Kevin Whelan

Rights of Memory

First of all, let me extend my thanks to Healing Through Remembrance for their kindness in inviting me to make this presentation. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you about some of my own reflections on the complex relationships among history, memory and storytelling (or testimony). The great scientist Albert Einstein once said to make things as simple as possible but no simpler. That is what I want to do this morning. I will use, at times, complex language because we need a complex language to describe complex issues. If it was all so very simple, we would have sorted it out long ago. So, I make no apologies for not condescending or dumbing down what I will talk about, because these are fundamental issues that have engaged the greatest minds in human culture as long as written evidence stretches back. It also brings us to the limits of the human condition and asks us to consider what evil might mean.

Tony Judt, *Postwar: a history of Europe since 1945* (London, 2005). 36 million died, 19 million of them civilians: huge destruction & looting - Rotterdam, Minsk, Kiev, Warsaw: large parts of London and Berlin: Old European elite collaborated, collapsed, fled, or died. After the war, a politic amnesia developed a blanket of fog over collaboration: in France, forty million citizens were controlled by a mere 1,500 Nazis and 6,000 German police. The elites never recovered their authority in the postwar period and in that sense Old Europe had committed suicide in an intestinal war. New Europe had to maintain the fiction of venerable continuity but it was really a new construct built over the ruins of the old, a wasteland of smoking ash. Europe after 1914 and the following three decades had also witnessed an enthusiastic campaign of sustained ethnic cleansing that stripped out the old complex weave of Mittel Europa and homogenised all round. Europe was caked in ashes, dirt and blood. A tidier Europe made for a more stable Europe, a less complicated Europe, but it is haunted by the ghosts of its disappeared.

The collapse of the old Europe ensured that there were no reserves of private capital, no NGOs, no civil society: this absence led to social planning, nationalised economies and strong states, The European political model was accidental and built on pragmatism and necessity: 'Shadowed by history, its leaders implemented social reforms and built new institutions as a prophylactic to keep the past at bay'. Europe had to forgo its past and build in the ruins a new economy and a new society but in the rebuilding it tried to remember ethically and culturally. Thus European consciousness is dependent on historical self-awareness. This 'compensatory surplus memory' accelerated in recent decades since the 1960s especially around the Holocaust but this excess was necessary to moving on from the past.

Three Levels of Memory

I want to begin by talking about the work of the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, who, more than anyone, has grappled with this issue and dealt with the nature of the problem in Europe. For example, what do we do with the Holocaust, international relationships and post-conflict situations? Let us remember that the history of Europe and the globe throughout the twentieth century has been one of unremitting violence.[1] Conflict is a Northern Ireland problem, but it is also a wider problem and others have offered reflections on this. Ricoeur was interested in the relationship of memory not to the past but to the present and the future, and the issue of the ethics of memory. What is appropriate memory and how should we approach it? Ricoeur begins by defining three levels of memory in an ethical context.[2]

The first level is the one that is best known, the individual or personal level of memory and it is most associated with psychoanalysis. It begins with Sigmund Freud in his *Metapsychology* of 1914, with his pathological/therapeutic version of memory. Freud asked – looking at it clinically –what constitutes an acceptable past to an individual? If things have happened in that past which have been disturbing or traumatic, how does the individual deal with it? Freud says two things which at first are seemingly oppositional – that a lack of memory is a problem but that equally an excess of memory is a problem. If you have too much memory, it can flood, overwhelm and paralyse you, but if you have too little memory, you can feel weightless, unanchored and unbalanced. Too little memory comes from repression and not being able to cope with something that is extremely damaging. Abuse, violence and trauma tend to lodge in the psyche as an open wound that never fully heals. This is, perhaps, true at an individual level. Eugene O'Neill, the Irish-American playwright dealt with this issue in one of his plays. He writes:

> At the final curtain, there they still are, trapped within each other by the past, each guilty and at the same time innocent, scorning, loving, pitying each other, understanding and yet not understanding at all, forgiving but still doomed never to be able to forget.

The psychoanalytical or therapeutic model viewed the work of memory (*travail de mémoire*) as about establishing a proper, healthy or ethical balance between what psychoanalysts called mourning and melancholia.[3] Mourning is the natural human response to loss, seeking to reconcile the self with the lost objects of love. Melancholia is incomplete mourning, the inability to move beyond the loss, that is internalised as a despairing

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[1] Tony Judt, *Postwar: a history of Europe since 1945* (London, 2005). Thirty six million died in the Second World War, nineteen million of them civilians. See also Nancy Wood, *Victims of memory: legacies of trauma in postwar Europe* (Berg publishers, 1999).

[2] Paul Ricoeur, 'Memory and forgetting' in Richard Kearney & Mark Dooley (eds.), *Questioning ethics. Contemporary debates in philosophy* (London, 1999), pp 5-18.

[3] J. P. Bacot & Christian Coq (eds.), *Travail de mémoire 1914-1998. Une necessité dans un siécle de violence* (Paris, 1999).

longing for reunification. When you are in the melancholic state, you are unable to move beyond the loss or trauma and are condemned to a form of repetition. In psychoanalytic terms, there is an inability to come to terms with loss – what Freud called 'the reality principle' - and that, therefore, melancholic people live in a disconnected relationship with the day-to-day realities of life. Freud and other psychoanalysts suggested that the individual damaged patient needs to move from melancholia to mourning. That involved a 'working through' from repetition, through remembering, and eventually, reconciliation. This allowed you to re-establish the 'reality principle' and get on with your life. At an individual level, it is necessary to move beyond an excess or a repressed memory, that otherwise leads only to repetition or melancholia. That is a standard version of mourning and melancholia and of the problem of memory and trauma. It has often been described as the 'talking cure': if people can only talk about what is blocked within them, that talking, that storytelling, that testimony, can release the blockage within and help people to move on.

The second level of memory is what might be called pragmatic or functional memory. That is the level that links memory to identity, through answering the vulnerable and complicated question - "who am I"? That involves a crucial issue of time. Am I the same person today that I was five years ago? ten years ago? before I was married? Is there some irreducible core that remains unchanged within me, or have I grown or developed or expanded? Is the 'I' of today the same as the 'I' of a decade ago?

Again here, one might want to talk in Freudian psychoanalytic terms about the concept of 'ego': that 'I' which is the irreducible core of identity. But one might also, from a more theological angle, want to talk about an individual human soul: 'something alive, growing, evolving, multiform, manifold and almost infinitely deep', to quote the words of the greatest American doctor of this generation, Oliver Sacks. Is memory essential to the fullness of the individual person – the person seen in their full biological, cultural, personal and spiritual dimensions - the person who is capable to survival, adaptation and response to vicissitude and trauma. Sacks has posed this question as a medical practitioner: 'Ask not what disease the person has but what person the disease has'. It is essential to get a personal narrative of how a disease is experienced by an individual, the particularity of the response. It is not just a case of the clinical practitioner recognising the symptoms, making a diagnosis, and then recommending a medical treatment. In order to be a responsible and ethical medical practitioner, you have to look at each case as a human not a medical issue, exploring it through the prism of the unique circumstances of an individual life. In order words, Sachs claims that stories should lie at the very heart of clinical medicine. But stories also lie at the heart of the individual identity: it is the stories that we can tell about ourselves and our relationships as we are now, and what we were in the past, and how we came to be where we are now – those narratives or stories are crucial to our own sense of identity. One might also want to ask how that works not just at the individual, but also at the community, and indeed the political level. Can we share a political space if we can't share our narratives?

There is one other feature of this pragmatic level of memory that I have described as a question of identity and the continuity of identity through time. Identity also crucially

involves the issue of sameness and difference. Part of how we define ourselves is through what we are not. We constantly define ourselves as much by what we are not as by what we are. We define ourselves, to use the jargon, in terms of 'the other': that which lies outside our experience or outside our possibilities. That problem of definition accentuates or intensifies in a situation of conflict or where violence disfigures a society. Because we might then say that our relationship with 'the other' becomes over-determined. Violence then becomes the originating moment in the mobilisation of collective identity, where cultural memory becomes a storage system of violence, wounds, scars, anger, where the past bleeds uncontrollably into the present. Violence creates a version of Gothic memory. We might then also ask: is there ever a situation where we might have an ethical duty to forget and forgive as well as to remember. I would like to remind you that there is a close link between the word 'amnesty' and 'amnesia'.

It is possible to say that there may be a duty to go beyond anger and hatred towards achieving a new horizon of justice, a culture with a just memory, while keeping alive the memory of the trauma, the trace of event, while reconciling past and future. Memory is not just retroactive, it is also crucially about the future and how we should balance the space of experience and the space of expectation. What is it that we need from the future?

The third level of memory is the most challenging one in the context of a post-conflict situation - the ethical or political level of memory.[4] Memory is not a static or unchanging phenomenon. Memory is not a parcel that is passed from person to person and that remains unchanged in the process of transmission. Memory changes as we transmit it, as we tell the story, and depending on to whom we tell our story. That might seem disturbing because it makes memory subjective and situational but at another level it is extremely important because it also gestures towards the possibility of educating or healing memory through the work of narrative, testimony or storytelling. I would also wish to stress here the work of the artist who can help us in seeing things, telling things another way.

In that sense, testimony adjudicates between memory and history, between remembering and forgetting, because the stories we tell and the stories we choose not to tell determine what it is we remember and what it is we forget. Memory does not have to be an overwhelming thing, a coercive or intransigent force that traps or fixes us in a particular position, a handcuff that ties us to our history. The availability of testimony always enables choice. We can decide how we want to tell our story and it is that choice that also adjudicates, balances or negotiates between the personal level and the collective identity. Narrative or testimony means that it is always possible to tell it another way – and, equally crucially, to hear it another way.

This is what Ricoeur means by an ethical memory, one that is not so much locked into the past, but that is concerned with opening the past as a mechanism to release the future, to help birth the future through understanding what has happened in the past. Ethical memory wants to move beyond the melancholic version, where we are constantly fixated

[4] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, history, forgetting*, (trans.) Kathleen Blamey & David Pellauer (Chicago, 2004).

on the conflict, on the moment of violence, on the event. It is also regulated by a horizon of justice. We need a memory that is just to the victims as well as the victors. But at the political level, it also requires the inauguration of new institutions that guard against recurrence.

The existence of all three levels, Ricoeur argues, means that there is an absolute fundamental human necessity for memory - not merely as a form of knowledge, in an inert way, but as an action or a process. Memory is active, in the sense that we talk about 'exercising our memories'. In Ricoeur's terms, there is a responsibility to remember (*devoir de memoir*), because of the inescapable human linkage between past and future.

Memory is a necessary stay against the annihilating force of time and its remorseless erosion of historic traces. It is also a fundamentally human capacity, that, as Hannah Arendt has reminded us, enables a continuation of action in the face of death.[5] What is it that allows us to keep going? Memory allows us to liberate ourselves from the ties of the past through the capacity for forgiveness; it also establishes a link to the future through the capacity for promising - a capacity to be bound by one's words. Testimony, in that sense, directly links the past and the future.

Memory and History

Let me now move to talk about history. The French commentator, Pierre Nora, has made a distinction between how historians understand time, in what he calls memory and history.[6] Nora says that the collective memory of any society is spontaneous, social, collective and encompassing; borne by living societies, it is permanently evolving like a coral reef, with a cumulative, incremental version of the past, as each generation adds to the evolving story. In this sense, there is a collective collaboration of everyone within a community in creating a collective memory and that memory is embedded in the defining narrative which that community tells to itself. You often find a collective, unified version of what is important and the key points of a community's history achieve a certain recurrence or solidity. That commodified collective memory belongs not just to the individual but to the community or the nation as a whole. Nora points out that there is another version of the past, which he describes as 'professional history' – what historians do as a professional discipline. Disciplinary History, in the way it has evolved in the twentieth century, has sought to divorce itself from collective memory in the way that I have just defined it. In Nora's terms: 'History is perpetually suspicious of memory and its true mission is to annihilate it.' The historian's task is to destroy memory by undermining these collective versions of the past embedded in communities and nations, in an effort to establish 'proper', objective history. Nora concludes that the late twentieth century version of history has witnessed the conquest by disciplinary history of memory as a version of the past. Historians claim a privileged access to the past, based on professional

[5] Hannah Arendt, *The human condition* (Chicago, 1998), chapter 5.

[6] Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire,* 3 vols (Paris, 1984-1992); Pierre Nora, *Realms of memory. Volume* 1. *Conflicts and divisions* (trans.) A. Goldhammer (New York, 1999); ibid, 'Between memory and history; *les lieux de memoire*' in *Representations*, xxvi, (1989), pp. 7-25.

training, on exact protocols and methodologies, on the authority of the archives, and citation of sources –that is deemed superior to the version of memory that is individualized, subjective and based on individual story and testimony. In that sense, professional history is viewed as more prestigeous than memory.

Memory and History: The Irish Context

If we transplant Nora's perspective into the Irish context, we can see is that that is very much how the writing of Irish history has been practiced over the last couple of generations. In the 1980s, a television history of Ireland was produced by Robert Kee. In the very first shot in that series, the camera hovers over the cobbles of a narrow Belfast street, while an old woman with a distinctively Cork accent began to intone a very heavily unreconstructed nationalist view of Irish history. Here, the narrow street suggests the narrow mind; the old droning, feminised voice shows the Irish to have a confused, non-linear and ultimately lethal version of their own history. The closing shot in that sequence was of a sudden massive bomb erupting out of the Belfast streets, drowning out the droning voice. The next shot was taken from a helicopter panning over the landscape of Ulster, accompanied by Kee's standard estuarine English voice. Here, the medium is the message: the high-level survey is way more important than ground truth. The professional historian, high up in his helicopter, has a much better synoptic view than the little people trapped in the narrow streets of Belfast. Again, the not so subtle message is that the dangers of our history lurk, not up in the helicopter, but in the streets: it is the streets' lethal, toxic or contaminated versions of history that have fed the bomb and the bullet. Therefore, we need to establish a rational history, as opposed to an emotional memory, a more objective history as opposed to subjective memory. In Irish history, there has been this constant harping on the hygienic version of Irish history: somehow, we need to cleanse the Irish Augean stables of the dung of memory.

Samuel Beckett in *First Love* ridiculed the nationalist nostalgia with ruins:

> What constitutes the charm of our country, apart of course from its scant population and this without the help of the meanest contraception, is that all is derelict with the sole exception of History's ancient faeces. These are ardently sought after, stuffed and carried in procession. Wherever nauseated time has dropped a nice fat turd, you will find our patriots, sniffing it up on all fours, their faces on fire. Elysium of the roofless. Hence my happiness at last. Lie down, all seems to say, lie down and stay down.

Professional historians have set themselves up as opposed to memory, as something that is subjective, emotional, irrational, and ultimately dangerous. Therefore, a common response by historians is to hector us to move beyond or decommission memory.
This represents a variant on the English liberal view that the Irish obsession with their past itself needed decommissioning: *The Standard* of 1 June 1867 opined:

> Are we perpetually to be dwelling on the memory of those ancient grievances? Are we never to be done with Oliver Cromwell and William III, 1798 and the persecution of the Roman Catholics? England did doubtless many wrong and foolish things in the past. But Ireland has no peculiar and especial property in wrong-suffering. She was not exactly an angel of light herself at any time. As for rebellions, treasons, stratagems, she has never been without them. These are not things of English introduction but of Irish growth. [7]

The secondary response to that would be to urge us to forget about the past, and, in the famous phrase, 'move on'. This is a common liberal or scholarly view: if these foolish little people, trapped in their narrow streets and small fields, with their subjective tribal versions of history, could only see it as we detached professionals do, then all would become sweetness and light. There is another agenda here too, which is to say: do not get involved in politics because it will ultimately damage you. The best response that you can make to conflict is to fence off your private life and your family and create your own private Idaho into which you can retreat, quietly and safely cocooned from the violence, trauma and noise outside.

That is a version of memory as a dead weight or disabling incubus, something that is inherently dangerous or toxic. That seems to suit a particular type of English or American 'liberal' sensibility. This is very much the view of the contemporary American philosopher John Rawls. If you read any issue of the *New York Times*, whether they are talking about Northern Ireland or Rwanda, Bosnia or Iraq, it is always this version of the benighted past that is presented – exotic backward peoples who are weighted down with memory, that drags them back into irrational violence and away from the I-pods and the cappuccino. And yet, that view itself constitutes a problem. If we do not engage with the past and develop a professional history that acknowledges the legitimate claims of memory and testimony, we are doomed to remain constantly locked within that adversarial confrontation.

Oliver Sacks, who has worked with people who have lost their memories concludes that a person who is amnesiac is incapable of acting in the present or, crucially, of planning for the future. Therefore, the question, at an individual level, is not whether but *how* we should engage with the past. We cannot sweep it under the carpet. If we refuse to deal with these issues, they will come back to haunt us. The nation or the community without a sense of its history is like a person without a memory. We cannot become amnesiac or be encouraged to become so, without in some respects, damaging ourselves, but also damaging the generation that comes after us.

It is certainly the case that in Ireland - and in Northern Ireland - we have had a divided history. It is also the case that the current political divides are based as much on a claim of the past as they are on contemporary social or community divisions. The past is

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[7] Cited in M. de Nie, 'A medly mob of Irish-American plotters and Irish dupes. The British press and trans-Atlantic Fenianism' in *Jn. British Studies*, xl, 2 (2001), p. 232.

constantly resorted to as a mandate for political action. In this sense, the Irish past lacks 'closure'. In a situation of a divided political community, you are always going to have a divided version of history. You can lament that, to some extent, but you also have to acknowledge it and take responsibility for it. Every community must understand that it has a responsibility for its version of the past, but also for how that version of the past plays with another community. It does mean that the Irish past can never be seen in the rear-view mirror. The Irish past is always in front of the windscreen. In this sense, the Irish past has never fully exited politics and entered into history 'proper', that professional historians like to deal with.

Therefore, the pressure on the past to explain and justify the present intensifies the debate around memory and history and the anxious search for a history that would liberate Irish people from their memory. Once you approach it in this way, by setting up an opposition between memory and history, then you are always in a situation of privileging history over memory and disparaging and underplaying the significance of the experience of conflict for the people who went through it. This moment intensified in the late 1990s outside of Northern Ireland: the response was an almost audible exhaling with the advent of the IRA cessation, the Good Friday Agreement and the sense that there was an end coming to the Northern Ireland Troubles. There was a palpable sense that we could finally shuck off this baleful, gothic memory which constantly insisted on resurfacing. Now there was a sense of a bright new dawn, of a new kind of possibility that we were turning our back on the past and that we could all move forward into an unblemished future.

In the south, in particular, since it has moved into its Celtic Tiger mode, you can see that version of history and the movement beyond memory in what Dublin choose to erect in its city centre – a stainless steel needle, universally called 'The Spike'– a gleaming, sterile, stainless steel needle 120m high, scrupulously devoid of historical context. It was argued that it should not have a historical reference because 'it would be lost on younger people'. The reason that it was chosen was because it could be anywhere - Kuala Lumpur, Los Angeles, Beijing - and that it was an appropriate symbol of modernity. It made no reference to the past and had no specificity. It represents that moment in Ireland were we were saying that we have shrugged off our past, that we are post-Catholic, post-nationalist, we have moved beyond the Northern Ireland conflict. There are troubles in store when you adopt that kind of approach, that the Troubles are suddenly over and that we can forget about what happened during them.

That still leaves the problem of memory. What are we saying to those who have lost loved ones, to those who have lost limbs, to those who have been incarcerated? How can we say to those people to move on? How can we say - just move beyond it? For the victims, those who have lived through it, do not have that easy luxury of forgetting of the outsider. This is why the work of testimony and the work of *Healing through Remembering* is crucial and pivotal. If we do not engage with the victims, then we narrow our versions of the past. What we need in Ireland is both the memory and the history. We need testimony as the link between them – the link between memory and history.

Filiation and affiliation

Edward Said explored the issue of what motivates the great artist[8]. Said pondered over what the proper role of the intellectual, the writer, the artist, the administrator, the museum curator, those who have official responsibility for dealing with these kinds of issues, should be. Testimony lies between memory and history, but you could also say that everyone who is professionally involved in this work is suspended, to use Said's terminology, between 'filiation' and 'affiliation'. Filiation is what we are born into, what we do not choose in our lives. Nobody chooses where they are born, their parents, their skin colour, the ethnicity or the cultural identity that you are born into. You have it, whether you like it or not. Affiliation, by contrast, is what we aspire to, what we ourselves want in our lives as we develop as human beings. Said asks: what is the appropriate relationship between filiation and affiliation – what we are born into, and what we aspire to? Those who move themselves too far away from filiation or memory, become 'airheads', with no understanding of what is going on the ground. But Said equally argued that if we remain too 'filiated', too fixated on staying where we are and what we are born in to, then we become asphyxiated by the pressure of proximity. The question then becomes: what is the appropriate distance between 'filiation' and 'affiliation', between memory and history? How far should we go? The standard intellectual argument has been to say that we should move as far away as possible in pursuit of objectivity. Said ultimately judged that what we are looking for is an appropriate distance. That space is the space of 'ethical witness' or 'ethical testimony'. If the distance is too far from our own culture or community, we can become detached and irrelevant.

Testimony occupies that middle ground, because testimony is simultaneously disengaged and incriminated. Once you start telling a story, it is already moving away from you. You cannot tell a story unless someone is listening to it. You have to tailor what you say to reach another person, an audience. The minute we start talking about it, we are already establishing some distance. And yet, at the same time, because it is your story and your experience, it is always going to remain incriminated and embedded in the experience from which it emerged. You cannot just pull it out by the roots. It also has to come above the surface to flower. In a post-conflict situation, we must constantly negotiate between memory and history, filiation and affiliation and also in an unexpected way between memory and imagination.

You might say that testimony is the least imaginative of responses. Testimony tells it like it happened, like it is. You might say that imagination is not bound to the past at all, it is what allows us to think new things and to be other than what we are now. Testimony will always be rooted in the past, but it also contains an engagement with imagination and the future. How can I move with it, without abandoning it or without betraying it in some way? But how will this allow me, my community and society, to have a possible future ?. Testimony occupies this crucial middle ground between past and future, filiation and affiliation, memory and history.

[8] Edward Said, *The world, the text and the critic* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), pp 24-5.

An ethics of discourse

We can finally return to Paul Ricoeur and the various levels of memory. Ricoeur concludes that there is a truth claim to history. These things did happen. People died. Their deaths were not a figment of one's imagination. They are real people and they are the real casualties, as those who survived them know so well. It is inescapably true and no amount of reconciliation can or should forget those people. There is a record of history as what really happened. If imagination, or aspiration or affiliation is unleashed and allowed to float free, history must remain leashed, tethered and faithful to the pastness of the past. It has always, in Ricoeur's terms, to return to the body count. This is where testimony comes in: what is it that allows our dead to have an afterlife and to live on? They live on in the memories and in the testimonies of those who care about them, who talk about them, who remember them. The fundamental task of testimony is the retrieval of the memory of the dead and the expansion of the archive of what the historian can ultimately work with. The historian has, ultimately, to become a witness who provides testimony and whose ethical position depends on trust in the word of another person. This trust in testimony and the expressive function of language is itself a moral power. The moral power of narratives enables what Ricoeur calls 'an ethics of discourse'. Ricoeur argues that 'we must have trust in language as a weapon against violence, indeed the best weapon there is against violence.'[9] Testimony - of the individual, of the scholar, of the artist - is the link between inspiration and memory, between mourning and melancholia, between filiation and affiliation.

Rights of memory, rights of testimony, rights of audience

Let us now return to the question: how do you engage with the past ethically? What is the appropriate way of approaching the past? This is not easy. This is challenging work and it is work that can be very painful for those who experience it, for those who have to revisit it in the form of testimony, and for those who have to hear it. The literary critic Homi Bhabha has reminded us that: 'Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.'[10] The poet Derek Walcott, surveying his Caribbean world shattered by its colonial experience, talks of the recovery: 'If the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture.'[11] He talks about a vase being smashed and the challenge of putting it back together again. Walcott says that there is great craftsmanship and imagination in putting the vase together the first time, but that it is a considerably greater challenge to put back together what has been smashed and broken.

[9] Ricoeur, ' Memory and forgetting', p.18.
[10] Homi Bhabha, lecture to the Irish Seminar, O'Connell House , Dublin, July 2005.
[11] Derek Walcott, *What the twilight says: Essays* (New York, 1998), p. 69.

There are three things that we can think of as human rights and the first of these should be rights of memory. It is a phrase used by that great master of language, William Shakespeare, in the play *Hamlet*. We have rights to our memories, they are indisputably ours and they make us what we are. No one has the right to tell us to forget our memories and move on. Individuals and communities have right to memory, in this sense. There are also, therefore, indisputably, rights of testimony. People have the right to tell these stories and to tell them in the forms, shapes and ways that make sense for them. But there is also a third element, that we have not sufficiently considered – the right of audience. As well as having the right to tell our stories, we also have an ethical duty to hear other people's stories. In a post-conflict situation, this becomes a very pressing issue. This third right, that is also an obligation and an ethical duty, may be the most difficult one, because, in some respects it is what makes possible a shared version of a past, and therefore of a possible future. Testimony means that it is always possible to tell it another way. It means that it is also possible to hear it another way. Testimony, in that sense, always has the possibility of opening a space for dialogue and negotiation with the 'other'. Ultimately this may lead to a process of reconciliation beyond memory and history. Oliver Sacks says that a doctor cannot just be the clinically detached professional practitioner. A great doctor ultimately requires both empathy and imagination.

Marina Warner writing on the idea of historical apology,[12] notes that the word apology twines two languages - the theological/sacramental language of repentance/atonement and the psychoanalytic one of the talking cure. This in turn creates a curious religious/secular crossover. The apology can become a secularised ritual demanded by identity politics. The Truth and reconciliation Commission [TRC] in South Africa established four different kinds of truth:
1 Objective empirical truth. This what people understand as the facts: Freud's material truth:
2 Dialogue truth – This is a social construct established by dialogue, debate and discussion.
3 Narrative truth: the victim's story- testimony: subjective, partial, mythical; the collective impact of these individual narratives creates collective memory;
4 Healing truth: facts positioned within a social constellation of human relations: ritualised and therapeutic.

These different kinds of truth are in perpetual conflict with each other. That conflict means that all historical narrative is inevitably relativised.
Finally, in the aphorism of Sean Ó hUiginn, Northern Ireland requires a political settlement with which not just the living but the dead can live.[13] Testimony is pivotal to that achievement.

[12] TLS, 1 Aug. 2003.
[13] Sean Ó hUiginn, Lecture at Inauguration of Keough-Notre Dame Centre, Newman House, Dublin, October 1998.

NOTES

Nadine Gordimer, *Get a life* (London, Bloomsbury, 2005) – a novel:

'I have never felt not at home here' [1970s] cited in Ronald Roberts, *No cold kitchen: a biography of Nadine Gordimer* (2005): 'The white artist is the non–European whose society nevertheless refused to acknowledge and take root with an indigenous culture. He is the non-black whom blacks see as set apart from indigenous culture. He does not know as yet whether this is a dead end or can be made a new beginning'.

resting on our historical oars as if crossing an historical finishing line:

'They felt useless as they were and so became what they were not' [terrorists].

"They asked us for bread and we gave them a stone. Now they have found a use for these stones: we are getting them back – thrown.'

'The only attachment that makes claims valid in human terms is some sort of vital attachment to the people: you cannot be 'attached' to soil and thorn trees because these do not respond. [attachment to land is not a proof of title], 'some kind of right that is entirely separable from behaviour, social behaviour'. Land cannot exist outside of the social relations embedded in it.

Kevin Whelan – Biography

Kevin Whelan was named as the Smurfit Director of the Keough Notre Dame Centre in Ireland in 1998. A native of Co. Wexford, Kevin has been visiting professor at the new York University, Boston College and the Concordia University (Montreal). He has lectures in over dozen countries and at the Sorbonne, Cambridge, Oxford, Torino, Berkeley, Yale and Louvain. He has published sixteen books and almost 100 articles on Ireland's history, geography and culture. Among these are: *The Tree of Liberty* (1996), *Fellowship of Freedom*: *The United Irishmen and the 1798 Rebellion* (1998) and *The Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* (1997).

Kevin lectures on history and memory and the links between these. He discusses how choices can be made to tell your story, which narrative to tell and about what to remember and how to evaluate it. He also considers issues relating to the telling of stories within living memory and the possible problems that can arise with the next generation and the choices about what to remember negotiating with the past.

'Rights of Memory' was first presented at a conference on the role of storytelling in the process of conflict transformation. The conference, organised by Belfast based Healing Through Remembering and titled 'Storytelling as the Vehicle?' was held in the Dunadry Hotel, Dunadry, Co. Antrim on the 29th November 2005.