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William Jefferson Clinton, Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

Middlebury College Commencement
Middlebury, Vermont
May 27, 2007

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Thank you very much, President Liebowitz, Mr. Fritz, and the members of the board. My fellow recipients of honorary degrees. As I was listening to the other people getting degrees, I leaned over and said, "I wish all of them were speaking. I could learn more." I congratulate them. Vani Sathisan, you gave a great speech. You look better without your mortarboard. Don't worry about it. Let's give her another hand. I thought she was terrific.

I would also like to acknowledge a person who served in my Administration as Ambassador to Switzerland, former Governor Madeleine Kunin. Thank you for being here. Middlebury's ambassador in the White House when I was President, Andrew Friendly, who was my personal aide, I thank you for being here today.

The first person who introduced me to Middlebury was Ron Brown, who was my Commerce Secretary. He grew up on the streets in Harlem and found a home at Middlebury. He served on the board until his untimely death in 1996, while leading a delegation of Americans to the Balkans to try to help people put their lives together again after we ended the horrible Civil War in Bosnia. I loved Ron Brown. He was an unbelievable human being and like a brother to me, but his eyes would just light up every time he talked about Middlebury. I hope that all of you, for the rest of your lives, however long they may be, will feel some of that, because I can see that he found here what I want for everyone in the world. A kid who grew up in a hotel in Harlem found a home here, because there's a community here in the best sense, and that's really what we have to build in the world.

Every successful community has three things, whether it's a university, a sports team, a business, an orchestra, a family; you name it. They all have three things: a broadly shared opportunity to participate; a broadly felt responsibility for the success of the enterprise, whatever it is; and a genuine sense of belonging. That's what Ron Brown felt at Middlebury when he became the first African American member of his fraternity, and then his fraternity had to choose between kicking him out and being kicked out of the national fraternity. They chose him. Good for you, by the way.

Look around here. This is a much more interesting student body than it would have been if I had come here 30 years ago to speak. It's more diverse racially and religiously. Sixty-two percent of you studied overseas. You've got students from 74 countries here. You had a commencement speaker from Singapore of Indian heritage. You doubtless have Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and perhaps Shintos, Confucians, Jains, and goodness knows what else. But you're still in a community.

Now, the world has lots of problems. We have the existential problem of climate change, and you're on the cutting edge of that, and I congratulate you on your commitment to become carbon neutral in the next few years. We have the problems of resource depletion all over the world, unprecedented loss of topsoil, water, trees, plants, and animal species, just at the time when the world's population is expected to grow from 6.5 billion to 9 billion, almost all of it in the countries least able to take care of themselves today. Only Brazil and Argentina have significantly increased grain production in the last 10 years, because they still have more than 20 feet of topsoil. That's a huge problem. For all the people down in Washington who are so exercised about the problem of illegal immigration, you haven't seen anything yet if we go from 6.5 billion to 9 billion people on earth and our capacity to grow food is reduced, not increased.

We have legitimate problems with terror, weapons of mass destruction, and the potential spread of them. Our interdependence has made us more vulnerable than we have been since the end of World War I to a global epidemic like avian influenza, which is why you can turn on the evening news and see stories about chickens competing with Britney Spears' shaved head. First you see the local crime story, then maybe the fight over the remains of poor Anna Nicole Smith, and then I've seen stories about chickens in Romania, India, and Indonesia. Why? They all have avian influenza. It has a 60 percent mortality rate in people, and we don't have a vaccine or cure yet. It's a good story to be on the news, certainly more important than the other ones.

We have problems because the world that is now yours to command with your imagination is so beyond the reach of half the people on this planet. Half the world's people still live on less than \$2 a day; a billion people live on less than \$1 a day. A quarter of all deaths on earth are from HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria, and infections related to dirty water.

Even within rich countries, there's a real struggle to maintain anything like a sense of social cohesion as inequality in America runs rampant. We're now in our sixth year of an economic recovery. We have a 40 year high in corporate profits, the stock market reaching record levels, increasing productivity of people every year, but median wages are flat and poverty and the lack of health insurance have both gone up among working families. We're becoming more and more unequal.

So there are plenty of problems out there. Why would I come to you and ask you to think most about community? Because I believe questions of community and identity, personal identity, will determine our collective capacity to deal with all the problems. The most important thing you've got coming out of this Middlebury education is the understanding of the elemental value that makes all communities possible in an interdependent world, which is that our differences are really neat, they make life more interesting, and they aid in the search for truth. But our common humanity matters more.

So much of the world's difficulties today are rooted in the rejection of that simple premise. Think about all the political, the religious, almost psychological fundamentalism that drives the wars and the conflicts and the demonization in the world today. All of it is premised on the simple fact that our differences are more important than whatever we have in common. When the terrorist bombings hit London not so long ago, the most traumatic thing for many British citizens was that the people who set the bombs off were British citizens. It was in no sense an invasion. They felt somehow violated and disoriented, and I read painful article after article where people were saying, "I just don't get it. I work with these people. They're nice people. I don't understand it. My kids played with their children. We went to sporting events on the weekend. We had all this contact." What happened? The people who set the bombs off did not feel they belonged. They believed that their differences were more important than what they had in common.

Even though they lived and worked and sometimes played with other people, the same people somehow became less human to them. All this may seem completely alien to you, but we are all guilty at various points of doing the same thing. I'll give you a little test. When I was President, I strongly supported the sequencing of the human genome, which was completed in 2000. Lots of wonderful things have happened because of that. Just last week, we learned that the two genetic markers which are high predictors of diabetes were found. This is a huge discovery because of the rampant growth of diabetes along with childhood obesity in the United States. We have for the first time statistically significant numbers of young people with what we used to call adult onset diabetes. A lot of other great things have happened. We found the markers for breast cancer. We're getting close with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

But the most important thing I learned was that, genetically, all human beings are 99.9 percent the same. That is astonishing. Look at each other. Every difference you can see of gender, skin color, hair color, eye color, height, weight, you name it, everything you can possibly observe about another that seems different is rooted in one-tenth of one percent of your genetic makeup.

But most of us spend 90 percent of our time focused on the one-tenth of one percent, don't we? I'm 60 years old. Well, at least I'm not 80. I'm 10 pounds overweight. Well, at least I'm not 40 pounds overweight. I did a terrible thing, but at least I'm not as bad as she is or he is. How many times have you done that?

I met Rush Limbaugh the other night, and I was tempted after all the terrible things he said about me to tell him that we were 99.9 percent the same. I was afraid the poor man would run weeping from the restaurant, and so I let it go. On the other hand, a few weeks from now I'm going to South Africa, as I try to go every summer around the time of Nelson Mandela's birthday. He'll be 89 this year, and I try to share his birthday with him every year. I can't believe that he and I are 99.9 percent the same, because he's so much greater in every way than I could ever be. But it's true. So on the one hand, what you do with that one-tenth of one percent of you that's different makes all the difference, but if you think that it's more important than what you have in common, then the problems that bedevil the world are likely to overwhelm all the wonderful things that you might otherwise do.

If you think about what it would take for your grandchildren to be sitting here on a day like this 50 years from now, we have to deal with climate change and resource depletion; we have to reconcile the world and move it away from terror and the maniacal spread of lethal weapons; we have to develop cooperative systems to deal with disease; and we cannot continue to have this spreading inequality. We have to widen the circle of opportunity within and beyond national borders. And it all starts with questions of community and identity and the elemental knowledge that what we have in common is more important than what divides us.

I do a lot of work in Africa, as the President said, with my AIDS project. We sell medicine at the cheapest price in the world in 66 countries, and we have health projects in 25, and I never cease to be amazed by the intelligence of people with no money, no education, nothing, just lots of observation and received wisdom. In South Africa, in Mandela's tribe language, Xhosa, people discuss

the idea of community in a fundamental, almost existential way. They use a word which was used as the motto of the youth service project he and I started for black and white kids in South Africa: "ubuntu." It simply means in English, "I am because you are." Our differences cannot be as important as our common humanity, because we couldn't even exist in any meaningful sense without each other.

A little north of there, in the central highlands, when people meet each other walking along paths and one person says, "hello, how are you, good morning," the answer is not "I'm fine, how are you?" The answer, translated to English, is "I see you." Think about that. Think about how empowering that is. Think about the difference between that and a world of people obsessed with concentrating power instead of empowerment, with control instead of freedom, with imposed ideology instead of reasoned evidence. "I see you."

Most of you don't have a racist bone in your body. Most of you don't have a sexist bone in your body. Most of you are probably as free of artificial categorical bigotry as any group of young people has ever been, but you have gifts. The gift of a fine mind, the gift of a chance to be here, the gift of all the choices you have when you leave. So the bigotry you will have to work hard to avoid is not seeing everyone else. When we leave here today, somebody's going to have to come in and fold up all these chairs and clean this place up, and a lot of people who do that work think no one ever sees them. They have to be involved in the fight against climate change too, or the fight against income and equality. They have to have chances in life.

If there's one thing I've learned traveling the world, it's that intelligence and effort are equally distributed; organization, investment, and opportunity are not, and so too many people remain unseen.

I believe you will live in the most interesting, peaceful, prosperous time the world has ever known. Even if we have to deal with terror for a few more decades, they're going to have to really work to kill as many innocent people as were killed from political violence in the 20th century in two world wars, the Holocaust, in the purges in the Soviet Union, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and all the tribal wars in Africa. You're going to have a better time of it, but only if, with all of our scientific advances, we can drive home the elemental requirement of community that will lead all of us to serve, whether we're in office or just in private life.

Our common humanity is more important than our differences. We must see everyone. That is what I wish for you. As you save the world, remember all the people in it. If you see everyone, if you believe that we are because others are, if you serve in that spirit, your grandchildren will be here 50 years from now, and it will be even better, because you will have fulfilled humanity's first obligation, to honor what is holy about it and to pass it on.

Thank you and God bless you.

Student Speech by Vani Sathisan '07

Middlebury College Commencement, May 26, 2007

Good morning, President Liebowitz, our distinguished guest of honor Mr. Clinton, esteemed faculty, to those of you parents, \$200,000 poorer but nevertheless proud, dear friends, love-filled lovers, and to the star-studded and outstanding class of 2007. It's an absolute honor and pleasure to be here with you all today. I admit I lack the life experiences of Mr. Clinton, but my aim here is to use my sensational melodramatic skills, inherited from my dear mother, to convince you, that there's actually life beyond Middlebury, and you are going to rock that life.

The first time I had to give a graduation speech was back in 1990 when I was 6 years old, having completed two years of kindergarten education. Seventeen years later, it feels fantastic to deliver a college commencement address - but this time around, I wrote it by myself. I want all of you to pause for a moment and rewind about 15-17 years back into your life. Do you remember pitifully clinging on to your dad's shirt refusing to let him drive you to school? Now fast forward to this very moment, 17 years later, and reflect on who you are. Many of us are still clinging on to our dad's shirts, and their pockets too, but how far have we come!? I want to celebrate this journey with you today, by bringing in a few groups of people who have made this insane ride worthwhile and meaningful.

I heard somewhere that professors are people who talk in someone else's sleep. [1] Today, we couldn't thank them enough for all that excessive talking. Two teachers come to my mind instantly. In my pre-college high school, the United World College in Italy, I took an English class from a legendary teacher who had more influence on me than any adult, other than my parents. She was an animated woman, nearing her 60s, with a sense of fashion still stuck in the '70s, but under her inspiration, literature just grabbed my imagination. She was the polar opposite of cool, but she sure got us all excited about lit.

Since then, the next inspirational teacher I met was here at Middlebury College. Guiding me with excellent advice, making the study of global conflicts engaging and attention-grabbing, and always ready to harness our potential without spoon feeding us, Professor Quinn Mecham from the political science department, stands out. He epitomizes this "magic" - this magic which so many of our Middlebury professors possess - to spur the students to think beyond the textbooks and to be charged up about issues that matter,

I know, and he knows, that I'm not his best student in our Political Islam seminar, but I hope he knows that he has inspired me enough pursue a future career in a related topic. All of us sitting here today are silently grateful to so many of our professors out there, from political science to biology, computer science to Arabic, geography to women's and gender studies departments - we're indebted for your gentle direction and persuasive teaching. So, thank you, professors. All that talking has paid off.

To all our parents, siblings and extended family members, sitting in the crowd, leaning towards bankruptcy but beaming with pride, look at us and realize that you have invested in us with your unconditional faith and love, and it has all been worthwhile. It kills you to see us grow up, but I guess it would kill you quicker if we didn't. [2] Your unwavering support and believe in our potential has spoilt us enough to graduate from college today.

I read a quote once that said: "The place of the father in the modern suburban family is a very small one, particularly if he plays golf." [3] How beautiful to see so many of you busy dads and the ever-busy moms fly from all across the States, parents of us international students who have crossed borders from other continents to share this grand moment in our lives - and at this point, a big shout out to my dad, mum and big brother out there, as well as the host families of several international senior students who have been a family away from family and home - such as my fabulous host family sitting in the audience, Larry Novins, Misse Smith and Emma. They've helped me out through homeless Christmases and bad tooth extractions. It's great to see all of you here today.

We've heard that there are only two lasting gifts you can give your children: one is roots, the other wings. [4] Although you parents are trying to clip the wings of your crazily independent sons and daughters, I also know you're silently sitting in the audience, overwhelmed with so much pride and joy. Thank you for letting us go, parents. We will always carry a part of you with us as we succeed.

My graduating friends, today's a bittersweet experience of a sense of achievement mixed with the sadness of saying goodbye to our dear friends, not knowing when our paths will next cross. Many of you will go on now to conquer greater heights and excel in your respective fields. Just look at your class now:

1) You are part of MiddShift, a student organization whose plan the college has approved and accepted to become a carbon-neutral institution by 2016.

2) You are part of a class that has produced three Watson Fellowship winners from across the nation.

3) You are part of a class that has produced Step It Up, the groundbreaking group with the courage to shake the big bad guys for action on climate change.

You give kids from other schools a run for their money, just what will you do tomorrow? Maybe you will be the future secretary-general of the United Nations, a prize winning writer, or an Oscar winning actor, maybe a professional cage fighter or the star housewife raising seven kids, three dogs and two cats, and a husband ... maybe you've met the love of your life in Middlebury and you'll celebrate commencement getting married in Mead Chapel. There's nothing crazy about that but some of us will hide in a corner and secretly laugh at you. The point is, "Our time is limited and I hope we don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice, and have the courage to follow your heart and intuition." [5] I try to live by this quote myself: "The tragedy of life is not that man dies, but what dies inside him whilst he's still alive." [6] So, while we all come out here with some specialty, I also hope that we will keep reinventing ourselves to be trendsetters, never mere followers.

Above all, we must realize the need to let others light their candles by our knowledge. We each have duties to fulfill as global citizens of this world, and I hope we will live our grand dreams with integrity and humility. By that, I do not ask you to be meek and to bow your heads in submission. But be quietly confident. Maintain your dignity in the darkest hours. "Defy the gods. You will be astonished how many of them turn out to have feet of clay." [7]

My mum always emphasized that "school is something you complete; life is something you experience." So "don't worry about your grade, or the results or success." [8] I'd like to think that I'm significantly smarter than what my GPA suggests. "Success is defined in myriad ways, and you will find it, and people will no longer be grading you, but it will come from your own internal sense of decency." [9] So, I guess at the end of the day, my message is: "Love what you do. Get good at it. And let the chips fall where they may." [10]

I know, we just cannot wait to graduate and go out and party, so allow me to end this spiel with my all-time favorite quote by Arundhati Roy, a prize winning writer: "To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never, to forget." [11]

May we never forget our years in Middlebury, and may we fall in love over and over again. Class of 2007, you are phenomenal. The world is waiting for you. Rock on.

Thank you.

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Bread Loaf commencement address by John Elder

Commencement Address

Bread Loaf School of English

August 11, 2007

By John Elder

Stewart Professor of English and Environmental Studies

Middlebury College

President Leibowitz, Director Maddox, Associate Director Bartels, esteemed colleagues on the Bread Loaf faculty, friends and family of this community, and, most of all, graduates in the remarkable class of 2007—please accept my warmest greetings and congratulations on this happy occasion.

I've been thinking about *sequels* since listening to Jim's appreciation of Joseph Battell's masterpiece *Ellen, or The Whisperings of an Old Pine* at our opening ceremony this year. Upon returning to our home in Bristol later that night, I decided, for reasons now hard to explain, that I would immediately begin re-reading the book again by starting at the last page and moving forward. While I may have thought I'd at least *looked* at every page of Battell's prose before, I now found myself staring at an unremembered advertisement for two projected sequels to *Ellen*. They were to be called, and I'm not making this up, *Edith* and *Gertrude*. I began to contemplate with mounting excitement writing a first chapter for the lost manuscript of *Edith*, for delivery upon this very occasion, but decided that we already had enough literary surprises and sensations around here.

One of the surprising pleasures in every Bread Loaf course turns out to be discovering which authors *not* on the syllabus will nonetheless end up entering into regular dialogue with the assigned books. In my seminar on the poetry of Robert Frost, one such writer turned out to be Virginia Woolf; this fact doubtless reflected, among other things, the exciting course simultaneously being taught on Woolf by Jennifer Green-Lewis. I'd like to reflect this evening about some of the ways in which our present, ceremonial afterglow relates to the core of our summer's program, and to frame these brief remarks with a passage from *To the Lighthouse*. Mrs. Ramsay is musing inwardly as her dinner party draws to a close:

Everything seemed possible. Everything seemed right. Just now (but this cannot last, she thought, dissociating herself from the moment while they were all talking about boots) just now she had reached security; she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy which filled every nerve of her body fully and sweetly, not noisily, solemnly rather, for it arose, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband and children and friends; all of which rising in this profound stillness (she was helping William Bankes to one very small piece more, and peered into the depths of the earthenware pot) seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all around them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the

feeling she had had once today, already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures.

It's perhaps *not* so surprising that throughout this summer, having also been teaching a new course on the literature of farming and food, I've found myself thinking of Bread Loaf itself as a feast. Our school's very name brings eating to mind, of course, along with the accompanying bakery of metaphors-crumbs, croutons, tortilla, nacho, biscuit, crumpet, hard-tack. Over the years more than one Bread Loaf speaker has reminded us, too, that the word "companion" has as its fundamental meaning one with whom we share bread. Here we are, then, companions, ballasted in our seats in the Burgess Meredith Theatre for a few minutes, after a splendid banquet in the Inn that in turn represented the end of this summer's feast.

When Gerald Graff spoke in this space earlier in the summer the question he posed was how to engage students energetically in literature when they may never have made a strong connection with it in the past; his own discovery as a teacher had been that this could be accomplished through criticism that was framed as an argument against other, specific points of view. I would like to ask a different, but perhaps still complementary question. How do we step away from literary experiences and conversation that have sometimes been intense to the point of incandescence? I tremble to express myself in this way, lest I sound sentimental or extravagant. In all honesty, though, it's felt harder than ever to let go of this summer's classes. If, as I suspect, such difficulty is widely shared among our student body and faculty, that very fact may cast light on the meaning our companionship that is rooted in a questing devotion to literature and language. I'd like to frame an exploration of this phenomenon by describing two particular class meetings that I was fortunate enough to participate in this summer. In each case, the most notable thing about the session was the way it ended.

In the second week of classes our seminar on agrarian literature focused on the fourth and final book of Virgil's *Georgics*-that tasty mélange of mythology, celebration of the beauty of Italy, and practical advice on everything from grafting fruit trees to crop-rotation. This last book, intriguingly, focuses exclusively on bee-keeping, and much of it is taken up by the epyllion, or inserted narrative, of Aristaeus. He is a farmer who complains to his mother, the nymph Cyrene, about the death of all his hives, with the destitution that seems to await him. She counsels him to grab the shape-shifter god Proteus and hold onto him until he finally explains where Aristaeus's woes have originated. Cyrene takes her son to the cave of Proteus, then withdraws to watch. After the struggling god has assumed his full repertoire of snakey and horrific forms to no avail, he finally lets his assailant in on the fact that his hives were cursed because of Aristaeus's role in the death of Orpheus's wife Eurydice. As the lustful Aristaeus was pursuing her she stumbled upon a poisonous snake and died from its bite. At this point Proteus is released and Cyrene steps forward to tell her son what to do next. He is to sacrifice eight oxen and return to their bodies nine days later. He will find swarms of bees emerging from the corpses and can then capture them to repopulate his hives.

In over an hour spent exploring this epyllion we had already considered it from the perspectives of Orpheus, Eurydice, Aristaeus, and Virgil-who seems to have invented this elaboration of the Orpheus myth. We had both appreciated the vigor of the poetry and related the death of the bees to the disappearance of colonies of honeybees all across North America. We had looked back over a range of political and economic challenges facing Virgil's farmers, anticipating modern versions of them in our subsequent readings. But then, when it seemed we were about done, one participant in the seminar, Marshall Schwarz, had called our attention to the unremarked fact that this entire epyllion is framed and managed by a female character, Cyrene; this was notable because the rest of *The Georgics* are thoroughly dominated by male characters and by Virgil's often militaristic similes. Two immediate benefits followed from this insight that was articulated just when the discussion was feeling done. One was that it opened a new perspective on Virgil's desire for control and effectiveness, both on the farm and in the nation. The difficulties of succeeding in both realms seemed tied, on the surface, to bad weather, pests, war, and the like. But on a deeper level, the framing of the epyllion suggested, they had to do with problems inherent in the very impulse for domination and control. Agriculture, technology, and the accumulation of land and wealth may sometimes be presented in Virgil as vehicles to recapture, at least temporarily, the plenty and wholesomeness of the Golden Age. But from another perspective they are themselves manifestations of a fall from such blessedness. Without communication with, reverence for, and intercession by the Mother, we are finally helpless. Such an understanding remains deeply rooted in Italian culture to this day. As this new aspect of our discussion opened, I remembered the painted terra cotta shrines Rita and I have often encountered when walking through the farmlands of Tuscany-with the blue-cloaked Mother fondling her infant son, and with sheafs of wheat, clusters of grapes, and flowers draped across those altars in season by the neighboring farmers.

When I mentioned this discussion to Heather James over lunch the next day, she told me about a recent article in *Renaissance Quarterly* that looked at this epyllion with specific reference to gender and the role of Cyrene. I e-mailed the PDF of this article to everyone in the seminar, and we all learned a new word, "*bugonia*"-meaning the spontaneous generation of honeybees from a sacrificed ox. We also learned that our own speculation about the significance of gender in the epyllion's framing character was currently of great interest to classicists far more deeply versed in *The Georgics* than anyone in our group.

This unanticipated turning at the very end of a conversation returned to mind just last Wednesday, when I was having lunch with a group of faculty colleagues that included Sara Blair, Jonathan Freeman, and Jacques Lezra. I was eager to ask them some questions about literary theory, in connection with my current collaboration with the ecologist, Glenn Adelson. My question for these colleagues was how we might better understand the theoretical implications and potential of this new joint-venture. While I was at it, I also asked

for their perspective, as folks well versed in theory, on the sorts of close-reading that are central to my teaching. They offered a variety of highly interesting and encouraging replies in response to my foggy questions, and I left the table filled with new ideas and good intentions. As we were all saying goodbye and heading off to our classes Jonathan remarked, with characteristic grace, that he always found it best *not* to apply theories systematically but rather to view them as an array of options to consider when approaching a given work of literature. Pick a theoretical gambit that seemed promising, see where it goes, then abandon it and pick up another when that approach runs out of steam.

I loved this angle but also reflected wryly that it would be hard for me to follow, having essentially no theoretical arsenal at all—regardless of the literary work at hand. In this regard, I remembered my warm sense of kinship with Vice Admiral James Stockdale, the candidate for vice president on Ross Perot's ticket in 1992. In a nationally televised debate with the other candidates the conversation turned technical after the first round and Stockdale called memorably, "Out of ammo, out of ammo!" But the point I'm trying to make here is that, though I didn't invoke a feminist perspective in framing this discussion, such an insight arose from the class at a perfect time. In the context of Virgil, it deepened our interest in the issues of control, faith, and sponsorship. And when we moved on to works where I *had* already anticipated talking about farming and gender—such as *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the stories of Wendell Berry, and Jane Brox's saga of a failing family farm, *Here and Nowhere Else*, those conversations were now much more readily integrated with our Virgilian framework. Might this effect be called retrospective framing? At any rate, from that meeting onward, a number of our best sessions in that class included a final half hour of speculation that felt wild, totally beyond my own ability to synthesize, and as generative as Cyrene's classic recipe for *bugonia*. Hanging in there with each other and the book for just a little longer paid off.

The other class I'd like to tell you about was our final session of the Frost seminar. We began by focusing on "The Silken Tent," the single-sentence sonnet that figures prominently in Jay Parini's biography of the poet because of its association both with Frost's wife Elinor and with Kay Morrison. Here's the poem:

She is as in a field a silken tent
At midday when a sunny summer breeze
Has dried the dew and all its ropes relent,
So that in guys it gently sways at ease,
And its supporting central cedar pole,
That is its pinnacle to heavenward
And signifies the sureness of the soul,
Seems to owe naught to any single cord,
But strictly held by none, is loosely bound
By countless silken ties of love and thought
To everything on earth the compass round,
And only by one's going slightly taut
In the capriciousness of summer air
Is of the slightest bondage made aware.

The folks in this seminar really had their chops as readers of poetry by now, and our conversation was a highly satisfying and expansive one. It ranged, in turn, from metrical and musical effects, to themes religious, sexual, and biographical, pausing over the cluster of images relating this sonnet to the process of composing poetry itself. Along the way individuals in the class also helped us all to hear some of the specific echoes this outwardly non-allusive poet so frequently achieves in his poetry. David McCullough recited the opening lines of Herrick's "When as in silks my Julia goes," while Kellam Ayres helped us recall Roethke's variant on that theme in his poem "I knew a woman." Katie Retallia brought in Donne's "Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," in which the central cedar pole of Frost's poem has its equivalent in the fixed leg of a compass, as couple inscribes the circle of their love through the experience of separation and return. It was another feast, with numerous chefs companionably at work in a spacious kitchen.

But then, just as we were getting ready to move on to another poem, "Never Again would Birds' Song Be the Same," Cliff Gahan and Steve Suomi spoke up. They were both thinking about the passage at the end of *Exodus* when Moses has come down from the mountain with the tablets of the law and Yahweh commands him to build the Tent of Meeting, which would house the Tabernacle and which would both reveal and conceal the presence of God. This was an unexpected tug in one direction, just as the class and the poem seemed to be gently swaying at ease. As at the end of Virgil's Book IV, it both amplified and complicated the themes we had considered. We were reminded that Frost's silken art may be a discloser of form, human and divine, but it is also an encloser and a screen. Much of the power of his writing comes from the way in which, after having drawn us in with his limpid verse, he turns away so resolutely at the end from any implications of closure. Whatever the priestly poet may have glimpsed within the tent, our perspective on it remains from without—that's what we get, that's what we see. That's what keeps us swaying together instead of lifting the flap one at a time and getting on with our personal projects. In fact, bringing a wide variety of angles to bear on a work of literature can feel like Mrs. Ramsay's floating "element of joy." One of the many reasons for celebrating Jim and Dixie's sustained efforts, over so many years, to

bring a greater diversity to the faculty, student-body, and curriculum of Bread Loaf is that it allows for a richer and richer experience of such suspension within the widening concord.

Just as we often emerge from an exciting discussion with no definitive line on the work in question, so too do we depart from Bread Loaf with no particular pedagogy or critical methodology. What we do have is the memory of moments when literature has been the catalyst for the conversations of true community. In one meeting of the Frost seminar we were talking about the word *dialogue*, and the fact that it derived not from the particle di, for double or two, but from dia, for *across*--as in a group's dialogue across a table. At this point one of *our* group's members, Marty MacMahon, said, "Yes, and the poetry we discuss *is* the table." Conversations fostered by literature may be luminous ones, living in us for many years, as Mrs. Ramsay's gift for gathering people together did for Lily Briscoe, as "globed, compacted things over which love lingers and thought plays." But such gifts finally have less to do with attachment to any one place, group, or book than they do with openness to whatever comes next. Upon the conclusion of this commencement ceremony we won't be marching down off the mountain in lock step, but we may still take a certain recognizable sway with us as we saunter away.

Just one final memory, from this Theatre, and I'll close. Every year we are transported by another of Alan MacVey's amazing productions, as we were this year by the endlessly thought-provoking Henry IV. The *first* such production Rita and I ever saw here was the 1980 staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. So much about it was wonderful, but the moment that returns to mind now was its aftermath. After Puck's epilogue the audience still held together speechlessly in that circle of enchantment, when our eyes were suddenly drawn out onto the west lawn--where this present group will soon be exchanging farewells. That's where the fairies were scampering or floating away with their candles, toward the dark line of trees. It was a moment of breath-taking beauty, and I can still remember how long the audience remained looking into that mysterious and scattershot constellation toward which the whole play had moved. But when Rita and I finally made it to our car for the drive home to Bristol, we saw swirls of fireflies in the brushy fields on either side of Route 116. Bread Loaf's greatest gift may be an enhanced receptivity to the unexpected weathers and concords of an enlarged world.

Thank you.

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