

1. INVOCATION

President Fraser, Distinguished Guests,

Members of the Administration--high and low, Fellow Faculty Members--Beloved and Otherwise,

Students, Parents and Friends, and Friends of Friends, Ever Faithful Staff of the Dining Hall, Housing, and Buildings and Grounds,

Campus Pets Large and Small--mostly Dogs and Cats but also Birds and Fishes, for that matter, every Little Creeping Thing that Creepeth upon this Campus,

Trees and Shrubs and Multifarious Flowering Things that Cover the Ground of this Campus, All Things Inanimate without which Animate Things cannot be so described even if it were possible to so conceive

them in the dualistic world of thought in which we find ourselves so thoroughly enmeshed unless one tries very hard to resist it,

last but by no means least, Members of the Senior Class, last and least, all those who think I have left them out of the distinguished roster,

Greetings to you all!

2. ACCEPTANCE: BUT WHY ME?

I am very grateful to the Senior Class for having chosen me to speak at the Last Collection this evening. I am flattered but, to be honest, I am also dumbfounded. Why me! Granted that we live in the day and age of minorities -- and minorities among minorities are especially fashionable of late - still, I am hardly the right person to address the graduating class. Those who know should know that I am known through the campus as a contentious person. Some are kinder and say that I am outspoken, while others are less kind and speak of me as obnoxious, venomous, vituperative, or even worse. Why me! Maybe, there was some mistake. This is clearly a miscast. I was quite ready to graciously decline the invitation. But I changed my mind. What changed my mind is a comment made by a close friend who, in all good intention, congratulated me and then advised me that I should accept: "That's wonderful," she said, "you should definitely accept." I was still uncertain, and she added: "You know, you may not be asked again." The thought that I may not be asked again reminded me vividly that I am perhaps at the zenith of my academic career. I felt genuinely flattered to think that I made a small success in what I profess. But no sooner than I realized that, it dawned on me that all is bound to go downhill hereafter. Right then and there, I shuddered and wrote a letter accepting the invitation.

3. WHY ME: THREE THEORIES

The Seniors are honoring me. But why are they honoring ME! The thought still troubled me; and it forced me to think rigorously and analytically -- rigorously and analytically as I have been trained to do in my many years of teaching at Swarthmore, where students are taught to never leave professors idle even when, at rare moments, they'd themselves rather idle than work. Thinking, however, led me to develop theories about it. For, again, in the good Swarthmore tradition, there is nothing in this wide world which does not lend itself to being theorized from aardvark and abaca to Zeppo and zygote; here they theorize about women and about numbers, about The Great Saga to the pangs of Room Choosing.

Well, I came up with three theories. First, contrary to the general opinion, students really like me and like me dearly. They love me dearly, and really wanted to honor me. This is known as Realism, or otherwise, Dearism, and no one with a shred of common sense believes it. Second, the Domino Theory. This states that those very few who liked me persuaded others to go along with them and they in turn persuaded still others, who fell in for it, and so on and so on. And, in no time, the whole Senior Class capitulated. But this theory, too, fails, given that Swarthmore students are never quite so gullible, if ever at all. Thirdly, then, the T.F.T. Theory. Briefly it claims that the students who had me in classes obviously had enough of my bludgeons and abuses and decided that this is the last and only chance to get back at me, Tit for Tat, hence the T.F.T. Theory. They liked the idea of putting me on the spot, and see me stand in front of them -- shaking and speechless. I found the third theory most plausible, and swore to myself that, shake I will not and SPEAK I will.

4. THE SPEECH: WHAT COULD ONE SAY AT A COLLECTION

For being chosen to speak at the Last Collection is a dubious honor, however. I don't mean to say that the honor is dubious. The honor is perfectly honorable; but the task is troublesome. It is inconvenient, it is inauspicious, and it is intractable.

It is inconvenient because it comes at the worst time of the academic year when those of us who teach are swamped by, buried under, a heap of bluebooks and term papers. It is inauspicious because there is something that bothers about anything which is last of something -

General Custer's last stand, for example,
Krapp's Last Tape (that sad, sad Samuel Beckett),
Last Tango in Paris,
Last Straw and Last Gasp,
The Last Supper, and worst of all,
The Last Judgment; but to think of it, still worse, the last chance to give the Last Collection.

The task is also intractable because

a) one is never clear what this Collection is a collection of (though in recent year almost anything has become collectible); it is never clear who is collecting what; whether you are collecting yourselves, or collecting from others (or am I to come down the aisle and collect from you?);

b) while this is allegedly an address to address the Senior Class, there are always others in the audience, and what if I had something to tell the Seniors only which I didn't want others to hear; and

c) what is the speaker supposed to say on an occasion that is so unclearly defined both in terms of its purpose and audience? If one tries to deliver something of substance, one is likely to be charged for being too serious and heavy-handed. If one tries to be light, one will be criticized as being flippant and frivolous. People will say: did you hear Kitao speak? All fluff.

One could try to be both light and heavy, something that reminds us of Oldenburg's soft sculpture, like his hand-sewn vinyl water closet, which droops. But trying to be light and heavy is exceedingly difficult, granted it may not be impossible. One could try to be neither light nor heavy, and that is easier. For example, as one senior so kindly suggested to me, I could show slides, especially because some people have a mistaken idea that that is all that art historians do. I took the suggestion seriously and considered showing two carousel trays, all 160 of them, at 2 slides per minute, in the manner of my shot-gun slide identification test . . . a song without words, so to speak.

Alternatively, I could start with one minute of silence, Quaker-like, followed by twenty minutes of silence in which we would ask the Senior Class to reflect individually and collectively, on the four long Swarthmore years, so grueling and yet so deeply meaningful; and then we shall all together spend the remaining thirty minutes in silence in order to reflect still deeper on the Senior Class's deep reflexive reflection. This is what Chomsky called deep analysis, which in Roland Barthes's system of thought is reflection degree zero, and which in the now fashionable literary theory is described as deconstruction, which is still yet to be recognized as a Quaker invention. But given that silence is golden, everyone knows that too much gold only breeds greed. So much silence, I was also advised, would be offensive to the non-Quaker segments of the audience, i.e., Catholics, like myself, Zen Buddhists, like myself, and above all, Jews, professed or latent, like myself. Remember I am, after all, a JAP--an overgrown Jewish American Princess. But more importantly, having accepted the T.F.T. Theory with regard to the choice of the speaker, how can I adequately express my retaliatory retort unless I spoke? Meditation won't do. And so in order to undermine the trick being played on me, I decided to talk, and talk without hesitation, without reservation, without inhibition.

5. THREE TRITE OBSERVATIONS

By the time I thought this far, it was beyond any doubt that what you deserve from me is a sermon -- non- sectarian, of course, in fact, so non-sectarian as to be better described as secular. A talk is a sermon, it has been said, when it is long enough to make the audience wriggle and squirm in the seat but foreboding enough to keep it there. Something Mark Twain might have said but didn't; I made it up. I think I can keep you wriggling for five hours but I'm not sure if I can be foreboding, so I'll probably be briefer, much briefer.

My sermon was to be entitled Three Trite Observations on Swarthmore Education; or, Where Have You Been These Four Years, My Dear Seniors, What Are You Up To, Anyway, What Do You Think Lies Ahead for You -- Eh, Monsieur Gauguin, What Do You Say?. That's Monsieur Gauguin in Boston -- an inside joke. I have, of course, many more than three observations, especially if you are asking about trite ones, but I limit myself to three and lop off the rest because years of teaching taught me that three is pedagogically the most effective number. Memory makes a leap between three and four, and while it is easy to remember three things it is always very difficult to remember the fourth thing when there are more than three of something, even for the brightest minds at Swarthmore. Try to think of four temperaments, four cardinal virtues, the names of Dürer's four horsemen of the Apocalypse; how about four laws of thermodynamics, and the four academic divisions at Swarthmore (there are only three). I am convinced that Christianity would not have been quite so successful in relation to its pagan competitors, had its divinity been endowed with four persons rather than three, notwithstanding the Gestaltists who might wish to raise the ante to seven. So, here beginneth my Sermon.

6. LEARNING SUBJECTS

First, then, where have you been these four years? You wouldn't know, actually, because you never gave a thought. But you were mostly in McCabe Library, or otherwise in any of the other libraries on or off campus. You were reading, writing, debating, or else dozing. In short, you were educating yourselves. You were educating yourselves day and night, seven days a week, during meals and in sleep, even while you were gossiping about your dearest professors, which can be very educational, given the faculty of superior calibre for which Swarthmore is justly famous and of which you are so proud, no doubt. You took at least 32 courses in several subjects, in more subjects than you cared to study, mostly easily forgotten except for the one you are going to pursue further, in school or as a career. You wrote reams and reams of term papers. Stop and think how many trees you caused to be felled, and how many houses you might have caused to be flooded. And those volumes of books you managed to read in these four years, those articles you scanned, those pages of printed matters you xeroxed for reading (even if they had been in the end left unread). As for the number of books you took off the shelf and opened and flipped through and closed unread and yet somehow understood, it's I am sure countless. And the hours of computing time, computing and writing but also testing various game theories between computing and writing.

All this is still much too close to you that you find it perhaps too painful to remember and too glad to forget. But if you try to remember these four turbulent years, all four of them, some of you will probably find your mind reeling, with ideas from different courses oozing together into one amorphous blob, with fragments of from this course and that thrown in like nuggets, one subject sometimes hardly distinguishable from another. If you have such pride as not to let this kind of confusion take over your mind so soon, as is very likely the case with most of you, you just wait and see. It will eventually come to you, or it should. And it is something you should look forward to. In case you didn't know, this confusion is what I call curricular integration. But let me explain something about academic subjects, first.

7. SUBJECTS ARE MANY . . .

In your educational career, probably from the very first day in your elementary school, you have been taught that there are such things as subjects. The idea has been inculcated in your mind tirelessly and incessantly so that you do think that subjects are what you study: physics, Spanish literature, economics, psychology, religion, paleontology, epidemiology, etc. It has become impossible, in fact, not to think of subjects as that which we study rather than as that under the rubric of which we study.

Subjects have come to be understood, not merely as a topic of discussion, but mistakenly as the substance of study; and the clusters of subjects have come to be known as bodies of knowledge--disciplines. If a topic touches on two or more disciplines, it is called interdisciplinary. But some topics fall between them, apparently into a deep chasm, a black hole, and get forever lost. In other words, they are believed to disqualify as legitimate subjects of study. And they never get to be studied. Such are matters like magic, reading, and food, even though these are so central in our life.

Can you imagine a college senior graduating as a major in magic, reading, or food? I can. Reading, for example, may be discussed from such diverse viewpoints as physiology, literature and social history. Topics may cover

perception
eye movement
ophthalmology and neurology
teaching to read
reading disorders like aphasia and dyslexia
reading in relation to writing, like
text and textuality; recitation and discourse
narrative, narrativity and history as writing
graphology, deciphering codes
sight reading music
reading charts, maps, diagrams and pictures

rhetoric, cognition, and hermeneutics
social history of books and libraries
printing and the Gutenberg Galaxy
reading vs. watching TV and hacking on a Computer
illiteracy
matters concerning books--book editing, book binding,
book collecting, book burning and simple bookmaking
reading of palms, tea leaves and other fortunes
reading of faces in poker and interviews
reading of menus in foreign countries

and other arts of reading signs which go under the rubric of semiotics.

Food for examples, concerns edible plants and animals, cooking, eating, preservation, taste, wines and other drinks, digestion and nutrition, poisoning, fasting, hunger and famine, banqueting (like Plato's Symposium), manners, etiquette and other social codes, and vessels and utensils, among other matters; and it cuts across various disciplines including agriculture, physiology, economics, biochemistry, anthropology, religion, art and literature, pathology, and sociology. But I can well imagine that most parents will be flabbergasted to find their daughter or son graduating with a degree in food even if it had been from Swarthmore. And how about toponymy, ancient and modern (combining geography, topography, folklore and linguistics), proxemics -- which studies physical, psychological and social spaces (introduced by E. T. Hall), vision (located today in the nowhere land between physics, psychology, philosophy and art), and rhetoric (which was once legitimate but fell in disfavor in modern times)? If think these subjects are peculiar, remember that there are subjects, which are today taken for granted and yet were only yesterday subjects of heated debate as to their academic legitimacy, like film and television, black studies, and art (which at Swarthmore was still a bastard ten years ago). And going farther back in history, how about American literature, comparative literature, folklore, and even sociology and psychology?

Now, you don't have to be alarmed because I am not going to propose a drastic curricular revision to the CEP, especially since the faculty decided not to elect me to its membership anyway -- to my deeply-felt relief, I might add. But I want to impress on you the fact that the disciplinary configurations are quite arbitrary even though it may have a historical legitimacy. In the Middle Ages, in fact, the trivium that awarded a Bachelor of Art, consisted of only three subjects: Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric. The Pedagogic Three, you see. If you did well in them, you would go for Masters and study four subjects, Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy and Music, completing the Seven Liberal Arts. Obviously, there are more than one way to slice the world of knowledge.

If learning had traced a history even a little bit differently from what we inherited, you will be graduating tomorrow in such undergraduate majors as magic, food, and reading,

rather than philosophy, biology or English literature. Other possible majors are the following: machines (combining engineering, science fiction, religion, economic history, robotics, and eighteenth century studies), mountains (combining geography, earth sciences, seismics, Chinese Art, skiing, ecology, and eschatology), The Mediterranean (as in Fernand Braudel's monumental book) and so on.

I can think any number of such topics which in the current scheme of things are either too elaborately interdisciplinary or else are not taken seriously, and thus disqualified as academic subjects:

dreams, Siberia, error and transgression, death, the brain, circle and square, emotion, poverty, walls, text, homo ludens, war, analysis, reproduction, self-reference, India, sight and sound (or, son et lumière) in all their permutations, womanhood, jest and humor, hands, healing, walking, and madness and sexuality -- as in Michel Foucault, whether done separately or even together in the form of double major or combined major.

8. BUT KNOWLEDGE IS ONE

Ultimately, then, subjects don't matter so much. For there are alternate ways of dividing the world into semantic fields other than the way we take for granted. We come to realize this fact as we study other cultures than our own, especially those less influenced by the West, something Swarthmore has not been providing enough of. We then also realize that there is no subject under the sun that does not lend itself to learning. No subject, I insist, is beneath the dignity of the true intellect. It is the mind that treats the subject, and it is the rigor of intellectual analysis that distinguishes it and elevates it above the mundane.

I often tell my students that there are good books and bad books, but there is no book that is not worth reading; it all depends on how you read it and what you read off it. Nothing that's ever been written is entirely worthless -- even the countless memos we receive in college mail every week; I find those memos quite fascinating, actually, for they reveal a great deal about their writers and their world of fears and anxieties. For, what has been written has been intellectualized. However feeble the intellectualization and however base and trivial the subject, that which has been written is a text (in Ricoeur's sense), something apart from the subject itself. One can actually say this not only of what has been written but of everything that is read -- the whole semiotic world of signs, i.e., writings, pictures, people, faces, objects, and all visible phenomena, everything that functions as a sign, everything under the sun. After all, it is the same mind that studies what the subject encompasses, be it mountains or microeconomics, physiology or eating, be it Fibonacci numbers, rain, Gothic Cathedrals, bare feet, speculative bubbles vs. efficient markets hypothesis, Immanuel Kant, fashion magazines, real analysis, free-radical reactions, or toothpick.

Mind is one and indivisible, and so is knowledge. So here is my first trite observation:

SUBJECTS ARE MANY BUT KNOWLEDGE IS ONE. And it concerns where you have been these four years.

9. CURRICULAR INTEGRATION

My second observation follows from the first, and it concerns what you are up to, anyway, now that you have completed your four-year education.

If we agree that subjects are many but knowledge is one, it is not hard to see that integrating the subjects one studied is something that happens in making them into knowledge. Curricular integration is therefore a contradiction in terms, as I see it. Only she or he who studied the subjects can integrate them with the effort of her or his mind. No one else can do it for you. For to integrate is to internalize what you have learned, to make it your own. When you have integrated it you feel you've known it from time immemorial. If it is done for you as an integrated course or as an integrated curriculum, it is only another course, another subject, another discipline -- a subject circumscribed somewhat differently from conventional courses but not too differently because it merely combines several of them.

That is why a drastic curricular reform is neither necessary or necessarily desirable; and I am not proposing one. Had you studied magic, food and reading, you'd be integrating them instead of algorithms, organic chemistry and Literatur des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts. In either case, it is only your mind that does the integrating, with or without your effort. For integration comes inevitably -- even if in the form of confusion which might at first seem more like disintegration than integration. But disintegration is a kind of integration, as Henri Bergson would have it. You may try and succeed in keeping your mind compartmentalized in analogy with the way the academic curriculum is departmentalized; but that is the surest way to end up with an academic mind. What is wrong with an academic mind? Nothing really, of course, except that it lacks that certain quirk, a streak of madness, furor poeticus in the Neoplatonic sense, that promises excellence or perhaps even brilliance.

But even with the academic mind, time comes when the subjects are forgotten and knowledge internalized. Forget the subjects, and you will see them eventually integrate. I assure you that there is nothing to worry about the amorphous blob into which your undergraduate courses may seem to and will eventually coalesce. And, then, you feel about something you know as if you've always known it, and you find yourself saying something like, "I must have learned it somewhere." You have internalized what you have learned as subjects. "You have not been confused enough," said Irish poet and theologian, AE (George William Russell) to young James Joyce, who took

the admonition terribly seriously as we all know and eventually produced a magnificent confusion. Integration is a mental activity, and no one can do it for you; but left to themselves the subjects you studied will eventually coalesce and integrate on their own.

So, here is my second trite observation: MIND INTEGRATES SUBJECTS INTO KNOWLEDGE.

10. USELESS IS USEFUL

The third trite observation takes up the question, What Lies Ahead for You? We know the answer, of course. Jobs? No promise. The way the promised economy is going, job is bound to be an obsolete term in no time like fountain pen and aconitum, the word used in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part II, Act 4, scene iv, line 48* (where it appears in a phrase "as strong as aconitum or rash gunpowder," and means "poison from wolf's bane"). So, no jobs. How about more school? Possibly. But how many more lawyers and doctors do we need, unless we swear to be more infirm than we already are and encourage the ailing to prolong their ailments as long they possibly can, and keep ourselves busy suing our neighbors at the slightest provocation to engage mushrooming lawyers busy in litigations? So there remains for you to idle around and think? That is most likely what you will end up doing.

It's a grim world we live in today. But I thought I should give you at least one foreboding idea to make the talk into a sermon. But there is always a bright side to every story. Believe it or not, Swarthmore taught you to think, though, admittedly, some of you learned better than others. Thinking and learning to think -- that is, after all, the central mission of the Liberal Arts Education. If the subjects you study are only rubrics under which you study, you will also realize that they are rather unimportant, so far as learning is concerned. As you yourselves so often insist, what a good course teaches, regardless of the subject, is how to think--to think like a physicist if it is a course in physics, to think like an economist if it is an economics course, and -- best of all -- to think like an art historian if it is a course in art history that you are taking. The real learning is not the information that books and your professors provide; for it eventually lapses from memory and is even rather quickly forgotten except that which you incorporate into your career and keep it up that way by constant review. But what really stays and is never lost, once learnt, is the way of thinking.

By the way of thinking, I mean not just the means and approach nor merely the style of thinking but the *tao* of thinking. And, in the Chinese word *tao*, skill and knowledge are inextricably fused. *Ars* in Latin, too, more or less meant that initially. There is a modest inscription on the wall of Parrish Hall facing McCabe Library, dated 1914, which says *ARTES SERVIUNT VITAE* (arts serve life), which I interpret in this sense. This is the art in the phrase, Liberal Arts.

These are hard times, I said. And, it is easy to forget the most basic notion that Liberal Arts Education is by definition impractical -- impractical in the sense that it has no immediate useful application. This is true not only of philosophy and literature but also of sciences. Take any of the subjects offered as a major in a liberal arts college. There are very few careers for which it serves as a training. Eight courses in chemistry that a major

does in chemistry hardly makes a chemist of her or him. Majoring in economics hardly prepares you for accounting. Even engineering as an undergraduate major does not make one into an engineer. I don't have to tell you that; you've amply experienced the frustration, or even exasperation and anxiety. You have undoubtedly discovered, as you were being interviewed for a job, that you have dismayingly little skill to sell. What you do best is to read and argue and debate, and you could argue that the ability to think is a kind of skill as is the ability to argue, and these you do, indeed magnificently. But very few jobs exist that will give you a chance to demonstrate such skills.

But IT IS THE VERY USELESSNESS OF THE LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION THAT MAKES IT SO

USEFUL; and this is my third trite observation. Trade schools teach specialized skills that are marketable. They teach proficiency in something that is immediately practicable, be it welding, cooking, accounting, furniture finishing, or film editing. Similarly, though on a higher level, professional schools prepare students for a specific profession: law, medicine, architecture, business administration, etc. Professionalization is achieved by channeling efforts in one special trade or profession at the exclusion of others, by which high proficiency is assured. By teaching to learn one thing well, trade school education curtails adaptability, however. Learning to do one thing well is practical, efficient, and most admirable; but it tends to constrain our capacity to expand beyond the trade we were trained to do well in and to adapt to new situations.

Liberal Arts Education, by contrast, forces students to disperse their

efforts and refuses to teach anything specific in the way of skill -- except, perhaps, how to think and think well, if that can be called a skill. But learning to think teaches us how to learn whatever there is to learn. It trains us to be adaptable to changing situations; and more importantly, it teaches us to continue learning. It may not teach us all the different trades that would help us land a job necessary for making a living. But it prepares us, at least psychologically, with the thought that, if need be, we can learn virtually anything that we need to learn and want to learn. Professionalism may prepare us for a career, but Liberal Arts Education prepares us for a resourceful life and, in that sense, liberates us.

ARTES SERVIUNT VITAE. It may not seem to be much, to some of you, for the four turbulent years at Swarthmore; but it is a treasure you will be thankful for later, if not sooner. For no one can take it away from you; it is forever yours.

Now, you have my three trite observations; I would like to cap them with three trite bits of advice.

First, **SUBJECTS ARE MANY BUT KNOWLEDGE IS ONE.** My first advice is this: **STUDY ANYTHING, LEARN EVERYTHING.** Learn whatever you have to learn, regardless of the subject, for there is nothing that is not worth learning. Jobs will then

come to you; or, still better, you will create your own job.

Second, MIND INTEGRATES SUBJECTS INTO KNOWLEDGE, I observed. My second advice is this: LET YOUR MIND BE CONFUSED. At Swarthmore you were trained to keep your mind sorted out and in order; in life, fight that temptation, and don't be afraid to be confused, for in order to learn more, it is better to be confused than be academic and stifled.

Third, LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION IS USELESS BUT THAT IS WHAT MAKES IT USEFUL, I observed. Ultimately, in life, it is your life that is more important than a career. That is the ultimate lesson of the Liberal Arts Education. A career will come, believe it or not, somehow. We know well, those of us who teach, because we are in the profession for which we were not trained in; having done the doctorate work in whatever field of specialization, we knew our subjects cold but we did not know how to teach because we were never taught to teach. We all had to learn it on the job. So a career will eventually come. My third advice, then, is this: ENJOY YOUR INTELLECTUAL LIFE; DON'T LET CAREER GET IN THE WAY.

This evening you stand at the beginning of a long path of learning, and here is the fourth of my three trite observations, and as such it has little to do with those three observations.

It reads:

Sapere quello che uno sa,
e sapere quello che uno non sa,
e caratteristica di un uomo che sa.

This is from a text written in the sixth century B.C., long before the Italian translation in which I read it came into existence. It is from the Analects of Confucius, and it says:

Knowing what it is that one knows and what it is that one does not know is the mark of one who knows -- the learned person.

My fourth and last advice: LEARN TO KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW.

THANK YOU.

KAORI KITAO: LAST COLLECTION, 1983 Revision, 2 June 1983

incorporating the last-minute addenda but not the ad lib material.