

Commencement Address Delivered at Haverford College

June 8, 1962

*Today a thinking person's thoughts
Are jeopardized by astronauts
Who spin in space,
By bombs whose thermonuclear heat
May presently make obsolete
The human race.*

*Today, forsaking planes and cars
They plan a vehicle to Mars
With men to man it,
While Mars, whose legacy is martial
And internationally impartial
Threatens our planet.*

*But still the set commencement speech
Will take peculiar pains to preach
The proper attitudes
With unsolicited advice
On making good and being nice—
In pious platitudes.*

*I happen to abhor the cult
Whose members annually insult
Their junior betters
With inspirational clichés,
Here and there interspersed praise
Of arts and letters.*

*A penny saved, a penny earned—
A lesson I have never learned—
Is fine—for banks.
Early to bed and early rise
May make you healthy, wealthy, wise;
For me-no thanks.*

*Despite Polonius, Hamlet's friend,
I never hesitate to lend
Nor blush to borrow.
And though the maxima says I should,
I never do today what could
Be done tomorrow.*

*If such old saws appeal to you
You may become a success fou
At thirty-seven
With well-bred kids in private school,
A tennis court, a swimming pool
In Wayne or Devon.*

*Yet he who swallows orthodoxy
Perforce must live his life by proxy
At others' choosing;
Self-mired in the accepted mold,
He never learns until too old
What he is losing.*

*Accumulating things material,
Keeping his image rich, imperial,
His life grinds by
In three-fourth toil and one-fourth leisure
While ulcers gnaw his little pleasure—
The price is high.*

*Nor is it only business folk
Who bow their shoulders to the yoke
That reads "Conform!"
Practitioners of the professions
Make—learnedly—the same concessions
To keep them warm.*

*So you who covet more degrees
Are not immune from this disease,
Which is contagious
To doctors, lawyers, priests and preachers,
To scientists and high-school teachers
And college sages.*

*To say all this is not to say
That you should goof your life away
On beer and skittles;
A regimen of fun and frolic
Will probably produce the colic—
For lack of victuals.*

*But he whom money holds as slave
Ought contemplate an ancient grave,
Thereon embossed
For him who 'neath the headstone slept:
"What I gave I have; what I spent I kept;
What I saved I lost."*

*Not, then, for riches from your labors
Nor to keep face with faceless neighbors,
Employ your talents
For work—but none the less for play.
Why make, and never roll in, hay?
The point is—balance.*

*An Old New England Calvinist
Undoubtedly would damn the twist
With all its twiches'
In horror, he would turn and fly
From radio, TV, hifi—
But he burned witches.*

*No Quakerly concern for quality
Forbids a measure of frivolity—
Which has its uses;
He who lives somber, grim, and solemn
As an obituary column
Dries up his juices.*

*The men who made our country free
Graduated to liberty.
You, their descendants,
Might likewise, at your graduation,
Proclaim your private Declaration
Of Independence.*

*In Jeffersonian pursuit
Of happiness, no disrepute
Inheres. Pursue it.
Squander, don't hoard for some hereafter
Your gifts of grace and love and laughter.
Good luck. Go to it.*

Fred Rodell