

Latin Oration (English translation follows)

Charles C. Bridge

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Praeses Faust; Decani Professoresque sapientissimi; familiae, amici, et hospites honoratissimi; et tandem condiscipuli carissimi...salvete omnes! Mihi voluptas magna atque honor altus est huius ceremoniae incipiendae in hoc theatro augusto Trecentensimo. Nec solum conventum ultimum classis nostrae, anni duomillensimi et undecimi, sed etiam conventum trecentensimum et sexagensimum huius universitatis hodie celebramus.

Hoc cum animadvertissem gaudebam, propter sensum singularem numeri trecenti et sexaginta. Ne mihi quidem, litterarum antiquarum discipulo, latere potest orbem omnem in partes trecentas et sexaginta esse divisam. Venit etiam in mentem orbis quidam praecipuus, qui vitas nostras hos quattuor annos rexit: Rota scilicet Fortunae Harvardiana. Temporibus antiquis, rota signum erat levis mobilisque naturae fatorum – circuitus vel unus cladem felicissimis afferre atque miseros extollere potest.

Nos Harvardiani quoque mutationes fati permultas passi sumus. Statim in anno primo repperimus custodem mensae Annenbergianae, Domnam, vel beneficium magnum vel iram inexpiabilem offerre posse, velut fortuna volebat (iram certe, si tesserarum nostrarum obliti eramus). Prope anni illius finem, circuitus alius Rotae Fortunae decrevit domum ad quam delegati eramus. Plurimi laetabantur, praesertim hi beatissimi qui in locum valde amoenum, Domum dico Dunsteriensem, sunt recepti.

Mox autem Rota Fortunae nos in ima desperationis saepe mersisse videbatur. Horae somno deditae numerique nostri in Chimica Organica inferius inferiusque ceciderunt. Universitas ipsa in malo rotae latere se invenit. Sicut mercatus corruerunt, ita corrui dotatio nostra, olim amplissima, et nova aetas severitatis aderat. Heu miserum indigne ientaculum calidum ademptum nobis! Haud aliter aleatores in spectaculo illo televisifico “Rota Fortunae” subito “Perditi” fiunt.

Hoc tamen anno Rota in cursu secundo rursus volvit, atque fortunae nostrae meliores factae sunt. Examinibus thesibusque perfectis, occupationibus (speremus!) inventis, et Yalensibus quater victis, advenimus ad tempus illud fortunatissimum – ver seniorum – et nunc hanc universitatem gratissimam deserere paramus. Iter rotundum in Rota Fortunae Harvardiana confecimus, et hodie ubi incepimus, iterum pervenimus, eodem studio eademque materia infinita quae in congregationem primam in hoc ipso theatro attulimus.

Ne praetereamus tamen dictum Appi Claudii Caeci: “Faber est suae quisque fortunae.” Etsi Fata impedimenta quaedam nobis coniecerunt, ea omnia superavimus adiutorio condiscipulorum familiarumque, doctrina professorum praeclarorum, et proprio labore constantiaque. Rota Fortunae per summa Fati imaque unumquemque nostrum ferre continuabit, sed semper recordamini commutationes quas in vita nos ipsi faciemus nostro labore, et studio, et incitatione esse decernendas. Progredimini igitur, collegae optimi, et efficite felicitatem vestram.

At nunc, amici, avete atque valet!

President Faust; wisest Deans and Professors; family, friends, and most honored guests; and finally, dearest classmates...welcome, all! It is my great pleasure and high honor to begin the proceedings today in this venerable Tercentenary Theatre. Not only do we celebrate today the final gathering of our class, of the year 2011, but also the 360th Commencement of this university.

I was glad when I noticed this, because of the unique significance of the number 360. Not even I, a student of classical literature, could be unaware that a circle is divided into 360 parts. I have in mind a very special kind of circle, which has guided our four years here: the Harvardian Wheel of Fortune. In antiquity, the wheel was a symbol of the capricious and cyclical nature of the fates – a single spin could bring disaster upon the most fortunate and uplift the luckless.

As Harvardians, we too have endured the twists and turns of fate. We discovered rather quickly in our first year that Domna, the guardian of Annenberg Hall, could bestow either great kindness or implacable wrath, according to fortune's whim (certainly wrath, if we had forgotten our ID cards). Near the end of that year, another spin of the wheel of fortune determined the house to which we had been assigned. Most were elated, above all those blessed few who were welcomed into that most wonderful of places, Dunster House.

Soon, however, it often seemed that the Wheel of Fortune had plunged us into the depths of despair. Our nightly hours of sleep and our grades in Orgo plummeted lower than ever. Our fair university also found itself on the wrong side of the wheel. Just as the markets collapsed, so did our endowment, once so mighty, and a new age of austerity was at hand. Alas, poor hot breakfast, undeservingly wrenched away from us! In just the same way, contestants on the "Wheel of Fortune" game show suddenly become "bankrupt."

This year, however, the Wheel has continued to roll on its circular course, and our fortunes have taken a turn for the better once again. With exams and theses completed, jobs (hopefully) found, and the Yalies vanquished for a fourth time, we have reached that most fortunate of times – senior spring – and now prepare to leave this dear university. We have finished our cyclical journey on the Harvardian Wheel of Fortune, and we arrive today exactly where we began, with the same excitement and limitless potential that we brought to our first freshman gathering in this very location.

Let us not pass over, however, the axiom of Appius Claudius the Blind: "Each man is the artisan of his own fortune." While the fates have thrown some obstacles in our way, we have overcome them with the support of classmates and family, with the wise instruction of our peerless faculty, and with our own hard work and persistence. The Wheel of Fortune will continue to carry each one of us through the highs and lows of fate, but always remember that the changes we will make in the world will be determined by our hard work, our energy, and our passion. Go forth, noble classmates, and make your own good fortune.

And now, friends, goodbye and farewell!