



VALEDICTORY ADDRESS, 2018

VERITAS PREPARATORY ACADEMY

Miss Anna Espinoza

I have come to believe that I had so much difficulty writing this speech because nearly all of the speaking and writing I do or have ever done is about argument, not inspiration, not goodbye.

I argue with my brother, with my parents, with the administration about the dress code, and with opposing counsel about whether or not a statement should be allowed into evidence. But best, very, very best of all, I argue with all of you, about all things.

About whether Gatsby loved Daisy.

About Marxism, anthropophagy, and relativity.

About extraordinary men, the nature of the infinite, and bioethics.

About whether or not we will ever stop placing value in gold.

About whether Socrates was wise or just annoying.

About who hardened Pharaoh's heart.

About the hypothetical happy pill.

About stealing pears and hastening to return tickets.

About rehearsal schedules and the broken coffeemaker and what time Mr. Ward said we were supposed to meet back at the metro stop and which of us actually has to pick up the scalpel and dissect the frog.



It has been my greatest privilege and honor in life to argue with you. I am unsure that I was worthy of it. I am sure that I am not worthy of standing before you now. Who am I to play this small part in our formal parting of ways, who am

I to give a speech at the stone, who am I, compared to our education and the entirety of the western canon? Still, I have been shown how beautiful it is to be unworthy.

Having been told I would be delivering this speech and having been confronted with the totality of my own beautiful unworthiness, I sought inspiration. I felt it was necessary to steep myself in sentiment in the hopes that

something to say to you might surface. (I knew wouldn't be good, as I had heard Mr. Sullivan had declared that all of these valedictories were, in fact, terrible. Thank you for your faith in us, Mr. Sullivan.)

So, hoping for something merely adequate, I visited one of the old campuses. Yes, some invoke the muse, I trespass at our beloved old Greek Orthodox church. I parked my car, paced the length of the field, sat on the curb where Mr. Giles used to hold his famous tutoring sessions, and shed one dramatic and sparkling tear. Then I climbed the stairs to haunt the courtyard and press my nose against the glass doors of the old lunchroom. Looking through those doors, I had a thought which I believe you will all agree

displays the high level of profundity that is a result of a Veritas education. Here it is: We grew. Fifty of us definitely wouldn't fit into that room anymore. At least not comfortably. Of course we have grown and improved so much in the intangible ways as well, but this is obvious, and not the topic on which I wish to focus today.

I wish to speak about the senior garden tree. Not the one outside Mr. Nydegger's classroom window or the one planted by last year's class, but the one at the very end of the yard. I love that tree. I've watched through the window as the petals of its white blossoms drifted away on the wind on particular days when I couldn't quite bring myself to focus on *La barca sin pescador*. I've examined the red and orange pigmentation of the stray leaves that fell onto my calculus notebook as we practiced partial fraction decomposition. I've leaned up against the sturdy trunk and paged through the Humane Letters reading again and again. Sometimes, I've tuned out the lunch conversation and lain on my back in the grass and admired how perfectly the green canopy above me filtered the harsh sunlight, allowing the remnants of rays to percolate until they touched the grass like the true manifestation of a Gerard Manley Hopkins poem.

I know that this tree and Veritas itself will be forever linked in my memory. Veritas is the tree standing tall, strong and steady, protecting our souls as it nurtures them. Yes, we can glimpse the breadth and depth of the great world as we can glimpse the breadth and depth of the blue sky through the branches, but the more harsh aspects of it have been filtered out in the same way the harsh sunlight has been filtered out, so that only the true, good, and beautiful can reach us.

On the very first day of sixth grade, in the very first chapter of *Ecce Romani*, Cornelia sat under a

tree and read. How peaceful she was then, and how easy the vocabulary from that chapter was to learn! As soon as she steps out from under the tree, bad things begin to happen. A wolf attacks! The family must leave the country house (and farm)! The carriage gets stuck in a ditch and stays there for at least five chapters! We actually have to learn to conjugate Latin verbs!

So you see why, if *Ecce Romani* is any indicator, I am afraid to leave Veritas, afraid to step out from under the tree. To do so is to be without my teachers, without you, my peers, who have acted so informatively as to be my secondary teachers. Each and every one of you have taught me something.

Ms. Brown: that we must have wisdom without ill will or malice.

Mr. Vaughan: that senior year is an excuse to eat candy for breakfast sometimes.

Ms. Larson: what true elegance is, and how when faced with never, we must look for always in a few stolen strains.

Mr. Pham: that eastern philosophy exists! That some people even study it!

Mr. Diaz: that from a middle school carpool can come a sense of family.

Mr. Swonger: that there is utility in reiterating the precise definitions of commonly used words.

Ms. Kucuksadic: that a friendship can be sustained on accidental meetings at the Starbucks on the corner.

Ms. Fowler, Ms. Vuletic, and Ms. Huseinovic: that we must look for romance everywhere. In books, in each other, and in discarded bouquets of fresh flowers on the streets of distant cities.

Ms. Hall and Ms. Hamann: that I am not as interesting as I think I am.

Mr. Hosack: that perhaps I should not care so much about whether Ms. Hall and Ms. Hamann think I am interesting.

Mr. Pierce: that kindness and caffeine make a difference.

Mr. Nelson: that there is a great deal of joy in knowing someone with whom you nearly always disagree completely.

And Mr. Power: that it is never too late to make a true friend, and that there is only one way to arrange nothing.

And so my fear of stepping out from under the tree is not rational, as the nature of these lessons is such that I will not forget them.

Let us go, let us set out from under the tree, let us not let the harsh sunlight change what is truly good about us, let us not deny the tree nor forget what we have learnt under it nor forget one another.

Thank you, and congratulations.