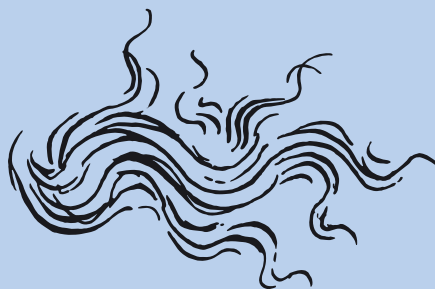
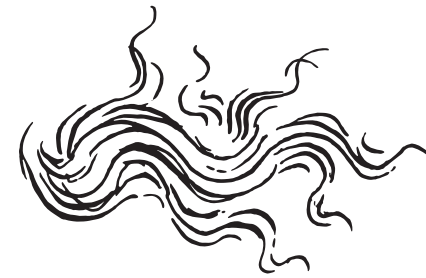


CULTURE AND POLITICS

Liberties



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*Accept the truth from
whoever utters it.*

MAIMONIDES

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MARK LILLA

The Once and the Now

*You will never be again
What you never were before.*

THEODOR STORM

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Every morning Odysseus sits on the beach and casts his eyes across the sun-freckled water. The breeze is fresh and the waves rumble gently as they break. He is crying. For seven years he has been a prisoner in paradise, the unwilling consort of the beautiful nymph Calypso, who loves and fawns on him. Odysseus can't bear it. Since leaving Troy victorious, he has wandered the seas, hounded by the god Poseidon, who would prevent him from finding his way home to Ithaca. Eventually Zeus is driven to pity and orders Calypso to release him. "Where shall a man find sweetness to surpass his own home and his parents? In far lands he shall not, though he find a house of gold." Odysseus

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builds himself a raft, and after one last night of lovemaking and weeping he sails off alone.

The home we return to is never the home we left. When Odysseus lands on Ithaca, he learns that his estate has been occupied by suitors vying for the hand of his wife Penelope, and dissipating his fortune while they wait. Odysseus comes to her, disguised as a beggar, and kills the suitors. After he proves to her who he is, the couple goes to their bed, which Odysseus had made with his own hands, using a tree planted in the ground as one of the bedposts. They make love and fall asleep. There is no space between the two of them, between the couple and Odysseus's handiwork, between the bed and the tree, between the tree and the earth. It as if they all sprang fully formed from the soil of Ithaca. Oneness has been restored. At least for now.

The fate of Aeneas was to be different. Troy was no more, vanquished by the craven guile of the Greeks. As they poured from the belly of the wooden horse to destroy the city, Aeneas reached for his sword to resist. But Venus in a vision urged him to flee with others. A priest grabbed the fetish statues, their defeated gods, and headed for the ships, while Aeneas lifted his father onto his back and followed. In the confusion he became separated from his wife, and would never see her again. As the ship made for open seas, he watched the flames consume everything he had ever known, then turned his back on Troy forever. Odysseus would face many more dangers and suffer worse deprivations than Aeneas would on his journeys, but the Greek knew that Ithaca still existed in time and space, that hope for return was not vain. This balm is denied Aeneas. Only ashes litter the site of ancient Troy, and no Penelope awaits him.

The *Aeneid* is not about loss, though. It is a phoenix story of rebirth, about a city rising, quite literally, out of the flames.

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The Once and the Now

While on his journey Aeneas makes a stop at Delos to consult the oracle about his fate, and he receives an enigmatic reply. *The land of your ancestors will welcome you again, return to her generous breast. Seek out your ancient mother.* He is baffled. But soon he has a dream in which his fetishes confirm the prophecy: *your home is elsewhere.*

That elsewhere would turn out to be Rome. The fetishes convince Aeneas that his ancestors were originally from the Italian peninsula, and not from Anatolia. By migrating to Italy, Aeneas will only be recovering what was rightfully his, just as Odysseus did when he returned to Ithaca. By building a new city inspired by Troy, and by making it more magnificent than the one he came from, invincible and prepared to conquer the world, Aeneas will in a sense be moving backward and forward in time simultaneously. Throughout his journey the gods confirm that this is his destiny. He is made to visit Hades and finds it crowded with Roman heroes of the future, who all look up to him as to a father. He is called to be the redeemer of history, the link between past and future. He accepts, and the poem then recounts in bloody detail how he conquered the native tribes and, in the book's last lines, brutally killed a rebel leader who had come to surrender. Yes, he thinks, laying down his sword in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.



Nostalgia is a mood that mixes pleasure and pain in equal measure. Consider photographs. Why do we take them? Ask parents this question and they are likely to say that they want to preserve the memory of their children at every stage of development, so that one day they can look back and measure the time traversed. Photography is an exercise in anticipatory

nostalgia. We foresee that come a certain age we will want to experience an odd pleasure that comes from reflecting on what has been lost.

Yet how to describe the flood of feelings set off by seeing all those pictures? There are the simple pleasures of self-recognition, of recalling happiness and pride, of seeing life as a continuum, of reliving the journey. There is also bitter with the sweet. Baby pictures bring out longing for a time when the child was an innocent wonder, and regret over not having appreciated how fleeting it would be. It is a pain that the arrival of grandchildren only partially relieves. Vacation pictures remind us, or delude us into thinking, that family relations were once simpler and happier than they are now. We see ourselves, thinner and with more hair, looking carefree as we cradle the nursing baby or put our arms around wet, shivering, reluctant teenagers on a beach. This brings pain, then pleasure in the pain. There is something mildly masochistic about the family album.

Do we really want to return to the past conjured up by the images? In the end, no. Whenever we have tried to relive moments from the past, we have almost always experienced disappointment. The old neighborhood we visit looks shabby and dull. The ex-lover we invite for a drink does, too. Psychologists suggest that the suffering nostalgic does not really want to possess the lost object, he only wants to preserve the bitter-sweet desire for it. Actually retrieving it or accepting its loss would rob him of a feeling he has structured his life around. He is stuck, unable to let the past go. And his resistance to getting unstuck is tenacious, since it would force him to acknowledge the open horizon before him. Freud developed psychotherapies to free people of that fear. No such therapy has yet been found for nostalgic societies.

Nations and peoples fall into nostalgic moods just as individuals do. It is hard to think of societies that don't romanticize their origins. The myths they conjure up combine innocence and grandeur in varying proportions. *Once we were simple and pure! Once we were strong!* Or, most powerfully of all, *Once we were strong because we were simple and pure!* The parallel between individual and collective nostalgia only takes us so far, though. No matter how much I embellish my memories and force them into neat narratives to make sense of myself, the experiences I remember are my own, not someone else's. The first-hand memory of nations does not extend further back than a single human lifespan, less than a century. Every literate society's image of its past is necessarily mediated by embellished accounts handed down over the years, even millennia, and modified at each step. Or by retrospective attempts to reconstruct events and past psychological experience from shards that we in the present deem to be relevant. All history is pastiche. In pre-literate societies, collective memories from the distant past are imbedded in rituals; they are remembered by being reenacted, not heard or read. Literate societies remember through articulate myths and narratives whose second-hand, constructed nature has to be veiled if the stories are to hold their power.

It is always surprising to learn that an ancient tradition is not so ancient after all. Two amusing examples happen to concern the Scots. In the mid-eighteenth century, a poet of some talent named James MacPherson published what he claimed to be the English translation of fragments of an ancient Gaelic epic. It had been composed, he asserted, by a mysterious blind bard of the third century C.E. named Ossian — the Homer of the Scottish Highlands, a lie that appealed to the proto-Romantic mood of European letters at the time.

The poems — which MacPherson seems to have written by drawing from Irish poem cycles — were welcomed not only by his fellow nationalists but also by some of the greatest thinkers and poets of the age, including Goethe, who placed translated fragments of Ossian in one of his works. Dutch and German artists painted scenes found in the tales, Napoleon read and admired them, and a French opera based on them was a smash hit during his reign. From the start doubts were raised about the epic's authenticity by, among others, Samuel Johnson, who when asked whether he thought any man from the present age could have written it, replied, *Yes, sir, many men, many women, and many children.* MacPherson never produced the Gaelic manuscripts that he claimed to have translated. Still, the poem continued to be read and translated throughout the nineteenth century and fed nostalgia across Europe for a pre-imperial, pre-industrial age.

Another symbol of Scotland's heroic age, the clan kilt, has little more foundation in history than do the Ossian poems. There is no evidence of distinctive Highland dress before the sixteenth century, when Scots typically wore a long shirt covered by a belted cloak, sometimes made of murky tartan. The skirt we now call the kilt was in fact invented in the eighteenth century by an English Quaker manufacturer who wished his scantily clad Scottish factory workers to be properly dressed. Once kilts caught on, regional stylistic variations developed, but there were no distinctive clan tartans. The skirt experienced some popularity among workers, until it was banned by the British after the rebellion of 1745. Not until the English ban was lifted in 1782 did the kilt become a nationalist badge of honor, worn mainly by gentry wishing to play up their real or imagined highland roots. After the Napoleonic wars, during which the Scottish

kilt was observed by armies across Europe, it was extolled by Romantics fascinated with noble primitives, which is what they considered the Highlanders to be. Only thereafter did distinctive plaids become associated with clans, thanks to the marketing genius of a clothing manufacturer who developed his own fanciful pattern book, arbitrarily assigning this or that tartan to particular clans.

The practice continues to this day. In 2016, a Scottish rabbi registered a “kosher Jewish tartan” with the official Register of Tartans, which itself had only been established in 2008. The garment has gold to represent the Ark of the Covenant, silver to represent the Torah, and blue and white to represent the Israeli flag. It now festoons kilts, neckties, and yarmulkes. Golf balls with the tartan pattern are also available for purchase.



Nostalgia can be fun. Anyone with a good internet connection can now research his lineage himself or with the help of very profitable businesses that promise an ancestry worth celebrating. But when an entire nation or people or faith begins searching for lost time, darker emotions and fantasies emerge. Political nostalgia transforms a feeling that things are not as they should be into the conviction that things are not what they once were. Everything hangs on that *once*. Once we were innocent and pure, now we are not. Once we were kings, now we are slaves. Once we lived in Eden, now we live in Los Angeles or Cairo or Dubai. Once we were nigh unto gods, now we are all too human.

The impulse to see the human condition as the result of a temporal fall from perfection is widespread in human culture, and there are numerous versions of the myth of the Golden

Age. The one told by the ancient Greek poet Hesiod is the most familiar to us. Frustrated by his lazy, shiftless brother Perses, Hesiod wrote a poem to explain to him why human beings had to work. He described a divinely created golden race that once lived off of the fruit of the earth without toil. But when this race disappeared, each subsequent one was fatally flawed and now we must live in the age of iron. For us, life is toil and suffering, and so it will remain until our destruction. That end is inevitable, but it can be postponed if we are decent, law-abiding, and respect the gods. Hesiod does not dangle before his brother any hope of returning to the Golden Age or of entering a new one. His message is: back to the plow.

The modern historical imagination is not terribly drawn to moral parables like this one, but it is still subject to the entwined emotions of hope in the future and nostalgia for the past. No sooner had poets and thinkers in the Renaissance announced the rebirth of ancient learning than their adversaries began romanticizing the older darkness. It is remarkable how quickly nostalgia for the Middle Ages grew up in Europe after they ended. Already in the seventeenth century there was a vast literature, mocked by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*, that extolled the medieval chivalric virtues of simplicity and valor, which stood in contrast to the new bourgeois spirit of gain and the terrifying impersonal mechanization of warfare. By the nineteenth century, Romantics such as John Ruskin were stoking a passion for Gothic architecture and the ruins of Catholic Europe, and encouraging architects to return to the old forms. The more advanced the nineteenth century became in science, industry, and even politics, the more nostalgic it became in spirit. Such are the hydraulics of historical consciousness.

The modern literature of nostalgia is enormous. Rare, though, are writers who explore the psychology of this longing without succumbing to it themselves. The Sicilian writer Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa was an exception. His only novel, *The Leopard*, published posthumously in 1958, is the most poignant portrait we have of nostalgic melancholy — and its futility. It concerns a fictitious Count of Salinas, the last of a line of Sicilian aristocrats, who can only be a spectator as the world familiar to him evaporates before his eyes in the late nineteenth century. Trains replace carriages, revolutionaries demand a democratic state, and a new class of greedy, untrustworthy arrivistes take advantage of distracted nobles who care more about observing the gentleman's code than turning a profit.

Lampedusa, himself the last prince of his line in Italy, is subtle. The aristocracy that he portrays is no longer glorious; it is lethargic, anemic. It is dying of wounds self-inflicted over centuries and prefers ruminating on the past to seizing the present. When the Prince's forward-looking nephew tells him, famously, that *if we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change*, he sees the point. But he and his class are incapable of acting on it. *They are coming to teach us good manners. But they won't succeed, because we think we are gods... We were the Leopards, the Lions; those who will take our place will be little jackals, hyenas.* There is no anger in his voice. He knows himself and his class, and he has reconciled himself to its fate. *The Leopard* is an elegy, not a tragedy. The sun has set. It takes a great soul to recognize this without betraying memories of the past or succumbing to hatred of the present. The prince gives all honor due to the lost world, but he is immune to fantasies of recovering it.



Feeling inferior is no easier for nations and cultures than it is for individuals. Powerful empires can also live with chips on their shoulders — even the greatest of all, Rome. It grew from a small city into an extensive empire within a cultural arena dominated by the Greeks. The religion, the art, the architecture, the literature, the philosophy, the sciences — to none of these could the Romans lay exclusive claim. Their cultural dependence made Roman elites double-minded. On the one hand, they had Greek masters educate their children, knowing that their cultural status in society would depend partly on how well they spoke the language and mastered the literature. Their palaces were full of copies of Greek sculptures. On the other, the Romans felt shame at their own belatedness and their dependence on the achievements of another people. Imitators can never fully respect themselves. And so, at different points in their history, even after Rome had entirely subjugated Greece militarily, they rebelled against Greek high ideals and asserted pride in things that distinguished themselves from their rivals. Romans, they told themselves, are simple and direct, not slippery and refined like the Hellenes. They are doers, not talkers, honest, not treacherous, courageous, not cowardly, tanned and strong, not pale and weak. Roman-ness (*Romanitas*) was the pinnacle of virtue and everything that came from the Greeks carried a disease (*morbus graecus*).

The Romans were always haunted by the specter of decline, always worrying that their vital essence was being sapped or had already disappeared. Fixing the moment when Roman decadence began was a parlor game that educated Romans loved to play. Already in the late republican period, when Roman power was rapidly expanding, nostalgic patricians such as Cato the Elder were railing against the effects of luxury, declaring that Rome was losing its rustic virility and

becoming effeminate. He was especially obsessed with Greek philosophers. When a group of them visited Rome he made speeches against them, declaring in the Senate, as if he were a prophet or a seer, that Rome would lose its empire if its youth listened to them. He then managed to get them banned from the city and transported back to Greece.

Rome's experience with Greece has become a global psychological experience. Beginning in the eighteenth century, due to trade and then to colonialism, and today with travel and the internet, non-Western countries and cultures have had no choice but to confront the modern West as idea and reality. And simultaneously to confront themselves. For all their interest today in cultural encounter, contemporary historians generally lack the psychological acuity that ancient historians once brought to the study of relations among peoples. Herodotus would not have been surprised to learn how significantly the dynamics of cultural pride and shame have shaped global history in the modern era, since they did so in the ancient world as well.

Nineteenth-century Russia was an extraordinary theater for this kind of drama. Long before Napoleon tempted the fates by marching on Moscow, Russia felt itself invaded by the West. Ideas associated with the Enlightenment were first introduced by Peter the Great at the beginning of the eighteenth century and inspired his radical, and much resented, reforms. Catherine the Great, who cultivated personal relations with the French *philosophes*, pushed those reforms further. More important, the French-speaking elite also embraced these ideas and began educating their children along modern European lines, much as the Romans used to send theirs to Greek tutors. And as in Rome, a powerful intellectual and political reaction to these changes then set in.

In the great novels of Turgenev and Dostoevsky, we are witness to clashes between modernizers and anti-modernizers, Westernizers and chauvinists, atheists and neo-orthodox Slavophiles, fathers and sons. The Russians were perhaps the first to go through a political-intellectual cycle that has become familiar elsewhere in the world: a nation or culture encounters the modern West and, at first, feels backward and humiliated, and so begins to slavishly imitate its ways. When the expected benefits of modernization do not materialize — or when they do, but with unexpected consequences — a reaction sets in. At that moment there arises from the depths of the nostalgic imagination the idea of returning to an idealized past. Then ideological movements spring up promising to do just that, to lead the way out of Egypt and back to the Promised Land.

The Slavophiles were one such movement, or family of movements. The questions that they asked were not foolish ones. What will happen to religious faith if we modernize? How can traditional authority be maintained? Will common decency and fellow feeling die out? And art as well? As Dostoevsky once put it, will a pair of boots or a barrel of oil become more valuable than Shakespeare or Raphael? For the Slavophiles, modernization meant the destruction of all that was virtuous and noble in the traditional Russian way of life. But like so many nostalgic political activists, they had trouble distinguishing the modern innovations themselves from the Western countries that had brought them to Russia. They were incapable of seeing modernization as a general historical process that only happened to begin in the West, and was originally directed against traditional life there as well. Instead the Slavophiles convinced themselves that modernization was the fullest realization of a distinctive Western culture, and all that was wrong with it. The struggle that they saw

was not between pre-modern and modern life everywhere, it was between the West and the rest. Their writings endlessly repeat the same refrain: the Western *mind* is rigid, abstract, rationalistic, and so fixated on the future that it destroys life in the present, while the Russian *soul* and *heart* are authentic, charitable, devout, and bring everything into harmony. The same tropes litter the literature of political Islamism, which purports to explain *the obvious incongruity between the Once and the Now*, as one revered thinker put it.



When Augustus declared himself emperor in 27 BCE, nostalgia became official state policy. After the Civil Wars, with their intrigues and senseless slaughter, at a time when the *urbs romana* was already sinking into the decadence that Tacitus and Suetonius would later chronicle, Augustus made an effort to re-instill civic virtue by giving patronage to artists and writers who were to celebrate ancient *Romanitas*. Bucolic poetry — a Greek invention, as it happens — became the rage and invoked a mythical past when Latin shepherds led simple lives tending to their sheep, playing the flute, and singing of love to blushing maidens. Other works, such as the *Aeneid*, gave Rome a noble mythical history independent of the Greeks, something crucial for self-respect. Its great innovation, though, was to redirect nostalgia for the past toward the future and raise the prospect of leapfrogging over the present to arrive at a utopian world to come. All the energy that old republicans such as Cato once wasted trying to call Romans back to a lost Golden Age was now freed up to inaugurate a new one.

The ideologies of modern fascism are all heirs to the *Aeneid*. Nazism, though, was also inspired by an obscure

work of Tacitus's called *On Germany*. It was an odd choice of subject for the ancient historian, since it seems that he never once set foot in Germany. His account, drawn from various sources including Caesar's memoirs, appear to have been written largely for contemporary polemical purposes. Tacitus deplored the decadence of the empire, which he later evoked so vividly in his *Annals* and *Histories*, and *On Germany* appears to be an early, veiled attempt to criticize it. The book describes a strong rustic people resembling the ancient Latin tribes: rude, truthful, loyal, united, proud, belligerent. They knew neither luxury nor adultery. Encouraged by women baring their breasts, men marched off singing into battle, indifferent to cold and hunger. And any man who had not killed an enemy had to go unshaven and wear a ring in his nose, as signs of his shame. The contrast between these Teutons and the imperial Romans could not be greater, which was Tacitus' point. Over the centuries *On Germany* became a reference for writers in many countries who condemned the decadence of their time, and it contains many of the commonplaces about noble savages that one finds throughout European literature. The book became particularly popular in German lands after Luther translated it, no doubt to contrast the corruptions of papal Rome with the virtuousness of his own flock.

Luther's translation also became a key source for *völkisch* thinkers of the nineteenth century who wanted to distinguish the earthy culture of rural Germany from the salon culture being imported from effeminate France. They quoted approvingly Tacitus' report that the Teutons practiced a brutal justice, killing slaves if they seriously disobeyed, drowning traitors and deserters in the swamps, and in some cases practicing human sacrifice. But one sentence in particular drew their attention. It is where Tacitus says, in passing, that *I accept the*

view of those who think that the peoples of Germania have never been tainted by intermarriage with other nations, and stand out as a race distinctive, pure and unique of its kind. He goes on to describe them as blue-eyed and ruddy-haired, with immensely strong bodies that could bear severe cold and hunger. In these passages the modern racial “theorists” found their ur-text. Just as Rome was supposedly weakened and collapsed due to racial mixing with the peoples it conquered, so Germany was threatened by mixing with alien races and cultures, particularly the Jews. This is how *On Germany* became, in the words of one Nazi propagandist, *a bible that every thinking German should possess, as this booklet by the Roman patriot fills us with pride in our forefathers’ superior character.*

For a nostalgic like Heinrich Himmler, Tacitus’s portrayal of racially pure and belligerent Teutons in their dark forests provided sufficient mythological inspiration for the Nazi policy of racial extermination. For Hitler, it did not. While he recognized the usefulness of *völkisch* propaganda, he also understood that idealizing such an undeveloped culture would keep Germans’ attention focused on the impossible task of restoring the past, rather than on the future they were capable of building. As he already complained in *Mein Kampf* in the 1920s, the imagination of many of his dreamy early followers, meeting in the back rooms of seedy taverns, clad in lederhosen, did not extend beyond the romance of conservative villages nestled in Bavarian valleys. Hitler wanted to create an empire that would be mentioned by posterity in the same breath as those of classical antiquity, and be remembered equally for its military conquests and its cultural achievements.

Associating the Germans with ancient high culture has always been a fraught and dubious enterprise, given that Germany was well outside the orbit of classical culture in

antiquity, and slow to participate in its revival in the Renaissance. Mussolini, by contrast, had only to give a speech in front of the Colosseum to drive the connection home. In one such speech he declared, “the Rome that we contemplate with pleasure and are preparing is a different one. It’s not about the stones of the past, but a difficult preparation for the future. Rome is our point of departure and point of reference. It is our symbol. Or, if you like, our myth...*Civis romanus sum.*” The Nazis had to find some other way to connect Walhalla with the agora, the fur-clad Germans with the toga-clad Greeks.

They eventually did so in the racial theory of the Aryan people. The term “Aryan” was first adopted by Western linguists in the late eighteenth century to describe a family of Indo-European languages, not a race or a people. But in the nineteenth century, when romantic nationalism was at its peak, European scholars began to speculate about the existence of an Aryan ur-race. And as the century progressed, that speculation became for many a scientific certainty, which was used across Europe and the Americas to justify slavery, colonialism, anti-Semitism, and much else.

In its original form, Aryan race theory suggested that all the European peoples — French, German, English, Spanish, Italian — had a common ancestry, and so in racial terms were fundamentally equal. Nazi race theorists came up with a brilliant, and in the end lethal, variation of this idea. They argued, on the basis of no evidence whatsoever, that the original Aryans had not spread out from the Indus Valley into Europe. Rather, just as Aeneas had discovered that the Trojans were originally from Italy, so these “scientists” discovered that the Aryans’ original home was actually in the German forests (and probably, as one straight-faced Nazi scholar suggested, near the port city of Lübeck). The Aryans subsequently

spread out from Germany into the rest of Europe and thence into India — and not the other way around. The Nazi regime invested enormous energy into propagating this myth, and through its own Department of Classical Antiquity — yes, you read that right — supported pseudo-academic research in history and anthropology to demonstrate its truth.

Once this Aryan racial link was made, the full range of symbols from the ancient world lay at the service of Nazi propaganda officials. All the cultural achievements of ancient Greece could now be claimed as German. And all the military achievements of Rome as well. Pericles was blue-eyed, Augustus was blond. And the Spartans offered the model for a new system of education giving precedence to physical prowess and toughness over intellectual inquiry. Hitler declared Sparta to have been the first racist state, and sycophantic Nazi scholars called them the Prussians of antiquity. In 1933, the race-obsessed German philosopher Alfred Bäumler gave a lecture in Berlin titled “Against the Un-German Spirit,” in which he contrasted the manly political education of the Spartans, who aimed to form citizen-soldiers, with the effeminate, Jew-infected democratic education of the Weimar Republic. He then called out to his student audience, many in SS uniforms, to take the first step toward restoring the Spartan spirit by burning all books poisoning the German soul. That night they did just that, heaping twenty thousand volumes from the University of Berlin library into a pile and setting it alight.

Hitler was also fond of drawing a parallel between the Spartan practice of abandoning handicapped children in the wild to the Nazi’s industrialized-scale eugenic cleansing. The difference was that the Spartans were amateurs who acted out of instinct. Modern racial science had discovered that the only way for a people to be genuinely reborn is through self-conscious

selection. The future was to be won by the first modern people that returned to this ancient practice, but carried it out with the most advanced scientific and technological means available.



Political nostalgia has lost none of its allure or destructive potential. And since the end of what now must be called the First Cold War, it is filling the vacuum left by the abandonment of progressive ideologies like socialism and democratic liberalism. Even Aryan race theory has been revived, in the Hindutva movement that inspires the core of Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party which dreams of driving Muslims out of the country.

In China and Russia the nostalgia is more complicated, since they live with double historical legacies: that of modern revolutions inspired by universalistic political ideals, and that of the traditional societies which those revolutions destroyed. Call it the Two Edens Problem. The link between them that Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin seem to be trying to articulate is a new ideology of *longue-durée* imperialism that is supposedly the deepest expression of the national essence. Whatever the differences between Puyi and Mao, or Alexander II and Lenin, they were all leaders of great empires, and it is these empires that must be restored or expanded. The Soviet one was abandoned with hardly a shot being fired; the Chinese one still lacks Taiwan, and Xinjiang Province refuses to bend its knee. Now we have a goal, now we have a historical destiny: to restore our lost wholeness. The Uyghurs and the Ukrainians are only the latest victims to be sacrificed on the altar of this fantasy. There will be others.



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Liberties

In the American moral crisis, the first requirement was to experience what was happening and to see what must be seen. The facts were covered from our perception. The increase of theories and discourse, itself a cause of new strange forms of blindness, the false representations of "communication," led to horrible distortions of public consciousness. Therefore the first act of morality was to disinter the reality, retrieve reality, dig it out from the trash, represent it anew as art would represent it.

SAUL BELLOW

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