

Doggerel for a Great President
(ABABCC & 13 beat lines)
- For Drew Faust

Edward Everett was elected to Congress five times
And thrived in that political discord and unrest
But when asked what on earth could be much worse, he opined
That President of Harvard was like “a hornet’s nest.”
He lasted three years. President Holyoke, likewise said
He had been “mortified” and “humbled” ...from his death bed!

And when contrasting the joy of his Professorship
With his Presidency, President Felton would tell,
(In a petulant classicist’s confessionnal quip,
It was like the difference “between heaven and hell.”
Felton lasted for just two. So Drew, I’m here to tell,
After eleven years it seems like you’ve done right well!

...Veritas’s guardian has so much to manage.
Jonathan Edwards said that a child sent to Harvard
Was in severe danger of being “infected as
To his morals.” President Kirkland wasn't that hard:
“College life is a severe experiment upon
The strength of juvenile virtue.” But George Washington

The proud, the wise Virginian, was more kind than that:
“The habits of youth [at Harvard] are far less prone to
Dissipation and debauchery than they are at
The colleges south of it.” There’s no doubt as to whom
He might be referring and what that “south” might entail.
There is really no doubt he was referring to Yale.

...And to manage commencement is to run a circus.
The first commencement on the Common under the trees
Gathered exuberant lads with uncertain purpose.
(The cops were first called in the 1770s.)
Some graduate and never leave this devil may care.
They become permanent eccentrics in Harvard Square.

...And to maintain the standards for the honorary
Degree, sometimes at the expense of American
Presidents, is all part of our Harvard history.
Grover Cleveland just refused his. Some were shunned or banned.
One professor objected to McKinley's degree:
A "Master's in Corruption" is the best it could be.

And when Andrew Jackson got a degree one mourner
Demanded from Harvard for this its disgrace, penance
For "conferring [its] highest literary honors
On a barbarian who could not write a sentence
...And hardly could spell his own name." That angry man,
John Quincy Adams, was about preserving the brand!

...And you must preserve our historical modesty:
Remember April 28, 1865,
By the General Court's Legislative Authority
We were emancipated and cut free to survive
Miles and miles from Boston, we were, in case you forgot,
A puritan school, up a river, with no mascot.

...And Drew, for you, in your first years, the stock market crashed
And with it our endowment was cut almost in half
So there went Allston, scholarships and the FAS.
That's a hell of a beginning! Do you cry or laugh?
And then most recently now on top of all of this
A Federal tax that puts our new endowment at risk.

"Listening is always an essential part of what
I try to do." you said, "Tough... means pursuing your goals
...And being decent to people" And then armed with that,
Budgetary compromise with the twelve schools unfolds
And with it our first university-wide campaign
Becomes "One Harvard" and we begin to grow again.

And so starts the most ambitious fundraising drive in
Higher education's history and it meets and beats

Its mark by two years and gathers and keeps on giving
For Allston, and so house renovations will complete,
And, because without the arts we're a rudderless boat,
Our new Theatre, Dance and Media Program got your vote.

You listened and you helped reshape our governing boards,
Brought fresh diversity and nearly doubled their size.
You've appointed the deans for all of our schools. What's more
You listened to our history of slavery's ties,
Added a Muslim Chaplain, return ROTC
And pushed for a campus for all students equally.

...And you could be "tough" in D.C. as the advocate
For research and liberal arts in universities,
Both public and private, and for student immigrants,
The Dream Act and Eric Balderas, personally.
Holding your ground, pursuing your goals, balanced and equal,
By being "tough" but by being "decent to people."

...And you've required the same of us. As a professor
Of a culture, within a culture, changed by a war
In which the living resisted that change in their mirror
Our divided past affects us now even more
As races, creeds and the sexes are daily at risk
But you persisted and insisted we co-exist.

It is said hindsight is twenty-twenty in the end.
We started with comparisons to heaven and hell.
As you return to your "professorial heaven"
And bid your presidency, perhaps, a fond farewell,
If you had it to do all over, what would you do?
Don't think you could have done it much better. Thank you Drew.