come the source of a new obsession. Our planet, which gets smaller every year, with its fantastic proliferation of mass media, is witnessing a process that escapes definition, characterized by a refusal to remember. Certainly, the illiterates of past centuries, then an enormous majority of mankind, knew little of the history of their respective countries and of their civilization. In the minds of modern illiterates, however, who know how to read and write and even teach in schools and at universities, history is present but blurred, in a state of strange confusion. Molière becomes a contemporary of Napoleon, Voltaire a contemporary of Lenin.

Moreover, events of the last decades, of such primary importance that knowledge or ignorance of them will be decisive for the future of mankind, move away, grow pale, lose all consistency, as if Friedrich Nietzsche's prediction of European nihilism found a literal fulfillment. "The eye of a nihilist," he wrote in 1887, "is unfaithful to his memories: it allows them to drop, to lose their leaves . . . And what he does not do for himself, he also does not do for the whole past of mankind: he lets it drop."

We are surrounded today by fictions about the past, contrary to common sense and to an elementary perception of good and evil. As the *Los Angeles Times* recently stated, the number of books in various languages which deny that the Holocaust ever took place, and claim that it was invented by Jewish propaganda, has exceeded one hundred. If such an insanity is possible, is a complete loss of memory as a permanent state of mind improbable? And would it not present a danger more grave than genetic engineering or poisoning of the natural environment?

For the poet of the "other Europe," the events embraced by the name Holocaust are a reality, so close in time that he cannot hope to liberate himself from their remembrance unless perhaps by translating the Psalms of David. He feels anxiety, though, when the meaning of the word Holocaust undergoes gradual modifications, so that the word begins to belong to the history of the Jews exclusively, as if among the victims there were not also millions of Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, and prisoners of other nationalities. He feels anxiety, for he senses in this a foreboding of a not distant future when history will be reduced to what appears on television, while the truth, because it is too complicated, will be buried in the archives, if not totally annihilated. Other facts as well, facts for him quite close but

distant for the West, add in his mind to the credibility of H. G. Wells's vision in *The Time Machine*: the earth inhabited by a tribe of children of the day, carefree, deprived of memory and, by the same token, of history, without defense when confronted with dwellers of subterranean caves, cannibalistic children of the night.

Carried forward as we are by the movement of technological change, we realize that the unification of our planet is in the making, and we attach importance to the notion of international community. The days when the League of Nations and the United Nations were founded deserve to be remembered. Unfortunately, those dates lose their significance in comparison with another date, which should be invoked every year as a day of mourning, although it is hardly known to younger generations. It is August 23, 1939. Two dictators then concluded an agreement provided with a secret clause by virtue of which they divided between themselves neighboring countries that possessed their own capitals, governments, and parliaments. That pact not only unleashed a terrible war; it reestablished a colonial principle according to which nations are no more than cattle, bought, sold, completely dependent upon the will of their instant masters. Their borders, their right to self-determination, their passports ceased to exist. And it should be a source of wonder that today people speak in a whisper, with a finger to their lips, about how that principle was applied by the dictators forty years ago.

Crimes against human rights, never confessed and never publicly denounced, are a poison which destroys the possibility of a friendship between nations. Anthologies of Polish poetry publish poems of my late friends Władysław Sebyla and Lech Piwowar, and give the date of their deaths: 1940. It is absurd not to be able to write how they perished, though everybody in Poland knows the truth: they shared the fate of several thousand Polish officers disarmed and interned by the then accomplice of Hitler, and they repose in a mass grave. And should not the young generations of the West, if they study History at all, hear about 200,000 people killed in 1944 in Warsaw, a city sentenced to annihilation by those two accomplices?

The two genocidal dictators are no more, and yet who knows whether they did not gain a victory more durable than those of their armies? In spite of the Atlantic Charter, the principle that nations are objects of trade, if not chips in games of cards or dice, has been confirmed by the division of Europe into two zones. The absence of the three Baltic states from the United Nations is a permanent reminder of the two dictators' legacy. Before the war, those states