



Shake Hands with the Devil

- Dallaire didn't begin writing the book until 7 years after his return
- Writing took several years
- 1993 Shaughnessy Cohen Award for Political Writing
- 2004 Governor General's Award for Non-fiction
- 2004 documentary film, *Shake Hands with the Devil* dir. Peter Raymont
- Feature film slated for 2006

Forward

Forward functions as epitaph; text as elegy

- Epitaph – words inscribed on tomb
- Elegy – lament for the dead
- Text commemorates the 800,000 slaughtered Rwandans, the 15 peacekeepers and Dallaire's assistant

Preface

- Gives motivation for writing:
- existing accounts were not adequate
 - “The sounds, smells, depredations, the scenes of inhuman acts were largely absent” (xi).
 - Avoided writing because he couldn't face the memories, he was “too sick, disgusted, horrified and fearful” (xi)
 - Return trip to testify at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda brought back the previous experience
 - Discharged from the Army with PTSD

Preface, cont.

- Aide, Major Brent Beardsley, pushes Dallaire to write the book: families, for history, and for others in the same situation
- Dallaire – accepts personal accountability (xiv)
- Statement frames the account not so much as an attempt at exoneration, but as justification
- Also feels accountable to Rwandan people
- Effort to prevent further tragedy (xvii-xviii)

Preface, cont.

- Contextualization of events in moral terms
- Speaks of “evil” and “the devil”
- Rather unfashionable to use the word, ‘evil’

- Preface also provides outcome – we know from the beginning what happened
- We read to find out ‘why’, ‘how’

Introduction

- Begins *in media res*, on May 1994, almost one year after arriving in Rwanda
- *in media res* – Latin, for in the middle of things
- Contrast between beauty of landscape and horror of human brutality
- nature = pure; humanity = depraved
- Failure to protect 3 year old orphaned Rwandan child becomes emblematic of “all our failures in Rwanda” (4).
- Confessional tone: “how ineffective and irresponsible we were when we promised the Rwandans that we would establish an atmosphere of security that would allow them to achieve a lasting peace” (4) .

- Moves into present – 9 years later (2003):
“I could not forget even if I wanted to. For many of these years, I have yearned to return to Rwanda and disappear into the blue-green hills with my ghosts. A simple pilgrim seeking forgiveness and pardon” (5).

- Pilgrim: someone who makes a journey to a sacred place – may seek forgiveness, appeal for healing, do penance, act of devotion, to give thanks, or to re-enact a religious event
- Medieval period, Christian pilgrimages were very common; roads and hostels were built to handle the large numbers of people journeying to sacred sites such as Canterbury, Santiago de Compostela. 7th of July was the date of annual pilgrimage; contemporary time – Muslims journey to Mecca
- Pilgrims, unlike heroes, may be foolish, confused, uncertain of their identity; less concerned with ideal behaviour
- Take no weapons and expect no earthly reward
- Objective is not accomplishment, but rather to move out of linear time into cyclical time into some sacred space

- Dallaire tells us, “the time has come for me to make a more difficult pilgrimage: to travel back through all those terrible memories and retrieve my soul” (5).
- His encounter with evil changed him; drained him
- Book becomes a literary pilgrimage in which Dallaire can perhaps find healing, forgiveness
- Desire to lift himself up and out of the depravity that he witnessed
- Desire to make sense of horrific conditions

Introduction, cont.

- Ostensibly, book is about events in Rwanda
- But also about one man's personal journeys – the first, when he encounters the 'evil' present in Rwanda; the second, when he relives it in his mind in writing his account

Introduction, cont.

- Dallaire blames nations with representatives on Security Council of UN (U.S., France, U.K.)
- Critiques attempts to make a scapegoat of Colonel Luc Marchal
- "how we all helped create the mess" (5)
- Also himself: "A public account of my actions, my decisions and my failings" (6)
- Red tape, penny pinching, political maneuvering, racism, inept UN mandate, and "fundamental indifference of the world community to the plight of seven to eight million black Africans in a tiny country that had no strategic or resource value to any world power"(6).
- Yet – look at pages 6-7; further motivations

Introduction, cont.

- More than military or academic study which would look objectively at cause-and-effect
- Not simply about apportioning blame
- Instead, it is a *cri de coeur*
- Failure to adapt to new paradigm
- Story of loss and horror; story so traumatic that he still does not identify himself as “I”; instead, he refers to himself as “a commander”
- Encounter with the devil

Trauma Narratives (recap)

- In face of a traumatic event, survivor can't assimilate event; either buries the event or represses it
- At the same time, the survivor has a desire to reveal the trauma
- Survivors alternate between “feeling numb and reliving the event”, trauma narratives show both “truth-telling and secrecy” (Herman)
- In order to heal, need to fully integrate the event
- Happens when the event is recounted and heard
- story must include smells, sounds, sights of the traumatic event

- Survivor requires assurance of safety
- Also require a witness; someone must be present to acknowledge that the trauma occurred
- Survivor often fears that they won't be believed
- survivors ask 'why me?' and 'why?'
- survivors question identity, relationships, belief systems, faith in an orderly universe.
- Problem is to find a place in history and in memory for to the traumatic event
- May transform their experiences and offer testimonial as "a gift to others" (Herman)
- Trauma is then no longer meaningless

- In first few pages of *Shake Hands with the Devil*, see markers of a trauma narrative
- Admits he couldn't write the book for 7 years
- In Preface and Introduction, Dallaire returns repeatedly to the same topics of genocide, guilt, blame and then sidesteps them – see 'truth telling and secrecy'
- Wants to include "sounds, smells, depredations, the scenes of inhuman acts" (xi), the recollection of which are part of a fully integration of the trauma
- Wants his account to be useful to others
- Desire for pilgrimage acknowledges his need for healing

Chapter 1

- Begins with his childhood
- Odd place to begin novel about genocide in Rwanda
- Adds support to contention that this book is also about Dallaire's personal journey
- Beginning the novel with his own birth provides an opportunity for him to integrate the trauma into his personal history as well as world history

- We learn about his value system:
- "saw in my parents a courage that led them to look beyond their own self-interest, to offer their own lives to defeat an evil that threatened the peace and security of much of the world. It was a model of self-sacrifice that I tried to follow, playing with my soldiers on the rug" (12).
- For him, the military offers sense of connection, "emotional attachment" (16)
- Criticism he experience "for being an 'emotional' leader, for not being macho enough..." (26).
- Learn of his model of command: "openness, in being both sympathetic to the troops and at the same time being apart, in always projecting supreme confidence in my own ability and in theirs..." (26).

- Such a declaration allows Dallaire to establish his strengths/weaknesses
- explains his later decisions as couched in early value system
- Provides framework for reader's later evaluation of Dallaire's decisions and reactions