

ERIK H. ERIKSON

1705 CENTRO WEST, TIBURON, CALIFORNIA 94920

October 20, 1980

Mr. Steven Marx
41E Escondido Village
Stanford, CA 94305

Dear Mr. Marx:

Your long and thoughtful letter arrived here after I had left for the summer, and I now realize that I never thanked you for it. The bibliography you provided is very suggestive and of very high quality but will take considerable time to consume. So let me now thank you and send you all best wishes for your continued autobiography and for your thesis.

Yours cordially,

Erik H. Erikson

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41E Escondido Village
Stanford, CA 94305
18 June 1980

Dear Professor Erikson:

It was a delight for me to listen to lecture at Stanford two weeks ago. And it was a privilege to speak to you briefly at the podium after your talk. But it was a great honor to have you ask me for a bibliography on the subject of my dissertation-in-progress--pastoral poetry and the life cycle. I had last heard you speak thirteen years ago at Stanford, when I was first a graduate student, and when the ideas you presented inspired me to begin the intellectual project that's now finally nearing completion.

I was thoroughly infected with the Sturm und Drang of 1967. At the time you spoke I was searching for a dissertation topic that could draw together my literary interest in pastoral poetry and the questions that were creating turmoil in my inner life. As were so many of my friends in the counter-culture, I was haunted by the idea of "getting back to the garden." It wasn't just a fantasy. Intoxicated by diognysiac politics, music, sex, drugs, and by writings of people like Aldous Huxley and Norman O. Brown, we knew what it was like to live in Eden. The everyday reality of war, racial strife, our parents' expectations, and our own pasts and futures seemed to be the real illusion. With enough faith and the collaboration of like-minded souls it would be possible to break away to some green world and leave the smoking towers of civilization behind.

And yet, our voyages out of time seemed perversely contained in time. One always "came down," and after each ascent, the descent was steeper and deeper. On Monday mornings I would feel the press of responsibilities: my studies, my career, my parents.

The gulf between the two worlds of vision and reality kept widening. I found one solace in the writings of William Blake: "Songs of Innocence and Experience, or Two Contrary States of the Human Soul." There are simply two valid and contradictory truths, implied Blake; human life is essentially schizophrenic. For a long time this admission of absurdity organized my confusion; and the study of the Blakean theme was the topic of my research. But after listening to you speak and reading Childhood and Society, I began to realize there was an alternative to that Freudian dualism. Using the framework of the life cycle I could recognize the polarities as stages rather than states of the soul. My dissertation subject shifted from Innocence and Experience to Youth and Age.

But the change of dissertation topics didn't resolve the antinomies of my life. I wasn't ready to complete the scholarship until I had done some field work. In 1970, my wife Jan and I left our teaching jobs in New York, where we had since moved, and where I was an Instructor at Columbia; we packed our possessions into a red van and set out for an unknown destination. As if guided by a pillar of smoke, we ended up in the wilderness of British Columbia. There we hoped to find an Arcadia remote from war, ambition, pollution and overcivilized decadence. But we were also ready to settle in a place on the map of this world, to

buy property where there were real winters and where nature could teach us the hard facts of life. On the way there Jan conceived our first child, Jonah. He was reared in a wood-heated log cabin, raised on goats milk, fresh vegetables and home-slaughtered meat.

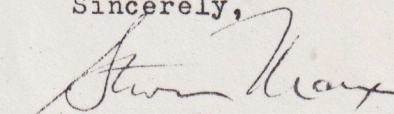
It was probably Jan's influence that led us to the decision ^{(to become parents,} at the same time as we were going back to nature. But I don't think I would have agreed--at least not without resistance--unless I had come to the realization that generativity was an inner imperative of my own. Once again, it was your work that led me to a dramatic insight: the energy behind the nostalgic idealism that drove me to hunger and search for a state of perfect innocence was a sublimation of the drive to procreate and nurture. Plato (and Freud) had it backwards, at least as far as I was concerned at a healthy twenty seven years of age.

Surviving in the pastoral world left little time to work on a dissertation about it. But the idea stayed with me. Nine years later, the vision of pastoral innocence had lost most of its mystical attraction, but the notion of a historical study of the literary conventions of the genre was still compelling. Through it I could begin to make sense out of the changes I had undergone while living on the land. I could see why the concerns of the parent, the householder, the administrator were excluded by pastoral and why characters of middle age were absent from bucolic fantasy. And I could see why the stages of the life cycle were such a strong concern in pastoral. It was because, like the seasons, it is one of the rhythms of nature. Shakespeare's Ages of Man speech belongs in the Forest of Arden.

At any rate, last year, backed by Jan's encouragement and by her remarkable ability to support a family of four and be a good mother, I came back to the Stanford English department to take up work on the abandoned dissertation. As of today, the first draft is three quarters finished. With continued good fortune, I should have the degree by next June.

You asked for a bibliography and I've sent you an autobiography. I apologize for demanding your attention like this; but it means a great deal for me to be able to tell you how your work has illuminated my life.

Sincerely,


Steven Marx