

HARVARD UNIVERSITY



Order of Exercises for COMMENCEMENT

JUNE 4, 2009

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES

TERCENTENARY THEATRE 9:45 A.M.

ACADEMIC PROCESSION	<i>University Band</i>
THE MEETING CALLED TO ORDER	<i>University Marshal Sheriff of Middlesex County</i>
ANTHEM—America the Beautiful (Katharine Lee Bates, 1859-1929)	<i>Soloist</i>
PRAYER	<i>Chaplain of the Day</i>
ANTHEM—Domine salvum fac (Charles Gounod, 1818-1893)	<i>Commencement Choir and University Band</i>
LATIN SALUTATORY	<i>Paul Thomas Mumma Aetates Hominis Harvardiani</i>
SENIOR ENGLISH ADDRESS	<i>Lois Elizabeth Beckett This Shaking Keeps Us Steady</i>
GRADUATE ENGLISH ADDRESS	<i>Joseph Smith Claghorn The Harvard Elm Crisis</i>
ANTHEM—For the Spendor of Creation (Gustav Holst, 1874-1934; arranged by Jameson Marvin)	<i>Commencement Choir</i>
INTRODUCTION OF CONFERRING OF DEGREES	<i>Provost of the University</i>
CONFERRING OF DEGREES ON CANDIDATES FROM THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES AND UNIVERSITY EXTENSION	<i>President of the University</i>
ANTHEM—Psalm 78 (St. Martin's) (William Tans'ur, 1706-1782)	<i>Commencement Choir and University Band</i>
CONFERRING OF DEGREES ON CANDIDATES FROM THE GRADUATE SCHOOLS	<i>President of the University</i>
ANTHEM—O, clap your hands (Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958)	<i>Commencement Choir and University Band</i>
CONFERRING OF DEGREES ON CANDIDATES FROM HARVARD COLLEGE	<i>President of the University</i>
CONFERRING OF HONORARY DEGREES	<i>President of the University</i>
HARVARD HYMN	<i>Assembly</i>
BENEDICTION	<i>Plummer Professor of Christian Morals</i>
THE MEETING ADJOURNED	<i>Sheriff of Middlesex County</i>
MARCH—Military Escort (Harold Bennett, 1881-1956)	<i>University Band</i>

There will be ample opportunity for photographs at the diploma-awarding ceremonies held at the Undergraduate Houses and Graduate Schools following the Morning Exercises.

FOR THE SPLENDOR OF CREATION

*Adapted from the orchestral suite: The Planets
Arranged for the Commencement Choir*

*Gustav Holst (1874-1934)
Jameson Marvin (1941-)*

For the splendor of creation that draws us to inquire,
For the mysteries of knowledge to which our hearts aspire,
For the deep and subtle beauties which delight the eye and ear,
For the discipline of logic, the struggle to be clear,
For the unexplained remainder, the puzzling and the odd:
For the joy and pain of learning, we give you thanks, O God.
For the scholars past and present whose bounty we digest,
For the teachers who inspire us to summon forth our best,
For our rivals and companions, sometimes foolish, sometimes wise,
For the human web upholding this noble enterprise,
For the common life that binds us through days that soar or plod:
For this place and for these people, we give you thanks, O God.

Text by Carl P. Daw, Jr., 1989

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HARVARD HYMN

Text by James Bradstreet Greenough, A.B. 1856

Music by John Knowles Paine, A.M. (Hon.) 1869

De - us om - ni - um cre - a - tor, Re - rum mun - di mo - de - ra - tor,
Sic dum ci - vi - tas ma - ne - bit, Cla - rum lu - men hic lu - ce - bit,
Cres - cat cu - ius es fun - da - tor, No - stra U - ni - ver - si - tas,
Lu - ce an - gu - los re - ple - bit, Fu - ge - rit ob - scu - ri - tas,
In - te - gri sint cu - ra - to - res, Er - u - di - ti pro - fes - so - res,
Er - ror ter - ri - tus la - te - bit, Vir - tus vi - vi - da va - le - bit,
Lar - gi - an - tur do - na - to - res, Be - ne par - tas co - pi - as,
Et in - sig - ni - or flo - re - bit, No - stra U - ni - ver - si - tas.

ALUMNI EXERCISES

TERCENTENARY THEATRE 2:30 P.M.

ALUMNI PROCESSION FROM THE OLD YARD 1:45 P.M.

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE HARVARD ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

PRESENTATIONS OF THE HARVARD MEDAL

ADDRESSES:

DR. STEVEN CHU
UNITED STATES SECRETARY OF ENERGY

PRESIDENT DREW GILPIN FAUST

New graduates, their guests, and all alumni/ae are warmly invited to attend.



Fair Harvard

Fair Harvard! we join in thy Jubilee throng,
And with blessings surrender thee o'er
By these Festival-rites, from the Age that is past,
To the Age that is waiting before.
O Relic and Type of our ancestors' worth,
That hast long kept their memory warm,
First flow'r of their wilderness! Star of their night!
Calm rising thro' change and thro' storm.

Farewell! be thy destinies onward and bright!
To thy children the lesson still give,
With freedom to think, and with patience to bear,
And for Right ever bravely to live.
Let not moss-covered Error moor thee at its side,
As the world on Truth's current glides by,
Be the herald of Light, and the bearer of Love,
Till the stock of the Puritans die.

THESE FESTIVAL RITES

Decorations in the Tercentenary Theatre

Tercentenary Theatre, the area between The Memorial Church and Widener Library, was first used in 1936 as an outdoor amphitheatre for the College's three hundredth anniversary, and today is ablaze with the reds, blues, greens, and golds of the varied flags of the University. Flags of Harvard and Radcliffe decorate the theatre for Commencement, while the three large crimson Harvard *Veritas* banners, bearing the ancient shield, billow above the long staircase in front of Widener. Also flying overhead are the brilliant colors of the thirteen undergraduate houses: Adams, Cabot, Currier, Dudley, Dunster, Eliot, Kirkland, Leverett, Lowell, Mather, Pforzheimer, Quincy, and Winthrop. Rounding out the heraldic display are the bright standards of the Extension School and of the ten graduate schools: Arts and Sciences, Business, Dental Medicine, Design, Divinity, Education, Government, Law, Medicine, and Public Health.

History of Commencement

The word 'Commencement' conveys the meaning of the Latin *Inceptio*, a term used in the Middle Ages to describe the ceremony that admitted candidates for the degree of Master of Arts and gave them license to begin teaching. The first 'Happy Observance of Commencement' at Harvard College was held in the autumn of 1642, with nine scholars in the graduating class. Throughout the seventeenth century the ceremony was celebrated at the beginning of the academic year: the change of Commencement to the end of the academic year recognized that not all graduates would become teachers, and that at Commencement recipients of degrees would leave the University to begin their professional lives.

Harvard College is named for John Harvard, an early benefactor from Emmanuel College, Cambridge University, England, who in 1638 bequeathed his library to the new college in New England.

The founders and first teachers of Harvard, in the early years following 1636, also came primarily from Cambridge University, and brought with them the organization of its component colleges — a president and teaching fellows. The government of Harvard College, and now of the University, is vested principally in a body of seven members consisting of the president, the treasurer, and five fellows, known collectively as the 'Corporation' — the oldest such body in North America. Although the Corporation in certain matters requires the consent of the Board of Overseers, officially named 'The Honorable and Reverend The Board of Overseers,' one of this board's principal functions is to visit and advise the graduate schools and various academic or administrative departments. The Board of Overseers is the senior board, dating from November 1637, while the Corporation dates from the Charter of 1650. Together the Corporation and the Board of Overseers constitute the governing boards of the University.

Academic Procession

The Commencement procession is formed in four divisions. Each meets in a prescribed area where, as President Conant noted, they happily "wander about, greeting friends and disobeying instructions" before starting on the walk into the Tercentenary Theatre. As the processors pass by the west front of University Hall they doff their hats to Daniel Chester French's imaginative statue of John Harvard. Candidates for advanced degrees from the far-flung graduate and professional schools gather in three divisions in Sever Quadrangle — until 1946 the site of the Commencement Exercises — for their march into the theatre, having tinged the roads of Cambridge with color as they approached. The graduating class of seniors, the alumni/ae, and the President's Division emerge from lively confusion to find their places in the Old Yard as the Harvard University Band plays the familiar college songs.

The President's Division consists of several sections, the first led by the sheriffs of Middlesex and Suffolk counties. The president follows immediately behind, wearing a black front-buttoned cassock under a heavy full gown embroidered at collar and cuffs which is derived from seventeenth century Puritan clerical dress, and is the only such presidential regalia worn in this country today. On her head is a tasseled mortarboard.

The University Marshal oversees the Commencement Exercises, escorts the president and the presidents *emeriti*, if present, and is followed by the other six members of the Corporation, by the provost, and by members of the Board of Overseers. The Governor of the Commonwealth, who until 1865 served as president of the Board of Overseers, follows the governing boards. Next in procession are the Lieutenant Governor, the Mayor of Boston, and the Mayor of Cambridge. Behind them march the candidates for honorary degrees, each attended by a faculty escort.

Then come the deans and vice presidents, followed by the dignitaries, including the ministers of the original Six Towns of the Bay Colony, other invited clergy, officials of the Commonwealth or nation, the Phi Beta Kappa Poet and Orator, former recipients of honorary degrees, and invited guests.

The Faculty section of the President's Division is made up of house masters, professors *emeriti*, University Professors, professors, associate professors, and assistant professors in order of rank but not by school. This section is immensely colorful because of the rich and varied display of academic gowns and hoods. The color, length, and shape of each academic hood represent a particular institution and the subject in which the degree was awarded. Harvard's practice is unique in that just three types of gowns are used: black for both Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degree candidates, and crimson for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and other advanced degrees. Hoods signifying Harvard degrees are black with crimson silk linings, differing only in length for master and doctoral candidates. Embroidered crow's feet on the lapels of their gowns are colored according to the faculties they represent, with white for the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, including Engineering and Applied Science, and the Extension School; dark blue for Doctor of Philosophy; medium gray for Business; lilac for Dental Medicine; yellow for Design; scarlet for Divinity; light blue for Education; peacock blue for

Government; purple for Law; green for Medicine; and salmon pink for Public Health. Crow's feet are double for earned degrees, triple for honorary.

The President's Division takes its place on the platform built for the occasion on the south porch of The Memorial Church. The president sits in the center in a Jacobean chair used at Harvard Commencements since the time of President Holyoke in the eighteenth century. The treasurer and five fellows are seated at either side of her. In the center section of the platform are the honorands with their faculty escorts, the members of the Board of Overseers, the vice presidents of the University, the clergy, the deans of the graduate schools, the masters of the undergraduate houses, and specially invited guests. Looking toward the platform, to the far left are two hundred of the most senior alumni/ae, and to the far right are faculty members.

When all participants in the academic procession are seated in the Tercentenary Theatre, the University Marshal signals for the ringing of the deep-toned bell of The Memorial Church. To announce the beginning of the Commencement Exercises, on this day the five thousand pound bronze bell is rung by hand.

Meeting Called to Order

The University Marshal addresses the sheriff of Middlesex County, "Mr. Sheriff, pray give us order." The sheriff, resplendent in silk top hat, rises, moves solemnly to the front of the platform and, striking it three times with his silver-tipped staff, proclaims in a resonant voice, "The meeting will be in order." The Chaplain of the Day offers a prayer, and the University Marshal proceeds to introduce the three student speakers of Commencement Parts.

Commencement Parts

The giving of Commencement Parts began early in Harvard's history when candidates chosen by a faculty committee for their outstanding achievement spoke 'Parts' in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. This practice continues to the present, with selected students delivering the Parts at the opening of the ceremony. In the first, a College senior delivers a 'salutatory,' or address of greeting in Latin. A second senior gives an address in English, and a professional degree candidate then presents the third address, also in English. For all of the Parts, students are chosen in a University-wide competition.

Hearing the Latin in today's ceremony reminds us that not only the public Parts but the conferring of degrees was until 1896 conducted in that language. Harvard still uses the abbreviations for degrees in the Latin order rather than in the English, for example: A.B., *Artium Baccalaureus*; A.M., *Artium Magister*; and Ph.D., *Philosophiae Doctor*.

Conferring of Degrees

The University Marshal calls on the deans of the faculties, who present their candidates for degrees to the president and governing boards, beginning with the advanced degrees of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. The graduate schools are presented in the order of their date of institution. Each dean addresses the governing boards with the following salutation: "Madam

President, Fellows of Harvard College, Mr. or Madam President" (here referring to the president of the Board of Overseers) "and Members of the Board of Overseers," before presenting the candidates, who stand in place while the president confers their degrees. The president confers the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science last, in recognition of the central role of undergraduate education in the University. For this conferral the Class Committee, as representatives of their class, and the candidates for degrees *summa cum laude*, are summoned to "draw near" the platform to be greeted by the president, and the class is admitted to "the fellowship of educated men and women."

Although the formal conferring of degrees is validated by the president's pronouncement, the College did not until 1814 give actual diplomas. Before that, following the model of the English university, it was considered sufficient that the degrees were recorded when conferred, and for centuries the candidates were greeted by the president and given a symbolic book which they later had to return. Since most students wanted something tangible as evidence of their intellectual accomplishments, beginning in 1645 and continuing until 1814, they were permitted to prepare their own diplomas for signature by the president and fellows. For this they paid a fee.

Another practice the founders brought from England was that of insisting that candidates for the degree of Master of Arts would first have received the Bachelor of Arts. At Harvard, the first class to receive the Bachelor of Arts was the Class of 1642, and since most Bachelors of Arts at that time hoped to become ministers or teachers, they went on to study for the Master's degree. Residence was not mandatory, but the lapse of three years, the payment of a fee, and proof of independent study were required. Eventually the last became purely nominal, and it was lightly observed that the only thing necessary for a Master's degree was "five dollars, and three years out of jail." After 1872, the awarding of the Master of Arts in this perfunctory fashion, called "in course," came to an end.

The Master of Arts, up until 1830, could also be awarded *ad eundem gradum* — to the same degree — to those who had received a Master's degree or its equivalent at a recognized university other than Harvard. A parallel practice since 1942 is that of bestowing an honorary Master's degree on professors who hold no Harvard degree but who are appointed to tenured positions in any Harvard faculty. This degree, usually awarded at the first faculty meeting each year, admits the recipient to the Harvard family.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, candidates for degrees expected to be tested academically at Commencement itself, or to perform a 'public act.' Bachelor of Arts candidates prepared theses or topics on which they could be queried, and candidates for the Master of Arts submitted questions they were ready to defend. Titles of theses and questions were printed in advance to be handed out at Commencement, and visitors often took the opportunity of challenging the candidates on their knowledge. Today the term 'thesis' applies to the written results of research submitted by candidates for the Bachelor of Arts degree with honors in a field, or by candidates for doctoral degrees. Theses are examined and approved by appropriate members of the faculties.

Conferring of Honorary Degrees

When the president completes the conferring of earned degrees she confers the honorary degrees and gives the diplomas, with an appropriate citation for each honorand. The tradition of bestowing honorary degrees began in European universities in the Middle Ages. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were few special awards at Harvard other than those of the Master of Arts *ad eundem gradum* mentioned earlier, and it is questioned whether they were honorary or earned. The first true honorary award is generally considered to be the Master of Arts conferred in 1753 on Benjamin Franklin. Twenty-three years later, in April 1776, the governing boards of Harvard awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws to General George Washington in grateful appreciation for his role in forcing the British evacuation of Boston.

In certain circumstances, when a distinguished person whom the University wishes to honor comes to the Cambridge area, a special convocation is called in order to greet him and confer upon him an honorary degree. Examples of this is the degree awarded in 1784 to the Marquis de Lafayette; in 1817 to James Monroe; in 1833 to Andrew Jackson; in 1901 to Prince Henry of Prussia; in 1938 to the Crown Prince of Sweden, Oscar Fredrick Wilhelm Olaf Gustav Adolf; in 1943 to Winston Spencer Churchill; in 1998 to Nelson Mandela, president of South Africa; and in 2008 to Edward Moore Kennedy, United States senator.

Today the governing boards grant as honorary degrees the Master of Arts (A.M.) and Doctor of Laws (LL.D.), the Doctor of Science (S.D.), Doctor of Humane Letters (L.H.D.), Doctor of Literature (Litt.D.), Doctor of Music (Mus.D.), Doctor of Divinity (D.D.), and Doctor of Arts (Art.D.). Occasionally someone to whom an honorary degree is offered declines to accept. Grover Cleveland, twice president of the United States, is said to have refused an honorary Doctor of Laws at Harvard's two hundred-fiftieth anniversary in 1886, because he felt that he was not learned enough in law to deserve the degree.

Fifteen presidents of the United States have received honorary degrees from Harvard, some before they became president. They include George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Ulysses S. Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, Theodore Roosevelt, Howard Taft, Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy.

In 1955, Helen Keller was the first woman to be awarded an honorary degree, that of Doctor of Laws. Since then many women have been so honored.

The University makes an effort to keep the names of the honorands confidential until the actual Commencement ceremony, in the event that a specific candidate is unable to attend. Since 1900, honorary degrees have been given only if the candidate appears in person: rarely has an honorary degree been voted but not conferred, as in the 1945 Master of Arts degree awarded to World War II war correspondent Ernie Pyle, who was killed in action before Commencement. Others include the 1946 degrees for Generals George Marshall and Douglas MacArthur, who could not be present.

General Marshall came to receive his degree the following year, and in 1947 delivered the memorable speech in which he announced proposals that became the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of post-war Europe.

Commencement as 'Festival Rites'

In colonial times the ceremony, ending in the late afternoon, was followed by a Commencement dinner with speeches, singing, the consumption of wine and "plumb-cakes," and much revelry. Graduate students returning to receive the Master of Arts degree rejoined old classmates, and the evening was a time for festive class reunions. Before long Harvard's Commencement became a holiday in all of Cambridge, attracting not only alumni and parents, but everyone in the general population who had soon realized that Commencement provided a good party. Booths featuring food, drink, and the performance of short impromptu plays were set up on Cambridge Common, and it was a highly riotous time since life in New England in those days offered little in the way of public entertainment or fun. College and civic authorities, including a constable with six men, were hard-pressed to keep the festivities under control. To this day both the sheriff of Middlesex County and the sheriff of Suffolk County attend Commencement, the former opening and closing the ceremony as a pleasant reminder that he, as was the Marshal-General of the Colony before him, is invited to preserve order.

At the Harvard bicentennial in 1836, a formal alumni organization was proposed which in 1840 held its first meeting. By 1869 the traditional post-Commencement dinner celebration had combined with that of the Alumni Association, and moved to the middle of the day. Since 1905, a luncheon organized in the name of the Chief Marshal of the Alumni for Commencement, elected by the Twenty-fifth reunion class, is held to entertain the governing boards, honorary degree recipients, and distinguished guests. Other alumni/ae and class luncheon 'spreads' are located throughout the Yard. Following a tradition started in 1950, the new graduates return to their separate houses or graduate schools for luncheons with their families, where they receive their individual diplomas in smaller, more intimate ceremonies. After the luncheon recess everyone is invited to reconvene in the Tercentenary Theatre to participate in the Alumni Exercises.

Music

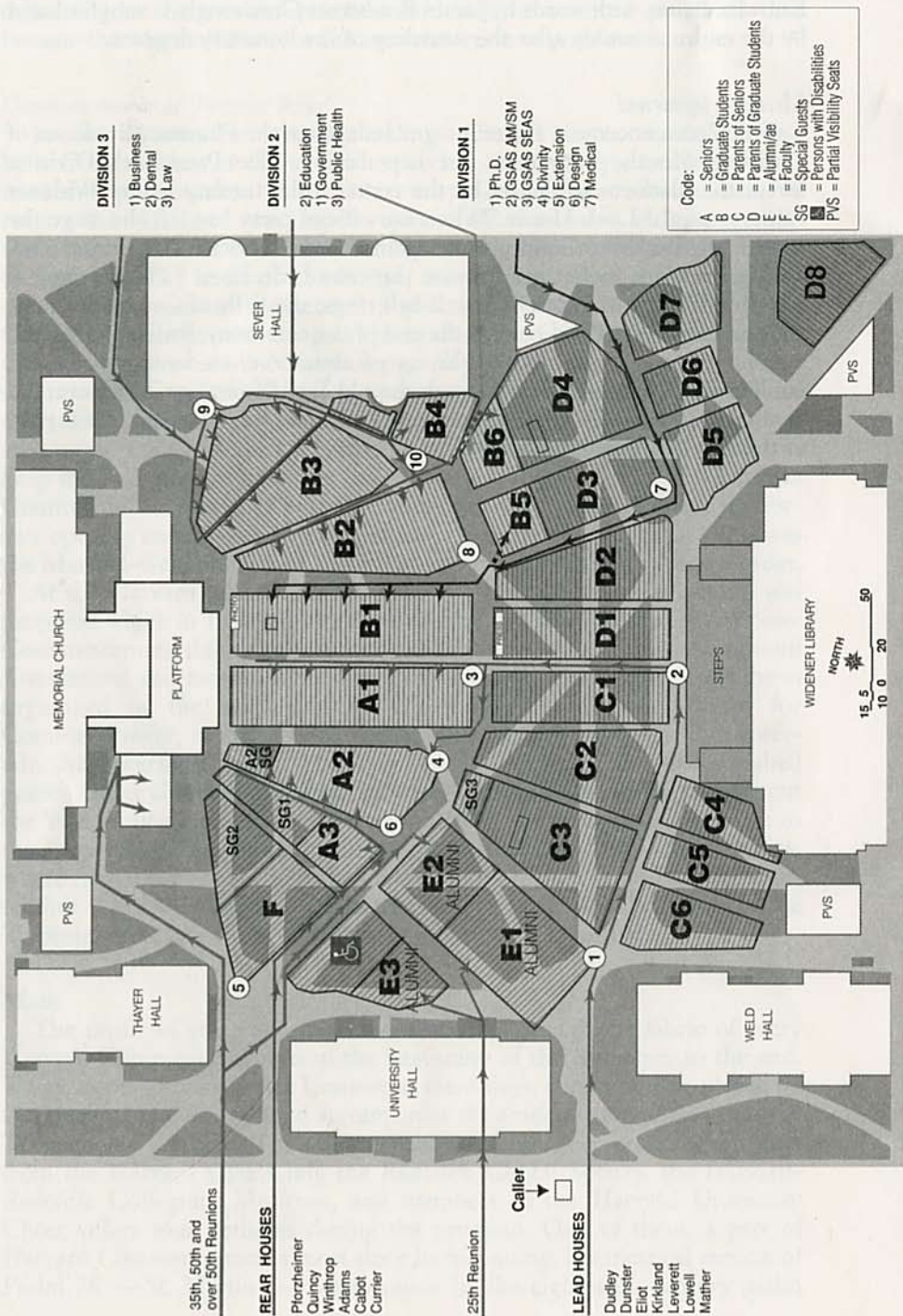
The music of voice and instrument weaves through the fabric of every Harvard Commencement from the beginning of the ceremony to the end. Today, as on so many other Commencement days, stirring music played by the Harvard University Band accompanies the academic procession into the Tercentenary Theatre. The Commencement Choir, composed of students from the Harvard Glee Club, the Radcliffe Choral Society, the Harvard-Radcliffe Collegium Musicum, and members of the Harvard University Choir, offers four anthems during the program. One of them, a part of Harvard Commencement almost since its beginning, is a metrical version of Psalm 78 — St. Martin's — set to music by the eighteenth century psalm

tune composer, William Tans'ur. The Harvard Hymn, composed by John Knowles Paine, with words by James Bradstreet Greenough, is sung in Latin by the entire assembly after the awarding of the honorary degrees.

Meeting Adjourned

The Commencement Exercises conclude when the Plummer Professor of Christian Morals pronounces the benediction. The President's Division leaves the platform to depart by the center aisle, turning left at Widener Library toward Loeb House. When the official party has left the stage the sheriff of Middlesex County once again stamps his staff three times and, raising his voice to be heard above the crowd, declares, "The meeting is adjourned!" The Memorial Church bell rings, the bells of Cambridge peal, and the University Band heralds the end of the ceremony. Striking a spirited march, it keeps step with the throng of alumni/ae, students and faculty, families and friends moving through the old Yard "from," as The Reverend Samuel Gilman, Class of 1811, wrote in *Fair Harvard*, "the Age that is past, to the Age that is waiting before."

2009 COMMENCEMENT SEATING TERCENTENARY THEATRE MORNING EXERCISES



"Aetates Hominis Harvardiani"

"The Ages of Man at
Harvard University"

by

Paul Thomas Mumma

June 4, 2009

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

"Aetates Hominis Harvardiani"

Praeses clarissima Faust, decani professoresque doctissimi, amici et parentes patientissimi, et denique condiscipuli carissimi, salvet 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 meminimus adhuc mathematicam et discipuli Studiorum Socialium sententias non invocato Foucauldio proponere poterant. Labor futilis 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 Iustitia 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 retextit. 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 asperissima 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. Iubilare 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 praebebit. 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!

Paul Thomas Mumma
June 4, 2009

"The Ages of Man at Harvard University"

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!

Paul Thomas Mumma
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