

Kabir Gandhi

“Bibliotheca et Hortus - A Library and a garden”

Praeses Bacow, decani illustres doctissimique professores, familiares, amici, benefactores, ter honorati hospites, vos denique, carissimi condiscipuli – salvete omnes! Magnus mihi honor est his in rostris Theatri Tercentesimi hoc munere mirabili perfungi, etiamsi in lingua quam perpaucissimi intellegunt. Hodie non solum incipimus officium nostrum aliorum ad beneficium vivendi, sed etiam finimus – si fas dicere est – nostram “experientiam transformativam” per universitatem Harvardianam.

Cicero alter verba sollertissima ex sollerti ore tonans sine dubio haud sum. Cum tamen legebam opera illius in bibliotheca praeclarissimae amplissimaeque domus Dunsteriensis, quaedam sententia concinna in epistula ad Varronem amicum oculis meis incucurrit. In qua aliquid fortasse veritatis inveniamus: “Si hortum in bibliotheca habes, deerit nihil.” Convocatis ergo diversis cohortibus ad contionem in horto optimo, ante bibliothecam optimam apud Harvardienses positam, haec verba fecundissima consideremus.

Nos Harvardiani certe intellegimus quomodo quotannis horti ira frigoris Cantabrigiensis iactentur. Bibliothecae autem – et nimirum officinae alchimicae – constantes stant. Primo, eas in arces mutavimus, in quibus noctu solitudine lucubravimus (et multum “Taurum Rubrum” bibebamus). Mox capita de laboribus sustulimus ut sapientiam admiraremur et amicorum praestantium et optimorum auctorum. Cor est artium liberalium bibliotheca, in qua sive historicus vel physicus, sive poëta vel mathematicus scientia omnium rerum humanarum ac naturalium augeatur. Nos Harvardiani quoque novum “Smith Forum” in aliam bibliothecam transfiguravimus... requiescas in pace aeterna, o templum coffeae et crustulorum, Bone Panis!

Tandem aliquando hiems veri cessit. Horti rursus usui nostro liberabantur! Statim delatis quaestionibus ad Canvas in tempore ipso (horresco referens), domus excurrimus ad hortos occupandos et plateam Harvardianam fruendam. Ecce! Hac ex parte alii “spiceam spheram” ludunt, alia ex parte alii sub frondosis quercorum ramis cubant. Laboribus intermissis, fabulas

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relatum, musicam auditum, et quietem in gramine acceptum ad hortos imus. Interdiu susurri discipulorum risusque Harvardianorum – mirabile auditu – hortos nostrae universitatis complent.

Itaque hortos bibliothecasque multiplices universitatis Harvardianae perscrutatus, sic enim arbitror: “Si hortum in bibliotheca habes, deerit *aliquid*.” Bibliothecae complendae sunt animis veritatis cognoscendae semper cupidis. Horti complendi sunt et gaudio et risu et amicitia. Universitas Harvardiana nobis hortus atque bibliotheca his annis fuit, noster locus amoenus, ubi praeterita explicare, praesentia discere, futura excogitare potuimus. Cum primum egressi erimus ex hoc horto delectabili, memorias non solum de floris librorum sed etiam, quod est maioris momenti, de moribus ac ingeniis humanis conservemus.

His ergo omnibus observatis, haec notissima verba profero quo celerius ad laureas admittamur: cara cohors anni bismillesimi undevicesimi, *ave atque vale!*

President Bacow, distinguished deans and most learned professors, family, friends, benefactors, thrice-honored guests, and of course you, dearest classmates—welcome, all! It is my great honor to perform this wondrous task before you on the stage of the Tercentenary Theatre, albeit in a language that hardly anyone understands. Today, we not only begin our journey of living in the service of others, but we also complete – if I may put it this way – our “transformative experience” at Harvard University.

There is no doubt that I am far from another Cicero, thundering wise words from a clever mouth. While reading his works, however, in the library of the resplendent and most plentiful Dunster House, a certain aphorism in a letter to Cicero’s friend Varro caught my eyes, an aphorism in which we might perhaps find some truth: “If you have a garden along with a library, you have everything you need.” As we assemble today from all our respective schools, in the finest of Harvard’s gardens, in front of the finest of Harvard’s libraries, let us reflect on these fruitful words.

As Harvardians, we are all too aware how long each year our gardens are buffeted by the wrath of the Cantabrigian winter. Our libraries, however, and indeed our laboratories, stand unshaken. At first, these spaces were our fortresses, in which we worked through the night to finish our tasks in solitude (and while we were at it drank plenty of Red Bull). Soon, we raised our heads from our work to admire the breadth of knowledge around us, both among our accomplished peers and within the works of the greatest authors. The library is the heart of our liberal arts education, where historian, scientist, poet, and mathematician alike gather to acquire knowledge about all matters pertaining to both humankind and the nature of things. We Harvardians even managed to turn the new Smith Campus Center into a library of its own . . . rest in peace, oh temple of coffee and pastries, Au Bon Pain!

At long last, however, winter gave way to spring, and our gardens once again were free for our use. Once we had uploaded our assignments to Canvas with minutes to spare (I shudder

at the thought), we rushed outside to enjoy our house courtyards and the open space of Harvard Yard. Look! Over here some play Spikeball, while others over there recline under the leafy branches of oak trees. We paused from the bustle of our academic life and collected in the gardens to share stories, listen to music, and relax on the lawns. Oh, wonderful to hear, the whispers and laughter of Harvard students filling the university's gardens!

And so, as I reflect on Harvard's gardens and its libraries, it seems to me that if you have a garden along with a library you do *not* have everything you need. You must fill the library with inquisitive minds, always in search of truth. You must fill the garden with joy, laughter, and friendship. Harvard has been our library and our garden for these years, our beautiful retreat for learning from the past, for discussing present issues, and for imagining the future. As we depart this most bountiful garden, let us take with us memories not only of what we've read in books, but – what is more important – of what we've learned about human wisdom and imagination.

With all this in mind, I repeat these famous words so that we can get on with graduating: dear Class of 2019, *hail and farewell!*