

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO | The College
AIMS OF EDUCATION ADDRESS 1998
SEPTEMBER 27

PRESENTED BY: Norma M. Field

The Robert S. Ingersoll Professor in Japanese Studies in East Asian Languages and Civilizations

Greetings to all of you, entering Class of 2002 and transfer students. Greetings to those of you who have traveled from the other side of the globe and to those of you who have spent all your lives in the city of Chicago. Greetings to those of you for whom this University was a first choice and those for whom it was a last choice. Greetings to those who know with clarity and conviction what you will do with your college education and to those who have no idea, absolutely no idea, of where these four years will lead. Greetings to those of you eager to get started on your roadmaps and those of you excited not to have one. And of course, greetings to you who are not quite sure that your goals are right for you—perhaps they are not exactly yours—and to you who are anxious about not having goals, whether chosen by you or somebody else. One of the few things I can say with confidence is, things will change. Your wishes and your capabilities, and with them, your relationship to the world will change. And I hope that, with the participation of the friends and acquaintances you are about to make, the teachers you will meet, and of course, your old friends and family members, this process will be a rewarding one for each of you, regardless of where you see yourself situated today. So I urge you to take a deep breath, suspend the need for immediate conclusions about your future, and in so doing open yourselves to what your time here might offer you.

Standing before you today, I realize that we have at least one thing in common: like most of you, I thought off and on throughout the summer about the beginning we are marking together today. If you have been eager and anxious, so have I. The eagerness and the anxiety have the same source: it is a distinct honor to have the opportunity to address a group of thoughtful human beings brimming with vitality on the threshold of adulthood. It is also sobering, not to say daunting, to speak to you over the chasm of our different experiences and therefore of expectation. I suspect that over the last few days you have may been too busy to think and perhaps even to feel, between moving, exploring the campus and the city, testing in and testing out, getting to know the habits of your roommates. The first sensation I remember registering when I started college over thirty years ago after the initial flood of new faces, skies, and rhythms was the sheer misery of waking up to an alarm clock once classes began. At home I had always been awakened by a human voice and often a touch, usually my grandmother's. The brutality of the metallic bell, combined with the results of a few early papers that suggested that my high school successes had been fraudulent and the pronouncement of a professor that "college is the place where you learn that your best may not be good enough" had me convinced within a month that I was not, in that vulgar phrase, "college material." If it had

been just a little easier to go home—to Japan—I might well have. People didn't fly around at the drop of a hat back then, not even domestically. And the exchange rate was 360 yen to the dollar. We didn't make international phone calls casually. And that in a world without e-mail! (Incidentally, I went to college in California. I had applied to the University of Chicago on the strength of knowing that my best friend's older brother went here, been accepted, and received a scholarship; but my mother would not let me come because Chicago was "too far from Japan, too cold, and too dangerous.")

I should return to the nature of the task at hand. To state the obvious—so obvious that it goes unsaid in the phrase, the "aims of education" address concerns the aims of liberal education. If you look up liberal in the Oxford English Dictionary, which you, like the rest of this university community, can now do on-line, you will find as a first entry

Originally, the distinctive epithet of those "arts" or "sciences" . . . that were considered "worthy of a free man"; opposed to servile or mechanical. In later use, of condition, pursuits, occupations: Pertaining to or suitable to persons of superior social station; "becoming [suitable to] a gentleman." . . .

Directed to general intellectual enlargement and refinement; not narrowly restricted to the requirements of technical or professional training.

The last part of the definition is familiar enough: emphasis on education for its own sake, on learning that is not instrumental, i.e., not undertaken for something beyond itself. These words are deceptively simple. In trying to understand them more concretely, the older senses that refer to the dimension of who you were, a "free man" and a "gentleman," become useful. That is, the question of liberal arts or liberal education might not only be a question of a particular kind of education but a question of who you are.

The late great English writer and scholar of literature, culture, and society, Raymond Williams, helps us sort these matters out in his book called *Keywords*. (I hope you will all pick up this slim book at some point during your time here. It is one of those rare books whose title is a fair indication of its content: *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*.) Williams observes that the political meaning we usually associate with liberal—having to do with open-mindedness, progressivism, freedom from prejudice or orthodoxy—is quite modern, and it is the earlier history, beginning with the reference to social class from fourteenth-century usage, that he finds interesting. That it required considerable resources to cultivate the liberal arts may account for liberal's taking on the positive meaning of "generous" and, at the same time, the negative one of "unrestrained." "Generous" and "unrestrained" are not exactly opposites, but their being attached to the same word reflects contrasting evaluations of the conditions enabling some—and only some—men to cultivate themselves. Williams thinks of this as a "tension" that haunts "any term which distinguishes some free men from others."¹

Various kinds of freedom echo through the historical uses of liberal and converge in present usage. Today, we are ostensibly all “free men” (and even women) before the law, free to cultivate the liberal arts, which are valued in and of themselves, and through that process to become individuals, i.e., independent and therefore free persons. The pursuit of liberal education implies freedom from external conditions or goals in its every aspect: the learners are free persons who seek to learn for the sake of learning alone such lessons (content and process) as are valuable in and of themselves and, through this activity, to cultivate (express and enhance) their freedom. If this is beginning to sound circular to you, that is because it is. We need to ask, what makes this wheel of freedom go ’round? The history of the word liberal helps, by reminding us that substantial resources are required to enable the development of autonomous individuals through the study of autonomous—intrinsically valuable—arts. Resources tend not to be fairly distributed in any society. That means that regardless of our equality before the law, only some of us are able to develop our autonomy through liberal education. What is the nature of an autonomy that is unavailable to some or many members of a given society? What is the nature of the learning that, by being free of the need to have external value, by being use-less, in other words, enables the development of that autonomy? What I am trying to suggest here is that we always need to be on the lookout for the conditions that make possible an activity, in this case liberal learning, which are forgotten or hidden by the activity itself.

For much of my adult life I have implicitly accepted the paramount value of the liberal arts and of lifelong learning for its own sake. No doubt there are multiple reasons for anyone’s believing in something as if it were obvious; in my case, the generational, that is, the historical factor seems decisive. My coming of age, my college years, took place in the late 1960s, against the background of first the civil rights and then the antiwar movements in the United States. Especially formative was my junior year abroad in France in 1968, where the student movement, which had erupted in many parts of the world, was sufficiently momentous once it was joined by workers to paralyze that country and almost bring down the government. The bank holding my modest account—mostly my next month’s rent—was shut down while I was taking a final exam. That night my landlady, in a most extravagant exaggeration of my competencies, accused me of cutting off her power supply. Power outages were especially frequent during the strikes of May and June. To witness so swift an unraveling of order in a stable society at the age of 21 skewed my education wildly. Revolutions, I thought, weren’t so hard to come by.

Why should this education, gained in the streets and university courtyards as well as the classroom, have been conducive to belief in liberal education? It could just as well have worked against it. Even before France, going to a college just in its third year of operation (Pitzer College, Claremont) at that particular moment in U.S. history accentuated the tendency of my generation to be skeptical of authority, including and especially educational authority.

Everything had to be rethought or rather, redone from the ground up. Even though “everything” tended to begin with getting rid of rules about how late young women could stay out or freeing the curriculum from the last distribution requirement, this was not unrelated, I think, to the flames in inner cities here and the slaughter in Vietnam. Don’t trust anyone over thirty, we said. Watergate was just around the corner. The political and cultural aspects of this skepticism were succinctly captured in one of the French slogans from May ’68: “No to consumer society.” Though this slogan is as simplistic as any, it is important in distinguishing that protest movement from many others. Note that far from demanding a just redistribution of resources, it rejects the resources and the society structured by them.

I think that one of the most valuable aspects of that skepticism and refusal was that it granted us a relationship to time that was different from what had prevailed before and has prevailed since. If your heart thrilled to the vistas opened up beyond consumer society, you were not going to rush to get what was called a real job. Of course, there was considerable arrogance, not to mention some amount of material privilege, sustaining that attitude. But that luxurious time after college and whatever we went on to do next, a time for travel and odd jobs, a time of searching for what might constitute an existence worthy of human beings, was a time that confirmed a hunger for lifelong learning in many of us. It reopened us to texts that we might have rejected as part of the past, part of the establishment, for we came to acknowledge the importance of study in any effort to effect fundamental change. The new hunger for learning, though, came with a growing recognition that it was not easily compatible with most available forms of employment. Sadly, the social structure we live in has resulted in too many jobs operating on and even exploiting an impoverished notion of human capacity and human need.

Feeling that history had been generous in dealing me an interesting and leisurely youth, I have for many years watched with sympathy young people pressed, earlier and earlier, it seems, to prepare themselves for careers by doing well in high school, honing their test-taking skills, and rounding out their profiles through a hectic regimen of athletics, volunteering, and perhaps music. College becomes all the more important, then, as that interval preceding and leading to jobs, often via professional schools. How can this interval be most meaningful to the rest of your lives? Should it be a time carved out of real time, just as the space beyond the academy is so often referred to as the Real World? I am loath to stand before you today and predict or even hope that the next three or four years will be the best in your lives. Not only do I hope that there will be features of your time here that will persist beyond the day when you assemble once again at your graduation, but that your time here will give you the aspiration and some of the means for changing the world beyond.

If you share that wish, what does it say about the nature of the education you will need in order to pursue it? Vexed by this question as I thought about this address early in the summer, I began an email exchange with my old friend René Arcilla. René grew up in Hyde Park, went through the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, the College, and then graduate school

here, where he earned a doctorate in education (1990). He is now a professor at Teachers' College of Columbia University, where he teaches philosophy. I asked him if I could share some of our exchange. "René," I implored,

Here's my question to you: I've been trying to think about whether what I'm seeking is truly noninstrumental [to be valued in itself, not as a means to something else]. That is, I very much want students to be aware of and reflective about the society in which their education is taking place, to think about the differences between the worlds of the University and the surrounding society. This is related to my broodings about art—not wanting it to be instrumental, but wanting to recognize in that very autonomy a crucial human and irreducibly social dimension. Maybe with education I do want a more immediately social recognition, though.

To which René replied,

The way I am trying to come at the issue of liberal learning is something like this. At present, learning or education in general tends to be considered a vehicle for achieving one or another aim, where that aim constitutes a state beyond the need for further learning. The politics of learning, accordingly, is the struggle between conflicting aims: e.g., should we promote the kind of learning that leads to individual economic success, or should we promote the kind that leads to a more appreciative recognition of oppressed cultures. But what if we conceive of learning not instrumentally, but as a dimension of what it means to be human that is coterminous with the beginning and end of our lives? In other words, what if we were the kind of beings that are learning from the moment, and as long as, we are living? Then [the affirmation of learning] would be tied to an affirmation of our given humanity rather than of some eventual form of it. And the politics of learning would be that of striving to reform society so that it supports this kind of learning, rather than using learning to support some vision of utopia that does not fully acknowledge our (learning) humanity.²

René admits that his formulation may be "grandiose" and "vague." Yet, though this description (part of an e-mail exchange, after all!) is abstract and general, it helpfully locates the value of learning simply in its being a feature of our humanity. This is quite different from the common definition by negation (liberal learning is not vocational, professional, or even preprofessional) or the isolation of certain acts, essential though they undoubtedly are, such as questioning or interpreting, as the content of liberal learning. In fact, though I have not checked this out with René, his description does not exclude the learning of a craft or a profession; it does not stop at the old boundary between the mental and the manual. Learning is what we humans do. Why not benefit from all our senses? Moreover, René's vision is refreshing in explicitly recognizing the role of society in enabling or disabling our learning; it even urges us to do something about it. It implies a profound vision of how individuals and society constitute each other. And coming to understand that with our intellect and our senses is a lifelong task of learning.

Before continuing, let me draw out three overlapping points I'd like us to keep in mind. The first has to do with the way in which social resources underpin liberal learning. I reformulated this as the practice of trying to identify the hidden conditions (including assumptions) that make possible any activity: here, the conditions of learning. Second, in referring to my own college experience in the late 1960s, I wanted to suggest the importance of the historical setting in which our education unfolds. Keep your eyes and ears open to what's going on in the world, and try to think about how that relates to what you're learning in the quadrangles of the University. Remember, if it looks like a total disconnect, that's a relation, too. And this has to do with the third point, about the way in which society and individuals are inseparable from each other.

I don't know how many of you have read Robinson Crusoe, but you probably know that it is an early eighteenth-century novel about a man marooned on a desert island who manages to singlehandedly reproduce the basics of civilization. Well, not quite singlehandedly because he has the assistance of "his" man Friday after rescuing him from the cannibals. Crusoe was a model figure for many 18th-century thinkers, who saw in him the ideal individual creating culture by mastering nature. Karl Marx was scathing about the way in which these thinkers mistook Crusoe the isolated individual as something sprung fullblown out of nowhere, or rather, out of nature. They ignored the historical processes necessary to producing something as complicated as the individual. (I am sure each of you thinks of yourself as an individual and as complicated, and rightly so.) "The human being," he wrote, ". . . is not merely a gregarious [social] animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in society." To think about human activity outside society, he continued, "is as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living together and talking to each other."³ Notice that he is not denying that individuals exist. They do, of course, but as made up of what he refers to as social relations.

Marx mostly elaborates social relations in terms of economic processes relying on and producing differences in power. All too often, scholars (and bankers and policy experts) forget to think about how economic processes translate into the details of human life that are far removed from dollars and cents. So let's get at it from the other end, and think about social relations in terms of who you are. In saying that you are the product, most literally, of your parents, we also have to think about everything that brought them together; we have to think about other family members, the places where you grew up, the places where you have traveled to, the kinds of schools you went to, the movies you saw, the language of your parents and the language of your friends (even if they're both English, they could be quite different), the clothes you wore. It's not just things, including places, that count. It's the relations—resources of income, knowledge, skills, friends and neighbors—that made those things part of your life. For instance, were your clothes chosen for you? If you were able to buy them, was it with money you earned or money given to you? Did you have access to a car? Or did you become expert in getting around on public transportation?

Since Orientation began, you have probably experienced new settings in which you were perfectly comfortable and others in which you were not. Feeling comfortable in a situation is crucial to how well you function in it. Remember, I was ready to drop out of college because I had grown up within social relations—those of an extended family—that allowed me to wake up to a human touch. In trying to understand who you are at this threshold of transformation, think about all the factors that have brought you to this day, how they give you both strengths and vulnerabilities in this new setting. You might even keep a diary of this process and surprise yourselves several years down the road with both your own early thoughtfulness and a more concrete sense of the distance you have traveled than memory alone can provide. This approach, by the way, is not a bad way to analyze many things: start with the whole as it is visible to you, break it down, then build it back up again. Thus we come back to you, concrete, complex, and irreplaceable precisely because you are made up of so many social relations interacting over time.

What are your capabilities, you who are unique beings embodying a diversity of backgrounds? Having so emphasized the ways in which we have been socially produced—the breaking down part—I want to focus for a moment on the rebuilding part, or rather, the concrete persons you are now. I'm going to do this by quoting from a letter by a children's book editor to a very young author, or author to be, someone still in high school, in fact:

And never forget that what you told me is something ONLY YOU know about; no one else knows just what you know about anything. And that is why it will be so important for you to put down your thoughts and emotions in picture book form.⁴

The editor's name is Ursula Nordstrom, and she was director of Harper's Department of Books for Boys and Girls from 1940 to 1973. She was an innovator, someone who sought to make "good books for bad children," and she was responsible for books that many of you may remember, such as *Goodnight Moon*, *Charlotte's Web*, or *Where the Wild Things Are*. This quotation is from a letter to African American author and illustrator John Steptoe, who had gone to see Nordstrom without an appointment. (Now, there's an example of how relations are structured. The appointment is no doubt going to play a much bigger role in your lives from now on. That, in turn, gives a different value to meetings that can happen without an appointment.)

When I first read this letter, with "only you" all in capital letters, I thought instantly that this was not only a wonderful thing for an editor to say to a fledgling author, but for teachers to tell their students. And it is something that can be said truthfully to every student, for the reasons I have been trying to lay out. But notice that Nordstrom follows up the claim that "no one else knows just what you know about anything" with the injunction to "put down your thoughts and emotions." I think she was emphasizing the importance of letting the world see the unique

knowledge of a talented young man, but I also believe Steptoe himself needed to put down his “thoughts and emotions” in picture book form in order to really know what he knew. And this is what you will be asked to do, over and over, though probably not in picture book form, and with the emphasis on thoughts, not emotions. (Keep in mind, though, that emotional investment plays a considerable role in shaping knowledge.) You might even think of your education as a continuing encounter with what you know through your developing capacity to externalize it. This, in turn, will give you greater clarity about the new knowledge demanding to be let in.

I am using the language of inside and outside metaphorically, of course. What we know from our experiences is precisely what we learn through interaction with the world, including the world of books and CD’s and videos. “Only you know” what you know not because that knowledge was miraculously generated inside you out of nothing, but because each of you is a unique historical accumulation of interaction with the world. There is no end to that process (remember, learning as “coterminous with the beginning and end of our lives”), but the more we can be conscious of it, the more actively we can give to and take from the world. That is why learning to “put it down” is so important. But because learning this is going to be very hard for some and relatively easier for others of you, I want to emphasize these words borrowed from Ursula Nordstrom’s affirmation of the young John Steptoe and declare what I believe, that they apply to each one of you. Your teachers cherish you because each of you brings something unique and precious to our common endeavor. I hasten to add that sometimes we will be too harried to show our appreciation, and you may yet lack the means, whether out of shyness or resistance to discipline or easy success in high school or for any number of other reasons, to give us the necessary hints of what it is that “only you know.”

Fortunately, it is not only your teachers who can help you discover what it is that you know, but also your college advisers; the resident staff; the city of Chicago in its various aspects, whether of Hyde Park, the South Side beyond it, the Loop, or the North Side; and of course, your fellow students. I want to turn to these dimensions now, beginning with your fellow students, who will be at least as important to your education as your teachers. Much of your important interaction with your peers will take place outside the classroom, I imagine. But your fellow students are a significant presence in the classroom, obviously so in courses in which discussion plays a large role but also in lecture classes. Let us focus for a moment on the phenomenon known as the “stupid question.”

As I was debating whether to address this phenomenon today, an example came to me from very early in my schooling. It comes from my third-grade year, and it apparently had—has still—such force that it crowded out all other examples and insisted on being revisited. So here it is. My elementary school was on a U.S. military base in Tokyo, and our third-grade field trip was to the commissary on the base, the sort of institution that to this day provides American or American-style foodstuffs at reduced prices to troops and their families stationed overseas. It

was a big deal to go inside the commissary since children were not ordinarily allowed, and after our tour, our guide, perhaps the manager, asked if there were any questions. I can't remember if I put my question first, out of the anxiety I still feel when there is too long a silence after a speaker finishes, or whether I hesitated to raise my hand until the end, worried about the validity of my question but still wanting to know the answer. So I put my question: "Where does the food come from?" I remember a silence, broken by giggles all around me—or so it seemed—and then voices breaking out, "From a farm!" and even if wasn't literally said, I heard "stupid" tacked on. I was so humiliated that I can't remember if our teacher or the guide said anything in response. I wanted to say, "I know that," but lacked the nerve. I hadn't been able to compress into an askable question things like, where were the farms, anyway, since we're in the middle of the city? And how did those eggs and the milk and ice cream get packed into containers all in English, with no sign of being "Made in Japan"? And how could these products really be from Japanese hens and cows since many of my classmates said they never ate anything Japanese? (Mind you, this is a reconstruction since the problem was precisely that I couldn't articulate these thoughts.)

I'm wondering if it's the experience behind this memory that is at least partly responsible for a certain "question trauma" that has never gone away. You see the point I am working toward: how important the attitude of fellow students is, even the way they hold their bodies or turn their heads at such a moment. A good teacher can rescue a "stupid question," but it takes skill, talent, and luck. And even the teacher's salvaging effort cannot cancel peer contempt. Stupid questions are often, if not usually, questions that need to get asked. If the question concerns a basic point of the class, it is likely that the questioner is not the only one confused. An absurdly basic question may seem so because it is asking the matter at hand to be considered in terms of its broadest implications, but the questioner lacks the sophistication to put it that way. Or a question sounds stupid because it is "coming from left field"; but bringing in the left field can develop an issue in ways never imagined. Stupid questions also need to get asked simply because learning to articulate our doubts and our confusions is a fundamental part of education, and we can only get there by daring to voice our fumbblings, over and over. You will be helping not only each other but yourselves as you learn to make it easier for your peers to take those risks.

Next, I want to explore more broadly the question of differing strengths and weaknesses. Earlier in this talk I referred to our formal equality before the law. We could also have recourse to the language of equal opportunity or the level playing field. But opportunity by itself does not produce a level playing field. The level playing field is an ideal—something always on the horizon, if you will—that requires continual struggle to approach. Depending on the kind of school you went to, depending on the qualities valued in your family (expectations of sons and daughters, encouragement of argument or appreciation of silence), depending on a host of factors some of which I touched on earlier, you may find your classes agreeably challenging or excruciating. Perhaps all of you will experience some version of this mix, but as with the rest of

our society, the burdens and advantages will not be evenly distributed. Some of you will be working many hours a week in order to help your parents pay for your education. This may well make you more disciplined, more efficient in a hurry; but there is no question that it will be a challenge to balance work, study, and friendship. Remember that you've taken on something genuinely difficult and be patient and generous with yourselves. Some of you may be the first in your families to attend college; others of you may come from families that have gone to college for generations. Depending on such factors, though not entirely—for you are individuals whose distinctive mix of qualities cannot be captured by any given set of generalizations—your experiences will differ, at least initially. To return to the question of speaking in class: those of you who find it very easy because it is something you are accustomed to, might work on your listening skills. Perhaps you've had the experience of being very good at something that has come easily to you, say, a sport. And you hit a plateau from which you could rise only by stepping back, or stepping sideways. That is the kind of thing I am suggesting. From the effort to become a good listener, you may not only become a better reader but a deeper, more coherent speaker and writer. Finally, I hope you actively appreciate the variety you represent. I recently heard a new resident assistant reflecting on the dietary restrictions and preferences of the sixty-odd students in her house. Such diversity in itself is an incalculable resource for your education.

To take this one step further: let me urge you to make the city part of your education. You have already had an initial look at the Loop and the Near North. You may have some idea of the great cultural institutions and the miscellaneous pleasures of urban life. Yesterday you had a look at our more immediate neighborhood through community service activities. The South Side of Chicago holds many kinds of neighborhoods, some of them being among the poorest in all of North America. It is the site of momentous historical transformations, including migrations from the South, the flourishing of a vibrant urban African-American culture, the displacement of populations caused by deindustrialization and racism. These comprise important and still unfolding chapters in the history of the United States, in which this University has necessarily played and continues to play a part by virtue of its location. I happen to think this is one of the many reasons, one of the truly important ones, for choosing to come here. Your new neighborhood, in other words, affords exceptional opportunities to learn about this ongoing history firsthand. And I think we are extremely lucky to have the relatively new institution called the University Community Service Center, which has worked out a variety of ways in which you can sensitively and sensibly come to know the neighborhood in which Hyde Park is located. What you did yesterday is called community service, and the center gives you opportunities to pursue community service throughout the year, but such service is also an opportunity for your own learning. In addition to the intrinsic rewards of meeting people and taking part in activities you might well not have without the center, you will be gaining remarkable resources with which to reflect on the conditions of learning, specifically, the relationship between a great urban academic institution and its neighborhood. It makes me envy you that this can be a part of your college education, whether you go on to become

scientists, waiters or chefs, lawyers, teachers, prime ministers, lobbyists, advertising executives, artists starving or otherwise, computer programmers. . . . And this brings me back to the modern sense of liberal, namely, open-minded, not bound by orthodoxies and therefore forward-looking, qualities that make us proud to be associated with an institution. Indeed, the open-ended aspiration to educate the whole person makes the liberal arts college one of the finest achievements of U.S. history. How to translate that aspiration in practice needs constant rethinking, including and especially how to extend the pursuit of that aspiration to all members of society.

Now, in one final turn, I want to look at the question of the University of Chicago's location from a different angle. Even for those of you who grew up in Chicago, this experience of the city will undoubtedly be new. I don't mean by this that you may never have been on the South Side before, because even those of you who grew up on the South Side will experience this difference. I mean that the University, as an academic institution, is peculiarly part of and not part of its physical location. Take a look at the architecture, the way in which the quadrangles, quoting medieval structures, turn inward. I want right now to take this affirmatively. Much of my talk today has urged you to be reflexive, to hold a double vision that keeps in view the object of your study and the context of the process, to think about how you are learning as you learn—why some things are easy, others hard, what gets included, what excluded—and to make that process a part of what you learn because I believe that everything is connected, closely or distantly, and that your education will have failed you if it does not give you a real sense of that. But I wouldn't want to send you on your way today without also wishing you the experience of suspending all that and simply losing yourself in your studies, whether it is a single course outside your concentration, a series of courses, a lab, or something that takes place with your friends, outside the classroom altogether. Lose yourself so that you can come to a deeper encounter with the world. What might that look like? I think of something a poetry teacher said in a class I took many years ago. He was a practicing poet, so he talked about the struggle of writing. He put it in terms of love. This is how I remember it: I love you so much, he started out—"you" being whatever it was that he wanted to get at or do in a poem, really, the unborn poem itself, I think—I love you so much that even though I'm clumsy and don't know enough, I can't and won't give you up.⁵

Liberal education as animated by love: I seem to have come full circle from the original discussion of liberal education and flown further back, to an almost classical—Greek notion, but different, I hope, for the journey we have taken. I wish each of you the experience of discovering and grappling with such a love while you are at the University of Chicago. That love will give you courage, animate your whole being, and help you learn what it is that "only you know" so that it can be shared and grow out into the world, whence it will return to you multiply transformed.

Thank you for listening to me today.

-
1. Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 148-50.
 2. Email exchange on June 26, 1998. Arcilla is the author of *For the Love of Perfection: Richard Rorty and Liberal Education* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).
 3. "Introduction of 1857," *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 83-84. Emphasis in the original.
 4. Leonard S. Marcus, ed., *Dear Genius: The Letters of Ursula Nordstrom* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), pp. 240-41.
 5. The teacher was Richard Monaco, and the course, "The Logic of Poetry," co-taught at the New School with another fine teacher, John Briggs, was for a number of years in the 1970s aired on the New York City FM station. It resulted in their jointly authored book, *The Logic of Poetry* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975).