheritance. As he says in *Portrait of the Artist*, "when the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets." And fly by them Joyce did: to Trieste, Paris, and Zurich, from *Portrait to Ulysses to Finnegans Wake*, from home to exile, from the language of his birth to a language uniquely his own. To come awake as an artist was to create something that transcended both personal and national past. To awake was to come to yourself, to force a separation between what the tribe told you to be and what you truly were.

What is nightmarish about nightmare is that it permits no saving distance between dreamer and dream. If history is nightmare, it is because past is not past. As an artist and as an Irishman, Joyce was only too aware that time in Ireland was simultaneous, not linear. In the terrible quarrel at the beginning of *Portrait* over the meaning of the Irish nationalist politician Parnell's disgrace and death, when Dante screams triumphantly, "We crushed him to death!" and Mr. Casey sobs with pain for his dead king and Stephen's father's eyes fill with tears, it is clear that Parnell's death

is not in the past at all. In the quarrel, past, present, and future are ablaze together, set alight by time's livid flame.

To awake from history, then, is to recover the saving distance between past and present and to distinguish between myth and truth. Myth is a version of the past that refuses to be just the past. Myth is a narrative shaped by desire, not by truth, formed not by the facts as best we can establish them but by our longing to be reassured and consoled. Coming awake means to renounce such longings, to recover all the sharpness of the distinction between what is true and what we wish were true.

It has become common to believe that we create our identities as much as we inherit them, that belonging is elective rather than tribal, conscious rather than unconscious, chosen rather than determined. Even though we cannot chose the circumstances of our birth, we can chose which of these elements of our fate we make our defining inheritance. Artists like Joyce have helped us think of our identities as artistic creations and have urged us to believe that we too can fly free of the nets of nationality, religion, and language.

The truth is that the nets do bind most of us. Few of us can be artists of our own lives. That does not make us prisoners: we can come awake; we do not need to spend our lives in the twilight of myth and collective illusion; we can become self-conscious. Few of us will ever create as fully as Joyce the imaginative ground on which we stand or the language in which we speak. But though Joyce's hard-won freedom may be beyond most of us, his metaphor of awaking points to a possibility open to us all. In awaking, we return to ourselves. We recover the saving distance between what we are told to be and what we are. This saving distance is the space for irony. We wake: we tell our nightmare to someone; its hold on us begins to break; it begins to seem funny

or at least untragic. We may still shudder in the telling, but at least we can share it. We can lighten up. The day can begin.

II

WHAT DOES IT MEAN for a nation to come to terms with its past? Do nations have psyches the way individuals do? Can a nation's past make a people ill as we know repressed memories sometimes make individuals ill? Conversely, can a nation or continuing parts of it be reconciled to its past as individuals can, by replacing myth with fact and lies with truth? Can nations "come awake" from the nightmare of their past, as Joyce believed an individual could?

In his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* Freud once baffled his audience by remarking that there was knowing and there was knowing and they were not the same. We think we know a lot of things but we do not really know them at all. We can know something in our heads without knowing it in our guts. We can forgive people in our heads without forgiving them in our hearts. Knowledge can be propositional or dispositional. For the former to become the latter, it must be—in Freud's phrase—"worked through." A two-way process is involved: what we know in our heads must become something we know in our guts; what we know in our guts must become something we know in our heads. Psyche and soma, which have been divided by trauma, must be reunited again. The process is bound to be slow and painful. In working through death or loss, our bodies often resist what our minds know to be true; or our mind resists believing what the body already feels. To master trauma is not just to bring body and mind together in acceptance; it is also to recover, in both body

and mind, a sense that the past is past. This means shifting the past out of the present; replacing psychological simultaneity with linear sequence; slowly loosening the hold of a grief or an anger whose power traps us in an unending yesterday.

Can we speak of nations "working through" a civil war or an atrocity as we speak of individuals working through a traumatic memory or event? The question is not made any easier to answer by the ways our metaphors lead us on. We tend to vest our nations with consciences, identities, and memories as if they were individuals. It is problematic enough to vest an individual with a single identity: our inner lives are like battlegrounds over which uneasy truces reign; the identity of a nation is additionally fissured by region, ethnicity, class, and education. It is not merely that each of these elements of a nation will make its own reckoning with trauma but that the real reckoning is molecular—within the conscience of the millions of individuals who compose a nation. Yet nations have a public life and a public discourse, and the molecular reckonings of individuals are decisively affected by the kinds of public discussion of the past that a nation's leaders, writers, and journalists make possible.

Questions about how nations "work through" their past are mysterious, but they are also urgent and of practical significance. In 1993, after seventy-five years of civil war, partition, terrorist insurgency, and intercommunal violence, the people of northern and southern Ireland embarked once again on an attempt to awake from their Joycean nightmare and begin a joint process of healing and reconciliation. In Nelson Mandela's South Africa, a truth commission has been touring the country attempting to provide a forum in which both victims and perpetrators can come to terms with apartheid. If the perpetrators choose truth—that is, if they disclose what they knew and what they did—they

can avoid judgment and obtain amnesty and pardon. The War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague is both prosecuting crimes committed in the Balkan war and making them public in order to assist in eventual reconciliation. In the African city of Arusha, a similar tribunal is collecting evidence about the genocide in Rwanda, believing here, too, that truth, justice, and reconciliation are indissolubly linked. In all these instances—Ireland, South Africa, the Balkans, Rwanda—the rhetoric is noble but the rationale is unclear. Justice in itself is not a problematic objective, but whether the attainment of justice always contributes to reconciliation is anything but evident. Truth likewise is a good thing, but as an African proverb reminds us, truth is not always good to say.

In Archbishop Tutu's own words, the aim of his truth commission is "the promotion of national unity and reconciliation" and "the healing of a traumatized, divided, wounded, polarized people." Laudable aims, but are they coherent? Look at the assumptions he makes: that a nation has one psyche, not many; that the truth is certain, not contestable; and that, when the truth is known by all, it has the capacity to heal and reconcile. These are not so much epistemological assumptions as articles of faith about human nature: that the truth is one and, if we know it, it will make us free.

The rest of us look on and applaud, perhaps forgetting to ask how much truth our own societies can stand. All nations depend on forgetting: on forging myths of unity and identity that allow a society to forget its founding crimes, its hidden injuries and divisions, its unhealed wounds. It must be true, for nations as it is for individuals, that we can stand only so much truth. But if too much truth is divisive, the question becomes, How much is enough?

Faith in the healing virtues of truth inspired the commissions in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil that sought to find out what happened to thousands of innocent people "disappeared" by the military juntas during the 1960s and 1970s. All these commissions believed that, if the truth were known, a people made sick by terror and lies would be made well again. The results, though, were ambiguous. As Pilate asked as he washed his hands, What is truth? At the very least, it consists of factual truth and moral truth, of narratives that tell what happened and narratives that attempt to explain why it happened and who is responsible. The truth commissions in South America had more success in establishing the first than in promoting the second. They did succeed in establishing the facts about the disappearance, torture, and death of thousands of persons, and this information allowed relatives and friends the consolation of knowing how the disappeared met their fates. It says much for the human need for truth that the relatives of victims preferred the facts to the false comforts of ignorance. It also says a great deal for the moral appeal of magnanimity that so many of these people should have preferred the truth to vengeance or even justice. It was sufficient for most of them to know what happened; they did not need to punish the transgressors in order to put the past behind them.

But the truth commissions were also charged with the production of public truth and the remaking of public discourse. Their mandate was to generate a moral narrative—explaining the genesis of evil regimes and apportioning moral responsibility for the deeds committed under those governments. And here they were infinitely less successful.

The military, security, and police establishments were prepared to let the truth come out about individual cases of disappearance. Factual truth they could live with; moral truth was out

of the question. They fought tenaciously against prosecutions of security personnel and against shouldering responsibility for their crimes. To have conceded ethical responsibility would have weakened their power as institutions. Such was the resistance of the military in Argentina and Chile that the elected governments that created the commissions had to choose between justice and their own survival, between prosecuting the criminals and risking a military coup or letting them go and allowing a democratic tradition to take root.

The record of the truth commissions in Latin America has disillusioned many of those who believe that shared truth is a precondition of social reconciliation. The military and police apparatus survived the inquiries of the truth commissions with their legitimacy undermined but their power intact. The societies in question used the truth commissions to foster the illusion that they had put the past behind them. Indeed, the truth commissions facilitated exactly the kind of false reconciliation with the past that they had been created to forestall. The German writer and thinker Theodor Adorno observed this false reconciliation at work in his native Germany after the war:

"Coming to terms with the past" does not imply a serious working through of the past, the breaking of its spell through an act of clear consciousness. It suggests, rather, wishing to turn the page and, if possible, wiping it from memory. The attitude that it would be proper for everything to be forgiven and forgotten by those who were wronged is typically expressed by the party that committed the injustice.

The dangers of false reconciliation are real enough but it is possible that disillusion with the truth commissions of Latin

America goes too far. It was never the truth commissions' charge to transform the military and security apparatus any more than it is Archbishop Tutu's charge—or within his power—to do the same in South Africa. Truth is truth; it is not social or institutional reform.

Nor, when the truth is proclaimed by an official commission, is it likely to be accepted by those against whom it is directed. The police and military have their own truth—and it exerts its hold precisely because for them it is not a tissue of lies. It is unreasonable to expect those who believed they were putting down a terrorist or insurgent threat to disown this idea simply because a truth commission exposes the threat as having been without foundation. People, especially people in uniform, do not easily or readily surrender the premises upon which their lives are based. Repentance, if it ever occurs, is an individual matter. All that a truth commission can achieve is to reduce the number of lies that circulate unchallenged. In Argentina, it is now impossible to claim, for example, that the military did not throw half-dead victims into the sea from helicopters. In Chile, it is no longer permissible to assert in public that the Pinochet regime did not dispatch thousands of entirely innocent people. Truth commissions can and do change the frame of public discourse and public memory. But they cannot be judged failures because they fail to change behavior and institutions. That is not their function.

A truth commission can winnow out the facts upon which society's arguments with itself should be conducted. But it cannot bring these arguments to a conclusion. Critics of truth commissions sometimes speak as if the past were a sacred text, like the American Constitution or the Bill of Rights, that has been stolen and vandalized and that can be repaired and returned to a well-lit glass case in some grand public rotunda. But the past has none of the fixed and stable identity of a document. The past is an argu-

ment, and the function of truth commissions, like the function of honest historians, is simply to purify the argument, to narrow the range of permissible lies.

Truth commissions have the greatest chance of success in societies that already have created a powerful political consensus behind reconciliation, such as in South Africa. This consensus may have less to do with moral agreement about the need to purge the poisons of the past than with a prudential political calculation, shared by most people, that judicial vindictiveness has the potential to tear society apart and even to unleash civil or racial war. In such a context, where truth seems a less divisive objective than justice, Tutu's commission, even as it forces the disclosure of painful truth, may well reinforce the political consensus that created his commission.

In places like the former Yugoslavia, on the other hand, where the parties have murdered and tortured one another for years and where the crimes of the sons and daughters have often built upon the crimes of fathers and grandfathers, the prospects for truth, reconciliation, and justice are much bleaker. These contexts, however bleak, are instructive because they illustrate everything that is problematic in the relation between truth and reconciliation.

The idea that reconciliation depends on shared truth presumes that shared truth about the past is possible. But truth is related to identity. What you believe to be true depends, in some measure, on who you believe yourself to be. And who you believe yourself to be is mostly defined in terms of who you are not. To be a Serb is first and foremost not to be a Croat or a Muslim. If a Serb is someone who believes Croats have a historical tendency toward fascism and a Croat is someone who believes Serbs have a penchant for genocide, then to discard these myths is for both groups to give up a defining element of their own identities. The war has created communities of fear, and these communities cannot con-

ceive of sharing a common truth—and a common responsibility—with their enemies until they are less afraid, until fear of the other ceases to be a constitutive part of who they take themselves to be.

Obviously, identity is composed of much more than negative images of the other. Many Croats and Serbs opposed these negative stereotypes and the nationalist madness that overtook their countries. There were many who fought to maintain a moral space between their personal and national identities. Yet even such people—the human-rights activists and antiwar campaigners—are now unable to conceive that one day Zagreb, Belgrade, and Sarajevo might share a common version of the history of the conflict. Agreement on a shared chronology of events might be possible, though even this would be contentious; but it is impossible to imagine the three sides ever agreeing on how to apportion responsibility. The truth that matters to people is not factual or narrative truth but moral or interpretive truth. And this will always be an object of dispute in the Balkans.

It is an illusion to suppose that “impartial” or “objective” outsiders would ever succeed in getting their moral and interpretive account of the catastrophe accepted by the parties to the conflict. The very fact of being an outsider discredits rather than reinforces one's legitimacy. For there is always a truth that can be known only by those on the inside. Or if not a truth—since facts are facts—then a moral significance to these facts that only an insider can fully appreciate. The truth, if it is to be believed, must be authored by those who have suffered its consequences. But the truth of war is so painful that those who have fought each other rarely if ever sit down to author it together.

The problem of a shared truth is also that it does not lie “in between.” It is not a compromise between two competing versions. Either the siege of Sarajevo was a deliberate attempt to terrorize

and subvert a legitimately elected, internationally recognized state, or it was a legitimate preemptive defense by the Serbs of their homeland against Muslim attack. It cannot be both. Outside attempts to write a version of the truth that does "justice" to the truth held by both sides are unlikely to be credible to either.

Nor is an acknowledgment of shared suffering equivalent to shared truth. It is relatively easy for both sides to acknowledge each other's pain. Much more difficult—indeed, usually impossible—is shared acknowledgment of who bears the lion's share of responsibility. For if aggressors have their own defense against truth, so do victims. Peoples who believe themselves to be victims of aggression have an understandable incapacity to believe that they too have committed atrocities. Myths of innocence and victimhood are a powerful obstacle in the way of confronting responsibility, as are atrocity myths about the other side.

Hill-country Serbs in the Foca region of Bosnia told British journalists in the summer of 1992 that their ethnic militias were obliged to cleanse the area of Muslims because it was well known that Muslims crucified Serbian children and floated their bodies down the river past Serbian settlements. Since such myths do not need factual corroboration in order to reproduce themselves, they are not likely to be dispelled by the patient assembly of evidence to the contrary. A version of this particular atrocity myth used to be spread about the Jews in medieval times. The myth was not true about the Jews and it is not true about Muslims, but that is not the point. Myth is so much sustained by the inner world—by paranoia, desire, and longing—that it is dissolved, not when facts from the outer world contradict it, but only when the inner need for it ebbs away.

To speak of myths is not to dispute that one side may be more of a victim than the other or to question that atrocities happen.

What is mythic is that the atrocities are held to reveal the essential identity—the intrinsic genocidal propensity—of the peoples in whose name they were committed. All the members of the group are regarded as susceptible to that propensity even though atrocity can be committed only by specific individuals. The idea of collective guilt depends on the idea of a national psyche or racial identity. The fiction at work here is akin to the nationalist delusion that the identities of individuals are or should be subsumed into their national identities.

Ethnic war soldiers together individual and collective identities. Both aggressors and victims can bear only so much responsibility, as individuals, for what they have done or suffered. They need the absolution provided by collective identity.

Ethnic war isolates aggressors from the truth of their own actions. If ethnic cleansing is successful, it removes victims and leaves the victor in possession of a terrain of undisputed truth. Who, after all, is left to remind the winners that someone else once owned these houses, worshipped here, buried their dead in this ground? Ethnic cleansing eradicates the accusing truth of the past. In its wake, the past may be rewritten so that no record of the victim's presence is allowed to remain. Victory encloses the victor in a forgetting that removes the very possibility of guilt, shame, or remorse, the emotions necessary for any sustained encounter with the truth.

Victims of ethnic war, for their part, have lost the sites that validate their version of the truth. They can no longer point to their homes, their houses of worship, their graves, for those places are gone. In exile, victimhood itself becomes less and less real. The victims keep pleading for a truth to which fewer and fewer people give notice, and outsiders who tell them to face up to the truth are in essence asking them to accept the fact of their defeat.

THE WARRIOR'S HONOR

Victims of ethnic war may refuse this truth, preferring to stick together in refugee camps and settlements rather than disperse as individuals to face the world alone. Refusing the truth of defeat is a condition of their dignity but it also traps them in an identity of collective victimhood.

And so both sides in ethnic war end up trapped in collective identities: the victors in their amnesia, the victims in their refusal to accept defeat. These fates shape memory and personality, and, over the long term, make it impossible for either side to be reconciled to the truth.

III

IF THE PROSPECTS for shared truth are grim, and the prospects for reconciliation even grimmer, what is there to be said for the prospects of justice? The vital function of justice in the dialogue between truth and reconciliation is to disaggregate individual and nation, to disassemble the fiction that nations are accountable like individuals for the crimes committed in their name. The most important task of war crimes trials is to "individualize" guilt, to relocate it from the collectivity to the individuals responsible. As Karl Jaspers said of the Nuremberg trials in 1946, "For us Germans this trial has the advantage that it distinguishes between the particular crimes of the leaders and that it does not condemn the Germans collectively."

By analogy with Nuremberg, therefore, the Hague trials are not supposed to put the Serbian, Muslim, or Croatian peoples in the dock but to separate the criminals from the nation and to lay the guilt where it belongs, on the shoulders of individuals. Yet trials inevitably fail to apportion all the guilt to all those responsible.

The Nightmare from Which We Are Trying to Awake

For one thing, small fry tend to pay the price for the crimes committed by big fish, thereby reinforcing the sense that justice is not definitive but arbitrary. For another, such trials do not necessarily break the link between individual and nation. Clearly Nuremberg failed to do so: the world still regards the Germans as being collectively responsible and, indeed, the Germans themselves still accept this responsibility. The German novelist Martin Walser once wrote that when a Frenchman or an American sees pictures of Auschwitz, "he doesn't have to think: We human beings! He can think: Those Germans! Can we think: those Nazis! I for one cannot. . . ." The most that can be said for war crimes trials is that they do something to unburden a people of the fiction of collective guilt, by helping them to transform guilt into shame. This appears to have happened in Germany, to some extent. But Nuremberg alone could not have accomplished it. As Ian Buruma points out in *The Wages of Guilt*, many Germans dismissed the Nuremberg trials as nothing more than "victor's justice." It was not Nuremberg but the strictly German war crimes trials of the 1960s that forced Germans to confront their part in the Holocaust. Verdicts reached in a German courtroom benefitted from a legitimacy that the Nuremberg process never enjoyed.

Not was coming to terms with the past just a matter of digesting the message of the domestic war crimes trials. It took a million visits to concentration camps by German schoolchildren, the publication of a thousand books, the airing of the Hollywood television series *Holocaust*—a vast reckoning between generations, which is still going on.

But such a reckoning is possible only when a publicly sponsored discourse gives it permission to happen. West Germany made a collective attempt to confront its Nazi past; as a vanquished nation occupied by the Western powers, it had no choice.

In its classrooms, in its language of public commemoration, and occasionally in its leaders' public gestures of reparation and atonement, West Germany faced up to its past and, in doing so, has gradually allowed the past to become the past.

In East Germany, on the other hand, public discourse passed the burden of the Nazi past westward, to the other side of the "anti-fascist wall"; the official fiction was that the East was the heir of the Communist antifascist resistance and therefore absolved of all responsibility for Hitler's crimes. Even though this fiction must have contradicted ordinary people's memory of their own complicity with Hitler, going along with it was convenient, and for the war criminals among them, organized public amnesia provided a refuge and an exculpation. Over time, however, the public lie became a liability for the regime: official amnesia simply confirmed the suspicion that the regime, as a whole, depended for its survival on historical mendacity. When the public arena is filled with lies, private memory remains in hiding. Indeed, in East Germany, public forgetting engendered private forgetting. But over the very long term, a regime's present-day legitimacy is inevitably undermined if it persists in telling lies about the past. The very rapidity with which East Germany collapsed suggests that the gulf between public lie and private truth had created a long-standing crisis of legitimacy. The breach in the wall brought the whole flimsy structure down. Now that the Stasi is no more, East Germans must awake to the reality that they and their parents colluded not with one dictatorship but with two, Red and Black, from 1933 until 1989.

The enormity of this double inheritance explains why East Germany since 1989 has gone through the most convulsive of all attempts to purge itself of the past: state trials, truth commissions, dismissal of secret police informers, full disclosure of secret

police files. The thoroughness of the process was impressive, but its speed was suspect. It was as if the West German elite, which pushed the process through, believed that one single drastic operation could drain away the poison of the past once and for all. Perpetrators and accomplices colluded in this speedy forgiving and forgetting, and many victims did, too, simply to get on with the rest of their lives. Forgetting was made easier by the explosive invasion of the capitalist market into the East. Everyone had waited so long for the consoling bath of capitalist consumption that they could be forgiven for believing that it would cleanse them of the past as well. But the past is tenacious, simply because it holds so many clues to the present. Whenever a people ask themselves, Who are we?—as the East Germans must—they are forced to ask themselves, How did we let ourselves submit? No questions of national identity in the present can ever avoid encountering the painful secrets of the past. In this sense, as long as these questions are alive—and they are perpetually alive in Germany—there can be no forgetting.

IV

GERMANY'S ENCOUNTER with its Red and Black past was forced upon it by defeat. The Allies insisted on Nuremberg; the West Germans insisted upon de-Stasification in the East. But what happens when societies are *not* forced, by defeat, to face up to the accusing truth of the past? What happens when there are no truth commissions, no war crimes trials? Until the 1980s, Soviet Russia did not—and could not—face up to the crimes of Stalinism. Here official culture actively repressed the collective past because public knowledge of the regime's crimes would

But if the will to power of the members of the Gorbachev elite was sapped by the contradiction between their own family memories and mendacious public myth, the same was not true of many millions of ordinary party members. They felt no such contradiction or doubt. Russian society as a whole has never been de-Stalinized. There have been no truth commissions or public trials, and the party's acknowledgment of its guilty past, for example in Khrushchev's speech to the party congress in 1956, occurred only when the facts were too well known to be denied any longer. Indeed, the torturers have been decorated, promoted, and retired with honor. There have been no trials of the executioners of the Lubyanka or the camp commandants of Magadan. Thanks to Solzhenitsyn, there has been some truth about the past, but there has been no justice and hence there cannot be any reconciliation between the two Russias, between the majority who went along with the regime and the minority—whose numbers run into the millions—who were sent to the gulag. The awakening to truth remains confined to a small liberal minority of the old Gorbachev elite and the educated middle and professional classes in the big cities. For countless former party members, there is nothing to repent, nothing to apologize for. In the absence of justice, then, even the truth can be denied.

The case of contemporary Russia indicates that it is not enough to have *some* truth about the past. No matter how magnificent the efforts of Solzhenitsyn and the heroic research of people like Vitaly Shentalinsky, who forced the KGB to give up the secrets of its persecutions of Russian writers, the mere disclosure of truth—of a record of unpunished crime—does not allow the closure, the resolution that judicial trials can force a resisting society to accept.

THE WARRIOR'S HONOR

undermine whatever legitimacy the regime still retained from its successful defeat of the Nazis. Indeed, the historical mythology of the great patriotic war—of the great victory against fascism—made it extremely difficult for the society to confront the forms of Red fascism that flourished in its midst. Those who fought for the preservation of memory—Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov, Pasternak, and Akhmatova—were persecuted not simply because they demanded rights of free expression but because they spoke a truth about the regime's past that, if publicly known, would have destroyed Soviet legitimacy altogether. This truth—that the regime survived by extermination—was known to millions; hence millions had to be terrorized or killed to maintain the regime's fictions. As early as the mid-1950s, the men of Khrushchev's generation—who had only barely survived the Terror—began admitting that the cost of maintaining a regime based on historical lies was becoming prohibitive. And as a new generation—the men who came to power under Gorbachev—slowly worked their way up the hierarchy, they carried with them the stories of terror and extermination whispered to them by their parents. The increasingly flagrant contradiction between the public lies they were obliged to tell and their own private or family memories of Stalinist repression ended by undermining the Gorbachev elite's determination to hold on to power. The contradiction sowed deep doubt about the moral legitimacy of socialism in the very soul of an elite that was simultaneously confronting economic stagnation and social decomposition. As in East Germany, reconciliation with the past was possible only with the demolition of the system itself, and, as in East Germany, the collapse came very suddenly, as if the edifice had long before developed cracks in its foundation and was awaiting only a final blow from historical events.

Justice may be essential, then, but it is best to be modest about what trials can achieve. The great virtue of legal proceedings is that rules of evidence establish otherwise contestable facts. In this sense, war crimes trials make it more difficult for societies to take refuge in denial. But if trials assist the process of uncovering the truth, it is doubtful whether they assist the process of reconciliation. The purgative function of justice tends to operate on the victims' side only. While victims may feel justice has been done, the community from which the perpetrators come may feel that they have been made scapegoats. All one can say is that leaving war crimes unpunished is worse: the cycle of impunity remains unbroken, societies remain free to indulge their fantasies of denial.

V

IT IS OPEN TO QUESTION whether justice or truth actually heals. It is an article of faith with us that knowledge, particularly self-knowledge, is a condition of psychic health, yet every society, including ours, manages to function with only the most precarious purchase on the truth of its own past. Every society has a substantial psychological investment in its heroes. To discover that its heroes were guilty of war crimes is to admit that the identities they defended were themselves tarnished. Which is why a society is often so reluctant to surrender its own to war crimes tribunals, why it is so vehemently "in denial" about facts evident to everyone outside the society. War crimes challenge collective moral identities, and when these identities are threatened, denial is actually a defense of everything one holds dear.

There are many forms of denial, ranging from outright refusal to accept facts as facts to complex strategies of relativization.

In these, one accepts the facts but argues that the enemy was equally culpable or that the accusing party is also to blame or that such "excesses" are regrettable necessities in time of war. To relativize is to have it both ways: to admit the facts while denying full responsibility for them.

Resistance to historical truth is a function of group identity: nations and peoples weave their sense of themselves into narcissistic narratives that strenuously resist correction. Similarly, regimes depend for their legitimacy on historical myths that are armored against the truth. The legitimacy of Tito's regime in Yugoslavia depended on the myth that his partisans led a movement of national resistance against the German and Italian occupations. In reality the partisans fought fellow Yugoslavs as much as they fought the occupiers and even made deals with the Germans to strengthen their hand against domestic opponents. Since these facts were common knowledge to any Yugoslav of that generation, the myth of brotherhood and unity required the constant reinforcement of propaganda.

The myth of brotherhood and unity may have been pointing toward a future beyond ethnic hatred, but by lying about the past, the regime perpetuated the hatreds it was trying to get Yugoslavs to overcome. By repressing the real history of the interethnic carnage between 1941 and 1945, the Titoist regime guaranteed that such carnage would return. Competing versions of historical truth—Serb, Croat, and Muslim—that had no peaceful, democratic means of making themselves heard in Tito's Yugoslavia took to the battlefield to make their truths prevail. The result of five years of war is that a shared truth is now inconceivable. In the conditions of ethnic separation that characterize all the major successor republics to Tito's Yugoslavia, a shared truth—and hence a path from truth to reconciliation—is barred, not just by

hatreds but by institutions too undemocratic to allow countervailing truth to circulate.

It is not undermining the war crimes tribunal process to maintain that the message of its truth is unlikely to penetrate the authoritarian successor states of the former Yugoslavia. The point is merely that one must keep justice separate from reconciliation. Justice is justice, and within the strict limits of what is possible, it should be done. Justice will also serve the interests of truth. But the truth will not necessarily be believed, and it is putting too much faith in truth to believe that it can heal.

When it comes to healing, one is faced with the most mysterious process of all. For what seems apparent in the former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda, and in South Africa is that the past continues to torment because it is *not* past. These places are not living in a serial order of time but in a simultaneous one, in which the past and the present are a continuous, agglutinated mass of fantasies, distortions, myths, and lies. Reporters in the Balkan war often discovered, when they were told atrocity stories, that they were uncertain whether these stories had occurred yesterday or in 1941 or 1841 or 1441. For the tellers of the tales, yesterday and today were the same. Simultaneity, it would seem, is the dream time of vengeance. Crimes can never be safely fixed in the historical past; they remain locked in the eternal present, crying out for blood. Joyce understood that in Ireland the bodies of the past were never safely dead and buried; they were always roaming through the sleep of the living in search of retribution.

Nations, properly speaking, cannot be reconciled to other nations as individuals can be to individuals. Nonetheless, individuals are helped to heal and to reconcile by public rituals of atonement. When President Allwyn of Chile appeared on television to apologize to the victims of Pinochet's crimes of repression, he

created the public climate in which a thousand acts of private repentance and apology became possible. He also symbolically cleansed the Chilean state of its association with these crimes. German Chancellor Willy Brandt's gesture of going down on his knees at a death camp had a similarly cathartic effect by officially associating the German state with the process of atonement.

These acts contrast strikingly with the behavior of the political figures responsible for the war in the Balkans. If, instead of writing books niggling about the numbers exterminated at Jasenovac, President Tudjman of Croatia had gone to the site of the most notorious of the Croatian extermination camps and publicly apologized for the crimes committed by the Croatian Ustashe against Serbs, Gypsies, Jews, and Communist partisans, he would have liberated the Croatian present from the hold of the Ustashe past. He would also have dramatically increased the chances of the Serbian minority's accepting the legitimacy of an independent Croatian state. Had he confronted the past, the war of 1991 might have been prevented. He chose not to, of course: despite having been an anti-Ustashe partisan himself, he depended, in his campaign for independence, on support, both financial and moral, from former Ustashe in exile. Moreover it proved impossible, both for Tudjman and for much of his electorate, to admit Croatia's historical responsibility for war crimes, since it was central to the very rationale behind the drive to independence that Croats were historical victims of the aggrandizing Serbs. Nonetheless, it remains true that a gesture of atonement on Tudjman's part would have purged Croatia of its legacy of genocide; it would have invited Croats to replace self-pity and hysterical denial of the past with conscientious discourse, and it would have sent an unmistakable message of fraternity to the Serbs, perhaps preventing them from surrendering, with equal

self-pity and hysteria, to the Serbian myth that Serbs can be safe only inside a Greater Serbia. Societies and nations are not like individuals, but their leaders can have an enormous impact on the mysterious process by which individuals come to terms with the painfulness of their societies' past. Leaders give their societies permission to say the unsayable, to think the unthinkable, to rise to gestures of reconciliation that people, individually, cannot imagine. In the Balkans, not a single leader had the courage to exorcise his nation's ruling fantasies.

The chief moral obstacle in the path of reconciliation is the desire for revenge. Now, revenge is commonly regarded as a low and unworthy emotion, and because it is regarded as such, its deep moral hold on people is rarely understood. But revenge—morally considered—is a desire to keep faith with the dead, to honor their memory by taking up their cause where they left off. Revenge keeps faith between generations; the violence it engenders is a ritual form of respect for the community's dead—therein lies its legitimacy. Reconciliation is difficult precisely because it must compete with the powerful alternative morality of violence. Political terror is tenacious because it is an ethical practice. It is a cult of the dead, a dire and absolute expression of respect.

When nations or communities fight each other, they are often only continuing a conflict initiated generations earlier. What did or didn't happen at Drogheda, what Cromwell did or didn't do on his conquering passage through Ireland in the civil war—these are the obstacles that continue to stand in the path of reconciliation in the Ireland of the 1990s. Time and again, the slaughter inflicted by one side in Bosnia in 1992 was repaying a slaughter in 1942. This cycle of intergenerational recrimination has no logical end. Sons cannot—in any meaningful sense—pay their fathers'

debts or avenge their fathers' wrongs. But it is the very impossibility of intergenerational vengeance that locks communities into the compulsion to repeat. As in nightmare, each side hurls itself at the locked door of the past, seeking in vain to force it open.

Intergenerational conflict can be pacified only when both sides make elementary distinctions between guilt and responsibility. Sons are not guilty for their fathers' crimes and no peace will come until they stop feeling responsible for avenging the wrongs their fathers suffered. They do remain responsible for telling the truth about them. They must admit what was done. But they must also commit themselves to avoiding the repaying of like with like.

Reconciliation means breaking the spiral of intergenerational vengeance. It means substituting the vicious downward spiral of violence with the virtuous upward spiral of mutually reinforcing respect. Reconciliation can stop the cycle of vengeance only if it can equal vengeance as a form of respect for the dead. What each side, in the aftermath of a civil war, essentially demands is that "the other side" face up to the deaths it caused. To deny the reality of these deaths is to treat them as a dream, as a nightmare. Without an apology, without recognition of what happened, the past cannot return to its place as the past. The ghosts will continue to stalk the battlements. Of course, an apology must reflect acceptance of the other side's grief, something deeper than the Englishman Haynes's well-meaning but offhand remark in *Ulysses*: "An Irishman must think like that, I daresay. We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly. It seems history is to blame."

Joyce's great rebellion was against the idea of history as fate, compelling each generation to reproduce the hatreds of the previous one because keeping faith with the dead—honoring their

THE WARRIOR'S HONOR

memory—seems to require taking up arms to avenge them. Reconciliation built on mutual apology accepts that history is not fate, that history is not to blame. Nor are cultures or traditions—only specific individuals whom history must name. This last dimension of reconciliation—the mourning of the dead—is where the desire for peace must vanquish the longing for revenge. Reconciliation has no chance against vengeance unless it respects the emotions that sustain vengeance, unless it can replace the respect entailed in vengeance with rituals in which communities once at war learn to mourn their dead together. Reconciliation must reach into the shared inheritance of the democracy of death to teach the drastic nullity of all struggles that end in killing, the unending futility of all attempts to avenge those who are no more. For it is an elementary certainty that killing will not bring the dead back to life. This is an inheritance that can be shared, and when it is shared there can be that deep knowing that sometimes comes when one wakes from a dream.

Notes on Sources

Is Nothing Sacred? The Ethics of Television

On the Ethiopian famine of 1984 and the charitable response in Britain, I am indebted to assistance from the public relations department of Oxfam; for a study of television coverage of the famine, see William Boot, "Ethiopia: Feasting on Famine," *Columbia Journalism Review*, March-April 1985, pp. 47-49; on the background to the famine, see Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution* (1983); Graham Hancock, *Ethiopia: The Challenge of Hunger* (1985); and Ryszard Kapuscinski's brilliant portrait of the Ethiopian monarchy in decay, *The Emperor* (1983). On the origins of the idea of natural law in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, see Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories* (1979); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (1978); and Peter Stein, *Legal Evolution* (1981). On the doctrine of toleration, see Henry Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration* (1967); John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1990); Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism* (1979); and Michael Walzer, *On Tol-*

The Nightmare from Which We Are Trying to Awake

In thinking about German war guilt, I owe a debt of gratitude to Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt* (1991). Timothy Garton Ash, *The File* (1997), is essential reading on the subject of East Germany's working-through of its Communist past and its network of Stasi informers. On Gorbachev's Russia and the role of memories of Stalinism in undermining the self-confidence of the elite, see David Remnick's account in *Lenin's Tomb* (1993); see also Vitaly Shentalinsky, *Arrested Voices: Resurrecting the Disappeared Voices of the Soviet Regime* (1995). The special edition of *Index on Censorship*, vol. 25, no. 5, 1996, on *Wounded Nations, Broken Lives: Truth Commissions and War Tribunals*, contains an excellent article by Alberto Manguel on the Argentina Truth Commission. Ariel Dorfman's play *Death and the Maiden* is the most penetrating account of the issues of justice, revenge, and forgiving in the Chilean context. The best overview of truth commissions and the punishment of state crimes is Stanley Cohen's "State Crimes of Previous Regimes: Knowledge, Accountability and the Policing of the Past," in *Law and Social Inquiry*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1995. I also learned much from Avishai Margalit's published lecture "To Remember, to Forget, to Forgive," delivered at the Nexus Institute, Tilburg, Netherlands, in May 1996. Theodor Adorno's "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" is in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10, pt. 2, pp. 555-572 (1977); translation by Timothy Bahti and Geoffrey Hartman. I have discussed Jasenovac and the Croatian relationship to its Ustashe past in my *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (1993). See also Slavenka Drakulic, *Balkan Express* (1993); Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia* (1993); and Alain Finkelkraut, *Comment peut-on être croate* (1992). On national identity, see Anthony D. Smith's *National Identity* (1991). Finally, my discussion of Ireland and Irish nationalism owes much to Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland* (1988), and also his *Paddy and Mr. Punch* (1993). On Joyce, I benefited from Emer Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism* (1995), and James Fairhall, *James Joyce and the Question of History* (1993).

20, 1997. On *le droit d'intervention humanitaire*, see Bernard Kouchner, *Le Malheur des autres* (1992); for a critique of humanitarianism, see Alain Finkelkraut, *L'Humanité perdue* (1996); on the chaos narrative, see Robert D. Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth* (1996).

The Warrior's Honor

On the Red Cross, the Geneva Conventions, and the laws of war, I am indebted to François Bugnion, *Le comité international de la croix rouge et la protection des victimes de la guerre* (1994); I also consulted the annual reports of the I.C.R.C., 1990-1996, together with selected issues of its journal, *The International Review of the Red Cross*. On the Red Cross in action between 1936 and 1945, see Marcel Junod, *Warrior without Weapons* (1982); on the I.C.R.C. in the Gulf War, see Christophe Girod, *Tempête sur le Désert* (1995). For a view of the Red Cross that insists that its unspoken mission is ending war, not merely controlling it, see N. O. Berry, *War and the Red Cross* (1997); on the Red Cross in Yugoslavia, see M. Mercier, *Crimes without Punishments* (1994); Roy Gutman, *Witness to Genocide* (1993); Jan Willem Honig and Norbert Both, *Srebrenica* (1996). On Afghanistan, I benefited from Barnett R. Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan* (1995), and from discussions with Fred Halliday, professor of international relations at the London School of Economics. The best available treatment of the history of the laws of war is in the collection edited by Michael Howard, George J. Andreopoulos, and Mark R. Shulman, *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World* (1994). Finally, on the transformation of modern war, see John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (1993), together with his incomparable study, *The Face of Battle* (1977). See also Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (1991); Leroy Thompson, *Ragged War* (1994); Robert D. Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth* (1996); P. Delmas, *The Rosy Future of War* (1997); and C. H. Gray, *Postmodern War* (1997). I am especially indebted, finally, to Eric Hobsbawm's "Barbarism: A User's Guide" in his *On History* (1997).