

Respectabilis Baroness Rawlings and governors of the Board, headmaster Waldron, distinguished guests, and, of course, teachers of the English College in Prague,

this is what I have to say to your graduates:

Take a sheet of paper.

It is white.

It is blank.

Blankly, it is staring at you.

You are staring at the paper, rather tiny but, at the same time, eerily enormous. Physically, it is defined by its edges. Spiritually – and that is what really matters - it is boundless.

What a situation... even if it mostly occurs in silence. The world, deeply involved in its own business, will not be watching you watching that sheet.

And yet, you will find yourself at the brink of an adventure that could, and even should, be literally breathtaking. Just like any pathfinder, you will try to find a path, to blaze a trail, to chart an uncharted territory. If I may take the liberty to make a suggestion, I suggest to you: be persistent, as long as you possibly can and well beyond that. And be courageous. Taking up your pencil, make sure it is sharpened well, for, in a way, it is a lance you are toting against enemies that will be ubiquitous and very, very unkind. May you never succumb to a notion their preponderance over you is unbearably mighty. Quite on the contrary – rejoice. Because to champion a cause means you are battling its opposite. Again: be courageous.

Having sit down with your sheet of paper and your pencil, you did what no other known creature of the whole universe can do: you decided to make something out of nothing.

Such an act has a name. This is how it sounds: Creation.

No one but the people capable to make something out of nothing, capable to create, changes the world.

Bringing about such a change, though, carries a great responsibility. So always make sure, beyond reasonable doubt, you are going to change it for the better.

Telling the better from the worse, unfortunately, is a tall order. Far, far taller than one is usually prepared to acknowledge. One thing that may help you along is your conscience. The other is learning. So my second suggestion to you is: learn.

Learn hard.

Learn always. Graduating from a school is good. Go celebrate it. But as soon you grow sober again, go on learning more. Even if you one day run out of schools to enlist in, I can assure you that you will never run out of books to read and to ponder and to learn from.

Opening the first page of a book you have not read yet is a good opportunity to give at least a passing thought to the fact it also started with someone sitting down with nothing but a pencil and a blank sheet of paper. What you hold in your hand is something created out of an initial nothingness.

It is of only secondary importance whether what you put with the help of your pencil down on the sheet of your paper is a poem, a historical treatise, a mathematical formula, a picture, a political programme, a succession of musical notes. It is up to you to decide.

But decide you should.

The wish and the attempt to improve the world must never cease. Nor must ever wane the creativity, exclusively human, the drive to enrich it with new ideas and things. It is the noblest task Man, and Man only, has been set to fulfill. So this is my third suggestion to you: do not let just the others do it. Be part of that effort. Create.

Today, you graduate from the school you have been attending for six long and, I am pretty sure, demanding years. It is a time to congratulate you for having succeeded in finishing it. So: well done, young ladies and gentlemen.

You have acquired some tools for future work.

And, also, some weaponry for your future battles.

May they be many.

May they be difficult.

May they be furious.

May they be fruitful.

May you always prevail over the blankness of your paper sheets.

May you always create a beautiful something out of the terryfying nothing.

Thank you for your attention.

Michal Horáček

21 May, 2010, Prague

