RETROSPECT

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

This work is the product of three semesters of studies in Humanities, in which I read and critically reflected upon numerous works. The experiences led me to do further reading and research in order to expand upon the interests and knowledge I had gained.

This imaginative narrative is written to illustrate, through a dialogue of writers and characters from diverse literary periods and works, the results of my personal research and thought. I have used the story as a vehicle to present the prominent, recurring themes and ideas with which mankind has struggled throughout history. These include pride, free will and choice, relationships between internal and external nature, appearances versus reality, the importance of the individual versus society, and the quest for truth.

During my studies and reflections, I reached a greater understanding of and appreciation of the human condition, as well as a refreshingly new and broader awareness of my own identity and spirituality.
I sat at my desk and turned on my personal word processor. Having completed the Humanities sequence, I was faced with the task of writing my final paper, a reflection on all three courses. The green cursor on the otherwise blank screen blinked at me. I blinked back. It was getting later by the blink, and my eyelids pleaded with me to let them rest, just for one second... well, maybe two, or how about three, yeah, or...

"Hey, watch where you're going!" I felt a sharp pain in my left shoulder, and I looked up into the face of a very large and disgruntled man. I edged away from him and slowly, cautiously surveyed my surroundings. I was in a huge, open room. There were people all around me, in various positions: some were sitting, some were standing; some were talking, some were listening; some were wandering aimlessly around the room, some were staring off into space. Just like a college class, I thought. Except I didn't recognize any faces. Then I noticed that all of the people were wearing name tags—the tacky "Hello, My Name Is..." variety.

I glanced to my right and saw a huge, muscular man whose thigh was bigger in circumference than my waist!
His name tag identified him as the Greek warrior Agamemnon. He looked ready for battle; he was dressed in full armor, which included a bronze helmet, greaves to protect his lower legs, and a corselet made of several layers of hide to protect his chest. He also carried a shield, bronze-tipped barbs, and two spears. I noticed that each piece of armor was emblazoned with a three-headed snake. I remembered learning that the Greeks often used such symbols to instill fear in the enemy. In keeping with another tradition of Greek warriors, Agamemnon had not cut his hair or shaved his beard. The purpose of this was to make the men look fierce and intimidating. Well, it's working, I thought to myself as I looked at the warrior with a mixture of fear and fascination. It seems the Greeks placed almost as much emphasis on appearances as we do today, I thought wryly, recalling visions of televised beauty pageants and muscular fitness gurus on the covers of magazines.

I made my way past Agamemnon to a position from which I could observe and overhear the conversation of two men, Joseph and Odysseus.

"It's really remarkable how much we have in common," Joseph was saying. Standing there in his multicolored robe, he looked like he'd stepped out of the 1960's. I smiled to myself at the thought.

"Why do you say that?" asked Odysseus, folding his arms across his well-muscled chest.

"Disguise and discovery," Joseph explained. "When I
was in charge of the land of Egypt, my brothers came to me for food in the midst of severe famine. They had left me for dead in a field several years earlier, so I was disguised to them the first few times they came to Egypt. You disguised yourself upon returning home to Ithaca in order to test the loyalty of your friends."

Odysseus nodded and added, "The disguise also allowed me to go to my home and see if my wife Penelope and the suitors, who had taken up residence in my absence, would uphold their end of the guest-host relationship and show proper hospitality to a stranger."

"I've been wondering, why were you so bent on killing the suitors?" Joseph asked.

Odysseus replied, "By arriving and remaining uninvited at my house, I was able to confirm their improprieties in my house and their dishonoring of the guest-host hospitality code, for which they deserved to die."

"It sounds a bit harsh," Joseph remarked. Then he conceded, "But we were strict too. Because we believed in one God who had created every living thing, and that He was all-powerful, just, and stern, we had harsh laws and penalties. Our culture was integrated into our religion."

"So was ours, in a way," said Odysseus. "But mostly we were ruled by fate. We believed in many gods, but even though they could intervene, they could not really alter destiny."
Just then, I noticed Adam and Eve walking toward us.

"I never expected to see you here!" Joseph exclaimed.

"Well, we heard you talking about fate and thought we'd add a few words about choice," Adam said. "We believe God gives all of us free will to make personal decisions. As a result of our (here, he lightly touched Eve's shoulder) poor choices, man is fallen and separated from God."

"What did you do?" Odysseus asked, his curiosity peaked.

"We were the first human beings the Lord created," Eve explained. "We lived in the Garden of Eden, where we had everything we needed or could have desired. We had luscious fruit trees from which to eat. However, there was one tree from which God had forbidden us to eat and . . ."

"... and you did anyway?" Odysseus finished, a hint of awe in his voice. He wasn't familiar with Eve's God, but he knew the Greek gods would have been irate!

"I chose to eat the fruit after listening to the Serpent's deceptive speech and flattery," said Eve. "It was foolish pride."

"Then why was Adam punished?" Odysseus asked.

"She shared the fruit with me," Adam answered.

"I gave it a lot of thought first," Eve said. She seemed rather defensive, but I couldn't say I blamed her. She continued: "I considered keeping the fruit to myself, because the Serpent had led me to believe that eating it
might make me superior to Adam. But then I worried that God would punish my disobedience with death. I imagined Adam's reaction to my death. I figured God would just give him another woman to keep him company. He wouldn't miss me at all . . . probably wouldn't even think about me! The thought of him with another woman drove me to distraction. I became so jealous I couldn't even think straight. At last, I decided to share the fruit with Adam." She bit her lip at the unpleasant memory. Then she added suddenly, as if the thought had just now struck her, "But he knew full well that the fruit was forbidden."

"Then why did you eat it?" Odysseus asked Adam.

"I was afraid to eat the fruit, but I chose to risk death rather than the possibility of life without Eve," Adam answered. "I was not deceived. I chose to eat because of my love for Eve. I allowed her to seduce me into making the wrong decision."

"At first we blamed each other for the mistake. Neither of us wanted to accept responsibility for our choices," Eve said, rather pointedly. "But now we realize that free will is both a privilege and a responsibility. We must live with the consequences of our actions."

"And die with them." These words were spoken by a man in an expensive suit, who had been hovering on the fringes of the gathering for some time. Now, all eyes were riveted on Richard Cory. He said, "I made the choice to end my life."
"Why?" Odysseus seemed genuinely perplexed.

"I felt alienated from everything . . . from other people, from God, even from my true self . . . at last, all I had was Nothingness . . . " Here, his voice broke. No one could speak. I looked down and closed my eyes, my heart aching for this lost man. When I looked up, he was nowhere to be seen, and the group went on talking as if he had never been there . . .

I took one last look around for him and was blinded by sunlight. I blinked to clear the pink-purple and black spots before my eyes and squinted to focus on a beautiful glass door leading outside. I hadn't noticed it before, but now I was drawn to the natural sunlight pouring in. I walked toward it, my pace quickening and my view of the world outside the glass widening with each step.

I opened the door, stepped onto a neat stone path, and found myself in a garden of elegant simplicity and breath-taking beauty. I was fascinated by the way the flowers seemed to bloom of their own will--natural and untended by human hands. Even their colors seemed wild and untamed, so vibrant were they! Their fragrances wafted and merged into one unique, soothing aroma.

As I continued down the path, I came to a tall stone wall adorned with flowering vines. I opened the heavy gate and found myself in a garden vastly different from the one I had just left. The bushes, plants, and flowers had been fastidiously trimmed into uniform shapes and sizes.
As I observed the elaborate and deliberately secluded garden, I thought that its beauty seemed contrived... rather than natural. It reminded me of a Garden of Eden constructed for a major motion picture or something. I felt a bit uneasy, although I could not have explained why.

As I rounded a curve in the flower-bordered path, I saw a wizened old man. He was hunched over a plant, but when I walked near him, he rose to his feet and hurried away, his body still slightly hunched over.

I watched him disappear into a thick arbor of trees. Then I looked around to see the rest of the vast, enclosed garden. Standing silently beside the garden wall was a beautiful girl clothed in luxurious, pink robes. Her large violet eyes, shaded by long, thick lashes, were set in a small, delicate face which was framed by soft ringlets of shiny black hair. How odd, I thought, but she looks almost like a... flower? There, beside her, was an unusual, striking plant with bright pink blossoms and thin green leaves which curled in tendrils about the stems.

The girl looked at me and formed her lips into a slow, sad smile. Her friendly eyes encouraged me to come closer.

"I am Beatrice Rappiccini," she said. "Please don't mind my father. He's a bit... shy."

"I didn't mean to drive him away," I apologized. I glanced quickly around and said, "This is a lovely garden. It must be a wonderful place to live."

"It was, once," she said, wistfully. "Before I
knew . . ."

I looked at her, waiting for her to continue. When she didn't, I gestured to the flower beside her and said, "It's beautiful. I've never seen one like it before."

Beatrice smiled and said, "That's because my father created it. The flower and I were born and raised together, like sisters, in this garden. I never knew a life outside the garden walls. And I was content with this enchanted, secluded life, until he entered it . . ." Her voice became gradually softer until it was barely a whisper, and she stared into the flower.

"Who is he?" I asked, mercilessly curious.

"Giovanni." She spoke the single word into the flower, then looked up with an expression of mixed sadness and anger.

While I waited for her to go on, I started to reach out toward a petal of the exotic flower. Before I could touch it, Beatrice gasped loudly and stared at me in horror. Startled and confused, I dropped my hand and stepped back.

"The poison!" she said, her face serious, her gaze intense. "The flower is life to me, but it is poison to everyone else. The poison is also in me. It made me a danger to Giovanni . . . and he was a danger to me as well."

I was confused. Poisonous flowers and poisonous people? This was a bit strange.

"Why was he dangerous?" I asked, not knowing what
answer to expect.

"His contact with the corrupt society made him a threat to me in my protected garden. And he blamed me for my poison!" Her eyes flashed with anger, and she continued, "But his freedom made him responsible for the pain he caused me, while I had no control over my fate. My father raised me here in this garden. My only living companions were plants. I was surrounded by and in harmony with external nature, yet I was naive to the evil of man's internal nature."

As I reflected upon her statement, Beatrice said, "You should go now. It is not safe." She gave me one last sad smile before she walked away and disappeared into the same trees in which her father had gone.

I stood for a while, just staring at the poisonous flower. I felt compelled to touch it and to breathe in its scent. It was hard to believe that something which appeared so beautiful and innocent could be so dangerous . . .

I exited the garden through the gate. This time, I followed the path around the garden wall. Eventually, it led me down a hill of tall grass to a lush green valley through which a crystalline spring meandered. I felt tranquil, at peace for the first time in too long a while. The sun shone through the clouds as they metamorphosized into various creatures and formations in the sky. A delicate breeze caressed my face. I could feel the presence of the Creator of this natural, artistic display.
As I stood in awe and wonderment of the idyllic scene before me, I could identify with the feelings young Werther experienced in similar surroundings. I recalled reading about his appreciation and need for the solitude such a setting provided. I could even imagine him strolling beside the spring, picking flowers and binding them into a fragrant nosegay, only to toss them into the water and watch as they floated past him. I remembered how his love of nature had gone from pleasing him to tormenting him when his love for Lotte was not returned. His inner feelings determined how he saw the external nature around him. I knew that it was characteristic for many Romantic writers to incorporate this connection between internal and external nature in their works.

As I continued to walk beside the brook, my thoughts turned to Rousseau and his appreciation of nature for the individual and the exceptional. Proud of his uniqueness, he had been one of the first autobiographers to focus not on actual events in his life, but on how he perceived them, felt about them, and was affected by them. I had particularly enjoyed reading a passage in which he described the pride and sense of accomplishment which he and his boyhood friends felt at their own ingenuity in constructing a channel to redirect water from an existing walnut tree to their small willow tree. I found his approach to relating the events of his life interesting, because I shared his belief that each person is unique and perceives the world
through the screen of one's own experiences and feelings. In preparing to become an elementary school teacher, I had come to an even deeper understanding of this reality and its implications for education. It is so important to relate new information to what a student already knows. The more meaningful an experience is to participants or observers, the better that person will understand and retain the knowledge gained from it.

I stopped to observe a small stone beside the spring. It had been polished smooth by the water. As I knelt to inspect it more carefully, words of William Wordsworth came to my mind. A Romantic poet who valued the simple as well as the exceptional aspects of internal and external nature, he expressed his appreciation of nature for nature's sake. His work embodied the Romantic value for simplicity of spirit and expression. In "The Tables Turned," he had written the memorable lines, "One impulse from a vernal wood May teach you more of man, / Of moral evil and of good / Than all the sages can."

Wordsworth recognized the ability of the simple to express the profound. In "Ode: Intimations Of Immortality," he wrote "To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." He believed in the power and importance of the simple, intuitive life over reason and logic.

I turned the stone over in my palm and was surprised to see a number of tiny holes dotting its underside.
There were also speckles scattered on its surface, like white freckles on a gray stone face. I remembered with a smile the excitement and joy such a discovery would have given me when I was a child. Now, I felt a bit disillusioned: I had seen much of the world that I wished I hadn't, and I had overlooked things along the way which I wished I had seen. Especially now. I felt as if I no longer had the time to simply observe and lose myself in the wonder of the miraculous detail and uniqueness in hills, trees, blades of grass, clouds, and stars--tasks which used to occupy endless hours of my time. What has happened to me? I thought, that I should become so burdened with responsibilities and duties that I would forfeit the joy and wonder of life? To think that I have often walked through a beautiful college campus alive with nature and life, too hurried and worried to notice or acknowledge its presence! I was so busy now, attending classes and lectures, reading and researching and writing in order to "learn." Was I really learning more now in university lectures than I had in my backyard 12 years ago? And if not, was it not my responsibility to make the changes necessary to return to my earlier awareness of and sensitivity to nature? I gently replaced the stone into the slight indentation it had made in the bed of the spring.

I was experiencing firsthand some of the tension between innocence and experience, and between good and evil, which William Blake observed and wrote about.
Blake marveled at the fact that things are not always as they appear on the surface, for example, that the "good" lamb and the "evil" tiger could possibly share some characteristics and a common creator. Blake was fascinated by the tension and complexity in nature. In his poem "The Garden of Love," the persona's view of nature as an innocent child is contrasted to his later view through the eyes of experience. He has returned to the garden, only to discover that "a Chapel was built in the midst, / Where [he] used to play on the green." He feels disappointed and disillusioned. I now took comfort in the fact that others had experienced feelings and tension similar to mine.

The sun was sinking gently in the rose-amber evening sky. I decided to return to the room of people. I had enjoyed the solace. I had discovered much about myself, and I was resolved to make positive changes to live a more examined, observant, and meaningful life. I followed the stone path back to the glass door.

I entered the room and glanced around. I had seen and met several people; however, I was curious about the rest of the people in the room. I moved to a corner, from which I could inconspicuously (I hoped) listen in on a conversation in progress.

The Wife of Bath was winding down on one of her characteristic tales of self-proclaimed expert advice on the subject of love and the opposite sex. She concluded by saying, "I believe that the world would be a much
better place if all positions of power and prestige were held by women."

Without missing a beat, the man named Machiavelli retorted, "I have my own ideas about the qualities of a good leader, none of which involve being female." At this statement, my mouth involuntarily dropped open, but I immediately clamped it shut, looking around to see if anyone had noticed me.

The Wife of Bath pursed her red lips into a severe line and slanted her eyes at him, but Machiavelli went on, undaunted:

"A person in power should possess mercy, good faith, integrity, humanity, and religion. He should be able to inspire fear in his subjects."

"Why fear?" asked a third person, whose name tag told me he was Sir Thomas More. "Why wouldn't a person in authority try to cultivate a friendly relationship with the people he or she works with? It seems to me that this would prevent rebellion and encourage cooperation."

"You might be right," Machiavelli admitted, "but the goal is not cooperation, it is sovereignty. In order to reach that goal, any leader must be feared by those he rules. If people have no fear of him, they won't think twice about offending him. Clearly, a ruler must be independent. If he is concerned with being popular, he will be dependent on what people think of him."

"I don't think I quite understand what you mean,"
Thomas said. "How can a person in power make people fear him while practicing the qualities you first mentioned, such as mercy?"

"Well," Machiavelli began, "it is important that a person exhibit those characteristics when possible. If, however, to do so would hurt him and his causes, he must be flexible enough to practice the opposite responses. He likewise must keep up his appearances. If he has established his authority and seems to possess admirable qualities, people will justify and approve whatever his actions might be."

"So you don't believe people should use their authority to act in the best interests of the people they are in charge of?" Thomas did not hide his surprise.

"I am simply stating the fact that appearances are crucial to maintaining a position of authority," Machiavelli explained.

I thought about what Machiavelli had been saying about appearances, particularly regarding people in power. It brought to my mind memories of recent scandals involving politicians and televangelists, people whose personal lives--when eventually exposed to the public--were so far removed from the images which they presented in their public appearances and on TV. . . When I tuned in again to the conversation, Thomas was saying:

"I think one reason people are so selfish and ruthlessly competitive is that our society places an enormous
value on money. In the ideal society, money as we know it would be practically nonexistent. Instead of measuring the value of jobs in terms of money, work would be measured in terms of its relative necessity and contribution to society."

Hearing this, the Prioress lovingly fingered the gaudy gold brooch pinned to her blouse and said, "But if people worked only at jobs which were absolutely necessary for existence, who would make the fine things, such as jewelry?"

"That's my point," said Thomas. "In the ideal society, priorities would be different. Gold and silver would be seen as virtually worthless. Instead, great value would be placed on air, water, and the land--those things that are, by their very nature (no pun intended), of incalculable worth to man."

"Excuse me," said the Nun's Priest, "but I don't believe that money is so much to blame for the fall of man as is pride." Recalling what I had overheard Adam and Eve say, as well as my own personal experience, I felt inclined to agree. He went on, saying, "Man is extremely vulnerable to flattery. A relatively convincing compliment can render a man devoid of all logic and reason. Pride exacerbates man's competitive nature as well. Therefore, before we can achieve an ideal society, we need to exercise control over our emotions. We can take action right now, today, by using our reason."
"Exactly!" Marcus Aurelius was smiling broadly at the Nun's Priest. He said, "People in general are entirely too emotional. Stoics, on the other hand, are able to put logic above feelings. This allows us to endure pain and suffering. In addition, a rational man is able to understand divine purpose, because the soul is a fragment of logos, which is in all things." Seeing the confusion on the faces of his listeners, he added, "In other words, each of us exists as a part of the whole."

This statement reminded me of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," in which he had written "I celebrate myself, and sing myself,/ And what I assume you shall assume,/ For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

"I always try to do what is right," Marcus Aurelius was saying now. "Wrongdoing is impious because it is not in accord with Nature."

Removing the cigar from his mouth, Sigmund Freud cleared his throat and said, "That sounds a very noble idea... too bad it isn't possible."

"What do you mean?" Marcus Aurelius furrowed his brow and stared evenly at Freud.

"The evils of society are rooted not in the environment but in human nature. Reason will never be able to compete with the id—the instincts and desires which motivate man. Human behavior is governed primarily by nonrational drives, particularly the sex drive. Man's primary goal in life is to gain and maintain happiness."
"And what, in your expert opinion, is happiness?" inquired Karl Marx with a hint of sarcasm as he fixed his gaze upon Dr. Freud.

Freud returned the stare, took a quick puff on his cigar (sending Marx an unwelcome cloud of heavy, scented smoke), and said, "Happiness is both the presence of strong feelings of pleasure and the absence of pain. Man seeks to achieve this state in a variety of ways. When he follows his instincts, he is often punished as such action is usually in conflict with the rigid rules of society."

"I'll have to disagree with your pleasure principle," Karl Marx said firmly. "On the contrary, the motivating, driving force of humanity is not to be found internally, but rather externally: in the economics of one's time. An individual exists as a part of society; however, he is totally tied to that society's means of production. Economic forces, not inner drives, determine the course of human history."

"What about religion . . . patriotism . . . nationalism . . . philosophy . . . feelings?" I asked in desperation.

"Veils," Marx said with disdain, dismissing my statement as bothersome and inferior. As if summoning all of his patience, he continued, "These are merely veils which obscure man's awareness of reality. If you look at the history of mankind, you will see that social organization is consistently adapted to the means of economic production."
The history of mankind consists of a series of class struggles between those who own the means of production and those whose labor has been exploited to provide wealth for this upper class. In a cruel and unceasing pattern, the upper classes have dominated and oppressed the lower, working classes to perpetuate their own power: slave vs. master in ancient Greece, plebeian vs. patrician in Rome, serf vs. lord in the Middle Ages, and proletariat vs. bourgeoisie in my own time. This pattern of tension between the ruling and the ruled classes is, essentially, a necessary evil--necessary to the forward movement of history."

"How so?" I asked, trying to defend my earlier inquiry which he had so quickly dismissed.

Marx looked at me and said, "In the world, there are always two classes of people responding to the economic conditions of their time. The inevitable class conflict requires and justifies a violent revolution without which change is not possible. Without change, there is no progress."

"And you believe this will be obtained by a violent overthrow of Capitalism?" said I.

Marx nodded in reply.

"So your perceived pattern will end?" I continued.

"Yes, and with it will end the existence of the state, the church, private property, and classes. Workers will control production and property. Each person will use his
talent and ability to give what he can, and each person
will take what he needs. It will be perfect harmony."

"It sounds wonderful!" I said with a tight smile.
Then I grew serious and I said, "As a matter of fact, it
sounds too good to be true. I would dare to call it sus-
piciously utopian; like the plans of the very socialists
you criticize! Your view is too narrow, too limited:
you leave no room for the influence of nationalism and
religion and other belief and value systems in man's
social environment which can determine his behavior to a
great extent. I took a deep breath, gathered my courage,
and continued, "Furthermore, your description of history
is far from inclusive: many struggles have been between
nations, not classes. You are far too general in grouping
people into two distinct classes. You ignore even the
possibility of a middle class. Your simplistic philosophy
and 'solution' are an insult to the amazing diversity
within the human race!"

Listening to my critical analysis of Marx, Freud
smiled as if it were he who had won a secret battle.
Miffed at his smug confidence and driven by my own, I
turned toward him and said, "And you! While he places
too little emphasis on the individual, you put too much!
Your pleasure principles present an incomplete, not to
mention very unflattering and narcissistic, picture of man.
You also fail to explain, or even acknowledge, selfless,
unconditional acts of kindness on the part of man." I
paused, out of breath and momentarily frightened at the realization of whom I was criticizing. Then I took courage in the thought that this conversation couldn't really be occurring, and I finished my rampage: "You both chose to conveniently disregard vast amounts of information in forming your theories on the motivation behind man's behavior. You want to give a simple answer, and I don't think there is one! It is a complex issue; man is a complex creature."

There. I had said it. I was still here. Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud were still looking at me. I was still here . . .

"You mentioned religion . . . as if it is in conflict with my views," replied Marx, the first to break the silence and to respond to my appraisal of his position. "However, religion, like everything else, is influenced by economic factors: historically, the class in control of the society's material goods has also been in control of its values and ideas. The beliefs held by the ruling class eventually become the dominant ideas of that society. These ideas were presented to the people as moral and religious standards and were regarded as the truth by both classes. From this frame of reference, religion can be seen as an invention of man, created to satisfy his imagination and provide an escape from life's problems. The ills of society must be confronted and reformed, rather than avoided. Then will true happiness be obtained."
Here Freud joined in: "Religion is, as is everything else, a product and function of man's drives. It is a system of rules and promises formulated to conveniently explain the world and assure its followers of eventual rewards for injustices suffered in this life. It is just another attempt by man to face the disappointment of life, to satisfy his need to assign purpose and value to life. Religion is restrictive, in that it imposes one path to pleasure on everyone. It places minimal importance on the individual and this life. It is in conflict with reason, a crutch from which people need to break away and live independently."

Incensed by their criticism of religion, I retorted, "Even from a philosophical standpoint, you have the right to your opinion. However, you also have the responsibility to be thorough in your examination and analysis of religion and its influence on man, both externally and internally. Throughout history, the dominant religion of an age has had a great effect on its political, social, and economical condition. You both have disregarded evidence in the lives of many believers that religion and faith can play a very dynamic role in man's attitudes and actions. Instead, you rely on broad generalizations and unsupported theories in keeping with your personal, subjective biases about religion."

"No one can force a person to believe a certain way. We all have free will and choice. And true spirituality is anything but an easy out!" I protested. "Millions of
people throughout history, for example, have died for their beliefs in the God of the Bible, when those beliefs conflicted with the beliefs of the people in power. Following God requires sacrifice and submission, which are definitely not natural inclinations of man. Active faith must be nurtured and accompanied by obedience, humility, discipline, and self-denial. Hardly an escape! Instead, our God calls us to face the problems of life and do what we can to ease them and to show compassion for our fellow man.

"Rather than being restrictive, as you propose," I stated emphatically to Freud, "true faith in God and his son Jesus means freedom to the believer--the freedom of knowing you are loved and cared for, of knowing that you will spend eternity with your Creator and Savior. Being loved by someone gives you a sense of freedom--to be yourself and to show love to others. And as for faith and reason, it seems only reasonable to me when I survey the wonder and uniqueness of the world and of man, that we are here by design, for a purpose."

Looking at Marx, I continued, "Economics, in which you invest great faith, is a doctrine in its own right, a means of salvation and hope to some. It seems ironic that you criticize religions, when economics is in essence your religion."

Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud both sat and looked at me. I looked down at my shoe and pondered the pattern of the shoelaces as if I had never noticed them before.
Maybe I hadn't.

As I sat, I could feel a soft, warm sensation much like sunshine upon my skin. Instantly, the entire room was bathed in light of unearthly brilliance. I raised my eyes and squinted to see a man approaching us. He walked unhurriedly, and his stride appeared effortless, as if his feet barely made contact with the floor. He smiled a warm greeting, which Marx and Freud returned with silent, apprehensive stares. I wondered why the man was looking at us as if he knew us, when it was apparent that none of us had ever seen him before.

I heard a soft hum and traced its origin to the crowd of people I had met. They were huddled together, speaking in hushed, excited tones. When the man turned to look directly at the members of the crowd, many of them, such as Joseph and Adam and Eve, appeared to glow with recognition. The rest almost seemed to shrink with fear and confusion.

The man was now only a few feet away from us. He looked at Marx and Freud with an expression of deep sorrow and love. Then he looked directly at me and smiled the tender smile of a parent to a child. My heart felt as if it would burst with joy, as I realized that I was looking at Jesus Christ!

Every eye was riveted to the Son of God as he began to speak in soft, resonant tones, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven . . . "

As his soothing words continued, I knew that I had seen and heard the Truth. In light of our Creator, I had faith that the human condition, with all of its wonderful and terrible complexities, is not without hope.
Below is a list of the resources which I consulted either as individual texts or in anthologies such as Wilkie and Hurt's *Literature of the Western World*, Volumes I and II, by author and title.

Aristotle, *Poetics*.
Blake, "Songs of Innocence and of Experience."
Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*.
Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*.
Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.
Hawthorne, "Rappiccini's Daughter." [film]
Homer, *The Odyssey*.
Homer, *The Iliad*.
Machiavelli, *The Prince*.
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