UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS 1979
I would prepare the crowd a special revel,
For they believe in living, letting.
The posts are raised, the boards laid down and level,
All are in hopes we have a feast to give.
With eyebrows raised they sit in the enclosure
And long to be amazed, with due composure.

My friends, I've just spoken to you a few lines from the Director's speech in Goethe's Faust, since they seemed somewhat appropriate. The Director is staging a performance, and while he knows what to expect of people's tastes, he feels that he is in dire straits than ever. For he says that while his audience is not accustomed to the best, still, they are frightfully well-read and clever. And so it is with you.

How difficult it is to say anything new to you all, and I fear that I must but reiterate old themes—these with which four years of study at U.D. have thoroughly acquainted you. On the other hand, there is no such thing as an old theme, because we can always see it and understand it afresh. The old theme I propose to talk about is that of the imagination and its cultivation.

But first, let's move on to another very familiar U.D. theme. We have been led to believe that our lives here for the past four years have been—dare I say it?—contemplative. And opposed to the contemplative life there is the active life, as demonstrated by firemen, dentists and Herb Bowles. Actually, I'm just pulling your legs, because we all know that there is no such dichotomy between the two lives.

And yet, as we all prepare to graduate, each of us must reconcile two very different lifestyles—that of the student and whatever lifestyle one adopts after graduation. Some of us may even get jobs. This coming stage of our lives shall be designated the "practical" or "active" stage, as opposed to the "less practical," "less responsible," or "contemplative" stage.

You all know just what I'm going to say—that we never lose the fruits of our U.D. career, because we carry them through thick and thin, banal and beautiful, mythic and mundane, long and short, milk and cookies, etc. Maybe you're right, but anyway, that reminds me of a story.

Allow me to tell you this familiar tale which, in a roundabout way, will make a point for me. My story is that of Jacob and his quest for a wife. Jacob's father sends Jacob off into the desert to find his uncle Laban and to ask for the hand of one of his daughters in marriage. At one point, Jacob meets a beautiful shepherdess at a well and falls in love with her. This shepherdess conveniently turns out to be Laban's daughter, Rachel, and hence, one of the young marriageables suggested by Jacob's father. Jacob asks Laban for Rachel's hand. But Laban makes Jacob toil for seven years in order to merit Rachel. However, seven years pass like a few days because Jacob loves his Rachel so much. At last the wedding day arrives, and Jacob is beside himself with joy. After the wedding banquet Laban is supposed to bring Rachel to the wedding chambers. Instead, he brings his homely daughter, Leah—probably because he feels this is his only chance to get rid of her. Incredible as it may seem, Jacob does not notice until too late that he has slept with Leah and not Rachel.

Laban's trick is not well-received, but Jacob is told that it is customary for the elder daughter—namely, Leah—to be married before the younger. And Laban extracts a promise of seven more years of labor from Jacob before he gives over his daughter, Rachel. So it is that Jacob ends up with two wives.

According to one tradition, Rachel is considered a figure of contemplative wisdom, and Leah, a figure of moral or practical wisdom. If that is the case, then Jacob must embrace Leah, or practical wisdom, before he may ever hold Rachel. If Rachel represents the fruits of the contemplative life, the homely but practical Leah represents the vegetables of the active life. Rachel is wonderful, and we embrace Leah to have her. Nevertheless, Leah has a certain attractiveness, too, and is somewhat likeable.

What I admonish you all to do today is simply to practice bigamy. You'll have your Leah come graduation day, and don't be afraid when she rears her homely head. Remember, though, that it may take seven years of toil in the Real World before you truly have your Rachel.

But suppose, just suppose, that our fragile sensibilities are dulled by the appearance of blear-eyed Leah. Suppose that we forget our original choice of a bride. But this will never happen if your imagination is kept alive.

Imagination, you may recall, is the subject of this speech. For it is the imagination which transforms the reality of the practical world for us and makes all things beautiful in our perception. Even Leah is imaginatively beautiful to us. Imagination is not a faculty which tricks us into believing that the world is beautiful. Rather, it is a mode of perception which enables us to see the world clearly, to see the world as it really is. In the imagination all things are transparent, and this transparency leads us invariably to contemplation. Imagination enables us—if you'll pardon the cliche—to see the mythic in the mundane. It strengthens our love for both of these orders, and for both of our wives.
This is all ridiculously abstract, and I’m sure you’d love to hear of an example of imagination transforming reality, of the imagination striving to see the mythic in the mundane. Cast your minds back over the years. See calendar leaves whisked off by the wind. See the seasons passing in reverse. See newspaper headlines from the past four years whirl into focus. Think of your first afternoon at U.D. This was a time before your imagination perceived anything mythic, probably because you didn’t know what the word mythic meant.

After your parents unloaded your luggage from the station wagon and said good-bye, you decided to “get into” college life. The grass was dust-brown, you may recall, as was everything else. The mall was cluttered with piles of building materials and it seemed that the whole university was under construction. You and your new roommate (the roommate who, alas, quit school after one semester) sauntered over to P.D.Q. for some Doritos. Then, later that night, after your parents were safely home, you called them and demanded to be removed from this brick quarry. Of course, they refused.

After the first week of classes, you said to a teacher whose name you had learned, “You call this a university?” And the teacher said, “I call it a medieval hilltop village; you may call it whatever you’d like.”

Aha! Another case of reality transformed by the imagination. In no time U.D. was home for us, and in no time it was beautiful to us. And it still is. Let me stress again that imagination does not provide an escape for us, or delude us. It makes us see reality as it really is—resplendent.

And so it is that imagination transforms the practical sphere and ever draws us toward the higher order. I don’t really suppose that the active and contemplative lives are so simply reconciled by the imagination, but still, through the use of the imagination, one vows to accept both Rachel and Leah. May it be so with you.

I apologize for the fact that such weighty thoughts were not spoken in unrhymed iambic pentameter, as in any self-respecting valedictory address. My only hope is that your imagination transforms the reality of this speech to perceive its higher meaning.

Thank you, and my very best to you all.

Dolora Wojciehowski
Class of 1979

The valedictory address of the Constantin College of Liberal Arts is given by a superior student in the appropriate class who has been selected by the class to give it’s farewell at the Senior Convocation.