

The Latin Salutatory

“Aetates Hominis Harvardiani” [“The Ages of Man at Harvard University”] Paul Thomas Mumma '09

Praeses clarissima Faust, decani professoresque doctissimi, amici et parentes patientissimi, et denique condiscipuli carissimi, salvete omnes!

Quamvis “spes” et “mutatio” hodie celebrentur, res vero diriores videntur. Nobis gradum suscepturis hoc anno manifestum est: quattuor proximis annis, mercatura totius orbis collapsa est, Pluto non iam orbis est, et licet parentibus Codice Vultuum uti. Cum res undique labantur, facile putes - praesertim si literas humaniores didicisti - hos quattuor annos esse similes quattuor aetatibus hominis, quae ab aetate aurea profectae ad aetatem ferream pervenerunt. Hinc hodie discessuri, quid ab aetatibus nostris Harvardianis discere possumus?

Aurea aetate homines maiores fortioresque erant. Non laborabant quia tellus sponte sua multas fruges fluminaque lactis et nectaris dabat. Aurea aetate nostra, anno primo, nos etiam maiores eramus – plus quindecim libris. Nos cogitabamus doctiores esse: nempe memineras adhuc mathematicam et discipuli Studiorum Socialium sententias non invocato Foucauldio proponere poterant. Labor inutilis erat: etsi diligenter laboraremus, Expos tamen nos confutare solebat. Vita otiosa erat: alma mater – aulam dico Annenbergensem - nobis alimentum copiosum praestabat, dummodo nobis placeret primo vesperi cenare.

Deinde subiit argentea aetas, annus secundus, auro deterior. Fugit Justitia intravitque Discordia. Labor atque iniquitas undique erant. “Cibus Velatus” “Boloco” factus erat, et item “Tommy’s” “Pizza Unica.” Gregibus octonariis factis, pax fracta erat. Postquam studia nostra elegimus, subito necesse erat laborare. Verum enim vero habitatio nostra maxime mutata est.

Alii ad quadratum ultimum expulsi sunt, alii in paradiso – id est propter flumen - degerunt.

Pauci autem beatissimi erant, qui habitabant ubi florebat Domus de Eliot.

Successit annus periculosus, aetas aenea. Hac aetate fabulosa homines instrumentis utebantur usque ad exitium suum. Haud aliter tertio anno facilius utebamur instrumentis Harvardianis. Eheu, saepe ruinam fecimus. Inscientes bibliothecam semper apertam carcerem nostram fecimus in quo diesque noctesque libellos ac notas mathematicas conscripsimus. Conati sunt quidam hilaritatem huc adferre atque hoc solum perfecerunt: invitaverunt Gentem Vu Tang Fratresque De Gravii ad spectaculum cantorum eundem. Denique Caupona Capitis Reginae condita, Aula Annenbergensis quondam socia nostra adversaria fiebat cum nos a studiis avocaret.

Hic veteres poetae ut requiem quandam malorum darent, meliorem aetatem heroum ante aetatem pessimam, id est ferream, inseruerunt. Haec universitas autem semper singularis est aetatesque easdem retexit. Anno ultimo nos quoque ab aetate ferrea ad aetatem heroum progressi sumus.

Prima pars anni quarti certe aetas ferrea erat. Nos cum commentariis inopiaque occupationis hiemeque asperrima in die certaminis illustris certabamus. Vita nostra ingrata erat. Sed ecce, ad aetatem heroum et cacumen cursus honorum Harvardianorum pervenimus. Quisque ingenio proprio praestat. Centuriones legionis domicilii latrinas perfecte mundaverunt. Scriptores commentarios confecerunt. Et ultime stantes seniores...ultime steterunt. Etsi inferiores sumus veteribus heroibus, at tamen res laudabiles perfecimus. Iubilate igitur!

Haec aetas item conficienda est, sed oportet recordari orbem extra orbem Harvardianum commoda quaedam offerre. Licebit post occasum solis cenare. Televisio tramites innumerabiles iterum praebit. Fortasse et orationes lingua patria habebuntur! Ad summam, condiscipuli, in

quacumque aetate eritis, hoc semper fixum in animis tenete: vita procul dubio peior esset, si in Novo Portu habitaretis.

Valete!

[Translation]

Most esteemed President Faust, learned deans and professors, long-suffering parents and friends, and you, dearest fellow-graduates, greetings everyone!

For all the talk of “hope” and positive “change” lately, things are looking rather bleak. This is certainly clear to the class of 2009: in our four years here, the world economy has collapsed, Pluto is no longer a planet, and suddenly it’s OK for adults to use Facebook. With things slipping all around us, four years at Harvard College can look (to a classicist at least) suspiciously like the ancient “ages of man,” and the transition from a Golden to an Iron age. On the verge of graduating today, what have we learned from these Harvard Ages?

In the mythical Golden Age, men were bigger and stronger. Humans didn’t have to work for a living, and the earth gave forth copious food and drink of its own free will. In our own Golden Age (our freshman year) men were also bigger – 15 lbs. bigger, to be precise. We also seemed smarter: we still remembered high school math, and Social Studies concentrators could make an argument without referring to Foucault. Toil was futile: even if we worked hard, Expos told us we were bad writers. And the earth – Annenberg – supplied food and drink in abundance, as long as we were willing to eat at peculiarly early hours.

Eventually, the Golden Age gave way to a lesser Silver Age – for us, our sophomore year. Justice left the world, and Strife entered. Men had to work for a living, and inequality reigned. The Wrap became Boloco, Tommy’s became Unique Pizza. With the arrival of blocking groups, the peace was shattered. And in our day, sophomores had chosen a

concentration – we suddenly had to work. But perhaps the biggest change was our habitat: some were banished to the far corners of the earth—the Quad—while others lived in an earthly paradise by the river. Indeed, only a few were blessed with the best location of all, where the house of Eliot flourished.

Enter the perilous junior year, like the mythical Age of Bronze. Then, men made use of bronze tools until they were destroyed by their own hands. Just so, in our junior year we used the tools Harvard offered quite easily; unfortunately, this often led to our ruin. Unwittingly we turned our 24-hour library into a prison, spending days and nights on papers and problem sets. Some made a valiant effort to bring fun to Harvard, but instead brought the inexplicable combination of the Wu Tang Clan and the Brothers De Graw to the same concert. Even our old ally, Annenberg, turned against us: the Queen’s Head pub arrived, offering temptation after temptation to avoid our studies.

At this point in the decline, the ancient poets inserted a better age, an Age of Heroes, before the final and worst age of iron. But Harvard likes to be unique, after all, and we reverse the final two ages around here. In our final year, we have, in fact, made the progression from an Age of Iron to an Age of Heroes.

Certainly, the first half of senior year was an Age of Iron: we labored on theses, faced a dismal job market, and struggled to stay alive at the coldest Harvard-Yale in memory. Our lives were unpleasant. But then we reached the Age of Heroes, in which we arrived at the peak of our varied Harvard careers. Dorm Crew captains cleaned bathrooms to perfection, thesis writers triumphed, and the “last seniors standing” were, well, the last ones standing. True, we are nothing compared to the heroes of old, but still, we’ve accomplished worthwhile things. Congratulations!

Yet, as with all ages, this one too must come to an end. Fortunately, as much as we've enjoyed our time here, the world outside of the Harvard bubble shows some advantages: it will be possible to eat dinner after 7 p.m., cable TV will be available again, and speeches may even be delivered in a language you will understand! Ultimately, fellow graduates, in whatever age you find yourselves next, keep this one thought in mind: life could always be worse, if you lived in New Haven.

Good bye and be well!