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War and Peace: Illusions and reality

Abstract

War has always been with us. All early history is a series of accounts of wars. Because this is so we ask the question: Is war inevitable? When we consider the nature of the military arms being produced, we must turn around man's traditional way of responding to conflict. There can be no more world wars. If we have one more the planet itself will be stripped of life. Let our memory of recent disasters help us to clearly announce to our leaders that in another war we all will be losers. We must find a road to solutions that forbid the use of nuclear weapons. It is our right to live, not in fear, but in hope.

There is a scene in Stefan Zweig's play, *Jeremiah*, which has haunted me for many years. In that scene Stefan Zweig describes King Zedekiah, getting up from his bed one night and taking a walk on the walls surrounding Jerusalem. It is the last night of peace. The city is surrounded, besieged by the Babylonian soldiers and officers and commanders, and they all know that the next day it's war. Zedekiah, the King, actually had been a man of peace but because of his counsellors, his political advisors, he had given in and had to declare war on Babylon. This is, therefore, the last night for the King to know what is happening and maybe to have a feeling about the future. Here is the King walking on the walls. Nobody sees him – he is in the shadows – and therefore he can hear what people say. He hears two soldiers, one saying to the other:

"My friend, tomorrow we are going to fight. I may kill, I may die. Tell me, have you any feeling for the Babylonians?"

And the other man said, "No."

"Don't you hate them?"

He said, "No".

"Then why am I and why are you going to fight them tomorrow morning?"

And his friend said, "I don't know. We are here because the officer told us to be here."

A few steps further the same King hears two officers talk, and one says to the other, "Have you ever met the Babylonians?"

He said, "No."

"And yet tomorrow you are going to kill them."

"Yes."

"Or they may kill you."

"Yes."

"Then why?"

"I don't know," said the officer. "Our commanding officer, the General, said we should be here and fight, and we shall fight."

A few steps further, the King, still incognito, hears the General speaking to another General and he said: "Tell me, have you ever met the Babylonians?"

"Sure," said the other General. "I have. I visited Babylonia and I met my counterpart."

"Do you hate him?"

He said, "No, in fact I even know his wife and his children. They are very nice."

"And yet tomorrow you may kill them, or they may kill you."

He said, "Yes."

"Then why?"

He said, "I don't know why. I am here at the service of the King. The King wants me to fight and kill or die and I shall fight or kill or die."

Only then did the king know what despair meant. He thought that he was going to war because the people wanted it. That's what they told him, "The people want war." And now he realizes that people don't want

war. In fact nobody wants war, and yet war is here, war is there, war is everywhere. Hence the tragic implications in Stefan Zweig's play: that war is somehow an inherent part of history, that history doesn't move without war. And war – although we have nothing but abhorrence for it – is there. Nobody wants it but war is a kind of presence, a divinity in itself. In other words, war may be a metaphysical misunderstanding.

To the question, "What is war?", Paul Valerie answered: "In war people who know one another, send people who don't know one another to kill one another and die. But those who know one another stay at home very safely."

Well, I submit to you, today, that his definition, as charming as it may be, is no longer valid. If there is a war – and I hope there will be none – that war will envelope everybody. Those who know one another, and those who don't know one another.

But what is the topic that brought us here together? I like it. It speaks about myth and reality – or in French, *illusion et réalité* – and their relation to war. Now what is illusion? Is it bad, is it good – sometimes? What is reality and what is our perception of reality? What is the relationship between the illusion and reality? Must they always necessarily, inevitably, be incompatible? Could't they feed one another . . . forever? What if reality is ugly, even despairing; or despairing and even ugly? Should man accept it rather than transform it into a dream or an illusion, or a myth? In war, when all things are accelerated, time is no longer the same. It is slower and faster. For a soldier waiting for the attack, that night may last a thousand nights. And, on the other hand, time is very fast – the whole lifetime can occur and unfold in one minute, so that all history is accelerated and all distances abolished. Now in war, within the reality of war, where does reality begin and where does illusion end, or the other way around?

What is war? Definitions are available and there are many, because wars have always been part of our lives and our memories. War is naturally the paroxysm of violence. War, I would say, is legalized violence. In war all laws yield to another law: the law of violence and victory, and the victory of violence for the sake of violence. In war, whatever is virtue, becomes weakness. Compassion in war is forbidden. Cruelty on the other hand is commendable. To kill is illegal, to kill is immoral, to kill is the greatest and the gravest of all sins. Yet, in war, to kill is a good action. In other words, war is a total deformation, a total distortion of whatever creation is supposed to be.

The question for all of us – Is war inevitable? I mean, Is war really inherent in what constitutes the fabric, the matrix of history? An ancient Jewish legend tells us that war preceded creation itself. We are told that war

was waged by angels. Although, what kind of angels could they be if they had to resort to war? When angels wage war they stop being angels. But we are told in the beginning, before man was created some angels favoured the creation of man, but others opposed it. And later men themselves were involved in war. Surely you remember our forefathers Cain and Abel became the killer and the victim of one another. Later on, Abraham fought kings; Jacob was challenged by an angel. And then further on Moses, Joshua, and David waged war, more war. Only war dominated the early stages of history.

Let us remember general history, not only Jewish history or Judaeo-Christian history. Let us read the history of antiquity. The Romans, Phoenicians, Chaldeans, Babylonians, Macedonians, Greeks – their history is a history of war. So much violence dominated the endeavors, the ambitions of kings and people. Conquests, aggressions, massacres were carried out for political, religious and economic, and even literary reasons. Simply for a woman two nations went to war; for a piece of land two people went to war. Crusaders fought holy wars. Empires were won or lost; huge territories were claimed or reclaimed only to satisfy kings' ambitions, or generals' thirsts for glory. For all of them war was real; peace was an illusion. How can one explain so many people accepting war without question? Hadn't they learned anything from the past? After all, we have been warned by chroniclers and historians.

"In peace," said Herodotus, "sons bury their fathers. In war it is the opposite – fathers bury their sons." All wars are against children. They are the first victims. We have seen it again and again. Nations go to war and children die. Huge armies attack one another and children die. Children always die. The child-in-man is the first to die in war, for in war time is no longer the same. Young boys age overnight, whereas old men weep like children.

"Waging war," said Tacitus, "is to plunder, to slaughter, to steal, and these things they misname empire, and where they make a dessert they call it peace." Perhaps had war been described better – with more vigor, with more fantasy, with more emotion and more sincerity; had war been described in its terrifying horror – peace would have had a chance. Unfortunately war was glorified more often than not. Read antiquity, read all the adventures of the kings in Greece and Rome, and the Caesars. War generated excitement, whereas peace did not. Peace was an objective which, once obtained, became boredom.

Even in my own tradition, David is the hero, whereas his son Solomon was not. We remember David, and we glorified David, because he conquered so many territories and because he conquered Jerusalem. But we

remember Solomon with a smile, usually thinking "poor Solomon" because he had to deal with a thousand wives.

No, the ugliness of war, the scandal of war, the blemish of war, the obscenity of war is not seen. Tolstoy's *Stand Down and Remark* attempted to convey the inhuman aspects of human conflict, but words proved powerless – powerless to stop the plague. I hope you have read Kafka – the way I have. To me he is one of the great writers of our age. He is the prophet not only of the past but of the future as well. And to me he has divided literature into pre-Kafka and a post-Kafka, just as there is a pre-Dostoevski and a post-Dostoevski period. And I read him with admiration and emotion, often with envy. Surely you have studied and taught his letters. He loved letters, maybe because in those times there were no telephones.

I think of all the letters we have lost because of telephones. Had Spinoza had a telephone he would not have written letters to Minasha Ben Israel. Had Goethe had a telephone he would not have written letters to Ackerman. Kafka wrote letters to his father, the famous letter to his father. And he wrote many letters to his girlfriends. There is one marvelous, marvelous letter which my older colleague, and great scholar, Marcum Glasser, found. Kafka wrote two love letters, very beautiful, the same day to two different girls. He probably wanted to prove something there. He also wrote letters to his older sister. And in that correspondence, which lasted for years, from his adolescence to his death, he wrote about everything that happened to him: what he ate, whom he met, what he read, in which hospital he went, what hotel he went to. Sometimes he wrote about silly things: the laundry, what he had to pay for food, the grocery store.

All of a sudden I realized there was something wrong with Kafka's correspondence. The first world war began, the butchery of recorded history. Millions of people began butchering one another. It wasn't even what we call today a surgical operation. People had knives and bayonets and they killed one another. And Kafka the sensitive poet, the moralist, the ethical conscience of his time, didn't say a word about that war. So I went further – 1915, not a word; 1916, not a word; 1917, not a word. Worse than that, in 1918 the war is over. Now Kafka must have seen the effects of war because the invalids came from the front. I remember as a child seeing in the history books all these pictures of invalids when they came back from the front. Kafka must have seen them, surely, because he was in hospitals, and yet not a word. And then the war is over – and not a word about the fact that the war is over – at which point I almost divorced Kafka. How could Kafka not say something, how couldn't he shout with ecstasy, how couldn't he celebrate life after death? How couldn't he celebrate man's dignity after the collective death of war? Maybe Kafka decided that one cannot write about war. War is so cruel, pity so obscene, and it is so inhuman, that we shouldn't even dignify it in words. We should not take such agony and turn

it into a literary masterpiece. Now if this is the reason, then my love affair with Kafka will continue, and because I want it to continue I will say probably this was the reason. Kafka probably felt that there were no words to describe war, for war negates language. War replaces human communication. The only communication then is death. War is the instrument of death, the vehicle of death, the option of death. War is the enemy, period. War is death, and that is a scandal – a scandal, both in personal and metaphysical terms.

Now if this is what motivated Kafka not to write about the war, I am not sure he was right, for I believe that past wars have to be denounced in literature. They have to be denounced in every possible form, and in every possible forum. However, Kafka may be right, not about past wars, but about future wars, about the only future war – I mean the nuclear war. For the nuclear war, if it happens, will leave no literature behind. It will leave nothing behind.

Some years ago ABC television, in the United States, had a program called *The Day After*, a program which later on turned out to be an important statement for the 100 million Americans who had viewed that program and the debate that followed it. When the moderator and the vice-president began working on that program, they decided it must be followed by a debate, and they invited me to participate in the debate. I declined at first because I always like to say "no"; it's easier. But when they insisted, I said, "Please leave me out of it. I don't know anything about the subject. I am not a political scientist, and surely not a political person. I am ignorant of anything that has to do with politics. I'm also ignorant in nuclear science." If ever ignorance was rewarded it was then, because they said that's exactly what they needed. So I saw the film, and I must tell you I was afraid – but not because of the film. I was afraid because of the debate that followed it. The film after all is fiction but the debate was not. Some of you may have seen that program. There were the most important policy makers or decision makers past and present and future on that program. Kissinger, and McNamara, and one General. And there was I.

Now the film was long and it was fiction. You must surely remember it. It showed the nuclear destruction of a city – a city in Kansas – and then other cities. And then of course what we understood was that it was the end. It was the end. I remember especially what really frightened me in the picture was one minute when they showed the missiles after being launched, because you cannot call them back. Once that happens, destiny is in motion; it's finished.

So, they showed the film, and then the debate began. Everybody talked, and I was afraid because of a technicality. There were people who in their imagination were already fighting the Third World War. We need this

many missiles or that many missiles. And I learned some new vocabulary, like launch-upon-warning. I cannot even repeat what I heard that night. My turn came. I simply said, "I have the feeling, when I see this film, that the whole world became Jewish."

What I meant by that is the following: for 2000 years we, the Jewish people, lived in constant uncertainty, and now the whole world lives in constant uncertainty; for 2000 years we, the Jewish people, lived always on the threshold of the unknown, and now the whole world lives on the threshold of the unknown; for 2000 years we were constantly in danger, and now the whole world is in danger; for 2000 years we always depended on the capricious whim of some ruler, somewhere, anywhere, and now, once more, men and women all over the world depend on the capricious whim of a ruler somewhere, anywhere. So, now, finally the whole world feels what we have felt for 2000 years.

I believe in authenticity. That means I am a Jew and therefore I can fulfill myself, even universally, as a Jew. But a Christian should do it from the Christian tradition, a Buddhist from the Buddhist tradition, or a Muslim from a Muslim tradition. It is from within our tradition, if we are tolerant enough towards one another, that we can attain universality. I tried to communicate a certain image that now we all live united in fear.

The problem then was: what do we do with such a film? Now, the problem is: do we speak about it or do we prefer not to speak about it? Do I choose Kafka, or do I choose Jeremiah? Jeremiah spoke but he lost. The last moment before the war began Jeremiah was still urging the King not to go to war. He lost. But still his message remained. Jeremiah was a great politician, but we remember his poetry. And even more, we remember his humanity, his commitment to peace. Now, do we choose him or Kafka? Many of us would have preferred nuclear death to remain forever and ever ineffable, like God's name, unimaginable. Why? It is because what human beings imagine, they articulate, and what they articulate they do. And I don't want death to be done. On the other hand realists may argue: how could we warn against maledictions if we do not speak about them – better yet, if we do not show them in action, a kind of prefiguration in history? That's the dilemma. To speak and not to speak is equally perilous. But then we must take risks. I know life, like everything else, is a risk. A nuclear overawareness can easily be reduced to banality. If nuclear destruction is nothing more than science fiction movies, or cheap television programs, then why worry. You can always change the channel, can't you? But not to create awareness, not to speak up, not to pull the alarm would lead to indifference which, in my view, is surely one step away from the final explosion.

When I have a problem I go back to the source. My source is the Bible. I come from a very religious upbringing and therefore I still study it,

and I love studying it. If I have a question, I go back to the collective memory which is the Scriptures. So I try to find a precedent in Scripture to our predicament today. Has the world ever faced total annihilation? And the answer is: yes, it has, a long time ago. You remember grandfather Noah? Remember the flood? Noah is not my favorite character. I don't like him because I find him weak and also a bit selfish. He was weak because whatever God told him to do he did. God said, "Get yourself a private circus." He got a private circus. He said, "Build yourself an ark." He built an ark. But who was saved? Only Noah and his family. Now I would have preferred Noah to say: "God, Almighty God, I am not ready to be your partner in that. I don't want to remain alive while thousands and thousands of people die. I don't want to survive thousands of children." Why didn't he say that? But when you read the story of Noah, at the end of the forty days, the legendary forty days, what do we read? That God saved Noah. By the way, what did Noah do after he survived? The first thing was good. He brought an offering to God. After all, it was the least he could have done. Then he got drunk! To have survived the world's greatest disaster, and all he could do was get drunk. But then God said to Noah, "I'll make a deal with you. I promise you that never again shall I destroy the world with floods. Look at the rainbow and this will be the covenant. According to that covenant you will remember – your children will remember – I will never destroy the world with another flood."

When I read the story for the first time I loved it. I slept better. But ancient texts, as you know, must be reread. The difference between a classical text and a modern text is very simple. Occasionally you read something that you like in a modern text, but when you read it again you like it less; after you have read it five times you don't care about it at all. An ancient text is just the opposite. You start, it's difficult; the second time, less difficult; the fifth time, you see its dazzling beauty. But you must reread it. So I reread the story and I got worried. I realized God is a lawyer. He used fine print. He said to Noah, "I promise you I will not destroy the world with floods" – which means water. But we know today our problem is not water. The problem is fire, nuclear fire. Why didn't God say: "I will never destroy the world, period." Since he was in a good mood he could have said it. But then I reread it the third time and then I got really worried, because God said, according to scripture, "I promise you I will never destroy the world with fire or water." We know. The world is in danger now because of man. Man can destroy the world, not God. And we know that man is capable of making the impossible possible. Man has now the ability to destroy the world by nuclear fire.

Can man be trusted? Whatever the answer, we must take into account two elements. One, unlike any other war before, in this war no mistakes are possible. They cannot be corrected. One false move, one wrong decision and the angel of death would rule over creation. Once the missiles are launched they cannot be recalled. It is irreversible. Two, let us remember

with anguish, that as soon as society was in possession of nuclear weapons, it used them, all, in their totality. And I refer to 1945. The United States had two bombs, and both were dropped, over Japan.

Now could an accident provoke a general universal catastrophe? Are nuclear accidents possible? No philosopher, no prophet would tell you that they are not. Accidents by definition are possible. When the Challenger exploded, like everyone else I felt pain and sadness, for the people, for the seven human beings who were killed, and beyond, for the national trauma that had invaded the United States. But I also felt fear. I thought: this vehicle was guarded, inspected, cajoled, loved, perfected by thousands of the best scientific minds of the United States. They knew every fibre, every cell, every atom of that instrument, and yet ... Now can anyone guarantee that a missile somewhere in America, directed at Russia will not go off by accident? Can anyone guarantee that the same thing couldn't happen there? They're human beings after all, both in Russia and in America. Can anyone tell me with certainty that a Russian missile pointed at America will not fire by itself? The whole absurdity of nuclear war, the whole disgrace of nuclear confrontation can be resumed in this one possibility of accident. We have seen in history what accidents can do.

One man provoked the First World War. He shot at the Crown Prince Ferdinand. One bullet, and human kind has known unprecedented massacres from that time. Today the planet is so vulnerable. There are so many wounds, so many scars on the planet.

Can anyone guarantee that an accident would not happen? And once it happens, scientists say it would take twenty seven minutes either way for a missile to hit a target. Twenty seven minutes! I was talking to a friend of mine who is a professor in stress psychology and he tried to explain to me what it would mean for the President of the United States or for General-Secretary Gorbachev, once he gets the news that it has been launched. He must first ascertain that it's not a false alarm, then call together a few generals, then he must be sure that the cabinet members or the supreme commanders are in safety – all that in twenty seven minutes. Then they have to decide whether to answer or not to answer. Can anyone really believe that their decision would be a rational decision under such stress?

Futhermore, what about terrorists? I read a novel years ago about a terrorist who held a whole city hostage because he had a missile at his disposal. Just imagine a few years from now in the year 2000 when science and technology will be so advanced that a terrorist will have a kind of pocket-sized nuclear weapon. If they have now already these plastic weapons, these plastic bombs that are so small, like a wallet, why not think that one day they will have small nuclear weapons? And then what? I do not believe that the great powers – either the Soviet Union or the United

States – will ever start a nuclear war. I don't believe it, because the leaders and the people are responsible, and they know what it means. They wouldn't do it. What I do say is that small nations, small rulers, dictators, could get hold of nuclear weapons. Once it begins, who can tell me where it would end?

What, then, is there left for us to do? I have the feeling that we are in a train dashing toward the abyss, and all we may be able to do – we citizens, writers, teachers, poets, philosophers, professors of religion, students – is pull the alarm. Unless the system is broken, unless there is malfunction of the alarm system, we may have a chance. I suggest to you that we must use that chance. I too am a teacher, and I too am in touch with young people. And I cannot tell you what it means to me to be in touch with young people. I saw young people forty years ago and I saw what the enemy did to them. Since then every youngster, every child is to me a source of incredible beauty and, at the same time, of incommensurate anguish. I think of these young people and I feel sorry for them, for we destroyed their future – long ago. And all we, their teachers, tell them now is build something new on the ruins of our past. And to their honour, and to their credit, these young people, with their exquisite naivete, are listening and they are trying. How can we not help them? May I be more specific? I believe that we have a shield, and our shield is memory. If we remember we may save ourselves and future generations. If we forget we too shall be forgotten. This is more or less what we must tell our leaders. (I am very pleased that you have invited the representatives from the Soviet Union to this conference, for maybe they will take back the message that I humbly submit to all of us and to them.) They, too, must remember in order for them to come in touch with humankind's despairing memories . . . I would suggest to all our leaders, that the next summit conference, which I believe must take place, should take place not in Washington, or in Geneva, nor should it take place in any luxurious cultural conference centre in the world. I would suggest that President Reagan and General-Secretary Gorbachev meet in Hiroshima. I am convinced that in Hiroshima they would all reflect differently; they would speak differently; they would argue differently because there they would enter our collective memory.

But even if nothing practical would come out of such a summit, and I hope it would, just think of the poetic impact such a meeting would have on the world, on the young people in the world. It would prove to us that our leaders on both sides are sensitive to symbols and therefore to human passions and to memories.

Memories are symbols too, and therefore we must invoke them, although in doing so we may open new wounds. Clearly I refer now to the other tragedy, the unprecedented tragedy that had already struck my generation and therefore your generation as well. I speak about what

happened during the Second World War to so many people, including the Russian people but, above all, to the Jewish people because it happened so singularly, so specially, so differently. And I speak about this with some reticence and not without trepidation. All my adult life may serve as witness to my profound belief that that event must not be used for abuse, for philosophical, literary, or political reasons. I believe that Auschwitz is beyond literature and that Treblinka defies theology

Faced with a general tendency in all fields, in most languages, to trivialize, to commercialize, to cheapen, to dilute a tragedy that has no precedent in recorded history, I felt even stronger that it was our duty to raise our voice in protest. Easy parallels were drawn, vulgar analogies made. I remember a poor neglected neighbourhood in New York or in Los Angeles was compared to the Warsaw ghetto. I remember that the killing of seven innocent people was headlined in a respected newspaper as a holocaust. What was paradigmatic evil and agony to a people, the Jewish people, but beyond the Jewish people to so many others, had become a point of analogy and was now used to describe accidents or muggings.

With regard to the nuclear peril I think we may in good conscience evoke our recent past and see in it, if not an analogy, at least a point of reference. What happened once to one people happened later to others and now could happen to the whole world. Even after Auschwitz the planet is in danger. Never before has the planet lived in the shadow of total extinction. Never before has the planet known such fear. To save one human life, we may violate most laws of our Torah, of the religion. I believe we may overcome our hesitations and say paradoxically that the memory of Auschwitz could very well save the world from the next catastrophe, the Hiroshima of tomorrow.

Auschwitz was possible because few people cared. The killers killed and the victims perished. True, there was a war going on, a glorious war, for the Allied Forces fought gloriously and valiantly, magnificently. Still the killers saw in their war another war. So the killers killed, and children died, and the world was silent, and Auschwitz became possible because of the indifference surrounding it; or at least because of what the killers considered as indifference. In other words, indifference to destruction is complicity; indifference to death is death.

There were men and women who, in those times of darkness, tried to warn their contemporaries. People refused to listen. I shall never forget a man, a gentle and learned man who had returned from the mass grave to tell the tale. As the only survivor of his family and the community he told us what he had endured. His memories were descriptive, graphic, realistic, and heart-breaking. But people refused to believe. "He is mad," they said. Even I, a child, did not believe him. I listened to him because I liked stories. But

after a while he stopped speaking. He withdrew into his own world, deepening within his own silence. He had spoken and no one paid attention. Are we going to listen to him now?

I have a question for you: If Auschwitz has not put an end to war, what will? I was convinced in 1945 that after Auschwitz there would be no more war. I was convinced that just then, when we had seen humanity without masks, when we had all the reasons in the world to despair of human kind totally, just then we had known the profoundest sense of hope. We thought that never again will people be stupid enough, and criminal enough, to fight war and kill one another. Never again will children be the victims. Never again will people die of hunger. Never again will there be bigotry and fanaticism and racism. I remember then that we had known such an exhalation that it became an echo of ancient prophetic dreams.

Now, forty years later! Do you know that there have been forty wars that have been recorded since 1945? Twenty one million have lost their lives in wars since 1945. There is now a limited regional war about which we know nothing – the Iraqi-Iranian war. We don't even know why they are fighting. But we do know a million people have lost their lives in that war including, we are told, 100,000 children because they were used to clear mine fields. If Auschwitz didn't save the world from more stupidity and cruelty and war, what will?

Summary and Conclusion

I suggest to you memory as a shield. Furthermore, based on memory and inspired by memory, there are certain practical things that we must learn now. First of all, we must de-romanticize war and we must come out and say, with all the strength that we can muster, that there is no beauty in war; that there is no glory in war, for there is no beauty in death, and surely not in collective death. There is no glory in violence, and surely not in mass violence. There is no salvation in hate, for hate generates only more hate. One begins by hating others, then one hates oneself. Ultimately hate is hate of life. Hate leads to war. And what is war if not the glorification of hate and of death?

Abraham Lincoln spoke of war and said: "Military, that attractive rainbow that rises in showers of blood, that serpent's eye that charms to destroy." Well, I don't know whether we can stop war, but at least what we must do now, before war is about to break out, is to make war less charming, and violence less attractive.

Second, we must educate people so they realize that the reality of nuclear war would do away with all illusions. There can be no illusions about nuclear war. This war would bring no peace. In the past every war

was supposed to be the last war. But this one would be the last for it would result in collective, ultimate, total destruction.

Third, we must make people understand that if previous wars resulted in countless human tragedies, nuclear war would be an inhuman tragedy. It would not be nation against nation, human being against human being. It would be instrument against instrument, machine against machine. And human beings, all human beings, would have left only one part to play, the only one, the part of victims.

Fourthly, we must remember that all frontiers, then, will be abolished between nations, and religions, and ideologies, and races, and cultures. Once the fire is lit, it will spread everywhere.

I have written a novel in which I described a pogrom in the beginning of the century. It was a pogrom like all other pogroms. For some silly, stupid reason they accused Jews of killing a boy for Passover. And the boy wasn't killed, not by Jews. But still they began a pogrom. And the mob came to the Jewish quarter of a city in Eastern Europe and lit a fire. And all the Jewish houses of study began burning. And the Jewish houses of worship began burning. And all the Jewish houses began burning. But then the fire began spreading, and then homes were burning, and the school was burning and the market place was burning, and the church was burning and the bakery was burning and the butcher shop was burning. And soon the whole town was burning. And my protagonist, the last survivor, looking at the fire from a distance, suddenly felt anguish and fear. He had never been so afraid in his life. And he understood why. He had just had a glimpse of the future.

Is war inevitable? The answer that is offered by history is discouraging. Yes, we know that too many armed conflicts have been recorded to prove it. And yet, if we reinforce our axiomatic conviction that memory must play a role in all considerations and that nuclear war is different, perhaps even ontologically different from all wars, then what was true of the past may not be true of the present, and of the future. This war may be avoided precisely because it would be different. Total fear, or fragmented fear of total death, could be beneficial for humankind. Would peace ensue? I am not that naive to entertain such illusions. Prophets and poets advocated it in vain. Isaiah's dream remained what it was, a melancholy illusion. Shakespeare dreamed of a peace which would be the nature of a conquest, for then both parties nobly are subdued, and neither party is the loser. But human nature being what it is, man being condemned not to be at peace with himself, universal peace cannot be lasting and real. It is not given to man to alter the laws of nature to such an extent. But it is given to man to see to it that his quest for peace be real and genuine. I am not against peace as an illusion. I am against the quest for peace as an

illusion. Let man's quest be profound and genuinely motivated, and his endeavors would be their own justification. Should our quest for peace inspire children in search of future, adults in search of hope, old men and women in search of humanity, there would be only one loser, death. I speak illusions perhaps, but from what I have learned, from what my teachers and their teachers have learned, is only this: one person's life weighs more than all that has been written and said about life. One minute before we die we are still immortal. One minute of peace, of life, one minute of immortality is perhaps all we shall get as a result of our quest, as a result of our efforts, but that must be sufficient. Were that minute to be mine alone, it would be an illusion. For it to be yours as well, it would, in my eyes, be endowed with intense reality and nobility.

In conclusion, I owe you my sincerity. I am pessimistic. I am pessimistic because I read newspapers the way you do and I feel that history has undertaken a march towards death. I also believe that if we are aware of it, we can stop it. I am pessimistic and therefore I believe that we are justified to invoke despair as our condition. We have all the reasons in the world today to despair of humankind, of the future. I also believe that it is up to us to enter that despair, but not to be vanquished by it. It is possible for us to confront it and turn it around. And what could become a source of weakness may become a source of strength. In other words, a tale of despair actually means a tale against despair. So, as long as we tell this tale, as long as we continue to teach our students and our children and ourselves, as long as we meet in gatherings such as this to join our efforts and our energies and our imaginations, and say to ourselves there is something in man and in civilization that is worth saving, there is something in all of us that affirms our right to live not in fear but in hope. As long as we invoke that hope, even if it is rooted in fear, hope is possible.