

How I Rwanda What You Are

by Theodore Dalrymple (August 2014)

If ever there were a competition for the most cynical remark ever made, I think François Mitterand's at the beginning of genocide in Rwanda would stand a fair chance of winning. 'In those countries down there,' he is said to have said, 'a genocide isn't too important.'

I came across this uplifting sentiment in a book that I bought at the Shoah Memorial in Paris recently, *Gêneurs de survivants! (Annoying Survivors!)*, by Dominique Celis, a half-Rwandan woman living in Belgium. There was an exhibition at the Memorial to mark the twentieth anniversary of the genocide, perhaps the most democratic of all Twentieth Century genocides, or at any rate the one with the greatest popular participation. There were photos, recorded testimonies, even a few videos of the massacres themselves, though not too many to sicken the sensitive or satiate the sadistic. There was a pile of clothes of the massacred, from which I thought I could detect a characteristic smell (I am familiar with the smell of massacre), but my wife said that it was in my imagination. There were the instruments of genocide, from scythes and machetes to home-made mallets with which to smash skulls.

On our way to the Memorial, to pass the time in the *Métro*, I had been reading the *Black Book of Psychoanalysis*, an uncompromising critique of Freud and his legacy. Freud was no scientist; he was instead an unscrupulous charlatan, oscillating between wishful thinking and outright lying, an unscrupulous manipulator who owed his success not to the truth but to the emptiness of his theories, the founder of a religious sect rather than of a scientific discipline, a man avid for fame and fortune only too aware that he might not achieve them by more conventional means, and an incestuous adulterer to boot. Moreover, his technique, if something as nebulous as psychoanalysis can be called a technique, was of no greater therapeutic value than exorcism, although much more expensive and a great deal less fun – except for those who desired to talk endlessly about themselves and were willing to pay someone else to listen to them or at least pretend to listen to them.

France, as well as Argentina, is the last redoubt in the world of psychoanalysis (not that this prevents the French from being world-champion psychotropic medication swallows as well, on the contrary); the bookshops are still full of volumes by psychoanalysts written in alchemical language that means something only to those who have entered their temple, and perhaps not even to them. The exposure of Freud as a fraud, or a near-fraud, still comes as a shock in France, long after it has ceased to be such elsewhere in the western world. The

question that remains, but that is not susceptible to a definitive answer, is why theories so arcane, so preposterously speculative, so lacking in evidence in their favour and even in the possibility of there being any such evidence, should for a number of decades have conquered the most scientifically-advanced regions of the world.

Anyway, the book was good knockabout fun for those, like me, who enjoy the demolition of easy targets; and the *ad hominem*, always the most enjoyable form of argumentation, is here permissible because Freudians resort to it almost at once in defence of themselves. He who argues by the *ad hominem* is refuted by the *ad hominem*