

President Rose, members of the college, and guests,

Each spring, including last one, at around the time when the leaves of the oaks that encircle this quad begin to unfurl, a pair of ravens, *Corvus corax*, would nest in the trees along my walk back to Pine Street Apartments. Ravens are one of those few birds known to practically all of us, like crows but larger, maybe more ominous. The staying power of ravens in our minds is likely connected to their place in the myths of humanity across our world, a creature of importance to the Tlingit, the Haida, Pagan Europe, Bhutan. The raven, first to venture out from the Ark to the diluvian world, has been held in the stories of countless cultures, handed along mouth to mind, mind to mouth, for tens of thousands of years at the least. Mirroring the Greeks and Prometheus, Haida poets tell of how Raven stole the light and gave it to humans.

The Raven's ubiquity in myth and human thought is due, in some part I think, to ravens' own storytelling abilities, speaking a language of sorts only partially probed by ornithologists, composed of hundreds of sounds, croaks, knocking, gurgling, the showing of love, comforting young, saying, "I am here," "So are you," "Watch out for danger," and other things, things that we haven't come close to saying ourselves. When heard after hours in H-L, grinding out lab reports, or walking back from Moulton after waiting 45 minutes in the bibimbap line, they seemed to say, "There is more here," "There is magic," "There are things you can't know." These messages, though inspiring, were hardly appreciated by me at the time, falling asleep and getting up the next morning at five to keep writing. I'm sure all of you can relate.

But here we are, after the fact, no longer cranking out papers or staring blankly at figures in an "orgo" textbook. We have been set loose, but set loose into what? A world, it seems, that is beginning to look a lot more like the world known in those same myths as the Raven, one, all too often, wracked by fires, floods, famine, and plagues. Living now has started to take on the

feeling of living *inside* the old stories. If ever there were a time in our history that best reflected the final devouring of existence by the world-serpent at Ragnarok, then this, unfortunately, might be it.

So what do we *do* with this? What do we do with *any* of this? This isn't just about climate change or the politics of migrancy. It *is* about that, don't get me wrong, but it's also about ourselves and how we understand our place in a world where we hope to live meaningful lives as we leave this place. Perhaps the best answers I've come across so far were in those ancient stories, not the ones of war and great battles and the killing of enemies, but the kind of stories that come from a careful listening to what the rest of the world says when you finally give it a chance to speak for itself.

And I think *this* is what's meant by Raven giving us light, the stories *about* Raven are very much stories about *listening* to ravens, to seeking meaning in the inimitable marching of seasons, the singing of frogs, the falling leaves, and, importantly, also in friends, in our families, in conversations with strangers, for *they* are all a part of this too. In our years here at Bowdoin I'd like to think we've gotten pretty good at listening, but there is always more listening to be done, and maybe in ways that are still unfamiliar to us. If we are living in Raven's world then it is time for us to listen now more than we have in a very long time, to start learning again not for grades or degrees but for teaching ourselves how to live in this world fraught with both problems and beauty. There *is* so much more here, there *is* magic to know, and it is time that we take in our hands all that we've learned here at Bowdoin to help us now understand what it all is and how all of it and ourselves can be saved. And after we've listened, and I mean *really* listened for a long time, maybe we too can again learn to speak in a way more reminiscent of the croaking of ravens that live in those pines on the far end of campus.