



**Illinois Wesleyan University**  
**Digital Commons @ IWU**

---

Honorees for Teaching Excellence

The Kemp Foundation's Teaching  
Excellence Award Ceremony

---

Summer 8-1998

## Learning by Heart (text only)

Mona J. Gardner  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/teaching\\_excellence](https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/teaching_excellence)



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Gardner, Mona J., "Learning by Heart (text only)" (1998). *Honorees for Teaching Excellence*. 21.

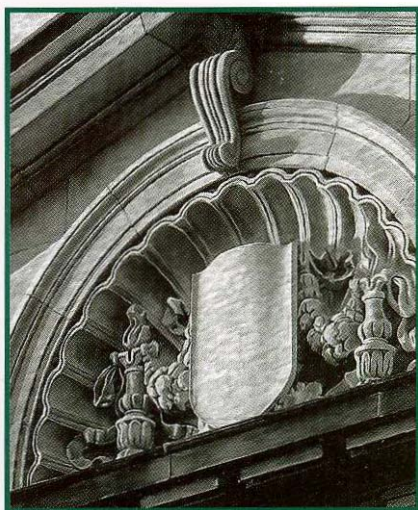
[https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/teaching\\_excellence/21](https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/teaching_excellence/21)

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by University Archivist & Special Collections Librarian at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

# *Learning by Heart:*

Reflections on Teaching at  
Illinois Wesleyan University



Andrew W. Mellon Center for  
Faculty and Curriculum Development



*The University Award for Teaching Excellence is given annually to one faculty member selected by the Promotion and Tenure Committee as best reflecting the faculty's high level of commitment to undergraduate teaching, the academic profession, and the University.*

1960	William T. Beadles, Insurance
1961	Wayne W. Wantland, Biology
1962	R. Dwight Drexler, Piano
1963	Elizabeth H. Oggel, English
1964	Rupert Kilgore, Art
1965	Dorothea S. Franzen, Biology
1966	Joseph H. Meyers, English
1967	Marie J. Robinson, Speech
1968	Bunyon H. Andrew, History
1969	Wendell Hess, Chemistry
1970	Jerry Stone, Religion
1971	Doris C. Meyers, Philosophy
1972	John Ficca, Drama
1973	Robert Burda, English
1974	Max A. Pape, Sociology
1975	Lucile Klauser, Education
1976	R. Bedford Watkins, Jr., Music
1977	Harvey F. Beutner, English
1978	Frank D. Starkey, Chemistry
1979	Fred B. Brian, Art
1980	Sammye Crawford Greer, English
1981	Jerry M. Israel, History
1982	John D. Heyl, History
1983	J. Robert Hippensteele, Biology
1984	Larry M. Colter, Philosophy
1985	Sue Ann Huseman, French
1986	Bruce B. Criley, Biology
1987	Michael B. Young, History
1988	Emily Dunn Dale, Sociology
1989	Pamela Buchanan Muirhead, English
1990	Thomas Griffiths, Biology
1991	Robert C. Bray, English
1992	John D. Wenum, Political Science
1993	Mona J. Gardner, Business Administration
1994	Paul E. Bushnell, History
1995	James D. Matthews, French
1996	Kathleen O'Gorman, English
1997	Jared Brown, Theatre
1998	W. Michael Weis, History
1999	Michael C. Seeborg, Economics

## Table of Contents

Provost's Introduction .....	4
History of the Award .....	5
About This Book .....	6
The Liberal Art—Vision and Form .....	9
John Ficca (1972)	
Creative Mechanists: Putting Things in Order .....	18
J. Robert Hippensteele (1983)	
The History of Love .....	29
Michael B. Young (1987)	
The Search for Captain Howdy .....	37
Robert C. Bray (1991)	
The Importance of Unlearning .....	45
Mona J. Gardner (1993)	
What's the Difference? .....	53
James D. Matthews (1995)	
As If the Language Suddenly, With Ease .....	61
Kathleen O'Gorman (1996)	
The State of the Art .....	67
Jared Brown (1997)	
The Revolution Will Not Be Televised .....	73
W. Michael Weis (1998)	

## The Culture of Teaching at Illinois Wesleyan

Faculty groups from IWU have recently become a notorious crew on the national higher education scene. While virtually every foundation and pundit seems swept away by a popular rhetoric that eschews the traditional relationships inherent to scholarly communities and instead promotes learning consortia tailored to customers' interests, we persist in thinking of ourselves as teachers and our students as pupils. At professional meetings, we speak up as dissenters on panels where everyone else shies away from talking of "teaching" because, they insist, we must level all distinctions so that all of us become equal "learners."

The faculty at Illinois Wesleyan have always focused on our students, as a community and as individuals, but we do not believe that focus to be inconsistent with paying honor and respect to teachers. We are not backward-looking luddites: we do believe that information technology is revolutionizing the way we live and learn, and we try to keep ourselves in the forefront of instructional uses of technology. Still, nothing is more important to this faculty than the education of each and every IWU undergraduate--individually, not in faceless hordes hidden at the other end of cyberspace. We see learning primarily as an act of emulation; consequently, in spite of our pursuit of every high-tech innovation that will give us and our students more access to the information age, we will never, never become a virtual university. We will remain a residential liberal arts university with a low student/faculty ratio and a dogged belief that four years in a human community of people devoted to learning is a sacred, if not downright magical, gateway to a fulfilling life.

Michael Oakeshott, one of Britain's leading political philosophers, has an eloquent essay, entitled "Learning and Teaching," in which he spins out a fine understanding of the distinctive threads that knit these activities together. He sees the teacher as the initiator of the pupil into the vast riches of human achievements, "an inheritance of feelings, emotions, images, visions, thoughts, beliefs, ideas, understanding, intellectual and practical enterprises, languages, relationships, organizations, canons and maxims of conduct, procedures, rituals, skills, works of art, books, musical compositions, tools, artifacts and utensils." Carefully, Oakeshott delineates differences between learning information and "acquiring the ability to feel and think," without which no student, however clever, will ever be fully able to tap the plenitude of this cultural inheritance. This kind of learning requires a "habit of listening for an individual intelligence at work in every utterance." The necessary "intellectual virtues" may be acquired in only one way--by imitating a teacher who cares for these virtues sincerely and practices the habit of listening deeply for him or herself: "Not the cry, but the rising of the wild duck impels the flock to follow him in flight."

This book begins a series that will memorialize talks given annually on Honors Day by Illinois Wesleyan's most honored teachers, the winners of the University Award for Teaching Excellence. They embody the culture of teaching at this university, and we are privileged to rise to follow them in their flights.

Janet McNew  
Provost and Dean of the Faculty  
August 1998

## History of the Award

In 1959, President Lloyd Bertholf led the organization of the IWU Century Club. According to an article in the June 4, 1959, *Pantagraph*, membership in the Century Club was to be open to anyone committing to an annual donation of \$100 or more "to advance teaching at IWU." The Club was intended to show its support of teaching in two ways—by enhancing the faculty salary budget and by sponsoring a Teacher of the Year award, the winner of which was to receive a \$250 cash prize.

Dr. Bertholf appointed a committee of faculty to develop criteria and procedures for making the award, and IWU faculty passed the committee's recommendations on October 12, 1959. The records of that faculty meeting note that the initial criteria considered were to be a candidate's "level of academic proficiency; proven, time-tested quality of teaching; and indications of potential growth." All full-time IWU faculty were eligible to receive the award, as were retired faculty who were still teaching on a part-time basis. Selection was to be by the general faculty, with first-year faculty ineligible to vote. The IWU faculty also recommended that the proposed name of the award be changed from Teacher of the Year to Century Club Honoree.

The first Century Club Honoree was William T. Beadles, Professor of Insurance. As a condition of the award, Dr. Beadles was asked in May 1960 to address the Century Club at a dinner in the Memorial Center to which all faculty were also invited. Dr. Beadles' address, entitled "Inflation," started an unbroken tradition of speeches by honorees in the spring of each academic year, several of which are reproduced in this book. Until 1989, these speeches were delivered at the annual Century Club dinner in May. Since 1989, they have been featured addresses at 11 AM Honors' Day Convocations held during the last week of classes each spring semester.

Over the nearly four decades since its creation, the selection process, the criteria, and even the name of the Century Club award have changed. Within a few years, the process moved from a vote of the full faculty to selection by the President from a list of three candidates developed by a faculty-administrative committee. As faculty governance, the committee structure, and the administration changed, selection evolved into its current form in which the Promotion and Tenure Committee chooses the winner from among nominations by the faculty.

Criteria for the award have also evolved, although the emphasis on teaching excellence is, and has always been, primary. For over 20 years, the criteria have been expressed as follows:

- \* Teaching excellence in the opinion of colleagues and students
- \* A high level of scholarship or artistic achievement, demonstrated

by a broad grasp of his/her discipline, scholarly activity, writing, and/or awards for performance or exhibition in the fine arts

- \* **Service to the University.** No fixed seniority is required, but the award generally is not given before five or six years of service at the institution.

In 1989, when the honoree's address was moved from a dinner meeting to a morning convocation, the name of the award also changed. As fundraising grew more complex at IWU and elsewhere, the Century Club had become but one of several levels of giving in which donors could participate, and it no longer stood alone as a symbol of donors' support for teaching. From 1989 through 1991, then, the award was known as the Sears Roebuck Award for Teaching Excellence, and it was funded by the Sears store at nearby Eastland Mall. The cash award had by then grown from \$250 to \$1,000 (no doubt reflecting inflation's impact—the subject of the first winner's speech). The current name—the DuPont Award for Teaching Excellence—originated in 1992 when the funding source for the \$1,000 prize became the DuPont Corporation's installation in El Paso, Illinois.

One thing, however, has not changed. The purpose that led Dr. Bertholf to found the original Century Club nearly 40 years ago—to reward and support undergraduate teaching excellence—is as evident today on our campus as it was in 1959. The speeches reproduced here, and all others over the decades, stand as evidence.

## About This Book

Reprinted here are nine speeches given by winners of the University Award for Teaching Excellence who are still full-time members of the IWU faculty. (The addresses of some winners still on campus are not included because they had elements of oral reading or performance that are not entirely suitable for print reproduction.)

The idea for the book arose from a desire among many faculty, expressed at various times both in meetings or over coffee or lunch, for a University publication that speaks to the academic and teaching culture of the campus and not merely to policies and procedures, important as these latter entities are to faculty life. The rich storehouse of teaching experience reflected in the University Award winners' annual addresses seemed a good place to start, and the Andrew W. Mellon Center for Faculty and Curriculum Development seemed a good place from which to coordinate the effort.

Mona J. Gardner  
Associate Dean of the Faculty  
August 1998

To reach an understanding of something it is necessary that one must, at some time, have deeply loved it, even if only for a passing moment. This is certainly true of those who devote the energies of their vocational lifetime to any one of the arts. When was this magic moment of enchantment for me? Did it happen somewhere in that period from the tender and confusing age of eight to thirteen (ending in "The Summer of '42") when I acted as selector and interpreter for my frail, sainted, Italian speaking aunt-guardian of a whole host of Dick Powell, Ann Miller and Bing Crosby movie musicals?

Or was it the fact that as a high school senior I captivated audiences in a major supporting role in Hildegard Dolson's *We Shook The Family Tree*? This along with being voted "class eyes," earned for me the yearbook distinction of "dramatics" as a destined career.

These experiences must certainly have had some influence on the nurturing of my desire for dramatic production—I still enjoy working with plays like *You Can't Take It With You* immensely. With no intention of establishing a legend to rival that of Lana Turner being discovered in a soda fountain in Hollywood, I can fix my moment on the first reading of a great play. The first time I read *Hamlet* I was enthralled by the vision of the poet in a form that was new to me. Here was Captain Marvel, Johnny Weissmuller, Colin P. Kelly, Doc Blanchard, Glenn Davis and Humphrey Bogart for heroics, Hoot Gibson for honor, Robert Frost for poetry and Gandhi for compassion and wisdom—all encompassed in one event. Furthermore, I experienced a John Barrymore acting the play, even though to that time I had never seen a Shakespearean work produced.

The years between have tempered that early image, but by no means diminished it. And here, at this moment, as I characterize Drama as "The Liberal Art," I realize that I am more sophisticated with regard to many of its tenets than are most of you, but at the same time and more importantly, that we share in common Drama's most striking quality: The power to extend ourselves, through imagination, beyond the day-to-day mechanics of life.

To label Drama "The Liberal Art" may seem a downright presumptuous assumption. I am by no means implying that this art can substitute for the broad spectrum of learning represented in the humanities, social and natural sciences, nor that it is in kind necessarily superior to its sister arts. Neither, however, do I wish to be condescending as a ploy to keep the goodwill of my faculty colleagues who might be prone to turn off at this point. Drama is "The Liberal Art" simply because the trivium derivatives (logic, grammar and rhetoric along with the graphic arts, music and mimetic action) are its mode of expression and every other field of study and activity is its subject matter.



To be sure, the practice of any activity with so broad a scope is laden with pitfalls. Fortunately, since Drama is both a temporal and spatial art, its individual works are bounded by reasonable limits of length and subject matter treatment: unfortunately, most fledgling playwrights, like beginning preachers, ignore both restrictions in the heat and passion of their personal calling. The mature dramatic poet takes these limitations in stride and finds himself struggling with the more difficult problems of unity and consistency. "Don't bite off more than you can chew, Charlie Brown, the bad taste coming up is a lot worse than the good taste going down." Enter the critic, guardian of the rules and arbiter of good taste.

It is inevitable that no sooner is something created than there are those immediately available to pass judgment on it and raise questions about it. God has had this problem ever since he created the earth: the playwright and dramatic productionists have had it since the early 5th century BC.

Of major concern to the theorists and critics of the early Greek Theatre, the fountainhead of the art in our western culture, was what its proper function should be. Should it be utilitarian in some fashion—or merely a pleasure-giving, aesthetic device? "To teach or to please," in other words, has been the basic question posed from the very beginning. "To teach pleasurably" has, in general, been the compromised answer arrived at by the majority of theorists. But for some the compromise has not been satisfactory, with the result that dramatic art has had a distinguished history of being alternately condemned and defended by some rather prominent thinkers.

Plato was one of the first to express definite negative feelings about the way poetry, and particularly dramatic poetry, was used in Greek education. During the 6th, 5th, and 4th centuries BC, poetry was the cornerstone of Greek learning and he deplored this situation. His contention was that it was produced by inspiration rather than by a rational process and could not be trusted. "Poetry is the mother of lies" and though it may serve man as an emotional outlet, it was necessary for the Philosopher-King to take over the function of serving him as teacher and leader.

Later, the Roman, Horace, was to deal with the question of the poet being inspired by the Muse in a more practical fashion. His contention was that the writer was indeed inspired but that he must be guided by a rational process as well and if you come upon an individual in a deep pit who claims in his raging that he is caught in the grips of the poetic Muse, leave him there—he is probably dangerous.

It was, however, Plato's brightest student who was to offer the first comprehensive and influential defense of dramatic poetry and to do so in a manner decidedly contrary to his master's teachings. Aristotle contended that poetic tragedy not only was a reliable dispenser of truth, but was indeed capable of

transcending empirical knowledge to a superior level of truth. In short, he responded that the poet could be trusted to render truth and guidance because of his insights (vision) and because he did not in his form necessarily pretend to the factual and rational as a means to his ends. As long as the poet was consistent within the individual work itself, that creation could be as reliable as any of man's other forms of inquiry. Inconsistency is legitimate so long as the poet remains consistently inconsistent within the form. Thus, the poet is liberated to make use of any subject matter—the factual and the imaginative. Of course, he strongly implied that much depends on the quality of the poet—Sophocles was his model and *Oedipus Rex* his favorite play.

The flow out of this Greek fountainhead of dramatic theory and practice has ranged ever since from muddled to crystal clear. The Romans, distrusting almost every cultural legacy the Greeks offered as being potentially corrupting, used the medium merely for entertainment through the vehicle of formula domestic comedies performed by slaves. This kind of literary Neil Simon approach, incidentally, has not changed a great deal in structure from that day to this. From this extreme of Drama "to please," and after virtual extinction during the Dark Ages, medieval churchmen revived Drama as an instrument by which "to teach." Since that time there has been continuity, with the drift from favor to disfavor depending on the social, religious and political climate of the place and time. Not only is Drama liberal in its use of subject matter, but by tradition it has freely touched the nerve center of every major controversial issue around and has scarcely ever found itself in the conservative camp.

The Renaissance concerned itself with a careful examination of every aspect of Drama and focused particularly on the question of its function relative to its several kinds, namely comedy and tragedy. And here the inevitable happened: In both theory and practice it became obvious in many quarters that if tragedy and comedy were so great individually, they would be wonderful together. Thus, melodrama was born—born and nurtured in every respect. There were immediate questions of style and good taste raised about this new form as is apparent in this passage (from one of melodrama's most sophisticated originators) dealing with acting specifically and the whole nature of Drama's function generally:

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at first and now, was and is, to hold, as 't were, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone, or come tardy off, though it makes the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others<sup>1</sup>

This still holds up as a pretty good basic acting lesson, even today in this age of the picture-image real as the standard. When Shakespeare wrote it he must have intended it for specific individuals. The marvel is that this piece of advice has had universal meaning for the acting profession as a whole even though, as individuals, actors find very little in it that could possibly have a bearing on their own style.

In the 17th century it became the dramatic literary fashion to spell out directly what was on one's mind through the use of prologues and epilogues. Since it was an age of refinement and much consequence, there was no limit to what might be covered in one or the other. Vanbrugh, for example, speaks candidly on the purpose of Drama in his prologue to *The Provoked Wife*:

'Tis the intent and business of the stage  
To copy out the follies of the age,  
To hold to every man a faithful glass,  
And shew him of what species he's an ass.<sup>2</sup>

The glass is held up and we see our own reflections in Mr. Vulture, Simon Pure, Sir Tunbelly Clunsky, Lord Foppington and Dapperwit. In this Restoration comedy, as most others, the emphasis is on a display of wit and manners in the moment-to-moment playing of the play, but there is also an underlying vision of implied moral instruction. See what we do as individual characters and then act in a contrary fashion if you wish to avoid our foolishness.

Here then is the essence of the poet-playwright visionary, able to show the follies of the actions of men in his own age and, at the same time, to become a seer and prophet of the consequences of those actions. It is a paradox that this same visionary has dealt with illusion and fancy as his main means of communication in order to reach out for a higher level of truth. It is a further paradox that this same being has often been unable to cope with the very truth he discovered and revealed. He often has become like Dylan Thomas, the man who put his finger on reality but could not face it, even as he admonished us to "...not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light."<sup>3</sup>

However, it is proper to look to some of those who were able to cope with what they saw. By the time the mature William Shakespeare had reached the point of writing *King Lear*, he saw clearly the relationship of the major forces of the age which had converged on his tiny island and, indeed, his world. The old-new order of Classicism was pressing hard against the established traditions of the medieval way of seeing and doing things. Aristotle had emerged as the high priest of the new order which continued to grow from the bias established by Humanism and which would ultimately reach a crescendo in Rationalism.

King Lear, early in the first scene of the play, announces his retirement and parcels out the land with these seemingly wise and benevolent words:

Know we have divided  
In three our kingdom: and 'tis our fast intent  
To shake all cares and business from our age,  
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we  
Unburthen'd crawl toward death.<sup>4</sup>

The poet's view is clear, but Lear's own vision is clouded, because his act is in defiance to the laws of church and state and nature. He gives what is not his to give and abdicates what is not his to abdicate, and every member of that Elizabethan audience understood and waited to see the terrible retribution his action would surely bring. They also knew and trusted that the form used by the poet would allow them to experience the working out of the consequences and that both their intellects and emotions would be satisfied.

Some 60 years later, the would-be tragic actor and writer, Molière, had finally accepted one of life's little maxims, "nothing succeeds like success," and he became resigned to producing comedies for his own time and the time ever since. He was especially fond of showing how excesses of any sort lead to absurd behavior. Let's take, for example, one of his favorite themes—affected learning: In *The Precious Damsels*, one of them remarks, "People of quality know everything without learning anything."<sup>5</sup>

To add credence to the statement: "I assure you that a learned fool is more foolish than an ignorant fool," Molière allows Clitandre to prove the point to one of "the learned ladies" in the play by the same name:

I am quite agreeable that a woman shall be informed about everything, but I cannot allow her the shocking passion for acquiring learning in order to be learned. When she is asked questions, I like her often to know how not to know the thing she does know.<sup>6</sup>

In the same manner, he has his Would-Be-Gentleman, Monsieur Jourdain, arrive at earth shattering self-realizations like: "Gracious me! I've been talking prose for the last forty years and have never known it."<sup>7</sup>

Molière is the unquestioned champion of dramatic comedy. He created the popular comedy as we know it today; his own work is still vital and universal.

More recently, a Norwegian from an obscure background touched at the core of what has become one of today's burning issues. Henrik Ibsen made no speeches concerning the rights of women and seemingly did not support the movement which, although fledgling, was nevertheless gaining some momentum during his time. Yet he obviously understood and had little sympathy with the blatant discrepancies which reduced women to little more than playthings in the male dominated Victorian society. In his play, *A Doll's House*, he produced a statement in dramatic form which was at once personally and individually that of

Nora Helmer and at the same time universally that of every woman stifled by what has come to be known as her "traditional role".

John Gassner describes the initial impact made by the play:

When its heroine, Nora, left her home in search of self-development it seemed as if the sanctity to marriage had been flouted by a playwright treading the stage with cloven-feet....he was not content with pleading. He took the offensive instead, stripping masculine egotism to the bone and depriving a conventional "doll's house" type of marriage of all its romantic and sentimental frippery. And he climaxed the awakening of his heroine not with the expected reconciliation of domestic drama, but with Nora's closing the door on her husband, home and marriage. An anarchist's pistol shot could not have reverberated more frighteningly in the Victorian world than the closing of that door.<sup>8</sup>

In a recent issue of *Life* magazine the cover shows a picture of a woman named Wanda Adams; in small black letters to the left of the picture it reads "left home and family for a new life." Above the picture in bold red letters it says "Dropout Wife, A Striking Phenomenon." The whole article reads like a factual paraphrase of what Ibsen had his husband and wife saying to one another almost a hundred years ago. Take as example this exchange between Torvald and Nora just as she is about to leave:

Torvald: It's shocking. This is how you would neglect your most sacred duties.

Nora: What do you consider my most sacred duties?

Torvald: Do I need to tell you that? Are they not your duties to your husband and your children?

Nora: I have other duties just as sacred.

Torvald: That you have not. What duties could those be?

Nora: Duties to myself.

Torvald: Before all else, you are a wife and a mother.

Nora: I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are—or, at all events that I must try and become one. I know quite well Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.<sup>9</sup>

The point is simply this, Ibsen's statement is no more valid than that made in the article; but it is far more vital as a living enactment of the truth, an enactment which has stood the test of time and which will be revived again and again long

after the magazine has been tucked away and forgotten in library archives. The dramatic form will keep it alive as an individual statement and the universal truth of the vision will keep it vital.

Another of today's sharp issues centers on the rape of nature growing from our hunger to have more of everything with which to feed affluence. More than 70 years Anton Chekhov had the physician Astroff speak to the problem:

You can heat stoves with peat moss, and build barns with stones.  
...Russian woods are creaking under the ax, millions of trees perish, dwellings of beasts and birds are emptied, rivers go shallow and dry, wonderful landscapes vanish, never to be brought back again, and all because lazy man hasn't sense enough to bend down and pick up fuel from the ground....He must be a reckless barbarian to burn this beauty in his stove, destroy what we cannot create again. Man is endowed with intellect and creative powers so that he may multiply what is given to him, but up to now he has not created, he has destroyed. Forests are fewer and fewer, rivers dry up, game becomes extinct, the climate is ruined, and every day the earth gets poorer and uglier.<sup>10</sup>

These lines from *Uncle Vanya* show remarkable insight to the question of ecology and as such are ample support for the role of the playwright as visionary. But there is far more here. The key phrase is "lazy man hasn't sense enough to bend down and pick up fuel from the ground," and the key word is "lazy." Coupled with the repeated allusions to boredom (which are both stated and shown dramatically throughout the play), they point ominously to the sickness which had struck the Russian society of the day and would ultimately lead to the revolution.

Chekhov saw clearly that the aristocracy had lost its will to find satisfaction in useful work; that it was living on and sucking dry what those of the class had built up before, with no attempts to wisely replenish. In each of his plays he issues the same warnings in a vain attempt to awaken his fellows to the fatal course they followed. The vision was there but the will was not, and disaster resulted.

The present climate of theatre in general and the American Theatre specifically is decidedly pessimistic. "The theatre is dead or dying" is a familiar slogan; "the form is no longer viable" is another and "commercialism has emasculated the art" still another. The follow-up argument is that the explosion of the mass media—radio, the cinema, television—has relegated this tired old form to the role, at one extreme, of an experimental plaything indulged in by intellectuals of the avant-garde (which no one else understands) or, at the other extreme, to that of an exclusive arena for the current fad of permissiveness in the "real life" exposure of skin, hair, and naughty language (which everyone

understands).

There is, of course, some validity to all of this. But those who are ready to sound the death knell for Drama are straining at the rope with very little possibility of satisfaction. They have no vision beyond this moment and no understanding of what the history of this art form tells. There is simply no substitute for the intimacy which the live stage gives. The mimetic creations of the media do not replace the theatre; they are derivatives of it and as such make use of its tested methods of directing emotional responses. But missing from them are those dimensions, both spatial and spiritual, which make theatre a unique, living encounter.

On the other hand, there is no denying that these same mass media have means of translating human experiences into art forms, which the theatre cannot individually achieve. The movies, for example, have recently shown a remarkable potential for subjective revelation (which is in tune with the writings of novelists like Joyce, and the works of abstract painters) and the ability of doing so for a wide and diverse audience. But all such efforts to date must be counted as beginning experiments, primarily because no single force has emerged to adequately fulfill the potential.

Likewise the whole of our present century has seen no end to theatrical experimentation in search of a new and substantive form for its time. We have moved from Expressionism to Epic to Absurdism to the Living Theatre without finding an acceptable contemporary vehicle for "the liberal art." What has yet to emerge is a Shakespeare of the cinema, an Ibsen of the tube, a Chekhov of the new theatre, or, better still, one who can take all of these implements and mold them into an effective form for us.

We should be optimistic that such a force will appear; indeed, it may be among us right now. I suspect Shakespeare expresses as well as anyone ever has what the impact of the realization of being finite really is:

Our revels now are ended: these our actors—  
As I foretold you—were all spirits and  
Are melted into air, into thin air;  
And like the baseless fabric of this vision  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And like this insubstantial pageant-faded,  
Leave not a rack behind: We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep."<sup>11</sup>

If I even began to enumerate the varied interpretations this passage from *The Tempest* has had since its inception, we would be here well into tomorrow, a prospect, I assure you, much more painful for me than for you. I like to regard this passage, at least in part, as Shakespeare's own vision of what was happening to the theatre as he knew it. There is implied faith here that though what is good may fade when its time is spent, an entity just as significant for another time will replace it. Molière's arrival in the next half century certainly bears this out for the theatre.

In the summer of '42, at 13, I had just begun to reach out toward that first experience with Drama which led me, in part, to this place tonight. Now at 42 and fully prepared to "rage, rage against the fading of the light" for a long time, I am nevertheless beginning to suspect that I am perhaps not that Messiah for the new theatre. But a possibility just as exciting comes with each new recruit to the study of "the liberal art," within this place dedicated to the liberal arts. Not necessarily the possibility that one individual will emerge as the shining light, but that collectively they will all add a measure to the vision, and vitality to the form. Friends of Wesleyan, you are here tonight encouraging that possibility from this faculty, and I salute you for it.

- <sup>1</sup> *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare, Act III, Sc ii.
- <sup>2</sup> *The Provoked Wife*, John Vanbrugh, Prologue
- <sup>3</sup> "Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night," Dylan Thomas from *Selected Poems*
- <sup>4</sup> *King Lear*, William Shakespeare, Act I, Sc ii.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Precious Damsels*, Molière, Act II, Sc i.
- <sup>6</sup> *The Learned Ladies*, Molière, Act I, Sc iii
- <sup>7</sup> *The Would-Be Gentleman*, Molière, Act II, Sc iv.
- <sup>8</sup> *Four Great Plays by Ibsen*, John Gassner, editor, Bantam Classic edition (New York, 1959). Introduction, viii.
- <sup>9</sup> *A Doll's House*, Henrik Ibsen, Act III.
- <sup>10</sup> *Uncle Vanya*, Anton Chekhov, Act I.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Tempest*, William Shakespeare, Act IV, Sc i.



## **Creative Mechanists: Putting Things in Order** **1983** **J. Robert Hippensteele**

Thank you President Eckley, President Dooley, members of Century Club Club and guests, fellow faculty members and friends:

The title I have chosen states the theme that I will follow as I comment on a few of the things important to me. We may find ourselves straying at times from that theme, but I will try to bring us back before we have been gone too long. The idea that I would like us to explore together is that many of the things we do, no matter how differently we do them, share an important feature. I suggest that most of us are in the business of putting images, be they auditory, visual, or conceptual images, into some order or pattern that is valuable to ourselves and to others because it is meaningful, pleasing, or both. Further I suggest that within each of our areas of endeavor, we can be creative as we put images in order; as we create a composition of images (if I may borrow from the creative arts).

I thank Rick Drexler for his performance and for his willingness to play for us, in the style of Thelonious Monk, the Oscar Hammerstein-Jerome Kern ballad "All the Things You Are." Monk is a jazz pianist and arranger whom I have long respected. I requested this particular ballad partly because I like the romantic message, but I wanted also the opportunity to argue that the statements in the ballad can be extended beyond its romantic implications. Hammerstein and Kern may have collaborated to produce this ballad with nothing more in mind (with the possible exception of earning a living) than romantic love, even young romantic love. They focus on the desire of the lover to believe that he or she feels a love that is based on a full and realistic knowledge of the other, not merely on some fragile characteristic like physical beauty, starty-eyed attentiveness, or even easy communication.

But, thinking beyond the romantic, don't we need always to seek fuller knowledge about, and appreciation of, whole persons? Be they parents, children, siblings, friends, or acquaintances, we shun (or ought to) either the hero worship or the judgment that can flow from narrowly viewing selected characteristics of the person—often the very characteristics that define that person's individualism. My own children can attest to my recognizing their ability. They would phrase it differently, however: "Daddy, you expect too much." They would also tell you I never suggested that they were perfect, not even outstanding (although in some ways each one is). But I have tried to treat them as individuals with strengths and weaknesses—thus respected, criticized at times, but never condemned. Never have I called any child dumb or bad—only wrong at times. As I respect my own children, so do I respect my students. Thus I treat them similarly.

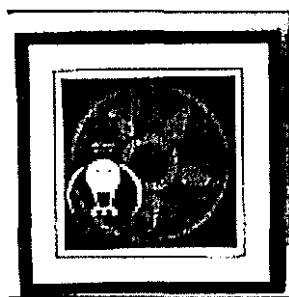
What we are talking about here is putting many facts about a person together in some combination, or order, so as to comprehend more fully who that person is. Of course the perspective from which I see a person is unlike any other

perspective. Thus my comprehension of that person will be biased. But comprehensive or holistic knowledge of persons helps us to predict how they will respond to particular situations. The advantages to such holism are recognized by many people. And I'm thinking especially of those involved in the delivery of health care. Paramedical professionals (here the prefix "para" means around or alongside, not below) including nurses, physician assistants, and physical therapists have, for some time now, argued the advantages of holistic medicine. And now, at least in some specialties, physicians are recognizing the value of learning more about their patients than just their obvious physical symptoms. Indeed, the practices of some physicians are approaching the warmth and concern of the old family physician who was often invited to stay for dinner after completing a house call. (Perhaps the ballad "All the Things You Are" might have made a good theme song for the television program, *St. Elsewhere*.)

Do I exceed poetic license—not even being a poet—when I suggest that the ideas in a romantic ballad written by Hammerstein and Kern could apply so generally? Let's turn back now, to the creativity of those two artists and of Thelonious Monk and, indeed, of Rick Drexler. At points during the performance we heard, clearly, a sequence of sound images in the same order as that created originally by Jerome Kern. Thus we recognized the melody because we have often heard that particular sequence. And many of us also associate with the melody the words put to it by Oscar Hammerstein II. But Rick added more information, mimicking—at my request—the style of Thelonious Monk. He played additional notes, in particular sequences and particular combinations, in order to alter the texture of the music, and thus, the mood of the listener (the perspective from which the ballad is heard—the images seen). So we hear a composition—sound images in a certain order formed by sequences and combinations of notes. Our individual responses to the composition stem from its basic statement, its texture, and our individual experiences.

Such arranging of images may be even more obvious in the efforts of creators of the visual arts. The choreographer produces kinetic arrangements of images that change with time, the painter or sculptor static arrangements. Charles Harper is a contemporary Midwest artist who creates imagery by arranging the simplest of lines into a particular order. Here we see a photograph of a Harper lithograph called "HEXIT." You may find Harper to be a bit commercial but I like his work well enough to have hung this piece on my living room wall. Note that all lines are of the simplest geometric form—you see only straight lines, circles, arcs, or dots (And of course a dot is the shortest line that can be drawn). All of these lines can be drawn easily if you have a straight edge and a draftsman's compass. Each can be represented by a simple mathematical equation. Does this sound uncreative? Even boring? I find Harper's work fascinating. He uses texture, especially color, to create a part of the message. The colors used by Harper are subtly independent mixtures of pigments of his own design. (This makes matting and framing a Harper piece quite difficult.) In

this piece we see a hex sign like many I have seen on barns in the Pennsylvania Dutch regions during drives north from Baltimore while I was a child. But we also see a barn owl who has just left a perch in the hayloft intent on doing its part toward maintaining the balance of nature. Harper suggests that there is a "hex" on mice scurrying through a nearby field tonight. Their number will have been diminished before this owl returns to roost. Subtle colors label the barn, especially the exit through which the owl has flown, as the source of a "hex." Thus the name "HEXIT." Brighter colors draw our attention to the owl through whom the hex is effected. Our impression, then, comes not only from the order or arrangement of the line images, the melody of the ballad—if you will, but also from the perspective provided by the texture of the combined color images.



As we continue to consider the process of putting things in order let's move from the creative work of artists to that of scientists. To make that transition I would like to look at an example of artistic efforts by someone whose major work is in the sciences. For this there would be an almost limitless myriad of examples of successful efforts. Still, I have decided to be self-indulgent and present a visual composition by one who makes no claim to be an artist—me. The credit (or blame) for this decision falls mainly on me, but also on those friends and colleagues whose artistic opinion I value and who have told me they "like" this piece. Here we see the St. Louis Arch, the so-called "Gateway to the West." Natural light from a setting sun behind us reflects from the moon and, for just a few more minutes, from the arch whose flowing lines thus still seem to point toward the moon. Soon the artificial light from the lamp atop the lamppost will replace the sun as the major illumination where we stand. Composing this picture required waiting for the sun to position itself for maximal reflection of its rays from the arch to the camera, and for the intensity of the mercury arc of the lamp to become bright but not brilliant. Positioning the images was not easy. With one leg wrapped around the lamppost and with my body contorted to position the images where I wanted them on the film plane, and to steady the camera for the slow shutter speed, I heard the footsteps of an approaching passerby. Fortunately, a friend was with me and nearby, for her laugh belied her attempt to deny that she knew me and it probably eased the anxiety of the

passerby, who did ask if I was all right. Here is another example of a composition in which the expression of a message goes beyond the simple ordering of the images. Their context stems, in part, from the texture. For effect, this shot was underexposed, darkening the sky and enhancing the contrast between the natural and the artificial light. (Actually, I was quite fortunate that one of the two exposures I tried gave the effect I sought, for I depend greatly on trial-and-error in my photographic efforts. )



Up to this point we have been considering the creative efforts which can put visual or auditory images into a particular order that has value because it is expressive, or pleasing, or both. But for many of us, just the ordering of ideas or conceptual images is a form of creativity. In his book *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*, Rabbi Harold S. Kushner states that: "A creative scientist or historian does not make up facts but orders facts; he sees connections between them rather than seeing them as random data. A creative writer does not make up new words but arranges familiar words in patterns which say something fresh to us."

Among the many who strive to put ideas, or facts, into a meaningful order, some are scientists. Today scientists tend to be mechanists. They tend to believe that if all of the "laws" of the universe were known we could explain everything, even life. In other words, all things that exist and all things that happen can—but not with our present knowledge—be explained in terms of physical and chemical forces and interactions. This distinguishes mechanists from the vitalists who believe that living things contain some undefinable stuff—a vapor, or a spirit—that imbues life into nonliving materials. Rene Descartes was a vitalist. He believed that the stuff comprising the soul of the human emanated from the pineal gland (near the brain's center). But we now know the pineal gland to be

the source of melatonin, a hormone important, at least in some nonhuman species, in the control of the springtime activity that produces still another generation. Could Descartes have been asserting that one of the soul's major responsibilities is to control sexual desire? Vitalists can easily be credited with creativity, (pun intended), as can those in the creative arts and humanities. However, I submit that a good mechanist must also be creative.

The creative scientist designs experiments to determine relationships between facts not previously recognized. But these must be recognized as efforts to learn about something that already exists, thus to "discover" something. From our discoveries we gain information that helps us to guess other relationships; that is to predict. Then we devise tests to see if our predictions were correct. But scientists can be overly zealous in their belief in the general applicability of relationships they discover. In his 1953 publication, *Politia Medici*, Jerome Head, himself a Midwestern physician, comments: "Science, then, is the method of obtaining knowledge and knowledge is the recognition of patterns of experience which permit prediction. Prediction permits intelligent action." Later, Head continues in this vein: "There is an almost ineradicable tendency to say that things happen as they do because they are governed by certain laws of cause and effect. Actually they merely happen as they do, and the law is constructed from observation of events. The events are not determined by the law. 'Why' turns out to be merely a refinement of what and how. It is, as they are, the result of pure description,—not merely a recognition of patterns and sequences which permit prediction."

E. O. Wilson takes it a step further, perhaps a step too far, when he claims that man is not a reasonable creature, that man is controlled mainly by genetically determined instinct. And Carol Tavris points out in her recent book, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion*, that we have come a long way from Plato's claim that reason (thus, our ego) can control our worst impulses. But Freud and his followers bet gloomily on the id, on the importance of instinct. And in contrast to Plato's attempts to show that man is better than the beast, Darwin and others have shown that man is just another species of beast. Tavris suggests that new ideas will "take" only if they fall on "fertile" ground and that the theories of Freud and Darwin are palatable because the social and economic conditions of the 19th and 20th centuries have buffeted human self-confidence, making us more receptive to psychoanalysis and to the concept of evolution.

Do we create ideas or do we merely observe nature and events? Do we instinctively guess what is to come? Do we act mainly by instinct? In the scientific community, how do we develop individual ideas? How do we determine a reasonable order in which those ideas relate to each other?

Let's look for a few minutes at a portion of the development of our present understanding of one scientific concept—one of special interest to me and one on which I work when I do research—namely, the functional design of the cardiovascular system in mammals.

Today we know that blood is pumped from the right side of the heart into the pulmonary circulation. Arteries carry the blood to the lungs and veins return it to the heart, this time to the left side. From there it is pumped into the systemic circuit which carries the blood through tissues throughout the body and back to the right side of the heart to complete its cycle. In both circuits blood flows from arteries to veins through microscopic vessels with walls so thin that gases and nutrients readily diffuse across them. Thus as blood flows past the lungs oxygen diffuses from air (in the many small cavities of the lungs) into the plasma, and carbon dioxide diffuses in the opposite direction, from plasma to air. The blood is then transported on through the plumbing of the system and it enters microscopic vessels near active cells. Hence oxygen from the blood enters the cells where it is used in the chemical reactions that produce energy for the cells. And the carbon dioxide released during those chemical reactions leaves the cells and enters the blood to be transported back to the lungs. Control of blood flow through the microscopic vessels (we call this the microcirculation) is of great importance to the survival of the cells. And this is an area of intensely active study. My own research investigates the control of the microcirculation provided by the levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in fluids surrounding the microvessels. Let's look at a photograph showing the microvascular network leading from a small artery to a small vein. An artery and a vein lying both parallel and close to each other, extend vertically through the field on the right hand side. The artery is the thinner, somewhat lighter vessel. We see how complex a microvascular network can be. In each tissue we find characteristic vascular patterns. This photograph happens to be characteristic of a specific portion of the cheek pouch of a hamster, a very thin muscular tissue. For a simpler representation we can look at a line drawing of a small portion of the microcirculation, this portion feeding just a few skeletal muscle fibers. Notice that blood leaving the artery can flow to the adjacent vein or into another vein through any of a number of pathways.



But, how did we come to the point of understanding, to the extent that we do, the architecture and control of the circulatory system? The evolution of our understanding required extensive time and effort. With the very onset of thinking, humans must have wondered what life is—and how living things work. Probably our Stone Age and Bronze Age ancestors had little or no systematic knowledge of life processes. But they bled from their battle wounds and knew blood to be warm and fluid. And they knew that its flow from large wounds corresponded with the beating of the heart that they felt within the chest. Allusions to that relationship show up in artifacts from early Chinese, Hindu, and Egyptian cultures.

Aristotle, pupil of Plato and tutor of Alexander the Great, introduced the first systematic work in biology. Believing that effective study could be aided by orderly arrangement of material, Aristotle devised an organized classification for animals in which form was related to function. He observed that the first thing to show life in a developing animal is the heart (Remember that no microscopes and no microbiological techniques were available to him). He went on to observe that the heart supplies vital spirits to the body by the boiling from within it of nutritive spirits with air that flows into the heart through the arteries (Can't you feel that boiling in your chest?). And Aristotle thought that the lungs merely cool the blood. For many centuries hence, only slow advances were made in our formalized understanding of animal function, in general, and of the circulation of blood, in particular.

History indicates that the first person to begin a comprehensive exposition of how animals work did so during the second century, A.D. Galen was a brilliant Greek physician from Pergamon, physician to the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. But Galen was not an experimentalist. He was an observer, a thinker, and an arbitrary enunciator. Not until the 17th century did we learn, under the tutelage of William Harvey, to do careful physiological experiments. We can briefly summarize the four major points describing animal function enunciated by Galen. These formed the Galenic dogma that persisted to control thinking for many centuries: 1. Body function proceeds from a "coction" of food in the stomach where it is prepared, by ducts, for absorption from the intestines and transfer to the liver. (The ducts in the intestine are now known to secrete chemicals, not absorb nutrients.) 2. There (in the liver) it (the coction) is converted to blood containing "nutritive spirits" necessary to nourish the cells to which it is transported by veins; 3. Some of the nutritive spirits pass through pores in the septum of the heart (there are no holes through the septum of the normal healthy adult heart) and are combined in the left chamber with air coming from the lungs (ostensibly through the pulmonary arteries) to form "vital spirits." (Galen was obviously a vitalist.) In the process heat is produced causing boiling over of the vital spirits into systemic arteries, and through them, to all parts of the body. (For political reasons Galen could not have rejected Aristotle's widely accepted views.); 4. Finally, some of the vital spirits pass into the brain where

they are converted into "animal spirits" which flow out through nerves to cause motion throughout the body. Amazingly, each of these points can, in an obtuse way, be related to present beliefs. Each is partly true. However, this humoral theory of the Greeks led to the practice of blood-letting in order to control the balance of the various humors. Disease states were believed to be imbalances in the relative presence of each of the humors.

You might have noticed that Galenic dogma gave no hint that vessels form a completed loop through which blood is circulated. But references from various historical niches suggest that, throughout the history from antiquity into the 17th century, there were occasional fleeting notions about the circular motion of blood. Still, few ventured to question the prevailing "scientific" dogma because it so closely adhered to the contemporary religious dogma and to the teachings of the Church. Indeed, it was dangerous to do so. As a case in point, consider Miguel Serveto (Servetus) who suggested, in the mid 1500's, a completed pulmonary circulation transporting blood to, through, and back from the lungs. It is true that in the same publication with his pulmonary theory, Servetus made some theological arguments concerning the Trinity. Knowing full well that the Roman Catholic Church would not abide his ideas, he left Paris to be with the Christian reformer, John Calvin, so that his ideas might fall on more fertile grounds. But Calvin tried him for heresy, condemned him, and had him burned at the stake along with all copies of his book. But three copies survived. They provide a good exposition on the pulmonary circuit of the cardiovascular system. Yet we have no indication that Servetus' work was widely read or that it had any significant effect on contemporary thought.

The man credited most with formally delineating the circulation of blood was the irascible founder of modern physiology, William Harvey. Harvey was more theorist than experimentalist. But a brilliant theorist he was. Near the turn of the 17th century the young Englishman was in Padua to study under the great medical teacher, Girolamo Fabrizzi. With his mentor he puzzled over the function of the valves in the veins. (The valves are located where we can see enlargements along the veins in a forearm when flow through those veins has been blocked by a tourniquet, or other constriction, on the upper arm.) Together, the two men dissected many of the structures and conjectured about how they might affect blood flow. This work helped Harvey to develop his concept of a complete circulation of the blood. The first formal exposition of the circulation suggesting that the vessels form a complete loop, out from the heart and back thereto, is found in notes from Harvey's first "visceral lecture" delivered in 1616 during the very month when Shakespeare died. Harvey had returned to London where he was a newly appointed Lumleian Lecturer at the Royal College of Physicians. His lectures there represent an important turning point in our understanding of animal function. At risk of excommunication from the church, Harvey described some simple observations which had led to his conclusions. But we should remember that many who preceded him had set the stage for Harvey's ideas, had produced the fertile grounds on which his ideas would fall.

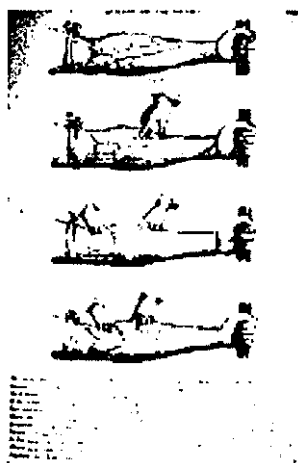


First Harvey presented an estimate of the total blood volume in the body. (Suggesting from his anatomical observations that about 10% of the body weight is blood, he presented values that only slightly exceeded our present best guesses.) He then computed the volume of blood pumped per minute, multiplying estimates of the amount pumped during each contraction by the number of heart beats (felt in the chest) per minute. He indicated that in only a short time (actually several minutes) the heart pumps a volume of blood several times the total blood volume in the body. Thus, he concluded, the blood being pumped must be returned to the heart, the same blood passing through the heart several times each few minutes. He also demonstrated that the blood is returned through the veins and that the valves play an important role in that return. To do so he made a simple observation. Referring to the diagram (slide #9):

But that this truth may be made the more apparent, let an arm be tied up above the elbow as if for phlebotomy (AA). At intervals in the course of the veins, especially in labouring people and those whose veins are large, certain knots or elevations (B, C, D, E, F) will be perceived, and this not only at the places where a branch is received (E, F), but also where none enters (C, D): these knots or risings are all formed by valves, which thus show themselves externally. And now if you press the blood from the space above one of the valves, from H to O, and keep the point of a finger upon the vein inferiorly, you will see no influx of blood from above; the portion of the vein between the point of the finger and the valve O will be obliterated; yet will the vessel continue sufficiently distended above that valve (O, G). The blood being thus pressed out, and the vein emptied, if you now apply a finger of the other hand upon the distended part of the vein above the valve O, and press downwards, you will find that you cannot force the blood through or beyond the valve; but the greater effort you use, you will only see the portion of vein that is between the finger and the valve become more distended, that portion of the vein which is below the valve remaining all the while empty (H, O).

As Harvey delivered this lecture, all present could see the evidence by following the procedure on their own arms. Thus they had been carrying this evidence with them all along, but had not observed it.

Also among Harvey's achievements was his enunciation of the most effective approach to studying natural science. That approach has been labeled the "scientific method." There are four components of the methodology which Harvey thought to be essential. Briefly they are: 1. a careful and accurate observation and description of a phenomenon; 2. a tentative explanation of the phenomenon (a hypothesis); 3. a controlled testing of the hypothesis; 4. conclusions drawn from data obtained during the tests.



When I first heard of the constraints of scientific methodology I knew I could never be a scientist. (I don't even like to use a cookbook though I do enjoy cooking and eating. ) Fortunately I had forgotten about the scientific method by the end of my third undergraduate year, the point at which I first decided to pursue my developing interest in the sciences. Later I found that, as my exposure to the sciences and to those in the forefront of research in the sciences increased, I became increasingly aware of the fact that most advances result from investigations best described as "trials and errors." Granted, of course, that the trials are not random but are the result of careful thought and contemplation. This, by the way, is the approach I most enjoy when cooking, when creating photographs, and when investigating science. And I am in good company. In the words of Claude Bernard, one of the most brilliant investigators of animal function:

"Scientific investigations and experimental ideas may have their birth in almost involuntary chance observations which present themselves either spontaneously or in an experiment made with a different purpose."

One of the requirements, then, of the successful creative life scientist is an ability to realize when you have come upon something important, something that increases our knowledge of the order of living systems, or of the relationships between the parts of a living system. Or perhaps your discovery merely alters our perception of relationships between facts already known, thus affecting the texture of that part of science.

A sonnet by Jerome Head appears in your program. Head captures there some of the difficulties encountered when a person tries to study life, interpret observations about life, or otherwise tries to discover a meaningful order among facts or ideas. It seems fitting to close with his words:

All being is a fountain's shifting plume  
Whose scattering mist falls back into the bowl  
Which, being always full, has always room.  
The fountain lives by changing, but the whole  
Containing change is changeless; measures rise  
And equal measures equally return  
For naught is born of nothing, nothing dies  
And ne'er a drop o'erflows the brimming urn  
Whose surface ruffled by the falling drops  
Turns back the shafts of man's too curious eyes  
And shows himself reflected. Knowing stops  
Sharp at the surface, and howe'er man tries  
To peer into the deepness of the bowl  
'Tis his own self he sees and his own soul.

(Jerome Head, *Sonnets in Exegesis of Heraclitus and Empedocles*,  
Evanston, 1955)

I have enjoyed sharing these thoughts with you. Thank you for your attention.

As I stand here before you tonight to talk about the history of love, I am reminded of the Peanuts cartoon I have posted on my bulletin board. Poor Peppermint Patty is sitting rigid in her school seat at the beginning of a test. You can sense the panic she is feeling. She reads the test question: "Explain World War II." Explain World War II?! The mind boggles. And then Peppermint Patty reads the instructions: "Use both sides of the paper if necessary." In order to confine myself to about thirty minutes tonight—my two sides of the paper, so to speak—I will have to leave a lot out. I cannot take time to worry over a definition of love. I cannot talk about the whole history of love, only a few hundred years of it. I cannot deal with the whole world, only England, with a few references to western Europe. I cannot incorporate literature and the findings of cultural anthropology as I would like to do. I cannot carefully distinguish between different socio-economic classes. I cannot show how tricky it is to interpret historical evidence, not least because there is often a difference between what people preach and how they actually behave (as Jim and Tammi Bakker have recently demonstrated).

What can I do, then? I'll begin by briefly describing the one historical couple I am really well acquainted with: John and Marie Coke. They were English. They lived in the early 1600s. And I think they were in love. See if you agree. In John's first extant letter to Marie, written at about the time of their marriage in 1604 but while John was delayed by business in London, he attested to "my continued affection," and he said that this affection had increased as a result of reading Marie's letters because "love kindleth love." John promised that "my affection will whet my industry and help my despatch." In the meantime, he asked Marie if there was anything he could send her from London, saying, "I will take it for a favour from you, and will think you then love me indeed, when you dispose freely of me and mine." When John was back in London two years later, he expressed the same sentiments again. He told Marie that "here I remain as far divided from myself as I am from you." He expressed the hope that this separation would "not estrange but rather enflame our desires and affections." In closing, he sent Marie "the kisses of true love."

And the feeling was mutual. In one of Marie's first letters, addressed to her "loving husband," she thanked John for the gift of a hat and gown, although she admitted that the foul English weather and the dusty grounds around their home prevented her from wearing the long, golden gown as often as she wished. On another occasion, Marie told John: "I have received the ribbon you now sent. I confess I am deeply indebted to your lips for it...." From these same letters it is clear that Marie missed John's company. In the first letter, she said she could not help thinking "that we are not in our own place whiles we are so far asunder." In the second letter, she chided John good-naturedly: "You seem sometimes in your

letters to be somewhat melancholy. I wish myself with you to put you out of it and to prattle with you. No doubt I should give you good council [sic] and further you much in your business. You have great cause to wish for me."

Both John and Marie were upset by the business trips that separated them. After two years of marriage, John told Marie he would devote "all my thoughts and endeavors to a speedy contriving of such a course of life wherein we may continue together without these distractions." And he asked Marie to help him choose "either by this foreign attendance and striving with the world to seek a better estate, or by a domestical frugality and united counsels and endeavors to improve that small condition which we have already." Marie undoubtedly preferred the latter course. She suffered from loneliness during John's absences, a loneliness that was seemingly compounded rather than alleviated by the birth of their first child. In one of her letters, Marie lamented, "I want your companie many times to make mee merie when I am apt to be sad." Their son had been restless for two days, Marie reported in this letter, and her parents, who had recently had another child of their own, insisted on rocking him. "And if he were not rocked," Marie explained, "they would take him up and dance him and shake him, which I thought would hurt him less than rocking. I will do what I can to break him from it, which will be hard to do in this house where there are so many rockers." In another letter, Marie wrote, "My thoughts do many times make me earnestly desire your company, that we may spend this short life together as much as may be." To this she touchingly added, "Your son calleth often, 'Dad, Dad,' although you do not hear him."

During the next twelve years of their marriage, John and Marie enjoyed a more settled household, building their own home in the Herefordshire countryside and increasing the number of their children to six. In 1618, however, John's "striving with the world" resumed when he seized the opportunity to strike it rich at the court of King James I. As their letters resume, John can be found lamenting again, "I suffered enough by being [away] from home where I love to be, and at London where I never take pleasure." In another letter, he wrote, "I will not be induced nor forced to live from you any longer, but will rather break away and abandon all the expectation of reward than neglect those real duties which I owe to yourself and my family." In John's words, it was the "expectation of reward" that made this separation worthwhile. And as the prospect of reward drew nearer, he dreamed of what this would mean for himself and Marie. "We shall have means," he wrote, "to live together here, or in the country when we think fit, and in a better fashion than we have done heretofore...and shall be able to settle our children at the university, and you shall be freed from those drudgeries and domestical cares which now take up your time." But there was already a cloud hovering over this bright prospect. Marie was plagued by a lingering illness, which John attributed in one of his letters to "the cares of our family and my absence." John was a notoriously frugal man, but not where Marie's health was concerned. In one letter, he wrote, "sweet wife spare yourself rather than

money." At another time, he waited anxiously for news of Marie's health, and when a reassuring letter finally arrived, he was "so glad of your letter...that I willingly gave the deliverer a triple reward." John was soon to experience the terrible misfortune of a man whose dreams come true—almost. In quick succession, he obtained a lucrative court office, moved his family to a new home in London, and sent his two oldest sons to Cambridge University. But during their first Christmas in London, John and Marie lost their oldest son to spotted fever. John bemoaned this "affliction that we suffer, I by the breaking of the very staff of my age and my wife in her motherly affection." Required by his new office to spend the next month away from home, John regretted that he was not able "to comfort my family nor to support or assist a woman that is indeed very sensible of her loss." What little support John could provide, came in his letters. Though separated, he assured Marie, "you are dailie in my hearte and dearest affection...I esteeme you as myself...no woman shall have more cause to be confident in the love, care, and tenderness of a husband than you shall finde whilst I live." To combat Marie's depression, John again offered the prospect of a brighter future: "doubt not sweete harte, that God hath still his mercie in store for us, and that you and I by his goodness shall see better daies..." But John was cruelly deceived in these hopes. Two months later, while giving birth to twins who barely outlived her, Marie died.

Even this brief synopsis of John's and Marie's marriage should be sufficient to show that the fundamental emotions binding them together and the strains threatening to pull them apart were not unlike those we experience today. One obvious strain on their marriage was John's ambition, which carried him away from his home and family and placed a greater emotional and physical burden on Marie. It also deserves to be said, however, that we can never know for sure how much John pursued a court office, as he himself claimed, for the sake of his wife and family. And even this tension between career and family makes John and Marie look contemporary, except of course that in their day John was the only one who had a chance to pursue a career at the risk of being criticized later for neglecting his family. Far more important, however, is the obvious love that drew John and Marie together and sustained them through twenty years of married life. To anyone who has experienced love in the twentieth century, the love between John and Marie, though it occurred three hundred years ago, should look quite familiar.

Now how does all this fit the history of love? Well, there's the problem. It doesn't fit at all. At least it does not fit the widely accepted view enshrined in a blockbuster best-seller by Princeton historian Lawrence Stone (*The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*) published ten years ago. Stone's book is now used in hundreds of college classrooms across the country, and here is what students are learning from Stone. According to Stone, at the time when John and Marie lived, people did not care much for each other. Marriages were arranged by parents and kin for the purpose of preserving or expanding family financial

interests. The children had no voice in this arrangement, and it would have been absurd to suggest that marriage should be based on anything so hare-brained as romantic love. According to Stone, the sympathies of Shakespeare's contemporary audience would have been entirely on the side of Romeo and Juliet's parents, not the crazy kids. Just as husbands and wives did not care much for each other, parents did not care much for their children. Since mortality rates were terribly high, it was not sensible to invest much emotion in anything so fragile as a child. Those children who did survive were treated harshly and unappreciatively. Stone has no doubt "that more children were being beaten in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, over a longer age span, than ever before." The society of this period, Stone wrote, was one in which "a majority of the individuals that composed it found it very difficult to establish close emotional ties to any other person. Children were neglected, brutally treated, and even killed; adults treated each other with suspicion and hostility; affect was low, and hard to find." Or, as Stone wrote in another place,

About all that can be said with confidence on the matter of emotional relations within the sixteenth-and early seventeenth-century family at all social levels is that there was a general psychological atmosphere of distance, manipulation and deference; that high mortality rates made deep relationships very imprudent; that marriages were arranged by parents and kin for economic and social reasons with minimal consultation of the children; that evidence of close bonding between parents and children is hard...to document; and that evidence of close affection between husband and wife is both ambiguous and rare.

This is a bleak picture, but it is not Stone's own personal, eccentric view. Many other sociologists and historians since the time of Karl Marx, through the writings of Max Weber, to the more recent work of Philippe Aries and Lloyd de Mause, have assumed that there was a transition from the "feudal" family to the "modern" family. They have insisted that you could not have had individualism—and hence "affective individualism," as Stone calls it—until you had the modern nation-state and the modern economic system. According to this theory or model of modernization, the modern "companionate" marriage simply could not have existed until the eighteenth century because the modern nation-state and capitalism were not firmly established until then. This is a powerful argument or theory. But it has not gone unchallenged.

Stone's severest critic is another historian named Alan Macfarlane. Macfarlane has shown the ways in which Stone had to ignore evidence, misinterpret evidence, and select evidence carefully so as to prove the theory he already assumed to be true. Macfarlane calls this a "massive effort" to prove a "false paradigm." To take just one example, Stone argues that parents refrained from becoming attached to their children because of the high infant mortality rate until

the eighteenth century when "affective individualism" blossomed. Presumably, then, affect went up as the mortality rate went down. But Macfarlane points out that even Stone's own graph of the infant mortality rate in one English area where it has been calculated shows that it remained the same from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Thus Stone's own data contradict his theory. This is only one of many reasons why Macfarlane pronounces Stone's book "a disaster."

The basic disagreement between Macfarlane and Stone is over the question of whether love or "affective individualism" was a rarity prior to the eighteenth century. In contrast to Stone, Macfarlane finds overwhelming evidence of affective individualism as early as the fourteenth century. Actually we have here a new version of the old argument about whether we have to wait for the Renaissance to witness the birth of a better, brighter world to replace those gloomy middle ages. Scholars who devote their lives to a study of the middle ages naturally resist the insinuation that these were dreary, brutal, loveless ages. One medieval historian, David Herlihy, puts the question this way: "...if we are to believe Philippe Aries, medieval parents did not recognize their children to be children, and did not respond emotionally to their special qualities. Distinguished historians affirm that the affective family, comprised of loving spouses, loving parents and children, is a modern, even recent creation. Were medieval people really cold and indifferent toward their closest relatives, with whom they shared the most personal and penetrating experiences of life?" Herlihy finds this heartless portrait of medieval people "dubious indeed." Another medieval historian, Barbara Hanawalt, has reconstructed the courtship practices and marriages of medieval peasants. Hanawalt concluded that "modern descriptions of marriage in traditional society appear to be distortions." Hanawalt dispels many commonplace, false assumptions about the way medieval husbands treated wives. She finds that marriage was not "as devoid of companionship as Stone describes it." Hanawalt likewise rejects the "patriarchal model of marital relationships" as too simplistic, preferring instead to think of medieval marriages as partnerships. Hanawalt's work is solidly based on historical evidence of real behavior—court cases—not on a selective reading of fictional or prescriptive literature. Martin Ingram's work has the same virtue, and he arrived at much the same conclusions. Ingram studied matrimonial litigation in the church courts of late medieval and early modern England. In actual practice, Ingram found, the power of parents to arrange marriages was balanced against some freedom of choice among the children. As a rule, parents did not try to force children into unhappy marriages. Children could in effect veto arranged marriages. But by the same token, children were expected to marry only with their parents' approval. All this balancing of interests—taking each other's feelings into account—suggests that these people cared for each other. This is Ingram's conclusion. In Ingram's own words: "Despite the opinion of some modern historians that marriages tended to be loveless affairs before the eighteenth century [there is a footnote to Stone here], it seems clear that one generally



recognized criterion was mutual personal attraction between the potential spouses, to enable them to 'love' one another. (Indeed, something very close to our idea of 'romantic love', with all its heartaches and inconstancies, emerges quite strongly from the pages of depositions in matrimonial suits.)"

Actually, Stone's emphasis on the influence of parents and other kin can be interpreted as a vestige of another theory that is now discredited. It used to be blithely assumed that pre-modern families were "extended" families embracing a wide conglomeration of relatives. According to this theory, it was not until the modern period that the extended family was reduced to the now common nuclear family. Perhaps you have been exposed to this theory. It appeared as a fact in my college sociology textbook; but it is just plain false. Historical demographers have now demonstrated that for England at least, as far back as we can tell from the surviving records, the nuclear family has always been the norm. Older relatives simply did not live long enough in previous ages to comprise an extended family. Englishmen, therefore, did not have to wait until the modern period for the nuclear family to arrive or, presumably, for the emotional bonds that we associate with that smaller, close-knit family.

Stone and others who assume there was a fundamental change in the character of personal relations between the feudal and the modern period have to find some agent to cause that change. Most often that alleged agent of change is capitalism. Sometimes it is also the growth of the nation state and a public educational system. These institutions are alleged to have taken over the other functions formerly performed by the family, leaving family members with nothing else to do for each other except attend to their mutual emotional needs. (This theory strikes me as even more implausible than the theory of the extended family, but it has become a sort of sociological truism.) Another alleged agent of change is the Reformation. Edward Shorter in his book on *The Making of the Modern Family* asserts, like Stone, that personal relations were "affectionless" until the Puritans came along. "There was something about coming to the colonies in the eighteenth century," Shorter writes in all seriousness, "that gave family life a new quality." Here again perhaps the English were especially fortunate. One French scholar (Jean-Louis Flandrin) contrasts the stifling influence of the Roman Catholic Church in France with the encouragement of love among English Protestants. But this, too, is a facile distinction based on a negative stereotype of Catholicism, a favorable stereotype of Protestantism, and a very selective reading of religious texts. Steven Ozment, a Reformation scholar, does not agree with this cold-Catholicism/warm-Protestantism view. Ozment finds it "difficult to argue that Protestant marriages were more egalitarian or that the spouses loved one another any more intensely than did Catholic spouses." Ozment doubts whether any religious affiliation, world view, or system of ideals has as much effect on relations among family members as what he calls "set routine and natural need." Without quite spelling it out, Ozment implies that men and women confronting each other's needs on the most

intimate level have probably responded in ways that were more similar than different from century to century.

Is there not, as Ozment implies, something abiding in our most personal relationships that outweighs the minor variations in public expression from age to age? Barbara Hanawalt, whom I referred to earlier, entitled her book on the medieval family *The Ties that Bind*; and she clearly means to imply that emotional bonding is pretty much a constant in human relations. Hanawalt observed medieval children going through the same stages of development as modern children; and she found that medieval parents showed normal parental concern for the welfare of their off-spring. Here again Hanawalt studied official records of actual behavior, in this case coroners' inquests into accidental deaths of children. From these records, she reconstructs a society that cared about its children, where parents did not like to leave children unattended, where it was difficult to get reliable baby-sitters when both parents had to be away from home. All this should sound familiar. When Hanawalt turned her attention to medieval teenagers, the patterns of behavior she found were equally recognizable. As she wrote, "The patterns of work and play, the rather late age of majority, and premarital sexual flirtation all point to teenage years not unlike our own. While we cannot reconstruct the pimpled faces, the other biological characteristics of teenage sexuality are abundantly apparent. As in the case of childhood, the stages of biological development must be given their due and cannot be entirely culturally suppressed." Hanawalt reminds us of the biological constants that persist from one generation to the next no matter what changes may occur on the historical-cultural surface. As parents realize all too well, the hormones that caused the zits on the faces of medieval teenagers are the same hormones that run rampant in the bodies of our teenage sons and daughters today. We have the same endocrine systems, the same brains, and the same genetic predispositions of our medieval ancestors. A few hundred years is insignificant in these respects. I do not mean by these remarks to equate love with sex, to rob love of all its wonder, or to reduce love to a purely physiological phenomenon. But I do believe it is presumptuous (even foolish) for historians to write about love as if it had no limiting, constraining biological basis whatsoever. For example, how could human beings possibly turn off their feelings for their children based on a cold calculation of the mortality rate? At least one historian, Linda Pollock, understands that this would require humans to act contrary to the way they are programmed to act. As Pollock writes, "Parental care has evolved as it has done in ape and human societies, because there was a need for that type of care. For parental care to have been as drastically different in past societies as has been suggested [by Stone and Aries, for example] would mean parents acting in direct opposition to their biological inheritance."

Now I realize there are objections to this line of reasoning. Bonding isn't necessarily love. And even if parental care for off-spring could be demonstrated to exist world-wide, it is much more controversial to allege that bonding between

men and women exists world-wide. The nuclear family of which I've spoken tonight is, arguably, a uniquely Western ideal (and only an ideal even in the West, since most families do not in fact conform to that ideal). If anthropological studies of non-Western cultures are to be trusted, there is apparently no universal, biological imperative for monogamous bonding---or love, as I have loosely called it. Humans are uniquely able to override any biological predispositions that may exist anyhow. And the list of objections could go on. But still, it seems to me, love is inherently an interdisciplinary subject. It would be an ideal subject for an interdisciplinary colloquium series; and I would be especially eager to hear what the biologists (and psychologists) have to say.

While awaiting illumination from these and other disciplines, where are the historians themselves left? In a state of disarray, I am afraid. The controversy stirred up by Stone's blockbuster shows no signs of abating. Stone and his harshest critic, Macfarlane, are still going at it tooth and nail. There's no love lost between those two. Meanwhile, we are at least learning more about the issues at stake and the hazardous methodological pitfalls awaiting anyone who ventures into this field. I am painfully aware that hastiness has made me stumble into a few of those pitfalls tonight. One pitfall I have avoided, however, is a false pose of neutrality. My survey of the subject has been admittedly very one-sided. I do not agree with the contention that pre-modern personal relations were basically loveless. I think it much more likely that pre-modern people did, much like ourselves, experience love. Perhaps that is because I have been fortunate to experience love in my own life and simply cannot imagine countless previous generations of pre-modern men and women living without it. Perhaps, too, it is because Stone's bleak view of personal relations simply does not square with the images I carry in my mind of the one man and woman I actually know well from that period. When I think of John and Marie Coke, the images that come to mind are not consistent with Stone's theory. I think of Marie and her parents trying to soothe her crying child in a house full of busy rockers. I think of Marie, lonely, dressed in that long, golden gown, waiting for John to return. I think of John immersed in business at court but anxiously looking for word of Marie's health. I think of a grief-stricken mother trying to cope with the death of her oldest child while her husband futilely searches for words to console her. I think of these two people struggling together to deal with separation and grief, to provide for the needs of their family and yet steal some small measure of happiness for themselves. I think of love.

## The Search for Captain Howdy

1991

Robert C. Bray

*fade down house lights; spot on podium from above;  
fade up slide of Lorena Bray, left projector:*

I would like to dedicate this to my mother, Lorena Bray.

Maestro, if you please!

*play excerpt from 'the devil came from kansas;' fade up slide of me, right  
projector: As I start reading next section, fade down slide of Lorena Bray*

In the Procol Harum song, when the devil comes from Kansas he announces:

I teach I'm not a preacher/And I aim to stay that way

which is a good rule and one I've tried to follow. It's not that I'd ever choose to preach rather than teach, just that for a professor of literature it's hard to know which is which, to keep from crossing over or moralizing my subject because I don't know enough about it. Actually, I misquoted the line above, which really goes this way: "Though I teach I'm not a preacher." And here's the rest of the verse: "There's a monkey riding on my back/ Been there for some time/ He says he knows me very well/ But he's no friend of mine." So the devil and I, both from Kansas, have a problem purely teaching. And we both have monkeys on our backs. The devil's is nameless, but mine I call "Captain Howdy," borrowing from yet another song, an utterly forgotten early-70s number by Simon Stokes, who can't even be termed a "one-hit wonder" since "Captain Howdy" wasn't even a hit, just a 45 on a jukebox in a westside Bloomington tavern. Anyway, I've spent many futile fragments of years looking for the record of Captain Howdy, whose very elusiveness has made him-her-it my god of irony, with secondary portfolios in ambivalence and ambiguity. The Captain is the CEO in my personal pantheon—or maybe I should say my personal Pandemonium. I never catch up to him, but once in a while old Buffalo Bob gets close, and when he does Captain Howdy, like a hateful wooden puppet, always says the same thing out of both sides of his smirking, riddling mouth: "On the other hand . . ."

fade down on me (right); up on worm (left)

In the beginning was the worm—two worms, to be exact: one, the mythic Worm Ouroboros, 'the serpent that eateth its own tail;' and the other just an ordinary worm, as in the novice monk's response to his abbot: "I am indeed an execrable worm." The two worms represent books the reading and teaching of which were immensely important to me in the early '70s: E.R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros* and Walter Miller's *Canticle for Leibowitz*.

I first taught Eddison's magnificent heroic fantasy during my first year at Wesleyan, as part of a survey of the British novel. Now *The Worm Ouroboros* is certainly a British novel, but canonically and generically it didn't belong in the syllabus with, say, Virginia Woolf or D.H. Lawrence, two of Eddison's highbrow contemporaries from the 20s and 30s. *The Worm* was in fact resurrected as part of the huge 60s vogue for J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. I happened to think Eddison the more interesting writer and I remember being amazed both by his baroque style and the power of his vision of eternally circling and spiraling good-and-evil. Perhaps it was ignorant of me to include this book, but I've never regretted the decision: Look at this splendid drawing of the Worm by Bette Ann Hepner ('71), now an art teacher at Evergreen Park High School. She submitted it instead of a paper for her final work in the course. It wasn't that Bette Ann couldn't write: she was an artist; I gave her her druthers, which was the sort of thing 60s teachers did in the 70s.

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* was at the heart of a course called Writing and Reasoning which Larry Colter and I taught together. It was part of the freshman-year curriculum revolution of the mid-70s, a two-unit course that, if graduate follow-ups are to be believed, was an entirely-too-tough rite of passage into Liberal Land. Larry and I and the students, over several runs, struggled to develop our critical thinking and writing skills as we centered on the fundamental problem of political philosophy: the individual's relation to the social whole. Talk about Captain Howdyism! I'm here to tell you we never got close on this one, though by the end we finally figured out we hadn't figured it out!

I wonder if any among our students remember Writing and Reasoning that way. How about you, Ann Frank ('82), since gone on to a PhD in English and now trying to 'liberate' your own students in your own way at Elmhurst College? And how about you, Carl Teichman ('80): did we imprison you here for life with that damnable course? Or are you simply waiting for clarification before cashing your ticket out?

*A Canticle for Leibowitz*, an after-the-holocaust science-fiction novel, has no ultimate answer either, the nature of humankind being what it (maybe) is. The novel ends with a starship carrying a last new Noah's ark of folk off the now twice-nuked earth. Included are nuns and a begrudgingly-ordained priest, who carries the sacraments of the Church of New Rome, sacraments that are both necessary for starting over and the necessary evidence that all our rebirths are as flawed as the first. Larry and I, secular humanists and therefore infidels, were always awed by the ending of Miller's novel. As for the students, well, I'd love to ask Carl and Ann and all the many others....

*fade down worm; fade up stars; play after the gold rush*

*fade down stars; as I begin to sing/speak, fade up the two Mississippi slides:*

*railroad station on left, swollen creek on right.*

"Riding on the City of New Orleans, Illinois Central Monday morning rail." Early in January, 1973, with Paul Bushnell and a passel of students, heading south on the first travel seminar ever to New Orleans. We took the train, sleeping fitfully in the coaches through Illinois, waking up somewhere south of Memphis. I remember standing for hours in the open vestibule of the rear car, watching the passing country and thinking, "this must be Mississippi." I wanted the trip to be a descent into the heart of Faulknerian darkness, and I looked so hard for forty acres and a mule, for ramshackle poor-white cabins, that I must have missed the 'real' Mississippi, which is better reflected in these pictures of hamlet train depots and brown-swollen creeks. Yoknapatapha is a country of the mind. What I should have seen was a different darkness: the blue-black of African-American music. Robert Johnson's Hazelhurst was on the route, but I was seeing Jefferson instead. I thought I glimpsed Darl Bundren taking a wagon-load to town. "It means three dollars," I thought I heard him say to Anse. I thought he did, but probably it was just Faulkner's imagination.

*as I begin speaking next section, fade down two Mississippi slides; fade up bar interior slide right*

The avatars of Captain Howdy were around every next corner in New Orleans. Paul Bushnell taught me to detect the Captain's presence in the Quarter, the Garden District, across the river in Gretna. Paul was my mentor during that trip, and I have continued to learn American wisdom from him all the years since. But Darryl Pratcher was my chief drinking buddy—there he is now, his back to me as I take the picture in a certain slant of N'Orleans winter light, warmer than Dickinson's in New England but just as fleeting. Many late afternoons found us, after long hours of walking and talking and reading, in one or another of the French Quarter bars. Not the tourist traps or the nightclubs but just the old corner establishments that have been around for ages and are covered with the historical equivalent of Spanish moss. One of our favorites was the Old Absinthe House, which seemed still to exist as it had for George Washington Cable a century before, when he was looking back another hundred years into Creole Louisiana. Sometimes Beth Evans would join Darryl and me, the three of us at the bar like refugees from a bad Hemingway story. Amidst the palpable continuity of the place, one thing had changed between 1773 and 1973 and fortunately for us: the Old Absinthe House no longer legally serves absinthe, so we stuck to beer or pretended that a gray cloudy licorice Pernod was the same brain-rotting stuff as wormwood. Attitudinizing can be fun and educational.

Darryl went on to become a lawyer and works in Springfield; I see him once or twice a year. Beth briefly taught English in high school, conquered a life-threatening illness, and now works for a publisher in Florida. I'm not sure I'd recognize her if she slid down one of these 16-foot stops; yet we haven't wholly

been out of touch. Some years ago I received a postcard from her: "I went back to New Orleans," she wrote. "You're right, Bob: absinthe does make the heart grow fonder."

*fade up bluesman slide left; fade down bar slide right*

*slowly fade up burgundy street blues to background level; keep it there as I read the following section*

From my journal, New Orleans, Saturday, January 13, 1973: On Jackson Square: a lone clarinetist playing poignantly to a small crowd. The sounds drift over the breeze, break up against the talk. Other music-makers do folk/blues in huddled groups on the cold damp ground. The same boy walks briskly from front to rear of the Square and back again, head down, radio playing harsh among the natural noises. The 3 o'clock sun warms but the wind sweeps it away. One of the folkies is singing "Like a Rolling Stone." It is not Dylan.

*fade out burgundy street blues*

I saw Robert Johnson that day in New Orleans but didn't recognize him. Where was Paul off to when I needed him most? Paul, patiently imparting and receiving, would have noticed and said: "Look, Bob, there's Robert Johnson—or someone like him." Yes, and I bet you didn't know he was also quite a preacher.

*play preacher's blues*

The subtitle of Johnson's "Preacher's Blues" is "Up jumped the devil." The song is, among other things, a warning to teachers not to say they understand til they understand. What we heard was the last verse. Maybe we didn't catch what Johnson was singing any better than the pedant who had the job of trying to write down the words by listening to the scratchy old 78 masters. This transcriber underlines a couple of lines of text in the last verse, then gives us—what else?—a footnote: "The underlined are phonetically correct, although meaningless."

I can study rain  
oh, oh, drive. oh, oh, drive my blues  
I been studyin' the rain and  
I'm 'on' drive my blues away

Back when Sammye Greer used to wrastle with William Butler Yeats, she taught me never to turn my back on a lyric, but to stare down the snaking line until my eyes teared, which applies to folksong lyrics as surely as to "Among School Children." And thanks to Pamela Muirhead I also know a lot more about studyin' and signifiyin' than I used to—more anyway than our poor transcriber. He can't figure out how Robert Johnson could be "studyin' the rain." When an African-American studies something—and remember it's the black preacher who

leads the call-and-response, what we professors call class discussion—she gets to the bottom of it, right down to moral bedrock. Johnson, the preacher, and his double, the devil that is the blues, studied rain together til they knew it signified the blues—not symbolized, now, but signified. When they learned this they knew also that studyin’ would be the death of one of them: Johnson will drive his blues away. How. ‘Goin’ to the ‘still’ry,” he declares, “stay out there all day.’

*fade out bluesman slide left; as I begin speaking next section, fade up snow graveyard slide fight*

I’ve been told that all American Brays worthy of braying are from Kentucky, but since my dear old dad was as slippery as Captain Howdy himself—everywhere but where I happened to be at the time—I couldn’t ask him and just don’t know. But what with my obsession with the preacher Peter Cartwright—and more recently with the founder of bluegrass music, Bill Monroe—I’ve been studyin’ Kentucky pretty closely. You wouldn’t think there’d be much connection between Mississippi blues and Kentucky, but, like me, you’d be wrong. Bill Monroe’s “high lonesome” is musically close to the blues, though at first they may sound as different as apples and oranges:

*play footprints in the snow*

I don’t have time here to study the sinuosities of this apparently simple song, though I can’t resist wondering why the singer went to see Nellie that day, was it his first visit, why did she go wandering off in the snow, what condition she was in when he found her, and why he blesses that happy day, since the last verse makes it clear that “now she’s up in heaven.” The silly sentimentality of the song is undercut both by the blues of the “high lonesome” and the subversive behavior of the text. A bluegrass masterpiece results. Captain Howdy, how do you do it?

*fade down snow graveyard right; fade up highway sign left*

Robert Johnson once visited Decatur, Illinois, on his way up Highways 51 and 66 to Sweet Home Chicago. In soybean town he played—I kid you not—a square-dance—this was in the late 20s and means that the great Delta bluesman played the musical parent of bluegrass—and probably to an all white audience of Kentuckians gone north. I can’t begin to imagine what the social ambience was, or what the music sounded like, but it’s an event on my list of top ten time-machine trips, maybe number one ahead of Lincoln’s Lost Speech. Johnson probably came on up 51 to catch 66 in Bloomington. If so he went through Clinton, where twenty years later one of the Midwest’s best bluegrass bands was located: the Bray Brothers—Harley, Nate and Francis—playing live week in and out on radio station WHOW:

*play whow station break*



But, wait: all this Braying only gets louder and crazier. One day a guy walks into my office on campus and announces: "I'm Bob Bray." "The hell you say!" I answer. But he was, and so am I. We became friends from this time if not doppelgangers. In those days Bob looked like Michael York playing D'Artagnan in *The Three Musketeers*—all blond hair and blue eyes and dimples when he smiled, which was most of the time. And he was as ready as D'Artagnan to mount his pickup and ride out of Gascony (Wapella) to save the world. Bob was incandescent, even a little scary, about the plight of native Americans and the rape of the land. I tried to teach him what else was there, tried, that is, to give him context, though whether context would moderate or further spur I didn't know. He taught me horses, laughed when I fell off my big gelding Jake into an icy March creek running through his farm. He even made me just once a cowboy, a Sunday when we rounded up strays from his father's herd loose in Weldon Springs. After a couple of years at Wesleyan, Bob went back to farming, as the Indians went back to the reservation. We rarely see one another now. But he and his wife Martha have a daughter, Sarah Bray, who is making it hard to tell the dancer from the dance. My own daughter, Madeleine, watches her on the stage and wonders... And so it goes, Bob, so it goes...

*fade out highway sign left; fade up jerry stone slide right; as I read, fade up canterbury slide left*

Because Jerry Stone long ago recreated the 12th century for me, I can't see a Gothic cathedral or a Romanesque basilica without putting him in the space, and I miss the ancient days when we watched Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* Sundays and shared a classroom Mondays—a place of learning devoted to the proposition that if I climbed the one cottonwood in Wright Morris's Lone Tree, Nebraska, and cupped my hands, I could hail Jerry standing away off east in the western portal of Chartres, and he could holler back across an Atlantic Ocean of time. We thought we could hear each other; we thought we were saying the same thing from different directions. Jerry is the most empathetic person I've had as a friend—but he's also a wonderful thinker. Wesleyan students don't know what thinking is until they've watched Jerry worry an idea for days, weeks, semesters, a lifetime. And the result: a shake of the head, a self-deprecating smile, and "I don't know, I don't know." Neither do I, Jerry, but I feel a lot better not knowing together.

*fade down canterbury jerry stone slides; fade up cathedral interior right*

A warm, muggy night right here in June, 1975, no air-conditioning yet in Presser. I have no idea why a faculty recital a month after graduation. But Dwight Drexler was playing Debussy's "Preludes", not to be missed. I went with Spencer Sauter, so the evening was amplified by friendship. Now the tentative, probing first chords of "La Cathedral Engloutie" emerge—the "Sunken Cathedral," spectral image of a legendary church rising like Mont St.-Michel from the

sea, once every millennium, glimpsed by faithful and skeptic alike, then subsiding slowly back and gone. A thousand years take six minutes. At the fully risen moment, the cathedral's bells ring out across water and land:

*play cathedral englutie*

I remember white knuckles, wanting to shout not clap, inner voice saying over and over, "I see, I see!" Spencer remembers, awesome. Dwight remembers a recital like any other.

*fade down cathedral interior; as I begin to speak this section, fade up slide of empty tomb left*

*fade up circle unbroken to background level and keep it there all during this section; raise volume for first chorus, then fade out*

Riding back from Springfield one afternoon with Angie Hill; desultory conversation. Angie, did you know that Christian graves are always laid out east-west? Well, maybe not all and always but all of them I've seen...Look at that cemetery over there...We're heading north...see how they all line up eastward. Why is that, Angie? What's going on? Is it so the bodies will be going up when the last trump sounds, like something in a Michael Jackson video?... No? Maybe all those rectangular graves square the circle so it won't be broken....

Will the circle be unbroken/ By and by, Lord, by and by?

Is that a question, Angie?

There's a better home awaiting/ In the sky, Lord, in the sky.

Is that an answer? The folk seem pretty positive on slim evidence. Will that sky then be like Stevens's sky, "not this dividing and indifferent blue"? Can you help me with this one, Angie? Can you?

*fade down empty tomb left*

So, after all, students make the best Captain Howdys. You try to trick them and they signify on you. Last year about this time I thought I'd joke my American Renaissance class by giving them an absurd extra-credit question on their take-home final: Recite from memory Walt Whitman's poem, "This Compost" at Operation Recycle headquarters. Hand in tape and witness' affidavit for verification. I called this extra credit—ha, ha—brown-nose points and offered an A+ in the course to anyone who could do it, thinking no one could or would. I should have known better. Howdy, Captain Howdy, you've been sitting in the front row all semester, under the alias of Kim Hefner.

*fade up A+ slide right*

Besides the requisite Howdyish grin, you've got a case of softball catcher's knees, meaning you like to stretch out your aching legs, lean back in your seat, chin in hand, from which position sooner or later in the hour you come out with an "on the other hand." Of course you'd try this crazy thing; of course you'd hand in a tape just minutes before the deadline. You dared, Kim, you did it; now listen to yourself; listen with especial care to the line you left out—and bless or curse your own Captain Howdy.

*play kim reciting this compost; as she reads, slowly fade out A+, leaving both sides of screen blank; house lights up at end, when tape says "good job."*

## The Importance of Unlearning

1993

Mona J. Gardner

President Myers, distinguished guests, colleagues and friends, students (especially those in the class of 1993), thank you for the great honor of being a part of this program today. In the few years I have been at Illinois Wesleyan, I have been privileged on similar occasions to attend the presentations of Professors Pam Muirhead, Tom Griffiths, Bob Bray, and John Wenum, all of which have been imaginative and insightful. I assure you, therefore, that it is with great humility—and a considerable amount of trepidation—that I've approached this task. In addition to reflecting on the four speeches I have heard myself, I looked back at remarks of winners since the initiation of this award in 1960 and found topics ranging from "Inflation", by the first winner, the late Professor William Beadles, to "The Occult Revisited" by the late Professor Max Pape. As you will see, I finally determined to make my own contribution to this distinguished history a very simple one, having little to do with my academic discipline.

I am teacher. For most of my life—certainly as far back as I can remember—I have always loved considering new ideas, commanding new facts and figures, developing new skills, mastering new technology. In brief, learning has always seemed to be one of those rare unequivocally-good things, and helping someone else learn, among the highest human callings. Since becoming a teacher, I have spent most of my time expounding this belief to my students. I have often stressed that knowledge is cumulative, that it builds on itself, that previous learning becomes the foundation for subsequent learning. I suppose that over time I have felt vindicated and reinforced in my beliefs by many references in the media to the "knowledge explosion" and by frequent reminders that more knowledge is created in a modern decade than was created in some previous centuries. So much to learn ... so little time.

Still, as much as I want my students to leave my classes with a keen desire to learn more than I could possibly teach them, only recently have I begun to realize that I must also encourage them to unlearn if I truly want to help them mature intellectually and personally. And I have finally seen that if I really wish my own actions to reflect my fundamental values and beliefs, I too must know what and when to unlearn.

Today, I hope to share with the graduates of the class of 1993 (many of whom have been my students and advisees), with other students, and with my colleagues and friends, further thoughts on the importance of unlearning. I will focus especially on three types of unlearning that strike me as crucial: unlearning the boundaries of specialization; unlearning stereotypes; and unlearning cynicism. I hope also to issue challenges to the class of 1993 so that as you leave us, armed with your hard-earned degrees, you'll embark upon a path not only of sustained learning but also of lifelong unlearning.

Members of the class of 1993, you are justly proud of your accomplishments. Most of you have chosen your major fields of study carefully and have acquired the level of expertise that you desired, and that we on the faculty demanded, in the vocabulary, the methodology, and the culture of your discipline. Some of you have already taken, or will soon take, exams that qualify you for a license or certificate of proficiency in your field. Others have taken a graduate record field exam, on the basis of which you will go on to acquire even greater expertise in that area in the future. Whatever your future, if you are like many of your predecessors—including the person I see in the mirror each day—many of you have begun to learn some things very well: that the world as seen through your discipline is the world as it really is; that the methodology with which you approach problem-solving will lead to the best solutions; and that the language through which you communicate is clear, precise, and definitive. You have learned, and perhaps have adopted, the shared values that underlie your discipline or profession and may even feel that part of your responsibility to that discipline or profession is advocacy of those values.

When I step back from my own field for a moment, many of my personal observations suggest, however, that these specialized lessons so well learned in school are often not the ones on which human progress is founded. My discipline of finance, for example, employs elaborate mathematical models and arcane jargon (such as “arbitrage pricing theory,” “semi-strong market efficiency,” and “delta-neutral hedging”), phrases born of the enthusiasm that characterizes a group of academics talking to itself. Yet I am struck by the fact that finance professionals consistently rate human relations as the most desired talent among new graduates. After all, I have a PhD in finance—what do they know that I don’t know? Or could it be that I have learned not to see what they see?

The methodology with which I am most comfortable dictates that problems are best solved by developing hypotheses, collecting vast amounts of empirical evidence, subjecting the evidence to statistical analysis, and dismissing data points that don’t seem to behave like the rest of the group as “outliers” from which little of importance can be gleaned. Yet I know that a historian may use a single unusual incident or individual (my “outlier”) to illuminate a generation. How could an intelligent person be so misguided? Or could it be that I’ve learned not to see what the historian sees?

Sometimes the steadfastness with which we view the world according to our specialization not only prevents us from communicating well with others, as my previous illustrations suggest, but it actually impedes personal development. Two years ago, a fine senior biology major enrolled in a management class to broaden her understanding of the relationship between science and business. She soon withdrew from the course, however, because she was unable to adjust to the fact that, for example, the word *un-ion-ized* in management was *u-n-ion-ized* and not *un-ion-ized*! Of course, a senior business student might well have had the

same problem in reverse. But while this true story is mildly amusing in retrospect, it illustrates, I believe, how much unlearning is sometimes necessary before we can enjoy further intellectual progress.

Today, therefore, my first challenge to members of the class of 1993 is to begin your post-baccalaureate days determined to discover what discipline-bound lessons you must unlearn to enable you to learn new lessons in the future. If you are entering law or medicine—fields that may well lead to the top economic stratum of almost any society—seek also to understand that society from an inner-city teacher's eyes. If you are a mathematician, make sure you understand how a nurse sees the world. If you plan a management career, consider how a minister or social worker might look upon commercial values. If you are an artist, musician, or actor, recognize and understand the beliefs that motivate business decisions. If you are a chemist, an economist, or an accountant, try to view the world through a poet's eyes. In brief, make it your objective not merely to acknowledge that those outside your field may see the world differently—that's easy—but try genuinely to understand how they may see it. I am virtually certain that to do so, you will be forced to venture outside the intellectual ghetto in which it is very tempting to settle down comfortably.

Do I offer this challenge because I have simplistically concluded that, if we unlearn the behaviors and language that define, and often restrict, our own specialties, we will find that "people are the same everywhere," and we will all live happily together? Of course not! Such a conclusion would not only be foolish, but also dangerous and undesirable, because it would fail to acknowledge the importance of diversity. Do I instead offer the challenge because I believe such intellectual boundary-spanning will allow you personally to lead, in the words of IWU's mission statement, "more fully realized lives"? No again, although I do believe it will. But that motivation would be essentially appealing only to your self-interest, and I hope to do more than that. Instead, I urge you to discover what narrow lessons you must unlearn—and then to unlearn them—because I am convinced that identifying and respecting differences in intellectual perspective is the only real basis on which human progress can be made on the social, economic, and political issues that divide us—and will conquer us if we let them.

Consider, for example, health care reform as one such issue. For us as a nation to enjoy universal but affordable health care will certainly require policy makers and health care specialists to listen to and to consider the needs of many interest groups, including doctors, lawyers, hospitals, employers, state governors, insurance companies, and, of course, people who need health care. Yet as important as the role of policy-makers and specialists is, a truly workable solution will be found only when members of each interest group understand and respect the positions held by the other interest groups. Developing such understanding almost always requires unlearning some of the cherished "truths" one

has previously learned. We will soon begin to see whether we have the will to do it.

A second area in which we must make greater unlearning efforts is that of stereotyping. This statement is neither startling nor original. Nonetheless, I am amazed and saddened, by the alarming frequency with which stereotypes of race, gender, regional or national origin, age, sexual orientation, religious preference, class, height, weight, and occupation dictate the terms of human interaction—even in relatively benign environments such as ours. My generation, and generations younger, often consider ourselves enlightened about and aware of the dangers of stereotypes. Many of us have taken classes in which acting on the basis of stereotypes is rigorously analyzed, dissected, and almost universally rejected as an impediment to our personal development, to the development of others, and to solutions to social and economic problems. If we are so well educated on these matters, then why do stereotypes persist with such a vengeance? More specifically, why do Willie Horton ads work? Why do Atlanta Braves fans continue to do the tomahawk chop? Why is the movie *Falling Down*, in which contemporary white males are symbolized by a crazed maniac who truly “just doesn’t get it,” so wildly popular? Why do surveys show that most men and many women prefer male bosses, when most respondents have never had a female supervisor? It is not simply the fact that politicians, baseball executives, movie producers, or pollsters play to stereotypes that deeply disturbs me, it is that large numbers of people continue to find those stereotypes acceptable.

At one point in the 1940s musical comedy *South Pacific*, the heroine, a sheltered white woman from Arkansas named Nellie Forbush, breaks off with the man she loves because she learns he is a widower with two Polynesian children. Speaking to another character, Lieutenant Cable, Nellie justifies her reluctance to embrace these children as her own by noting, “I can’t help it ... There is no reason ... This is emotional... This is something that’s born in me..” To Nellie’s surprise, Lieutenant Cable is not sympathetic, and replies in a dramatic and, when *South Pacific* debuted in the late 1940s, highly controversial, song entitled “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught.” Although Nellie’s personal stereotypes may seem dated today, the message that Rodgers and Hammerstein sent through Joe Cable to audiences in that era is what anthropologists had long before told us, and what they continue to tell us: that stereotypes are embedded in culture, and that culture is learned not innate. Therein lies the best news of all: what is learned can certainly be unlearned—but only if we first recognize the importance of unlearning.

I listened with interest at a recent diversity workshop when Malik Jones, one of our Admissions Counselors, discussed his preparations to travel to Nigeria this past January with other members of the IWU community. Malik noted that the most important action he took was not to learn all he could about Africa

before the trip, but to make his mind a clean slate—to eradicate the images of Africa he had acquired over a lifetime of Tarzan movies so that he had even a hope of seeing it as it really is. Malik's insight mirrors my belief that stereotypes persist in part because many of us have simply "pasted" new knowledge about particular groups or societies over what we have already learned is true, failing first to unlearn the stereotypes we may have been carefully taught. Thus, our subsequent encounters with people from that group are informed not only by our new knowledge but also by the deeply embedded beliefs we have failed to unlearn. The consequences of this pasting over are, of course, undesirable for those whom we stereotype. But neither are they good for us: Only after Nellie Forbush unlearned the lessons so carefully taught in her native Arkansas was she free to learn that her destiny lay on a Pacific plantation with a French husband and two Polynesian children.

Thus, my second challenge to students, and especially to graduating seniors, is to unlearn the inevitable stereotypes you carry with you, despite the certainty you may have that, through your classes, your travels, and your social contacts, you don't have them. Your personal efforts to unlearn will not, of course, eradicate the evils of stereotyping. They will not, for example, prevent the Jesse Helmses of the world from waging political campaigns on blatant appeals to prejudice. But they may prevent him from winning with such strategies the next time. Your personal unlearning should also make you more able to help others unlearn and therefore not to contribute inadvertently to the persistence of stereotypes on this campus, in your hometown, in your company, or even in your family. And you may well find that your own life is richer because you are now open to experiences your embedded stereotypes may cause you to reject today.

The third and final lesson I hope my students, and especially those in the class of 1993, will unlearn, is cynicism. I am concerned that somehow you have learned to be cynical; that some of you may doubt yours, or indeed anyone's, ability to change the world for the better, that you have concluded that factors such as competence and personal integrity don't count. I'll tell you why I'm worried. Last year, only a few days before it was announced that I would be the speaker at this year's Honors Day convocation, the *Argus* ran a column from a graduating senior entitled "Columnist Learned Lessons Well." Permit me to read excerpts:

I learned that brown-nosing can get you points just as well as studying.

I learned that being popular means not caring enough to say the truth.

I learned that doing the work yourself is unimportant: taking credit for work well done is essential.



I learned that learning something from your work is not necessary for success.

I learned that making a difference in the world is easy—pollution, prejudice, and political corruption come without effort.

I learned that impressing the right people is more important than knowing much of anything.

Maybe college did teach me how to succeed in life after all.  
(from the *Argus*, May 8, 1992)

If those are some of the lessons of a college education, they are lessons in desperate need of unlearning. In this case, as in the others I have shared this morning, I know because I've "been there," because at times in my life I have personally felt the sentiments she expressed. Like many of my faculty colleagues in the audience, when I was in college, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated. We came of age during the deep national divisions provoked by the Vietnam War. The year after I graduated, student protestors at Jackson State University and Kent State University were killed by young men who in another era might have been their classmates. Shortly thereafter many of us watched with disbelief when the Watergate episode revealed that the President of the United States had abused the awesome powers of his office to conceal his involvement in a petty crime. Like many in my generation at that time, after living through this series of events, my faith in established systems and institutions ebbed to almost nothing. Inevitably, too, my belief in the contribution that any individual, especially myself, could make to any form of human progress completely eroded. At that time, I could have, and no doubt did to friends and colleagues, express many of the sentiments the *Argus* columnist expressed just last year.

Yet I had once been a genuine idealist. There had been a time when I had not yet come to believe that it made little difference what I did or said, when I did not believe that the system was truly corrupt. Admittedly, my newly learned lessons in cynicism did not make me happy, but at least I felt I was finally prepared to meet the world as it truly was. I felt I had gained wisdom by putting aside the naive dreams of my past. And I believed these lessons were necessary for survival.

In the song "Against the Wind," the rock artist Bob Seger penned what I consider, as a member of the first rock and roll generation, to be a memorable line: "Wish I didn't know now what I didn't know then." For me, there was not really a defining moment in my days of cynicism when I knew that I, too, "wished I didn't know now what I didn't know then,"—when I wished I hadn't come to believe that most systems were hopelessly corrupt and that my indi-

vidual actions to the contrary didn't matter. Instead, my recognition was gradual. Perhaps I became discontent with always feeling discontent. More likely, after becoming a teacher, I began to remember that the best teachers I had had—including my late mother—were not cynics, but idealists, were not people of little faith in the power of one person's words and deeds, but people of great faith in them, were not purveyors of hopelessness, but of inspiration. So, though I can't define a dramatic moment (it would make for a much more entertaining speech today!), I am glad that I finally recognized that if I really wished I "didn't know now what I didn't know then," I could do something about it—that cynicism, like excessive specialization and like stereotypes, was learned and, therefore, could be unlearned.

My third and final challenge to the class of 1993 is to discover, and then to unlearn, the beliefs that tempt you to be cynical. But don't expect it to be easy. It's clear each generation has many opportunities to become cynical. Like my 1960s generation, during your college days, you have witnessed more than your share of events that could undermine your ideals—from the horrors of ethnic cleansing, to political corruption here and abroad, to headline-grabbing financial scandals, to television evangelists' exploitation of the weak and the infirm. Furthermore, individuals within each generation also have personal experiences which, like those of our *Argus* columnist, can teach cynicism. You may witness a peer cheating undetected and receiving a high grade or a promotion in the process. You may encounter times when hidden, rather than shared, agendas prevail within groups. You may—indeed, I'm sure you will—suffer broken promises and disappointments not of your own making.

And, as if an abundance of opportunities to become cynical weren't enough, the difficulty of unlearning cynicism is compounded by its very nature. Cynicism is sometimes allied with intellectual sophistication, with a certain *savoir faire*, with cleverness. Because most of us value being acknowledged for our intellect and wit, we may wonder if we will deny ourselves important recognition if we fail to endorse the cynic's view of the world. So if you choose to unlearn cynicism, it will not be without cost, at least within some circles.

In challenging you to unlearn cynicism, I do not fail to recognize the contributions of an H.L. Mencken (perhaps the most widely recognized professional cynic in American history) or of a film, novel, or play whose theme has a hard-boiled edge. Indeed, such shared and creative expressions of cynicism often serve as useful catharses for readers and audiences. Neither do I suggest that you approach your lives as scientists, physicians, teachers, nurses, lawyers, writers, accountants, politicians, artists, or managers as naive rubes, blindly ready to be "taken" by those who would willingly do so. Instead, I advocate adopting mature idealism, tempered with wisdom born of past experience. But *I am* suggesting that, even as you recognize that all human endeavors can be, and often are, conducted in the style highlighted by last year's *Argus* columnist—that is, by emphasizing form over substance, by using others, by taking personal credit

where it is not due, by sacrificing integrity for popularity—even in recognizing these things, I challenge you to show by example that these same endeavors can also be conducted competently, courageously, and nobly, despite inevitable temptations to behave to the contrary. To be sure, you may never reap tangible benefits by adopting such a course of conduct. But someone—a friend, a colleague, even a stranger—may be watching at a critical moment in his or her personal struggle with cynicism. And if you are perchance the unknowing instrument through which that struggle is peacefully resolved, you will have contributed to human progress. Although you may never know of such contributions with certainty, you cannot afford to live as if they are not possible, or do not matter.

In George Bernard Shaw's play *Major Barbara* one character notes to another, "You have learned something. That always feels at first as if you have lost something." The statement on its face seems puzzling. How can learning create a sense of loss? And if it can, how discouraging a thought. Losing anything is rarely a human goal, and most of us will go to great lengths to avoid it. But Shaw implies, and I have suggested this morning, that if we really are to learn personally and collectively, there are times when we must lose something first—namely, useless, outmoded, and dangerous lessons from the past. The next time you feel a sense of loss as you consider an unfamiliar idea or encounter a view of reality differing wildly from your own, don't be disturbed. It may be that you have just learned the importance of unlearning.

## What's the Difference?

1995

James D. Matthews

President Myers, Provost McNew, distinguished guests, honored students, class of 1995, and one special faculty member to be named later, I am fairly humbled to stand before you today. You have offered me a most generous gift: the obligation to think deeply over the past year about an issue that I have longed to explore. In the course of this contemplation I have learned many things, some of which I hope to share with you today. But first we need a warm-up exercise. So everyone turn to a white space in your program, take out a pen or pencil and follow my directions carefully. If you are wearing academic regalia today you are exempt from this exercise.

First, draw me a picture of a loaf of bread. Next draw a picture of a window. Now spell out the letters of the name of our railroad system. Finally, write down the name of the President of Mexico and the Prime Minister of Canada. Now imagine that we are conducting this experiment in Montpellier, France. What would your loaf of bread look like? Wonder bread? Wrapped in plastic? Will it stick to the knife when you spread something on it? What about your window? Will it move up and down, or in and out? Will there be a shade to pull down? You probably got the train question right—AMTRAK. In France it would be, of course, SNCF. What do the letters in AMTRAK stand for, besides 30 minutes late? The President of Mexico is named Zedillo and the Prime Minister of Canada is named Jean Chrétien. How many remembered the accent in “Chrétien”? Do you think more of you would know the leaders of your country's nearest neighbors if you lived in France? I think so. Culture is rooted in the language through which we express it; “pain” and “bread” are not directly translatable equivalents for one another. Language shapes and is shaped by the cultural values we hold dear.

Let me tell you a story about overcoming cultural obstacles. It is a true story, an African story. My friend Yeno Matuka was left fatherless at an early age, a position of some trepidation for a Zairian youth in a culture where much depends on the ability of one's father to smooth the way, to engage his personal network of connections on a child's behalf. In fact, Matuka once told a group of students in Contemporary French Culture here at IWU that he had been named by his father to commemorate a significant event in life; namely, that his father was still fertile at the ripe old age he had reached when Matuka was born. That is an Honor's Day way of saying nicely that his name really means “Still standing strong and proud” and I am not referring to his backbone.

In any event, when he was nine or ten, Matuka pestered his uncle (now head of the family) to send him to a school run by Belgian monks. The uncle finally agreed, but like many other families, failed to pay tuition by the end of the year. The next fall, when Matuka showed up at school (a three-day walk from his

native village), the monks refused to enroll him. They let him sleep on the kitchen floor for one night, but sent him on his way the next day in search of tuition. Of course, this was also the beginning of the monsoon season, and Matuka walked for two days to the village of his uncle through a steady hard rain to confront his surrogate father about the lack of support. Matuka tells this story much better than I, coming from a culture which values more highly good storytelling. He tells me he spoke to the frogs along the way, and to the stones, and they all seemed to mock him both with their calls and with their silence. Think of walking that far at age ten. What in the world could possibly be worth that much effort, not to mention the hard work of lobbying he had to do when he finally confronted his uncle (who eventually paid up)? An education. From Belgian monks who wouldn't even let him sleep in a bed. And, by the way, the state of education in the Belgian Congo was House Speaker Newt Gingrich's doctoral dissertation topic. I think somehow Newt would approve of Matuka and his fight to get an education. I disapprove of Matuka having to fight so hard to get an education.

I am humbled by this story. Matuka's courage and his commitment shame me in my comfort and the relative ease of my life. I have always assumed my education; it was clear in my family that I would not have a choice but to go to college. Unlike Matuka, I would not claim this valuable experience until much later. Matuka and his family now live in the United States, political exiles from one of the most inhumane regimes known to a continent which represents something like the major leagues of repression. Matuka is my brother and my teacher and I wish he were standing here today with me.

I too know something of Belgian monks for I teach in the Department of Foreign Languages, the department that makes everyone nervous because we do weird things such as behaving as if English weren't the most important language on earth. After nine years, it is still something to be remarked on, that I spend 95% of my instructional time speaking French. And a significant amount of my meeting time also.

There are several common reactions to this strange behavior of mine, all of them offered by good-hearted people of well-meant intention. Among them are that speaking a foreign language is cute, fun, entertaining at parties, a neat secret code in which you can say what you really think about something. Foreign language is the only program at Illinois Wesleyan by which we recruit students by assuring them that with some effort they will never have to take courses in it. Think about that for a minute. Think about spending your working life learning a set of skills, mastering a body of knowledge, only to listen to admissions guides tell prospective students that they may never have to use the "neat equipment" we have on the first floor of Buck if they are lucky. At some point in one's career one learns to smile through this frustration, to understand that one is always going to represent difference to some degree, that what we do threatens a

significant portion of the population, even in our somewhat rarefied community.

I use my own experience as a window through which to understand how "foreign" continues as an operative word in American discourse. I now realize I grew up in a suburb of Detroit as segregated as any found surrounding Johannesburg. An important part of my youth was devoted to learning that difference existed, even if it was to be avoided.

Like many of my contemporaries, I spent my college years learning about difference, in my case learning the virtues of thinking in a different language system. The ability to move between two language systems became my life's passion. I learned in short, to cherish the difference.

On February 14, 1990, I began a new leg of my life's adventure in which I am learning to erase difference, to move beyond the French obsession with norms and deviations, to live in the light of the teaching of Dr. Martin Luther King where we seek those things that bind us together rather than separate us, where every person can realize full potential, where artificial impediments to that realization are overturned by dogged, loving opposition.

Finally, I think it is a function of working to get beyond difference to realize one day that quite unexpectedly, one has come to represent deviation from the norm to a large group of people. In my lifetime I have learned second-hand from the experiences of such individuals as Dr. Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela how one counters being labeled as different without sacrificing one's own humanity. I have also learned from my own experience that being designated as "different" brings pain, growth, and often unexpected blessings.

My exploration of difference today begins with the immediate culture in which I find myself. Most of us are aware that the State of Illinois has no foreign language high school graduation requirement, though many high schools themselves do. I can only begin to guess why not. More urgently, I can only begin to wonder why no one seems particularly upset by this fact. Most countries I have visited have education systems in which knowledge of a second or even a third language is a fundamental expectation for every student. This is so, not because second languages lead to better jobs or improved economic status, but because the ability to think as the "other" represents an important step forward in human growth. To be able to think, to reason, to feel within the confines of only one language system is viewed as limiting growth to child-like levels, which explains why my French friends often discuss Americans as overgrown children. It is not my intention here to reopen a debate between Americans and Europeans which has gone on for 200 years, but rather to point out to what extent learning to reason within other language systems is normative throughout the rest of the world. We are different in this country and I believe we are deficient. In point of fact, and here I speak out of personal experience, Illinois culture as reflected by our school system is one that first negates differ-

ence, then isolates it, thereby heightening it without celebrating its positive aspects, and ultimately forces those who are differently colored or abled to pay a price. "What's the difference if the differently abled or colored never learn, so long as they don't hurt us?", I hear this culture asking. And who is that culture that shuns difference to such a degree? Why it is us, of course. Pogo always knows.

It has always been thus in Central Illinois. The first Europeans that I know of here spoke French, and came looking for furs and souls, probably in that order. They found plenty of both. The journals of LaSalle, Marquette, and Hennepin speak of the native American they found here (the Illinois) as distorted and uncouth mirror images of themselves. *Civilisés et sauvages*. At some length, one journalist details the way in which the Amerindians of this region formalized life experiences. This is of course one of the best ways in which to describe the French culture which produced the writer himself. Seventeenth-century French culture saw form and content as intimately linked, the one producing the other in an organic, symbiotic existence. French explorers and writers such as LaSalle and Marquette were experienced decoders of form, and as such were apt to project similar world views onto the natives they found along the Illinois River. In a world quite different from their own, it was perhaps natural that these two men sought out resemblance of any sort. There it is, an initial reaction to the strangely threatening or the exotic is to deny the existence of difference. To Marquette and Hennepin, stuck in the paradigm of civilization/savage, favorably comparing Amerindian dance rituals to the Ballet de France may have been a way to push back Josef Conrad's horror. Or perhaps an anonymous French trader/canoer hired to help transport LaSalle, and abandoned while the latter went for help back to Quebec said it best when he carved the famous inscription on the ruined boat which sealed his fate: *Nous sommes tous sauvages*. We are all savages. Sometimes when we encounter what we see as difference, we do not appreciate what we learn about ourselves. I hope this individual learned to reconcile himself to what he learned about himself, but we'll never know for he vanished without a trace.

And yet as I read these journals, I am left with a sense of frustration that the Frenchness as well as the Amerindians have been cleansed so thoroughly from this area. For with all of their Western imperialism and limited views of the Amerindians, the French trappers and missionaries whom I have read seemed, if not to embrace difference, then at least to coexist with it on roughly equal terms. There were fortunes to be made, and a rich mission field to be explored, but not by driving the Native Americans across the Mississippi. Jesuit and Recollect fathers who lived with the Amerindians in Quebec, Ontario, Wisconsin, Michigan, and yes, even Illinois, furnished stories which became bestsellers of Louis XIV's court. That many of these fathers ended their life in torture and murder only heightened the appeal of their writings. Everywhere they went, they spoke French and they saw microcosmic images of *La Belle France*. But they did not

seek to destroy what they saw.

All of this was, of course pushed to the back shelf when the English conquered Quebec in 1759 and began to eradicate any culture or way of life which threatened their hegemony over the land. One of the more obscure victims of this cultural dominance was the small French settlement near Peoria which had fiercely resisted any cultural inroads until a contingent of Anglo-centric Americans sailed up from Shawneetown looking to eliminate any Amerindians they found, and settled for driving French-speaking citizens off the land. In no way matching the horror of Bosnia, nonetheless, the policy of "ethnic cleansing" helped begin the dominant culture of this region as we know it. One culture, one way under God. If a few French or Indians have to be moved, what's the difference?

But what of the melting pot, or the salad bowl? Well, nuts. I am weary of the periodic eruptions of violence that I have witnessed in my lifetime due to our inability to live with difference in whatever sort of metaphoric vessel we place ourselves. I am also weary of supplying "foreignness" in an area of the country that used to be a fairly interesting intersection of several cultures.

I find echoes of this oppression due to language or skin color in my own experience, though still second-hand. As a boy, I commuted from the lily-white suburbs of west Detroit to a lily-white downtown church in an all-black neighborhood across the street from Northern High School, from which my father had graduated. For those of you blessed with a knowledge of Detroit, this is along Woodward Avenue, south of Palmer Park. I sang in the choir throughout my youth, since this meant I got to leave before the sermon in order to rehearse for the next week. One of the duties of the youth choir was to lead the adult choir into the sanctuary every Sunday, singing God's praises, swaying left-to-right in rhythm to the music. Tom Szabo and I led off every week. We never missed a Sunday because we were afraid we would lose our spot at the head of the assembled choirs. One Sunday however, everything changed. Herman Gray was brand new to our church, needed a partner, and no one would be his partner because Herman was the first and only African-American boy in our church. Everybody was asked, everybody said "No," and finally it was my turn. "Sure, I'll do it. What's the difference?" Well, as it turned out there was a lot of difference. I had to march at the back instead of the front, lots of people stopped speaking to me when I was with Herman, but it was OK because Herman was cool. Herman was tough. His parents were missionaries, his father was a doctor in Africa, and Herman had more dignity than anybody I had ever met. And he couldn't sway at all. He and I invented slam dancing going down the aisle together.

Two years after I met Herman, troop carriers rolled down my street patrolling my lily-white neighborhood, supposedly protecting my people from Herman's people and we all started over trying to learn to get along. And it became a little



clearer to me how tenacious difference is, that sometimes it matters when it shouldn't and that other times we ignore it when it does matter.

So I became a French major and learned the richness of things that were different. Albion College, The University of Michigan, Ball State University, IWU. We only look the same because we see the same. But we don't have to. At first I was thrilled to learn French ways of seeing. Then, slowly, as I reached the end of my graduate career, I began no longer to notice the distinctions of French and English. So thanks to George Kieh, I sought out new ways of seeing, African ways of viewing. And slowly the passion to write, to argue, to persuade that Pierre Corneille almost killed in me revives. I too am Yeno Matuka, standing again tall and proud. And I do mean my backbone. Thank you George. You too are my brother and my teacher and I wish you were standing here with me today.

I came to Illinois Wesleyan because I was tired of working at a school where second languages were not seen as relevant to the lives of the students, 95% of whom came from the several counties around the university. If the students, most of whom never intended to leave east central Indiana, never became proficient in a foreign language, what's the difference? It did not seem to occur to folks there that the world might well come to seek them out.

One of my students there was named Janine. Janine worked hard, truly cared about improving her French, and never seemed to mind my teasing attempts to push her one level higher. She became frustrated at how long it was taking her to break through the intermediate/advanced level barrier. One Friday afternoon, as I was walking through the halls on my way back to my office, she raced up to me shouting in perfect, machine gun French: "Monsieur Matthews, je ne parle que francais depuis deux jours! Je ne cesse de penser qu'en francais! Ca y est, j'ai réussi!... Je parle francais, je parle francais." Epiphany. Janine had experienced one of the more dramatic breakthroughs I have witnessed, not unlike my own some 12 years before. As a student, I once found myself sharing the plot of a French film with the French club in fluent, if not perfect, French, and I held my own for 45 minutes (and then collapsed in total exhaustion). Janine had experienced much the same thing, and it changed her life. She went to study in France, returned home and became a fine French teacher. I don't know if she drives a fancy car, but she can undoubtedly tell me all about it in French. Her life is deeper and richer in ways than money in her pocket could ever provide.

When I came to Illinois Wesleyan, the first thing that happened was that everyone who hired me began to leave. The acting department head informed me when I came over to look for an apartment that she had resigned and we would never work together. Swell. The permanent department head, who labored for a year to get me to eat healthier lunches, gave up and left to pursue a personal agenda in North Carolina. The President of the University had already retired two months before, and I met the new President at my first fall faculty

conference. My first Division Director, and one of the best French teachers I have ever met, left to pursue an administrative career and is now President of Monmouth College. Nobody who hired me was around when I came up for tenure, and that should explain a lot. All of this coming and going provided opportunity to hear and see things I might have otherwise missed.

It was at the inauguration luncheon for IWU President Wayne Anderson that I heard Bishop Woody White offer a metaphor for what Illinois Wesleyan could become. Thinking of a bouquet of flowers, he said that God had created a world in which there are many varieties, many colors, many scents of flowers. So too with people. How well did we think our "bouquet" at Illinois Wesleyan reflected the rich variety of "flowers" from which we could select? Not very well, was our understanding. What if he asked that question today? How does our bouquet look today? Or will we say, simply, "What's the difference?"

I knew I had experienced difference mostly through the eyes of others when my son John was born on Valentine's Day, 1990. John has taught me patiently and lovingly what comes after being defined and labeled as different, after grudging acceptance of difference. John was born with an extra chromosome, a random occurrence from which no one is immune, which cannot be passed from generation to generation, which cannot be prevented and which results in varying degrees of retardation and other health problems. John experiences both of these things, but they do not define him. That has been his teaching for me. To teach me to reconcile myself to him, to all of him, not just to the extra damn chromosome he carries in every cell of his body, but to all of his chromosomes. John cannot hide his difference like I could when I studied in France. John speaks English as a second language using muscles and neural networks different than mine to communicate with others. John will always be different in this way. We look different. But we don't have to feel different.

Raising a child with Down syndrome, as with any child with a disability, is more expensive. It also causes one to experience being labeled as different firsthand. It is true that Mary Ann and I have acquired the stigma associated with Down syndrome through our parenting of John. It costs more money, it costs more tears, it requires much understanding from friends, relatives, and employers. It requires more confrontation than I am comfortable with, as we seek to help others overcome fears and misunderstandings about John. I have learned to ask myself daily a question borrowed from American Indian heritage as I pursue equal opportunity for John: "Is this the hill I am willing to die on?" More and more, the answer is yes.

As the same time John has taught me to be less tolerant of the occasional Illinois Wesleyan student to whom has been given so much and who chooses not to apply himself or herself. Students who refuse to speak French in class because it is too much trouble or they might appear less than perfect. Students who settle for the first answer rather than the best answer. Students who are, in

short, the spiritual descendants of those Americans who sailed up the Illinois River to eradicate the French-speaking population of Peoria. "No Indians to shoot? Oh hell, we'll shoot the French then. What's the difference?" You don't have to love French or Spanish or Japanese or Russian or Greek or German, just respect those who do. You don't have to love John, just don't prevent him from realizing his full potential. You don't have to love people with disabilities, just don't make their lives harder than they already are.

I fear John will never attend an institution such as Illinois Wesleyan for he will never be able to generate the standardized scores upon which we place so much value. He is too different for this place today, although more and more students with disabilities graduate from institutions of higher learning every year. It is for Illinois Wesleyan that I am sad in this foregone relationship, for John enriches every place he is. He is a prodigious and devoted learner already at age 5, and his unique way of seeing and expressing his world have deeply touched all who know him. John is my teacher and my brother, as well as my son, and I am delighted that he can stand with me today.

Asking the question "What's the difference?" has been a reflex action for me throughout my lifetime. It has meant to me at various times, "I can't tell the difference," "I'll pretend there is no difference," or "I have reconciled myself to the difference". More recently, it has come to mean, "Let me help you beyond your struggle with this difference." Last year, Paul Bushnell stood in this very spot and said in ringing tones: "Let us teach for justice and not for privilege!" Amen, Paul. It certainly bears repeating. In that spirit, let us remember the words of another Paul, the apostle Paul:

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;  
God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He  
chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the  
things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may  
boast before him.

In that spirit, let us teach students the courage to grow beyond paradigms like civilization/savage, black/white, abled/disabled. Let us create an institution at which Yeno Matuka, Herman Gray, and yes, even John Matthews will feel welcome to teach us and to learn from us. Let us not shirk from climbing those hills upon which we must be willing to die. And once the battle is over, let us remember the words of a character from an Ousmane Sembene novel:

Happy is the warrior who fights without hatred.

I thank you for this honor this day and I share it willingly with my teachers, my brothers and sisters, and especially with the members of my department without whom I would not be standing here. I am proud to be a member of our community and I look forward to seeing that community grow in the years to come. And if we are all a little early/late for lunch today, well, what's the difference?

Henry Drummond was right! “It’s the loneliest feeling in the world—to find yourself standing up when everyone else is sitting down!” (*Inherit the Wind*)

The last speaker on this podium—at Founders’ Day—used images of flight to talk about human possibilities: she spoke of bumble bees who don’t know they’re too heavy to fly and aerodynamically shouldn’t be able to, so, unaware of their limitations, they fly anyway. And she used images of geese flying in each other’s wake, facilitating one another’s efforts by staying in formations that minimize the strain on others’ energies.

As I began to consider what to talk about with you today, it seemed as if I probably ought to talk in some way about teaching, and especially about those who join me in class week after week, semester after semester. But in what way? I thought perhaps it might be helpful to try to give you a sense of what my classes are like, and I kept coming back to images of flight as well, though these are somewhat different from those Dr. Rebie Kingston so eloquently proposed.

The first has to do with my home. When I first moved in, a young man came to the door one day looking for one of the previous occupants. When I explained that he no longer lived there, the visitor turned to leave, but before walking away, he asked in an unassuming manner, “So, have you had any dead birds on your porch yet?” He saw my look of surprise and quickly explained: “See all of these windows?”—and, indeed, one of the great features of my house is that it has enormous windows in the front and forming almost an entire wall of the side of the living room. “Well,” he said, “the birds don’t see them, and they crash into them and land on the porch.”

He left, and, true to his prediction, I have since heard the crashes and subsequently found the bodies of many birds on the front and side porches of my house. Sometimes, they’re dead, but sometimes, they’re just—“just!”—stunned, and after a little rest, if I can keep the local predators away, they fly off again and seem to be OK.

The analogy may not play out entirely, but it’s struck me over and over how much like those birds the students in my classes must feel! First there are the rumors about the class. . . word gets out about the bodies on the porch! Time passes, and most make it without any trouble. But the occasional “thump” is heard, and the occasional body shows up at the doorstep. Whether the windows are the texts or the professor, or some unforeseen and unforeseeable presence that defies and defines us both, the risks do seem real, even if the violent metaphor is a bit uncomfortable.

Then there's the other image of flight I think of, this one from a Far Side cartoon. The cartoon shows a man swinging a woman around a room, with a toy village strewn about them, a toy mountain conspicuous among the village markers. The caption reads, "On the next pass, however, Helen failed to clear the mountains." And, of course, I'd propose a number of variant readings of it. My students would probably see me as the person in control here, with themselves precariously poised to crash at any moment into the impenetrable mountain—whatever text we happened to be reading. I, on the other hand might see them in control, with the text again as that against which we define our mutual inevitable upsetting encounter. Or, perhaps the text is, after all, the one in control, with students and professor equally energized and endangered by our engagement with it! In any case, I would propose that what matters is the energy we invest; what matters is the risk we take in interpreting our world and the fictions we offer one another to define it.

As Wallace Stevens reminds us, in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction,"  
From this the poem springs: that we live in a place  
That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves  
And hard it is in spite of blazoned days. (210)

This occasion is, indeed, one of those blazoned days—the first of several in which you will be honored. And while I want to join the folks on stage and in the audience in congratulating those of you who have managed to negotiate the past four years of your lives and still come out with academic honors of all sorts, I want to praise as well those of you whose names might or might not be called out today for special mention. Nor, of course, do I mean to suggest that the following groups and those with the official honors today are necessarily mutually exclusive. Of course they're not.<sup>1</sup>

I want to pay tribute to those of you who risked the lower GPA—and maybe got it!—because you wanted to study in another country, to risk learning and loving another language and culture, or who spent time working for Habitat for Humanity, Amnesty International, or the Western Avenue Center; I want to praise those of you who were so weakened by anorexia or bulimia that it took every ounce of strength you had to get your work in at all; I want to honor those of you who have had to endure cruelty, especially that which is masqueraded as high-minded moralism, and who have, despite the outrages. . . perhaps because of them. . . persisted with the greater dignity and compassion. I want to recognize those of you who have had to negotiate private lives—and the lives of your friends—through the minefields of AIDS, family tragedies, and all of those other horrors which really did put the occasional O'Gorman exam in perspective. I want to congratulate those of you in the class of '96 who were willing to risk challenging your faculty—and your faculties!—to envision alternatives to whatever formulas or paradigms we proposed. I want especially to congratulate those whose imaginative engagements with the worlds we posited—whether through physics, art, literature, math, religion or music—were able to see—and

see through—the essential falsehood of the constructs through which we all seek to define our worlds. Many of you took that to heart, reveling in the pleasure of the intellect and the imagination in embracing what might be called the fiction of fictions. And, of course, some of you simply embraced one another, and somehow got through! Just don't let anyone dare to say to you now that you're going into the "real world." Isn't this as "real" as it gets, in lots of different ways?!

One of the ways in which this world is as real as it gets is because we confront what Wallace Stevens and others suggest: that language may be our Supreme Fiction. My intellectual passion is for language, for literature, for the study of the fictions we offer one another and the constructs through which we do so. We need to acknowledge the lure and finally the terror of any imaginative absolute.

Not everyone will appreciate your enthusiasms. Not everyone has, mine! From some of my course evaluations:

British Poetry, 1994: "I learned that I don't like poetry."

Modern British Literature, 1988: "I felt she could have had some more exciting vocal habits. Her voice stays in a 3-note range and it gets monotonous."

British Poetry, 1990: "I liked poetry until this class."

British Poetry, 1992: "Sorry, nothing to say—too tense to concentrate."

Theatre of the Absurd, 1993: "I think I could have done without most of the absurdist plays."

And, from a Seminar on James Joyce's *Ulysses*: "Liked the relaxed atmosphere—felt very comfortable looking stupid."

Then there were the advising triumphs, among which my work with one alum indeed distinguished itself. For his second semester senior year, I signed him up for advanced tap dancing and Physics 406—Electricity and Magnetism—at exactly the same times on exactly the same days of the week! When the registrar notified him of the schedule conflict, the student refused to drop either class! To his credit, he did an epic tap through both, appreciating, as few in either class alone ever could, the many and varied potentials of the interaction of matter with fields!

See why my sympathies pull so clearly in the direction of those whose triumphs are of the more qualified sort?! Or perhaps just of a different order?! Well, back to the triumphs.

As a character in Heinrich Boll's *The Clown* notes, and this is very slightly paraphrased, "'Was I good? Did you like me?' How we speak of ourselves in the language of prostitutes. And we half expect to hear, 'Would you please recommend me to your friends?'" (221-222) I wonder: What does that mean, "the language of prostitutes"? Within what crude representational economy of degradation do we implicate ourselves and one another when we ask questions like "Was I good? Did you like me?" And I recall Pynchon's wonderfully paranoid reminder in *Gravity's Rainbow*: "If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about the answers" (251). But here I am again back at the issue of language, the interrogation of questions, the stuff of classrooms!

Naomi Wolf alludes to the words of the poet Audre Lorde: "[Lorde had] been diagnosed with breast cancer, and wrote,

I was going to die, sooner or later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silences will not protect you. . . What are the words you do not yet have? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? We have been socialized to respect fear more than our own need for language."

Wolf goes on—this directed particularly to the women in her audience: "Only one thing is more frightening than speaking. . . And that is not speaking." As Italo Calvino notes, "No one respects the power of language more than a police state does."

But there is a difference between silence and being silenced. One of my favorite fictional characters, Beckett's Unnamable, puts it this way: "[O]ne has also to consider the kind of silence one keeps" (309).

One of my friends pointed out the other day that I seem to be attending a lot of speeches lately! Imagine with what dismay—not to mention hubris!—I sat in the Memorial Center a week and a half ago and heard Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould elaborate in great detail essentially the same point I had intended to take as axiomatic in this segment of my talk with you here today! Oh, he used a different vocabulary, perhaps—that of the paleontologist—but he emphasized the same notion—that of our radical insignificance—and he did so with some of my favorite slides! Still, as I'm sure Gould and others would admit, and as Samuel Beckett has noted, "There are many ways in which the thing that I am trying in vain to say may be tried in vain to be said."

As I listened to Stephen Jay Gould discuss in the perspective of geological time and cosmic space the relative positioning of humans, I thought, as I'm sure many of you would, of another Stephen—Stephen Dedalus, from James Joyce's

*Ulysses*, and his attempt in the “Ithaca” chapter of that text to make meaningful his own being in the world. The narrator says of Stephen Dedalus: “He affirmed his significance as a conscious rational animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown and a conscious rational reagent between a micro and a macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void” (572). My students and I routinely consider gestures like those of Stephen Dedalus: all mental constructs formulate a relation of meaning between mind and world by advancing conceptions of order, design, and coherence. Whatever form they take, whether of algebraic formulae or of poetry, these symbolic utterances of intelligent and imaginative relationship designate a fictive space in which mind can move; they create a structure in order to define meaning within that structure (and outside of which the same meaning does not exist). The act of imaginative perception seems at once to be a gesture of human vulnerability and human freedom made in the face of the inscrutability of the perceived and the ultimate inadequacy of the mode of perception. So beset and yet so powerful in its urge towards form, the mind searches interpretive space within which it can escape solitude and seem to transcend insignificance.

One of the ways in which it does so is through art—through literature, through language, imperfect and fugitive though they may be. The conspiracy of language tries, with insolent and seductive ease, to domesticate and possess what is not our own. Occupying a territory between the unspeakable and the ineffable, while at the same time defining that territory, the work of art leaves a silent legacy, respite from radical insignificance. That is not to say that we must meet that silence with a silence of our own. We must proceed “as if the language suddenly, with ease / Said things it had laboriously spoken” (Stevens).

I want to return—not very laboriously, I hope!—to that initial image of the cartoon characters negotiating successfully—or crashing into!—the mountain in terms of which they define their mutual energies. I would echo the words of Robert Gosheen, who probably wasn’t thinking of that cartoon, addressing a graduating class at Princeton. His words: “If you feel that you have both feet planted on level ground, then the university has failed you.”

*‘In the paragraph that follows, I echo and elaborate on the kinds of tributes made by Naomi Wolf in her commencement address to students at Scripps College.*



I'm going to speak about my belief that the theatrical arts are at a crossroads in the United States today—in danger of being rendered irrelevant—but that universities like Illinois Wesleyan can make an enormous contribution toward solving the problems. As one who specializes in theatre, I have a particular stake in the issue, but I hope that what I have to say will be meaningful to those of you whose only interest in the subject may be what you choose to watch on television and at the movies.

When I speak about the theatrical arts I mean the stage and the forms that have derived from it: films and television. And when I say that a crisis is occurring, it's because I believe that these "art forms" are all too rarely creating works of art.

One purpose of art is to divert and to entertain, of course, and the large numbers of people who attend films and watch television indicate that audiences are indeed being entertained. But another purpose of art—at least equally important—is to provide insight into the human condition, and to express those insights so creatively that we, the audience, become aware of ideas and attitudes that we hadn't previously contemplated. This is serious, often profound, business—but it can be expressed in many ways: in tragedy, of course, but also in comedy, in farce, in musicals. Whatever the genre, and even if the work is intended as entertainment and nothing more, what counts most is quality: for example, a fresh, lively, clever, innovative comedy is preferable to a stereotyped, hackneyed one. But it's my contention that few recent movies or television shows have attempted to go beyond the stereotypical.

What have they given us? Movies about tornadoes, about exploding heads, about car chases and car crashes, about mad slashers chasing terrified young women, complete with improbable plot twists and one-dimensional characters. Such movies seem to keep the audiences happy and they certainly provide work for special effects technicians—but what happened to the demands of art? I can recall, not too many years ago, when it was a commonplace that, if Shakespeare were alive today, he'd be writing screenplays. Well, that might or might not be true—no-one knows, of course—but I think I can say with some degree of assurance that he wouldn't be writing *Die Hard VI* or *Twister II* or *Mad Slasher XI*.

It's interesting to contemplate what would happen if some of the great theatrical geniuses of the past *were* alive today. Would American movies or commercial television be hospitable to Molière? to Ibsen? to Bernard Shaw? to Chekhov? to Sophocles? I think the probable answer is No—remembering that the recent spate of films based on the works of Shakespeare and Jane Austen

have come almost entirely from Great Britain. All of the playwrights I mentioned challenged their audiences to think; all of them treated their audiences as intelligent individuals capable of grappling with complex issues presented to them in dramatic form. All of them created multi-layered characters speaking well-crafted, often inspired language. With few exceptions, writers for television and American films seem neither to possess those skills nor to want to master them. Commercial television, by its own admission, aims its entertainment not at adults but at adolescents: for many years, television executives have said that their intention is to produce shows calculated to appeal to thirteen-year-old minds. Surely most movies aren't aiming any higher. In fact, since so many movies today are remakes of old television shows—and generally inferior remakes, at that—one could make the case that the movies have fallen below the level of television as a creative medium.

And the stage? I do believe that the stage still offers a refuge for an audience seeking something beyond diversion—but challenging plays are becoming evermore difficult to find, as technological spectacles, formulaic comedies on a par with the worst of television, and adaptations of old movies crowd out more creative endeavors. Many people, alas, go to the theatre primarily so that they can see the sorts of special effects that were once thought to be the province of the movies. Think of the falling chandelier in *Phantom of the Opera*, the helicopter landing in *Miss Saigon*, or *Beauty and the Beast* (which tries, insofar as possible, to be a duplicate of the animated movie).

Let me be clear: it's not that the subjects dealt with by plays, movies and television are necessarily trivial or unworthy of investigation. The problem is that the treatment is so often superficial. As an example, let me tell you about an experience I had during Short Term two years ago. I accompanied a group of students on a theatre tour of London, where we all saw *Miss Saigon*, a highly popular musical that takes some elements from the opera *Madame Butterfly* and applies them to America's misadventure in Vietnam. Nearly all of us—students and faculty alike—were hugely disappointed in the play and in its production. When we returned to Bloomington, all of the students were assigned to give oral reports based on the plays they had seen. One student, who analyzed the text of *Miss Saigon*, did a wonderful job, as she articulated a number of ideas that might have been explored fully in the musical—but were touched on only superficially. As she revealed to us in her report, *Miss Saigon* had the potential for exploring the alienation felt by both the Americans and the Vietnamese in a profound and meaningful way. It might have examined the function of the Western presence in Vietnam by questioning its role as a supposed savior and its failure to succeed. It might have investigated the exploitation of women (for most of the female characters in the play are prostitutes) as well as exploring the nature of exploitation. Instead, the musical generally skimmed the surface of these topics, with the result that—for those of us on the London travel course, at least—we spent a most disappointing evening in the theatre. The oral report we heard convinced

us that *Miss Saigon* had the potential to be a brilliant piece of work if only its creators had been able to dig beneath the surface and explore the rich material lying underneath.

Suppose for a moment that *Miss Saigon* had attempted and achieved more. Can a musical, even a brilliant musical, actually change our perceptions? Of course it can. The performing arts regularly influence our behavior. If that weren't so, sponsors wouldn't spend millions of dollars on television advertising in an attempt to persuade us to buy their brand of soap. And how are we being influenced if we're consumers of popular entertainment? For one thing, the continuous violence displayed on film and television screens is, in my opinion, making us callous to violence in our own lives. I cringe when I think about the influence so many movie murders, so much mayhem, so little respect for human life must have on audience members, especially those who are immature. And television's disdain of intellectuals (who are referred to as "talking heads," and who are invariably mocked in situation comedies) must have an effect, too, making people intolerant of those who read, those who study, those who express themselves with precision; and popular entertainment's emphasis on easy solutions to the most intractable problems must persuade some people, at least, that difficulties can be solved easily and painlessly, without financial or emotional cost, without planning, without devoting considerable time and energy to the proposed solutions. These are some examples of why I think our theatre today is in crisis—because, rather than enlarging our horizons, it's shrinking them, encouraging us to think less broadly, less creatively.

I want to be careful not to sound like Illinois Wesleyan's version of Bob Dole, who, in a highly publicized speech two years ago, lambasted excessive violence in movies, naming particular films that offended him and praising others. The fact that one of the films he chose to praise was, by all accounts, particularly violent, but starred a major Republican contributor, may make you feel—as I felt—that his preferences were based more on politics than on genuine conviction. Still, I find myself agreeing with the notion that our society is to some degree shaped and perpetuated by the violent images seen so often on movie and television screens. But my point is not confined to the portrayal of violence.

After all, some of the best drama—Greek tragedy, Shakespeare's histories and tragedies, *The Godfather* trilogy—have successfully employed violent themes, another illustration of the fact that no subject is inherently unworthy of dramatization—it's the treatment that makes the crucial difference; and, secondly, television's and the movies' preoccupation with gratuitous, excessive violence should be seen in the larger context of a crisis in the performing arts, of which the emphasis on violence is only one symptom.

Which leads me to another reason why so few works of art are being produced in the world of professional entertainment today: because not enough of

the people who work there think of themselves as artists. They describe their profession as "show business"—with the emphasis on "business." I would argue, though, that theatre is not primarily a business, but an art form. Even more irritating, to my ears at least, are the references of professionals in television and films to what they call "the industry." I think it's unlikely that meaningful works of art can be created by those who describe their profession with terms taken from the world of commerce. This is not intended to denigrate the business world in any way; but the purpose of theatrical art should not be to turn astonishing profits but to create astonishing works of art.

The saddest aspect of all this is that American movies regularly did produce brilliant films as recently as the 1970s and the early 1980s. Some examples are *Nashville*, *Reds*, *Annie Hall*, *Barry Lyndon*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Chinatown*, *Carnal Knowledge*, *Julia*, *Ragtime*, *Sophie's Choice*, *Body Heat*, *Hannah and Her Sisters* and the aforementioned *Godfather I and II*—all truly original and beautifully crafted movies. But it's been a long while since an American film of such quality has appeared.

Of course, some of today's professional actors, directors, and writers do indeed aspire to be artists—and they're the ones we have to thank for the occasional American film, television show, or play presented with imagination and integrity. So there are positive signs: the recent ascendance of American independent films is one; *Northern Exposure*, for most of its run, was a delightful exception to the general blandness of television; and *Angels in America* showed that Broadway could still find room for an experimental play of substance. But the individuals responsible for such productions are too often stymied by a climate hostile to the creation of works of art. That climate, perpetuated by those who view the theatre only as an effective means of making money, has become the norm in the professional theatre. To my mind, therefore, the problems I've spoken about constitute a crisis for the American theatrical media.

Fortunately, however, there are two significant exceptions to the hostile climate I've spoken about, representing perhaps the last two places in America where the theatre is still valued as an art form. The first is in a number of non-profit regional theatres in such cities as Seattle, Minneapolis, and San Francisco—and the second is where you're seated right now. In colleges and universities throughout the country, Schools of Theatre Arts and Departments of Theatre regularly produce plays which have proven themselves to be great creative works. Moreover, many universities also present new plays, thereby enriching dramatic literature by discovering playwrights who may one day be regarded as outstanding dramatists of our age. The non-profit theatres and the academic theatres provide the best hope for the future of theatrical art, I believe.

Academic programs in theatre are educational in every sense: for the audience, which is given the opportunity to see great works of dramatic art, and for student-actors, directors, playwrights and designers.

For many years the primary training ground for the professional theatre was the conservatory, in which students concentrated upon the study of technique. Now, though, more and more theatre professionals are emerging from university theatre programs, a great many of them from liberal arts institutions. Why? I believe it's because theatre students at liberal arts colleges, rather than focusing narrowly upon technique, are taking courses in English and psychology and history along with their theatre courses. And that's all to the good, for an actor—or a playwright, or a director, or a designer—needs to understand those things he or she will learn in such classes: how to analyze a play, how to understand what drives and motivates the characters, how the historical context in which the play is set affects the characters' behaviors. If this base of knowledge is not present the individual can never become more than a technician—proficient at a particular skill, perhaps, but unable to translate that proficiency into art. True, the achievement of artistry also involves a mastery of technique. However, in my opinion, students of theatre are best served by liberal arts undergraduate training—training that encourages and nurtures the growth of *artists*, instilling in its students an appreciation for great theatre and encouraging them to aspire to the highest level of artistry they can attain. More sophisticated technique can then be acquired in graduate programs specializing in Acting, or in Directing, or in Design.

With this training behind them, many of the theatre students in today's audience will become professionals—and, because of their broad-based learning, they have the power to bring about a significant change in the direction today's theatre is taking.

At this point, some of you may feel you've detected a logical fallacy in this discussion. If the recent graduates of liberal-arts institutions have become professionals, and if, as I maintain, that's an encouraging development, why is the theatre in crisis? Why haven't the directors, for example, who were not so long ago idealistic college students, continued to aspire to artistry? Often, they find their idealism tempered by the necessity to make a living—which generally means directing commercials and soap operas, not Sophocles and Molière. That necessity can—and often does—turn idealism to acceptance of the status quo rather quickly. And what a shame that is, for these people—who've been nurtured by the university, where they enjoy nearly complete freedom from commercial pressures, where they're encouraged to maintain their idealism, their devotion to doing the best, most profound work of which they're capable—these are the very people who have the capacity to change the current crisis in the performing arts.

Parenthetically, this is probably a good time to mention that I'm a particular fan of Woody Allen's best comedies. One of his cleverest, and one of my favorites, is *Bullets Over Broadway*, a wickedly funny satire on theatrical idealists and idealism, so I realize that from some perspectives my comments today could be seen as pretentious and overblown. Nevertheless, I believe that our theatre should embrace those idealists who would present plays and films that are capable of making us think and feel deeply, that will challenge our assumptions and might alter our views.

Is it too much to hope that graduates of university theatre programs will hold on to idealistic attitudes and carry them into their post-university lives? That, it seems to me, is our best hope for a transformation of the theatre from "show business" to art. It won't be easy, for the professional world is, in some quarters, dominated by those who detest the very idea of "art." But, over time, it's possible to envision such a transformation occurring. Perhaps it's at this very moment, when the outlook for artistry in the American professional theatre seems rather bleak, that the rebirth of idealism will begin to occur, thereby enriching all who come in contact with it. Of course, I'm assuming that most students *are* idealists who aspire to become genuine artists, and perhaps that's a naive assumption. Perhaps those who graduate from liberal arts institutions will be content to assume the values of "show business" and the "industry"—but I'm hoping that they won't. I hope they'll attempt to change the values that predominate in the commercial theatre world today. Whether that occurs will depend to some extent—probably to a very significant extent—on those of you who are not studying theatre, whose interest in the theatre is confined to what you watch on television and at the movies. Without your support the changes I've spoken about can't occur. I ask that you consider passing up the next Arnold Schwarzenegger or Sylvester Stallone movie and seeking out more ambitious works—ambitious, that is, in the sense that they attempt to provide insight into the human condition, not simply to entertain. I ask that, at least occasionally, you take advantage of the opportunity to see a play by Harold Pinter, or Shakespeare, or Euripides, or Tennessee Williams—a play that will ask more of you than an unambitious movie or television show will ask, but that can yield far greater rewards. And if you prefer the movies to the stage, why not become familiar with the classic films of artists such as Ingmar Bergman or Stanley Kubrick, or the recent work of Zhang Yimou (a name you may not be familiar with, but a director of great Chinese films, perhaps the finest film director at work today) rather than watching the latest in a series of mindless sequels? If you ignore the work of great artists in favor of the sorts of movies and television shows that currently predominate, artists will continue to be marginalized and those who trivialize our culture will continue to prosper. If, as I've suggested, those who graduate from liberal arts theatre programs have an obligation to try to change the current situation, I'm saying that the rest of us share in that obligation. As well-educated members of our society (those of you wearing academic robes are about to receive your bachelor's degrees, and many others in the

audience today possess master's and doctoral degrees, so this is indeed a highly educated gathering), I ask you to play a role in the revival of the theatre and its allied arts in American culture.

Am I suggesting that audiences should turn their backs on works that have no higher goal than to entertain? Not at all. Everyone wants a good, uncomplicated laugh now and then. I am saying that we should also seek out more ambitious works whenever possible. For all of us, audience members as well as students of theatre, our goal should be not to subtract from, but rather to add to the richness of our cultural tradition by providing encouragement to artists who wish to explore fully the issues of our time. Under those conditions, I believe that the academic theatre within the liberal arts framework can serve, not just as a training ground, but as a model for the professional theatre. And if that should come about, the theatre as a whole may once again occupy a position of great importance in American culture: presenting works of merit that go beyond the simple mastery of craftsmanship; plays and films capable of entertaining us, moving us and inspiring us—and that may accurately be described as genuine works of theatrical art.

## **“The Revolution Will Not Be Televised”**

**1998**

**W. Michael Weis**

In the words of the great philosopher, Jackie Gleason, “How sweet it is!”

Before I begin, I'd like to thank the two people I'm told are most responsible for my being here. The first is much more deserving of this award than I am. More than a friend, Jim Plath has been an inspiration to me. He is, perhaps, the most caring, courageous, and creative person I know. The second person, Mike Young, has already won this award. He has been both a congenial colleague and my mentor these past ten years. Our styles are different, but I have tried to emulate his honesty and integrity. Thanks Jim and Mike.

And thank all of you for coming. Although I like being in the classroom, talking in front of such a large and prestigious group makes me nervous. And, I am competing against the IRS. I am also fully aware of the fact that the DuPont Award is the most prestigious award given at Illinois Wesleyan and my predecessors have all been gifted teachers.

This has been a difficult talk to prepare. The DuPont address has no rules and there are so many things I want to say. As a historian in a liberal arts institution, I am a generalist by nature and Illinois Wesleyan has always given me the opportunity to pursue my diverse interests. I've taught fifteen different courses here, everything from Latin America and International Studies to recent America. I've traveled to five countries, including four trips to Brazil. I've also had the opportunity to serve in a variety of administrative roles—in fact, I've had Acting Director or Chair attached to my title so often that sometimes I think I belong in the Theater Department, or Hollywood. The pressure has been mounting these last few weeks so that I feel I'm the title role in “Dead Man Walking.”

All of these experiences give me a lot of options, but make it difficult to focus on a topic. Many of my colleagues gave me advice—talk about your research and do something on the Amazon, or gear your talk on the need for a new American foreign policy in the post-cold war world, or talk about globalization, or the new millennium. Every time I discussed one of these ideas with a different colleague, they would invariably roll their eyes and say something to the effect of, “For God's sake, I have to be in the audience, don't make it a hold hands, we are the world, we are one, save the rainforest kind of speech.” Virtually the only thing my colleagues could agree on was to make it brief.

Despite the negative feedback, those are compelling subjects for me. I have a certain amount of passion for each of them and they have influenced my writing and teaching of history. And history has always been special to me. History is



alive. I believe that the study of history is essential to live life fully and with the greatest understanding of our world. Historians study change over a period of time, which makes change less frightening. We see change as an organic part of being human—and so we learn to look for change intuitively in our lives. In graduate school we used to joke that historians have an awesome power denied even to God—the ability to change what happened in the past. Unfortunately, the worst practitioners of my craft do so, and too often (though not always) these practitioners are film-makers and the self-appointed culture police. Bad history has disastrous consequences for us and is a major cause of the historical amnesia that pervades this culture and allows us to feel nostalgic about golden eras that never really existed. This historical amnesia threatens our nation. Thus, with this great power comes great responsibility; one that I've always felt as a professor.

In my confusion, last November I decided to seek out the opinions of my favorite students over the years. I wrote forty-one of them and asked for ideas for a topic and asked them specifically what they had learned from me, and what they hadn't learned from me that they wished they had. I received thirty replies. Those letters have been some of the most gratifying and uplifting correspondence of my entire life. I urge my colleagues to do this some day when you are questioning your career choice or wondering what you would do differently. All of us can produce such letters, and I suspect most of the students here could write one. This is evidence that we have an outstanding faculty. Although I hadn't kept in contact with most of these students since they left Illinois Wesleyan, the whole spectrum of middle-class America was represented in this unscientific cross-section: doctors, lawyers, school teachers, social workers, insurance agents, corporate managers, graduate students, legislative aides, college professors, and museum curators.

I really didn't know what to expect from my students, although since they were my favorites I expected some praise (I don't have the courage or humility that Kathie O'Gorman had a few years ago to read some of her negative teaching evaluations). And a lot of what they wrote did not surprise me. Most focused on personal traits—that I motivated them to try harder, that I helped them to think critically and write better, that I was willing to spend considerable time with them outside the classroom, that my classes are entertaining (or else they like stupid jokes). They noted my enthusiasm and that I like and respect students. Since it's my day, let's just pretend it is all true. Several of the letters moved me. One wrote, "You sparked within me what I am sure will be a lifelong interest in a topic that, prior to taking your classes, I had no interest at all." Another one noted, "You convinced me that engaging the world and being present in the community is not the 'correct' thing to do, not the 'progressive' thing to do, but the right thing to do. You cared and taught me to care." Still another admitted that she had already forgotten most of the content in my courses, and wrote, "I never thought you were teaching history; I thought you were teaching me."

These former students convinced me to talk about teaching and the impact that a teacher may have upon students.

The title of this speech, "The Revolution Will Not be Televised" comes from a 1974 song by a jazz-rock fusion artist named Gil Scott-Heron. The title was suggested to me by Jim Matthews as we were exercising together at the Shirk Center. I had just given him a cassette tape of various songs that included Ian Hunter's "Cleveland Rocks." Since I have always loved rock music and rock lyrics have been a source of inspiration to me, the idea seemed excellent—besides the title was catchy and if I got stuck, I could always play some of the song and dance. If it had been a different tape, the folk version would be Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are a Changing," while the rock version would be the Beatles' "Revolution," and the reggae version would be Bob Marley's "Get Up, Stand Up!"

I went through adolescence and young adulthood aware that I lived in revolutionary times mainly through Walter Cronkite and rock music. Rock music was something my generation used to demarcate its values and ideals from our parents or "The System." I play some of those songs in my post-1945 and Sixties history classes and I think those songs provide a chronologically accurate portrait of what became known as "The Movement." Dylan sought a return to the Garden of Eden with a dream of hope, confidence, and vision of peace, equality, and justice that captured the spirit of the early sixties. John Lennon expressed the ambivalence; hope mixed with fear of violence and the realization that it was more necessary to change yourself—"we all want to change the world, but you better free your mind instead." The Gil Scott-Heron and Bob Marley songs both came out of the mid-1970s, while I was in college. By then the Movement had crashed and burned—the failure of reform; the defeat in Vietnam; Nixon's resignation; the oil crisis and the start of the decade-long recession. Gil Scott-Heron and Bob Marley provided hope mixed with defiance and resignation. Bob Marley told us that even in defeat, we had to march on, while Gil Scott-Heron explained that even disintegration and economic decline could not stop the revolution, because the things that caused the revolution could not be stopped or reversed: things such as the increasing rapidity of change, technological innovation, economic and cultural globalization, threat of nuclear holocaust, growing inequality, and the yearning for a better America. The Revolution will not be televised because it is happening everyday in subtle and profound ways. He urged us to look beyond Hollywood, to not be blinded by the glitz and glamour, to not trust the manufactured news of talking heads and spin doctors and to learn to see clearly and really live. Most of all, The Revolution must be in our hearts.

The song works on many levels and its message still rings true. The Revolution will not be televised! There will be no re-runs, no instant replays because The Revolution will not be televised! The Revolution is both within and without. We still live in revolutionary times, even in this age of political reaction

and uncertainty. Indeed, our century has been revolutionary. Revolution dominates the history of the 20th century: the great uprisings in Russia, China, Mexico; anti-colonialism; the industrial, technological, & consumer revolutions; the conflict between capitalism, socialism, and fascism; and the great wars between rival empires and between religion and science. The 20th century is also known as the "American Century," a term coined by Henry Luce. We have sent "lawyers, guns and money," missionary and soldier, capital and culture to the four corners of the earth. America has wielded great power, wisely and foolishly, selfishly and benevolently and it has been a tremendous force for change. My fascination with revolution is partly why I chose to study United States Foreign Relations.

In 1962, in an oft quoted speech, Fidel Castro proclaimed to the world that "the duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution." I am not a revolutionary, no matter what pretensions I had as a college student in the 1970s. I live a privileged life. I am a tenured professor. I have a mortgage, a wallet full of credit cards, a good pension, and in the words of theologian Martin Marty, I have "burnt too many bridges to a pluralist and compromising society to be credible or convincing as a prophet" or revolutionary. I am not a revolutionary; I am only a professor and my job is not to turn my students into revolutionaries, but to create revolutions inside my student's hearts and minds. This is the task of the university and of all of us who toil in the trenches of the classroom. If we really do our job well, we convey the great joy that comes from a lifetime of learning, that these four years are just the beginning (and not the end) of a long and wonderful journey, or as the Grateful Dead said, "a long and strange trip." Our excitement and enthusiasm for our subject, no matter if it is Philosophy or Biology, can help students to see the value in a liberal arts education that comes from studying a variety of subjects, that comes from having an open mind and the desire to learn more about our world, including those that have different faiths, ideologies, and cultures. Our job is not to install our values or beliefs on our students, but only to show that the richness of this diverse world helps make the human species interesting and viable. In understanding and appreciating the similarities and differences of peoples, perhaps we will become more tolerant of those that disagree with us--or as a good friend of mine told me, "put the liberal back into the liberal arts."

As important as toleration and diversity are to the world and to the university, it is not sufficient. There are two more important goals of a liberal arts university. Good teachers need to show their students the power that each of them has to change their world and to gain control over their lives—to make a revolution. Most of us are frightened by the prospect; we struggle to remain in charge of our classes, setting ourselves up as the ultimate authority, keeping our students powerless and silent—except in ways that are pre-approved, safe, and "conducive to learning." The result is that our students are well-meaning and ambitious, but docile and afraid to take risks. They become another brick in the wall. They don't feel empowered, or significant or able to "make the revolution."

Thomas Jefferson observed that a quality education is indispensable to good citizenship and democracy. Jefferson was perhaps the greatest American ever; he certainly embodied the most contradictory elements in the American character. Jefferson was an exponent of slavery and liberty, of empire and local autonomy, of communing with nature yet being its master. Jefferson the revolutionary was a man who doubled the size of this country without the loss of a single life, but who still rated his founding of the University of Virginia as his most significant accomplishment. Two months ago, Nobel laureate Oscar Arias declared that "to govern is to educate" and expressed indignation that Americans didn't know more about the state of the world. What kind of citizens do we want to unleash onto America? What kind of community do we want to create? What kind of America do we want? These are not unimportant questions. Last May, Rex Nettleford, a distinguished Jamaican educator, addressed Illinois Wesleyan. Nettleford noted that even after five hundred years of environmental degradation and human destruction, America still represented the best hope for humanity. At the end of the millennium, for good or ill, all the world seems to be America, just as John Locke once wrote, "In the beginning, all the world was America." Nettleford's America is more expansive and inclusive than normal definitions. It includes the entire Western Hemisphere, where the descendants of British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Africans, Asians, and Native Americans live together, proving to the world that we can live together, if we would only, in Nettleford's words "embrace the light."

The light that he talked about was the same that Massachusetts Governor John Winthrop called for in 1630 when he exhorted his colonists to become "a city on a hill," a beacon in the darkness. It is the same light that Kevin Strandberg captured in sculpture in his retrospective, "Out of Darkness." In the shadows, the twilight, our deepest contradictions and darkest characteristics meet. The light contains our noblest aspirations and ideals. We must embrace the light. Professors are the molders of dreams and if America is to build the city on a hill, the university must lead the way. After all, what is a university but a community of learners, a microcosm of what Winthrop, and Nettleford, and Dylan, and Gil Scott-Heron envisioned?

I know the teaching of citizenship is a quaint idea, but the liberal arts are one of the last bastions of the communitarian ideal, where everyone's talents are recognized and valued, and where the good of the community is more important than that of the individual. Maisa Taha, a recent IWU graduate and one of my students sent me an essay by Wendell Berry entitled "A Continuous Harmony." Berry notes that "like a good farmer, a good teacher is the trustee of a vital and delicate organism: the life and mind of the community. The ultimate and defining standard of his discipline is his community's health and intelligence and coherence and endurance. This is a high calling, deserving of a life's work." We are not revolutionaries in any pejorative sense, or as George Will calls us "tenured radicals." We are stewards. And on good days, when we heed our noble calling, we can be inspirations of a better world. Thank you.

Manuscript Production by Jenny Hand

Cover Design by Susan Sombeck

Compiled and Edited by Mona Gardner

First Printing - August 1998