

CLASS POEM

by David Rytman Slavitt

*Here, in this pleasant space, this easy time,
into the pride and pathos of this day,
I come before you, with my sober rime,
knowing you may not like what I must say;
I have no wish to anger or repel,
yet you may take ill how I wish you well.*

*I cannot pray for general success:
prayers have their own particular direction.
All I can give in such a public address
is all I have—a mere and private affection.
Who wishes more may have all he can earn.
Though this be my poem, the matter's your concern.*

*If you are studious, then you must be wise,
sparing of speech, easy and discreet.
A pompous learning is the worst fool's guise:
the braying serves to make the ass complete.
I would remind those of the scholarly clan
that learning is but the footnote to the man.*

*Those who would try the alchemy of art
must be most wary of this: should they succeed,
then of alchemic guilt within the heart—
or, should they fail, then of the gold they'll need.
Regardless of how well you invoke the muse,
good art cannot a wretched life excuse.*

*A camel may get through a needle's eye
when they build bigger needles; until then,
those who'd amass great fortunes before they die
must remember the words about heaven and wealthy men.*

*It is often forgotten by Madison Avenue grads
that Life is not a collection of New Yorker ads.*

*Know learning, art, and wealth are accidents—
things men of substance neither crave nor spurn,
peripheral to that central excellence
which if you do not know, you cannot learn.*

*So drink this down with your fine Mory's ale:
you are not saved for having gone to Yale.*

*All I have said, you all have heard before.
I warn you now: do not forget it later,
lest Yale, which is and can be something more,
fade to "Old Blue"—bulldog and alma mater.*

My valediction then: it's understood

Yale men do well—may some of you do good.