

Senior Class Address 2005

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I will try to keep it short, which those of you who know me will reckon is quite a challenge. Dear spectators of this ceremony, I address myself to you, outsiders, yet guests here today — look, to see us, graduates of this year, for what we are, each of us in ourselves and us as a community. We were immersed into an unknown environment that we were expected to transform into a home. All students receive this little booklet — no, it is not the student handbook that I have commented on before. It is mostly found in trashbins all around campus. And that is a pity. Woven into a tour around campus is the story of Reynard the Fox, in original Dutch — even for the Lowlanders mostly gibberish.

On the cover is the face of Reynard the Fox, the story's villain that is concerned only about his own desires, smiling — perhaps rather grinning — somewhat challenging, too. Reynard was a free soul. He reminds me, not in the most negative sense, of some teachers. Academically, UCU has proven quite suited a playgarden for pedagogical joyriders and educational experimentalists. But at the same time we have not missed the the deeper message to enjoy studying in itself — like, as my philosophy teacher said, the Ancient Greeks who used the

same word for “school” as for “leisure”.¹ It is a privilege to be able to freely explore our natural love for understanding our surroundings and ourselves. Perhaps it is in this that the Liberal Arts and Sciences ideal becomes realised.

Socially, community life sometimes resembles the story of Reynard the fox. It is a fairy tale. One of my fellow graduates once said that our community features beasts, witches, fairies, kings and princesses — it enchants and at the same time continuously holds our minds captive. Sometimes, one is unsure whether the world beyond the gates is the oasis or we find ourselves in one already.

An artistic soul has found pleasure in baptising the campus buildings with names from the story — names that we never tend to use, by the way — in an attempt to cover up the lack of a tradition. Yet that lack of tradition has never obstructed me. Quite the contrary. It is its strength. The College was — and still is in many ways — a *tabula rasa* —. The excellence of it lies much in its being flexible enough to have strong motivation make it facilitate the realisation of our ideals as our lives’ stories are woven into its fundamentals. UCU is open. UCU is possibility. UCU is what we make of it.

What sometimes troubles me is that one can discover clearly a twinkling in Reynard’s eye. It is a spark of hope — a desire, perhaps. When I came to UC, I was told that I would discover my limits there. Yet how often we have been challenged — no, expected — to do the impossible. And how often have we exceeded our own bounds. And yet how often do we resort to looking down upon limits outside us. — down on the forest ruling board, down on Plasterkian outsiders that do not recognise the quality our education, down on other institutions where not all students receive A grades, down on the freshmen that will soon be awoken from their idealist dreams, and soon, down on those that are still there and are like us when we were here —. Then,

¹It is actually contested whether this is true.

we have failed to see the meaning of Reynard's evil grin, that reminds us to see how little the impossible is that we sometimes truly, freely achieve in the face of all this potential. It makes us realise how finite we are in our infiniteness. As Pascal wrote, "La dernière démarche de la raison c'est de connaître qu'il y a une infinité des choses qui la surpassent." — The final achievement of reason is to know that there is an infinity of things that go beyond it. The limits that we find and look down upon reflect only our inner lack of desire to change them — and that, is confronting. Reynard knows no limits.

My dear fellow graduates, in a month from now, we will have given up all that we think of as ours on this campus, and for some years, we will live on as memories of those that remain, after decennia perhaps only as names, until they, too, finally, will be lost.

It is surprising to see how people change when they become aware that they will soon leave. Some people spend the whole last third career in departure as if preparing a hibernation. They flock together, all those suffering from the I-am-almost-done-syndrome, and have given up explaining to any freshman ignorants — their goodbye kiss transforms into a *bacio di Tosca*. Are you, dear spectators, witnessing a rite of passage? I think it should be — but many of us have already left.

And then again, Reynard, though continuously pursued by his vengeful victims, is a happy fox. He skillfully — and joyfully — escapes every punishment. Likewise, there are some that have been granted to find Reynard's fulfillment even in a College's last leg's dance, while being chased down by professors with sticks. I have come to admire those who found their freedom, and respect those generous enough to support their neighbours rather than envy them. I have come to see the triumph of a beaver that found satisfaction in a great effort as opposed to the resentful decadence of those that receive the highest grades but find the least effort too much. Let us look for that glory.

The greatest things are done in silence.

And now they are done.

Let us close this booklet now, and look back, and then, dream of a future. My fellow graduates, I wish you a future that will satisfy in every way. I hope that you share my deep gratitude for forming part of this community these years. I also express my hope that we, then from the outside, will see this institute and all that we have given to it grow in the future. And Reynard the Fox smiles at us all.