

The Sachem Oration: Part II, 50 years later
by Dutton Foster

Oh, for a muse of fire that would ascend
the brightest heaven of invention, classrooms for a stage,
ex-Deans to act, and Provosts to behold the swelling scene.

What a piece of work is a man,
Let alone a Dartmouth man!
Indeed 'twas men we thought ourselves to be!
How noble seemed our reason!
How infinitely ahead of the faculty our cunning!
In form and moving what loose hangers!
In cool white bucks how express and admirable!
In apprehension what young gods,
The paragons of animal house!
Holding a mirror up to nature,
Speaking our witty speech trippingly,
We were fellows of most infinite jest,
Flashing merriment most wont to set the Thayer tables on a roar,
Honeying and making love to lips we kissed we know not how oft,
And oh! The readiness was all....
Longing to post with such dexterity to coeducational sheets
For a consummation... devoutly to be wished...

And oh, our heavy-headed revel east and west

Made us the mockery of Yale and Harvard –

They cried, "Something is rotten in the state of New Hampshire!"

They called us drunkards and with swinish phrase

Disguised their envy of our noble substance,

Of our achievements, performed at height,

Of our virtues, pure as grace, as infinite as man may undergo –

Yay, Dartmouth! Wah hoo wah!

Remember thee?

Yea, from the table of our memory

We'll wipe away all trivial fond records,

All saws of books, all term papers, all deadlines past,

And thy spirit, thy eternal blazon all alone shall live

Unmixed with baser matter – yes, 'twas Heaven!

Must we remember? But five decades gone?

That it should come to this!

But fifty years? Heaven and earth! Must we remember?

And now that time of year we in ourselves behold

When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang

Upon those limbs which once raced toward goal lines

Or rowed with swift abandon under Ledyard Bridge

Or dashed across the Green, or twitched restlessly in Baker

As with dull eyes we importuned Orozco to guide us thru hour exams
Or bless our bibliography with pith and marrow.

And yet it was to be, or not to be,
Or not so much to be as *what* to be,
Or *who* to be, or *how* to be, or maybe later *where* to be,
Those were the questions...

But our dear souls seemed to be mistress of our choice,
And our native hue of resolution was by no means
Sicklied o'er with any pale cast of thought.
Our enterprises seemed of great pitch and moment,
We took fortune's buffets and rewards with equal thanks.
We hoped our blood and judgement to be so well commingled
That we were not a pipe for fortune's finger
To sound what stop she pleased.
There were more things in heaven and earth
Than were dreamt of in our philosophy courses...
What memories these, so wild and withered in their attire?
Is this a Turnbull I see before me? His promo' in my hand?
Speak, I charge you...

Double, double, toil and trouble,
Viet Nam to housing bubble,
Civil rights and LSD,
MLK and MTV,

Soup can art and R.Crum comics,
Watergate and Reaganomics,
Drones and spacecraft fly aloft,
Al Khaida and Microsoft,
Our Dean Seymour in his chair
Carried out in cold night air.
Nine Eleven, Katrina shock,
Afganistan and then Iraq
Enron, Madoff, Fannie Mae,
Hybrid cars, the NRA;
Gay rights, health care, bailout,
Fear that fellow citizens grow stout.
Double, double, toil and trouble,
Hopes for future amid the rubble.

Friends, classmates, countrymen, lend me your hearing aids;
We come to honor the past, not to bury it;
For we have heard the chimes at midnight
And done such things – such things that beggar memory.
Where be our golf scores now? Our sturdy legs
Which braved the slopes of snow with such dispatch
That th' gods themselves threw incense on our joy?
Where the deeds, from year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes
We have passed, hairbreadth escapes and moving accidents?

And what the history of our travels, through bush, through briar,
Through flood, through fire, girdling the earth in fifty years?

So once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more
From this day to the ending of the world
But we in it shall be remembered
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.
For he today that celebrates with me
Shall be my brother, be he ne'er so vile
This day shall gentle his condition,
And gentlemen in Cambridge now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here
And hold their manhood's cheap whiles any speaks
That learned with us upon the Dartmouth plain.
Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
Cry "Vox clamatis in deserto!"
There's life in us yet!