
The River: A Vichian Dialogue on Humanistic Education

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I went down yesterday to the River. I was walking along the park where today the barge will be landing after the ritual marriage of the King and Maid of Cotton. They had put on this festival for a hundred years at least, and indeed, the cotton co-operates most every year, and the people prosper. The quiet of the park gave little indication of the throngs that would soon fill the banks in drunken revelry. But the workers were still constructing the platform for the orchestra, and cleaning the cannon in Confederate Park for the noisy part in the 1812 Overture.

Feeling a distance from the place and time, I had been pondering the ideal eternal history, the course that the nations run, as committed to paper in the old Italian's big book about a new science. The day was cool and comfortable for May, and portended a not unremarkable charm, something like an augury. The Old Man was relaxing on a

bench with the sun to his back and the River before him. I watched as his eyes followed a sizable branch floating gracefully downstream, but then I noticed that he looked out across the River to the west, with penetrating, deep-set eyes that seemed to see past all of Arkansas and Oklahoma and the high plains, until one would almost have believed that he could, somehow, from that vantage see the Great Divide itself, or beyond. I was intrigued, but not quite emboldened enough to ask after his vision.

"May I sit?" I asked.

"By all means. That's why it's here." He patted the bench.

We watched the River in silence for a quarter of an hour. In the periphery of my vision I studied his manner this day—queer, as always, but invitingly so. At length he opened a shabby little bag on the ground beside him, removed a half-empty bottle of Pinot Grigio and an irregular portion of cheese, and in

the most meticulous and refined way, set about enjoying them. Another part of an hour was passed in this way, as I watched without watching. Having seen thus to his repast, the Old Man replaced the wine and cheese and took a small, ancient, and well-worn volume from his pocket. He set about leisurely reading it. I could see that the title was *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*. This piqued my curiosity, as I am sure you will understand. What was here? Such heady topics upon such a fine spring day?

"Pardon me. I don't mean to disturb your reading . . ." but he cut me off before I could say more.

"Not to worry. I have read this book before, and the words of the living have a more admirable efficacy—in the springtime, on a Friday. What has come clear to you since last we met?"

"I have been shaking a fist at the heavens and nothing has come clear. Not one thing."

"Were you not just thinking about something I said to you many years ago?"

"Was I? I think you have me at an advantage."

"What were you thinking about before you sat down?"

There was nothing at all worrisome about the Old Man's question, and since he seemed today to prefer cat and mouse to a regular conversation, I decided quickly to follow his lead. "I was feeling a distance from this time and place, and thinking about the rise and fall of civilizations. Did you say something

about that?"

"I did, and have not found cause to regret it yet, but perhaps I shall. That will be up to you. What, specifically, were you thinking?"

"If you already know, why do you ask?" I took up the game.

"Oblige me, if you would be so kind." He flattened his "i's" and managed to lengthen the words themselves to two full-bodied syllables each, either in observance of the local accent, or in imitation of mine.

"I was thinking about tyrants."

"Yes, go on."

"Plato once said that democracy succeeds in avoiding the greatest evil only at the cost of losing the capacity to achieve the greatest good. Yet, for all a democracy gives up, it does not avoid tyranny. It exchanges the tyranny of an ill-disposed monarch for the tyranny of an ignorant *hoi poloi*."

"And that troubles you? Interest in politics is always an excuse for not thinking."

"It does trouble me. Deeply. In spite of your warning."

"How so? Please be specific."

"I have been wondering whether democracy is the end or apex of political evolution."

"Yes, I see. That is a troubling thought. And by 'evolution' do you mean progress?" he asked.

"I don't know whether to believe in progress. But I cannot help thinking that each time a civilization rises and falls, the civilizations that come later are different, and perhaps better off in some way, because they can learn from the earlier ones. So

the replay of events in history is not identical with the ideal and eternal pattern. It evolves. At the very least it accumulates."

"Describe the pattern. I am not certain I understand." It did not seem to me that the Old Man was patronizing me, but there was something about him that had always irritated me. Saying he did not understand seemed more an indictment of my capacity to make myself clear than of his own powers to grasp difficult thoughts. I continued,

"The various nations and cities and civilizations are born, they rise, they flourish for a time, they decline, they all fall. And it is the same for people."

"I see. Yes. Most men cannot part with the belief that each person's future is fixed from his very birth, but that some things happen differently from what has been foretold—through the impostures of those who describe what they do not know, and that this destroys the credit of a science, clear testimonies to which have been given both by past ages and by our own."

This was a remarkable thing the Old Man had said, although vaguely familiar to me.

"Necessity and chance," I mumbled to myself.

"Yes, of course; the currency of those who trade in prophecy. Are you a trader?"

"No," I said, "only a spectator."

"And what have you witnessed that brings you to these sublime thoughts?"

"You will think I'm quite mad if I

tell you."

"There are worse things than madness," he said.

"What?"

"Barbarism is worse."

"And what is barbarism?" I inquired.

"It comes down to a kind of impiety that constitutes nothing less than rebellion. To take divine things and treat them as if they were of human origin; to live as if one has made himself—and all else that is good, or noble, or worthy; *that* is barbarism. May heaven preserve us from it."

"That is how the tyrant lives, is it not?"

"Yes, and if the people be the tyrant, then it is how the people live. It is far better to be mad."

"I see. Then I need not worry too much if you think me mad; I should only fear that you may think me barbarous."

"If you fear that I will think you barbarous, you have already shown me that you are not. As for your madness, I should like to hear it. Give me a speech about it; I will listen."

"All right, but if I make a speech, you must make one also," I replied.

"That seems an admirable swap. Speeches, I suppose, are the money of spectators. But I shall return you only a fair price. Speak well if you want anything of value for your trouble."

"How shall I speak well?"

"Speak prudently. Do not neglect that which is particular to your account before you generalize. Give me what is certain and known about the life of man before drawing me

up to the heavens in a chariot of words," he said.

"I will do my best."

"That is all one can require of a man. I will not interrupt."

"My madness, then, seems to be caught in a vacillation like the one you mentioned earlier—between the conviction that things on the whole happen for inexorable reasons, and the feeling that I may act as I please and am able to pursue the occasions of fortune to my own advantage. My speech begins with the observation that Homer *said*, in essence, all that the Hellenes later lived out. That Dante *said* all that the Central and Southern Europeans later lived out. That Goethe *said*, in essence, all that the modern world has lived out. And perhaps Shakespeare *said* all that the British Empire later lived out. If this is so, then it seems that the stories of great civilizations begin and end in the words of epic poets, and that what a people may feel is already present in what its lyric poets have said. The heroism of a people is measured by the way that the heroes act in the founding epic, and the love and sympathy of a people is measured by the depth of feeling expressed in its founding lyrics. In short, all that a people can become is prefigured—dare I say predestined?—in its poetry, and here is necessity. A people cannot seem to think beyond its ordinary myths, and this because it cannot think *at all* without them. These myths are the very material of all that the people think, and of all the concepts they later make, and of all that they feel.

I paused and noted his attentiveness. I continued.

"Well, and good, I would say, but for the curious intuition that there is more to the story. I have spoken only of the beginning, and not of the middle or the end. The middle, however, is what I cannot understand, and I cannot speak of what I do not understand. But I can say something of the end, for I have also noticed the signs of the end of nations and of men. First, it seems, a philosopher appears from within a people who comprehends the end before it happens—not as a prophet would, who perhaps sees the particulars of the future, but as one who sees more the inevitability and nearness of the end, and who locates its causes in the epic and feelings of the people, and their limits. Hence, individual men spend old age in reflection upon the necessity of decline. And then, with nations it happens that from the margins of a people, a generation later, there arises a tyrant—one who embodies the Spirit of the people, all that is best and all that is frightful in them. He is their culmination and destiny, their childhood and their second childhood. And he performs many great deeds and many atrocities, and realizes in his very being all that was foretold in the beginning. He is godlike and yet bestial, heroic and yet he dies always before his time as the enemy of mankind. And so it is that in old age individual men and whole civilizations grow dissolute in luxury, and go mad, and waste their substance. Thus we become the tyrants

of our own souls. The philosopher sees the tyrant's shadow upon the horizon and knows what it means even before the god-beast even appears; the philosopher lives in the twilight, while the poet lives in the dawn. The twilight means the end is at hand, and beyond the end only the forest. Thus, we see that Plato appears a generation before Alexander, and Rousseau a generation before Napoleon, and Nietzsche a generation before Hitler. And the tyrant is not truly one of the people, but has come before them with all the talents, values and feelings of their hearts, but without their actual history as his own. In this way we are always surprised by the tyrant, even though we have been cautiously preparing for him all along. But we expect the tyrant to arise from within. That is not the tyrant's nature, however. So that in Alexander's being not a Greek but a Macedonian, Napoleon's being not French but Corsican, and in Hitler's being not German but Austrian, we find an alien power that compels each to recreate for himself, alone and from his own resources, the entire Spirit of the people to whom he does not fully belong but whose destiny he would fulfill. The purest tyrant must come from beyond and take up residence within a people. And all that Homer says in *The Iliad*, Alexander is—Nestor, Agamemnon, Odysseus and Achilles rolled into one. All that Dante says in his *Comedia*, Napoleon is—Heaven Hell and Purgatory, rolled into one. All that Goethe says in *Faust*, Hitler is,

playing Mephistopheles to his own Faust.

"And when the philosopher sees the tyrant coming, he speaks both of ruin and of a new day. The philosopher both longs for the day and fears it; despises the tyrant and yet hails his arrival. And the philosopher takes upon himself the task of thinking all of the thoughts of his people. And having thought all that can have been thought, he tires and dies. And then the tyrant comes. And after the tyrant, only the barbarians in the forest remain. The tyrant is, therefore, the last human being and the first barbarian, and he shows each their ways and their limits.

"And so that is my speech of the beginning and the end. Now you must pay for it in kind."

"I will," said the Old Man, "but let me ask you some questions, first, if you will permit me."

"Are you telling me the check is in the mail? I have heard that before. Do not forestall."

"I will speak, but I need some idea of what sort of speech is called for on this occasion, and there are things about your account I would better understand."

"Then ask," I said.

"You give me an enthymeme. Your speech lacks a middle term, and the wise have said that the art of the middle term is rhetoric itself."

"I have heard that, but I do not understand it."

"Do you see the River before us?" he asked.

"Yes, of course."

"And the other bank?"

"Naturally."

"And does the bank define the River, or does the River define the bank?"

"I should think that they define one another."

"And so they do. Is the River not between?"

"Yes."

"And is it wide and dangerous to swim?"

"I would not try to swim it," I confessed.

"But you have left me to do so, have you not?"

"How so?"

"You have given me either bank in your words, but no bridge or barge to help me get across, leaving me to swim from one end of your speech to the other, without so much as a drifting limb to keep me afloat."

"If I have given you a glimpse of both banks, then perhaps you should build a bridge across with your own speech," I offered.

"I fear that we haven't time to build a bridge, for the river is treacherous and unforgiving, and tomorrow's Festival would surely find us only stalking about the banks searching out a place to begin."

"Then make me a barge."

"I claim no expertise in that craft, and if you insist upon this, you would have to settle for a rickety and scrupulous vessel. And I could not promise it would take you safely to the other bank."

"I will accept the hazards. I have no special desire to go to Arkansas, but riding the River itself might be reward enough, even if it finishes

me off," I declared.

"You are suddenly very adventurous. Why not swim, if riding the River is worth a life to you? I think your youth is evident in your judgment."

"What would you prefer, then?"

"Let us speak not of bridges and barges, but of swimming, and leave the making of both to others."

"All right, if that is all I can get from you, I will take a speech of swimmers," I said.

"Do not be in too great a hurry. Come down to the edge of the water with me before you decide."

"If I must." As the sun peaked in the sky we arose and strolled lightly down to the River's edge. The Old Man spoke as we walked.

"The subtlety of nature is far beyond that of sense or of the understanding; so that the specious meditations, speculations, and theories of mankind are but a kind of insanity, only there is no one to stand by and observe it."

"The insanity of poets or the insanity of scientists?" I inquired.

"The insanity of poets is a divine inspiration, like the one who wrote of this river that 'it must know something, but it don't say nothin'.' That is a divine truth. But the scientists try to compel the River to talk, and the voices they later hear are really only their own. It leads them into barbarism."

"But do the mad poets not also compel the River, and all other things to speak?"

"Not in ordinary matters. The poet is mad to the point of compul-

sion only in speaking of things divine. Where the act is something out of the way and extraordinary, and seems in a manner to demand some impulse of divine possession and sudden inspiration to account for it, here he does introduce divine agency, not to destroy, but to prompt the human will; not to create in us another agency, but offering images to stimulate our own; images that give occasion to spontaneous action, aided and sustained by feelings of confidence and hope. For either we must totally dismiss and exclude divine influences from every kind of causality and origination in what we do, or else what other way can we conceive in which divine co-operation can act?"

"Providence? Is that what you mean?" I asked. "Certainly we cannot suppose that the divine beings actually and literally turn our bodies and direct our feet this way or that?"

"No, we cannot suppose that. But there is a sense in which our wills, unbeknownst to us, are turned to divine purposes through Providence. And the same may be said for chance and fortune."

"So is an inspired poet a sort of Providential opportunist, singing of what must be, but evoking the images freely himself?"

"The images of the poet certainly grasp the occasions of fortune, and the natural and moral causes of human things. But he is more a lackey of Memory than of Providence," the Old Man remarked.

"Yet, if my speech was true, he

sings of things that *will be*."

"If he follows his Muse, he sings of what *will be* by singing of *what is* and *what was*, since *that* is what will be."

"I don't understand," I said as we arrived at the water's edge.

"Remove your shoe and place your bare foot firmly in the River. Be sure to get a solid bit of river-bottom."

Thinking it exceedingly odd, I did as he requested, and placing my foot there began to withdraw it, but the Old Man interdicted with a mute but firm hand upon my shoulder, holding me to the place I stood, with one foot on the bank and one in the River.

"Remain there," he said. "If you wish me to repay you in kind for your speech, this is how it must be: I will speak for only so long as you will stand as you are, with a bare foot in the River, and a shodden foot upon the bank. Achilles' only weakness was the heel that remained dry. You are no hero, so your heel shall be your only strength. We will have no baptisms here."

"Why must I stand here like a dolt?" I asked in dismay.

"Because these are matters of the River."

"Then why don't you do the same?"

"Do not be impious, boy!" His sudden intensity took me completely aback, but it left me docile and attentive, as perhaps it was intended to do. He spoke.

"Between the beginning and the end is the middle. And the middle is change; indeed the middle is not

chaotic change, but growth. And in human terms, growth is education, formation—the Germans call it *Bildung*. And at the heart of *Bildung* is *die Bilder*, the images of the archaic poets. The images are not power itself, but are the source of all power. The images cannot be owned by the poets or their listeners, but rather are the basis of all ownership. They set the bounds of a people in thought, word, deed, and in sympathy. In mastering the images, the young man grows. He sets out, then, to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race. His mother prays that he will learn what the heart is and what it feels. He cries out to his old father the artificer ‘stand me now and forever in good stead!’ And he leaves home and steps into the River that will be his education. Here comes everybody!

“If he is wise the young man will be educated for the public good, or if he is foolish he will seek instead honors, titles, material gain, and the things that come from these. How one crosses the River makes all the difference. For young men are artists, one and all, but some are poetic and can make divine things with their words, while most others are technicians who can make only transient human things with theirs. And in making fools or poets of its young men, the commonwealth is the principal actor. For some states educate their boys for narrow ends, providing them with ready-made bridges

or barges across the River, while others cast their boys into the River itself and say only words of encouragement from the safety of the bank. The bridge-builders and barge-buyers deceive themselves that their sons will be safer from the perils of the River. But bridges collapse and barges sink, and those upon them who cannot swim are more certainly lost than those who have been cast into the River at the bank. The wise may learn to swim near the bank, where the current is slow, before setting out for deeper waters. The occupants of bridges and barges have no such luxury. Education, then, is a river of images, and the poets are its Olympian swimmers, fish of the sky, birds of the sea, becoming the psychagogues of their people, and their help.

“If you find that your commonwealth has constructed for you a sturdy bridge to the other side, eschew it. It will not take you to the other side, for arriving at the other side without comprehending the meaning of the journey is the same as never arriving at all. Not getting what one aims at is like getting nothing at all. No man can be educated for the public good who has not a clue what the public *is*. If it be warriors your people need, then let them choose warriors from among the swimmers, not the bridge-crossers. Commonwealths have been most renowned for military glory and most powerful politically when Letters have most flourished in them. Commonwealths that have educated their people wisely in the river of

images are preserved and grow. For where would one learn of heroism, of strategy, of prudence and of power except from Letters? Are these not the deeds and thoughts of those who came before, those who attained glory, honor, power, and gain? Are they not the darlings of blessed memory? Wasn't Alexander a student of Aristotle? Was Scipio, after all, not a student of Terence? Were Nelson and Lee and Patton and Rommel not educated in Letters? For the nation that would have power, for a time, let it cast its young men into the River. And indeed, such a nation will prosper and flourish, knowing always the difference between what it has made by itself, and what it owes to the divine. Let the commonwealth genuflect before the Temple of Mnemosyne if it desires greatness. The arts of war are the very matter of memory.

"After the military arts come the arts of trade. If you find that your commonwealth offers you a barge bearing precious goods that will take you across the River, eschew it. It will not take you to the other side, for arriving at the other side without comprehending the meaning of the journey is the same as never arriving at all. In this, you may be obliged to disregard the counsel of your parents. Among inferior peoples there may even be parents who propose to their children that the very fruits of these studies be some sort of base material gain. And they peddle in public as if in a marketplace the diligent but incomplete studies of their children. In truth,

these parents are the reason why their children may not advance any further, but continue all their lives in a single position of meager profit. The reason to seek the education of the River is not to trade in words, but rather to know their power. For men by their words may express intentions different from their real ones, and by their acts counterfeit intentions which they have not. At all events, a life of trade, whether one trades in words, goods or services, is a life eternally spent in acquiring merely the means of action. He who knows not how to act is not to be greatly trusted with these means, nor indeed should he trust his own intentions, since, being easily deceived by words, whether they be his own or someone else's, he knows even less of the intentions behind them.

"One now arrives at the deepest and most treacherous part of the River, wherein only statesmanship can sustain one's further crossing. And here one looks not to barges and bridges, but clings instead to one's fellows in the midst of the current. If the commonwealth tells you that you can only survive the River in a single group, or if it tells you that you can only cross the River alone, eschew the advice. The group you start with will not take you to the other side, for arriving at the other side without comprehending the meaning of the journey is the same as never arriving at all. Nor can you survive the journey alone, for to live alone is to be a beast or a god, and you are neither one. What-

ever else a statesman may be, he is inextricably tied to his people, and is yet an individual *par excellence*. He is not the unlettered military leader. Such a man may build many bridges but he cannot be trusted with matters of state. A military leader, though he possesses a great craft, may be elevated by fortune, and if he be entrusted with matters of state, then his nation stakes its common life upon a card game. Nor is the statesman an unlettered man of trade. For the standard of success in business is not high, being measured only in material gain. Such a man may purchase many barges, but he is not to be trusted with matters of state. The leader of business, though he possesses a great craft, may be elevated by good luck, and if he be entrusted with matters of state, then his nation stakes its common life upon the wheel of fortune.

“What, then, is the statesman? He will not be lacking the military arts nor the arts of trade, but by no means is he entirely given to the pursuit of either. Men of ambition look on money as a means of acquiring power, and of attaching others to their interests. This may be either good or bad. But whether good or bad, the statesman is a man of action, and not given overly to contemplation, since it inhibits action. Yet the statesman cannot be unlettered. While the military leader will seek his education only for the love of honor, and the man of trade will seek only for the love of gain, the statesman values neither honor nor gain so highly. The statesman would

sooner be dishonored than forsake genuine learning, and would rather be impoverished than forego it. These choices are beyond the poor imaginations of the military and business leader. They fail to grasp what other sort of action there may be, aside from action that aims at either power and glory, or wealth and gain. But the statesman understands a third kind of action. The statesman acts so as to serve. The military leaders and the business leaders may learn service from the statesman, but they cannot learn it from one another. Left alone, the military leader and the business leader will corrupt the law of the people, putting it to work either for the sake of power or gain. And inevitably these unlettered men place themselves above law in so corrupting it. They seem not to grasp that, simply because one *can* live outside the law, it is not necessary or better to do so. The statesman, however, sees this, and, in submitting to the law when he is not compelled to do so, truly serves. The military leader and the business leader may imitate, and, by habit of imitation, come to be functionaries of virtue in their actions, and hence, servants of the commonwealth, but they will never do so in the absence of the statesman. In serving his cause with a humble self-assertion—in saying, as he does, ‘I am the servant of my people, and being such, I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak save as this people shall command’—the statesman serves. The military and business leader both know that what the statesman

says in asserting not himself but his cause, is not pressed into speaking so by an irresistible compulsion—indeed, the statesman *does* have eyes to see and tongue to speak in his own behalf, or in behalf of power, glory or gain, but were he to speak so, or even allow himself to think so, he would be no statesman. And yet, although he is not compelled to declaim his powerlessness to speak otherwise than as his people require, there is no untruth in what the statesman says when he declares he has no power of his own. The statesman speaks here a falsehood that contains no untruth, a noble lie, and thus, the statesman teaches us in word and by example how to swim the most treacherous part of the River. He is known by his loyalty—not to power, gain, nor to the state, nor even to himself, but by his loyalty to what is best in man, which is nothing apart from his freely given loyalty itself, his thoroughgoing and practical devotion to a cause beyond and greater than himself.

“And after statecraft comes science. The scientist thinks he creates the very stream in which he swims, but in truth he depends upon the security that has been bestowed upon him by the military arts, the prosperity that has been laid before him by the entrepreneurial arts, and the freedom that is provided him by the statesman. The scientist has no comprehension of any of this. We are past the help of bridges, barges, and our fellows here. The man of science is not much interested in the partic-

ulars of history, nor in the commonwealth itself. He is a strong swimmer, but inept and forgetful in any but his own part of the River, for venturing outward, he will mistake every part of the River for his own, turning poetry, courage, statecraft, and even trade into sciences in his narrow estimation. He is a sort of reptilian being who prefers the River to the banks, and acts neither for glory, nor honor, nor power, nor even gain. Indeed, he spends so much time in the water that he develops webbed feet and hands, if he retains appendages of any sort, swimming as easily upstream as down, and could more easily be drowned on land than in the River. But the human cares and concerns of those swimming by on their way to a farther shore are quite foreign to him. Yet, he is neither beast nor god. He is human, but he is a barbarian—not the honest sort of barbarian who is merely ignorant, and a poor swimmer, but rather the sort who, overly impressed with the power of reflection and its words and measures, forgets the human things altogether by submerging them in eddies and currents of abstract figures and diagrams. These are the nearly empty images of the scientist. And he is dangerous to other swimmers. He may greet them with soft words and warm embraces, but those who can remember Grendel and Polyphēmos from their youthful reading of poetry will recognize him, passing by and introducing themselves only as ‘Nobody.’ The swimmers are well past tiring from the journey,

and so it is here, in the Kingdom of the Water-Snakes that they will have to learn prayer, if they would swim past the reptilian scientists and achieve the farther shore. Watch them as they move in tracks of shining white, they coil and swim, and every track a flash of golden fire. Say only that they are happy living things of beauty, and learn here the sympathy of your kind, or bless them unaware. They prey not upon those who can pray.

"Yet having learned to pray, you must finally face the Priest, and here you may recover your strength, or you may be altogether lost. Listen not to what the priest says, but attend to what he does. In his rites are to be found the absolute common sense of the people. When a child is born, the Priest will be there with rituals to ensure that his birth is a publicly celebrated occasion. When the same young man chooses a mate, the Priest will offer words in public to sanctify the union. And when the same man, now old, dies, the Priest will be there to mark his passing in public rites and remembrances. These, rites of birth, marriage and death, are the things without which no people can be human. And herewith the words and images of the Priest assist you onto the far bank itself. And in time you will come to see that you are he and he is you. And you are educated."

The Old Man turned suddenly as if to depart, but I reached out and took his sleeve.

"But what are you? Are you a Priest?"

"I am a man. And nothing human is foreign to me. But I cannot, as yet, know myself, and I must attend to the sacrifice."

He turned and was gone with such alacrity that I wondered if he had been there at all. As I surveyed my situation, I wondered whether it would be better now to swim the River or return to the safety of the bank. My foot was submerged in the mire of the River-bottom. At that moment the sky thundered "Babadalgharaght . . . !" with such violence that I fell forward into the River and found myself floating effortlessly on my back, watching the setting sun. I turned to see smoke curling slowly up from the cannon in Confederate Park. I was leaving home.*

* This Dialogue is dedicated to the Old Man. He knows who he is—to the extent that anyone does.

Note on Sources

There are many direct quotations in this dialogue from the works listed below, and still more paraphrases and allusions to them. I have not set these off with quotation marks and notes so as not to spoil any further the already slow progress of the dialogue itself. The literary need to use these direct quotes in such a way as to be integrated with the dialogue is also the reason for the free use of gender-exclusive language in this piece, since all of the translations employed use gender exclu-

sive language. There is a greater consistency of style among nineteenth-century English translations of the classics, and this lent itself more easily to integration within a dialogue than would have been possible using more recent translations, although it does render the prose of the dialogue somewhat archaic. Perhaps that is not an altogether bad thing—from the standpoint of style, in any case. Also, the gender-exclusive language is occasioned by the need for characterization, and the Old Man would indeed speak this way, and probably the Narrator would as well.

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