University of Dallas Convocation Address, 1998
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On behalf of the faculty, I would like to thank you for the past four years of your youth. At great cost and sacrifice, you came to UD to participate in a great enterprise, the enterprise of acquiring a liberal arts education, and you have done so. Congratulations. In essence, a school comes down to three things, three points of a dynamic triangle: its curriculum, its faculty and its student-body. Around UD, we often congratulate ourselves on our curriculum and our teachers, but we do not often enough remind ourselves that our students are regularly intelligent and often brilliant, and that they are always characterized by something highly unfashionable in the contemporary academy: heroism. We thank you for your time and courage. It's been an honor and a pleasure for us to be your teachers. It is a particular pleasure for me. We were freshmen together, and I look back upon our first year here with distinct fondness. The Class of 1998 will always be special to me. Thank you.

I begin my Convocation Address proper with an observation and a question. The observation: I loved all my favorite teachers, and they loved me, as well. The question: What is the nature of this form of love? Each of us has experienced this love: Every teacher on the faculty is someone's favorite teacher; each one of you is some teacher's special charge. We often do not acknowledge this love as love, and, even when we do, we lack the diction to express it properly. Yet it is important to discover the right words. We do know what pedagogic love is not. It isn't agapé or charity. No teacher enters the classroom imagining that his or her time there will be an act of mercy. It isn't philia or friendship. One is never completely comfortable with one's favorite teacher: the perceived inequality precludes friendship, at least while he or she is your teacher. It isn't erōs, if by that we mean sexual desire. I loved all my favorite teachers, but I assure you I certainly did not want to have sex with them. We know, then, what pedagogic love is not. But what is it? What is the actual object of love? What is its character? What is the essence of this particular human relationship?

For assistance, I turn, naturally, to a poem, William Butler Yeats' "When You are Old":

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false and true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

I would like to imagine the speaker as a teacher addressing his or her student, the speaker imagining a time in the distant future when the student will be reflecting on the past, when the student will take down "this book," whichever book both teacher and student have loved—Which is your book?—and remember the student's youth when he or she was loved with a love that eventually retreated, hidden, but present. This poem helps us define the love for which I want to find the right words.

The object of pedagogic love is, I believe, "the pilgrim soul," that within both teacher and student which desires to understand and therefore be more than it does or is. Many love your glad grace and many your beauty, but only your teachers love the pilgrim soul alone in you, that motive force within which, in response to the still and silent moment of marvel, moves you toward the object of marvel. Many are such objects: it might be a poem or a constellation, a painting or a constitution, a performance or a calculation. It must be a meaningful object, and a university ought to study objects whose significance never dims. The moment that a student begins to move toward greater understanding of that object: That is the moment his or her teacher falls in love. The moment a teacher recognizes the motion and directs it, both cultivating and disciplining it, the moment he or she moves too: That is the moment students fall in love. Not with the person, but with the person's disposition toward the object of desire—a desire at once intellectual, imaginative and spiritual. Ultimately, love demands a shared object of value, something lovers are moving toward. It is in the sense alone that pedagogic love is erotic: It moves both lovers toward what they both desire. At a university, that shared object of value is, ultimately, the nature of reality itself: A university is a place where people fall in love with the real and desire to understand it: the object of love, then, is not simply the soul of the other, but "the pilgrim soul" of the other, the pilgrimage of the soul in motion towards the real. The distance between knower and known can be measured by the increasingly encompassing and subtle relationship that such a soul has toward the real. This is the "you" your teachers love; this is the "you" your university as university has helped to fashion. You aren't who you were four years ago; or, rather, the potentiality you had then has now become actual. You have now become what you once dreamed you might be because, during some moment which will have been quite personal to each one of you, you discovered that someone else dreamed such a dream of you. As Prospero tells his students, Miranda and Ferdinand, "We are such stuff, such stuff as dreams are made on." It is a rare time in one's life to be dreamed of in that way; it is a rare time, and that time is quickly fading. Our revels now are all ending. What you may only be now noticing is that you had to be in motion for us to notice. Yours are pilgrim souls.

You graduate into a world that may not notice that you are in motion; when it does notice, its response may very well not be one of love. This is not an argument against our culture. The world was never any better or worse than it is now: though fallen, the world is essentially good. It is only that the liberal arts moment, the moment of
loving soul-enhancement, is not a moment that cultures as cultures value. Even Athens executed Socrates. A culture as culture wants to know how to use or exchange a human power, and you are now exceptionally powerful. Powerful excellence or aretē is the actualization of the human potential, and the aretē of a liberal arts understanding is a dynamic and beautiful thing. You are now, in this moment, beautiful and dynamic souls. Yet one can respond to dynamic beauty with "love false or true," and the less-than-real world you step into, taking as you now do, your solitary way, does not always love properly. Sometimes, it does not love at all.

What, then, are you to do? I am quite uncomfortable offering you advice; you don't need advice. Instead, I will tell you what we hope for you. We hope, not that you will miss UD in the world, but that you will take UD's pedagogic love into the world. Every soul you encounter will be, in potential, a pilgrim soul, dreaming a silent dream of themselves they very well might actualize if you dream that dream of them. Every soul responds to the pedagogic love that animates, directs and completes the soul-in-motion. And this is true no matter what their one true book is. Finding the shared object of marvel will be difficult, but not impossible. The pilgrim souls you meet will often not appear to be on the same pilgrimage as you, but they are, I assure you.

Love, then, as you have been loved, and you will discover, we hope, that Love, having fled, awaits you in a crowd of stars. Look upward, not backward, Class of 1998, and, when you are old and grey, take down Prospero's book, the one we have shared with you, and slowly read, and dream of the soft look your eyes had once and of their shadows deep. How many loved your moments of glad grace, and loved your beauty with love false and true. But one place will always love the pilgrim soul in you, and love the sorrows of your changing face. And bending down beside the glowing bars, murmur, only a little sadly, how Love fled and hid amid a crowd of stars.

That future moment awaits you on the quite distant horizon, but the present moment calls for another response. The reign of Prospero ends; the reign of Miranda and Ferdinand begins. It is your world, Miranda and Ferdinand. There is no need to miss this Isle, the one place which will always love the pilgrim soul in you; there is no need to miss the Isle. It is within you.

The ship is leaving for Milan. You must go. You have another world to govern and to love, and we have new souls-in-motion to love and a new revel to begin and complete.