

Text of the introductory address delivered by **Dr Pádraic Conway**, Vice-President for University Relations, University College Dublin on 16 June 2011, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Arts, *honoris causa* on **Garreston Beekman "Garry" Trudeau**

A Uachtaráin agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile,

Umberto Eco's celebrated novel *The Name of the Rose* reaches its climax with the revelation that the artefact pivotal to the plot, the *causa causans* of the first chaos of violence and murder, is a unique copy of the second book of Aristotle's *Poetics* – *On Comedy*. In his extant work, *On The Parts of Animals*, Aristotle claims that "no animal but man ever laughs". In this imagined work, we are told by William of Baskerville, "Comedy does not tell of famous and powerful men . . . it achieves the effect of the ridiculous by showing the defects and vices of ordinary men."



While Garry Trudeau has, *pace* the imagined Aristotle, indeed portrayed famous and powerful men – one American President as a waffle and another as a Roman helmet and Donald Trump as, well, Donald Trump – it is his extraordinary creation and nurturing of ordinary female and male characters and his portrayal over forty years of their sundry virtues and vices in a compassionate, critical, instructive and, most importantly, funny way that we honour today.

Garreston Beekman Trudeau was born in New York City on July 21, 1948. His Trudeau ancestors had moved from France to Quebec in the mid-seventeenth century and the branch that remained there includes among its distinguished members former Canadian Premier Pierre Eliot Trudeau.

After an idyllic childhood in the Adirondacks and school days in Concord, New Hampshire, Garry Trudeau started at Yale University in 1966. He quickly became editor of *Yale Record*, the campus humour magazine. Moreover in his first collegiate year, he served on the social committee under the chairmanship of an upperclassman, one George W. Bush. Remembering those halcyon days, Garry Trudeau is on the record in his appreciation of [I QUOTE] "George's mastery of organised socialising".

The pre-history of *Doonesbury*, read daily by around one hundred million people, may be said to have begun in September 1968, when Garry Trudeau turned up at the offices of the *Yale Daily News* with some cartoons about the football team and their star quarterback Brian Dowling. The debut episode of *Bull Tales* appeared on September 30th, centred on the character who within weeks would become known and endures to this day as B.D.

By the end of November of that year, Garry Trudeau had attracted the attention of Jim Andrews of the nascent Universal Press Syndicate and Andrews McMeel Universal Corporation. Intrigued by *Bull Tales*, Andrews wrote to Trudeau, requesting further samples of his work with a view to syndication. It took a while – in fact almost two years which included Trudeau's graduation from Yale in June 1970, his receipt of a medical deferment from the military in August of that year, and the re-naming of his strip – but *Doonesbury* made its debut in twenty-eight newspapers on October 26, 1970. One is almost tempted to stop here and say, simply, 'the rest is history'.

But, put another way, it is no exaggeration to say that the forty odd years of *Doonesbury* since then constitute a Bayeux Tapestry of American history; a

tapestry made up of thousands of individual visual haiku, each with its own punch and punchline.

Characters like B.D., the eponymous Mike Doonesbury, Zonker and Uncle Duke have become instantly recognisable cultural icons as Trudeau has imagined and created, in a part-soap opera, part-Tolkien-like fashion, a new world which saw these characters and their complex network of extended family and friends live and move and have their being through the grand events of contemporary history and the more intimate personal dramas of their own lives.

And he has done it all in a way that is unashamedly liberal – even after that word became unpopular and unprofitable. “Liberal values, tarnished by the spurious tributes of the rich world’s media, today make the rich world yawn and the poor world sick” was the jaundiced pronouncement of one of Ireland’s finest. It is Trudeau’s achievement that he has given the lie to any such attempted dismissal of liberal values through his passionate and compassionate – and all the while humorous – engagement with AIDS, amputation, and aphasia to name but three – I could go all the way from those A’s to Z, by the way, but that might just make this citation unconscionably long. Even a cursory engagement with the post-9/11, war-induced travails of BD and Toggle, not to mention The Sandbox, the forum for service members, returned vets, spouses and caregivers hosted on Doonesbury.com, makes one recognise that Trudeau’s liberal values have teeth as well as a smile.

The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that: “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow, as it judges the thoughts and purposes of the heart”. At the risk of being accused of heresy, let me suggest that much of foregoing could be applied to the best work of Garry Trudeau.

Doonesbury is the creation of one of the most multi-talented artists ever to work in journalism. And so, today, after more than 14,000 daily and Sunday strips, a Pulitzer Prize, a Broadway musical, an animated TV special, Oscar and Grammy nominations, a wide-ranging website, and 60 published collections and books (including a massive new 40th anniversary retrospective), we are pleased, indeed, privileged to honour Garry Trudeau:

Praehonorabilis Praeses, totaque Universitas,

Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Artibus; idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.