

UNDER WHICH LYRE

A Reactionary Tract for the Times

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We seldom reprint verse already published, but cheerfully make an exception for Mr. Auden's Phi Beta Kappa poem delivered last June at Harvard and printed originally in the Harvard Alumni Bulletin
— The Editors.

Ares at last has quit the field,
The bloodstains on the bushes yield
To seeping showers.
And in their convalescent state
The fractured towns associate
With summer flowers.

Encamped upon the college plain
Raw veterans already train
As freshman forces;
Instructors with sarcastic tongue
Shepherd the battle-weary young
Through basic courses.

Among bewildering appliances
For mastering the arts and sciences
They stroll or run,
And nerves that never flinched at slaughter
Are shot to pieces by the shorter
Poems of Donne.

Professors back from secret missions
Resume their proper eruditions,
Though some regret it;
They liked their dictaphones a lot,
They met some big wheels and do not
Let you forget it.

But Zeus' inscrutable decree
Permits the will to disagree
To be pandemic,
Ordains that vaudeville shall preach,
And every commencement speech
Be a polemic.

Let Ares doze, that other war
Is instantly declared once more
'Twixt those who follow
Precocious Hermes all the way
And those who without qualms obey
Pompous Apollo.

Brutal like all Olympic games,
Though fought with smiles and Christian
names

And less dramatic,
This dialectic strife between
The civil gods is just as mean,
And more fanatic.

What high immortals do in mirth
Is life and death on Middle Earth;
Their a-historic
Antipathy forever gripes
All ages and somatic types:
The sophomoric

Who face the future's darkest hints
With giggles or with prairie squints
As stout as Cortez,
And those who like myself turn pale
As we approach with ragged sail
The fattening forties.

The sons of Hermes love to play,
And only do their best when they
Are told they oughtn't;
Apollo's children never shrink
From boring jobs but have to think
Their work important.

Related by antithesis,
A compromise between them is
Impossible;
Respect perhaps, but friendship never:
Falstaff the fool confronts forever
The prig Prince Hal.

So, standing here, surrounded by
The eyes of Miltons and the high
Foreheads of Shaws,
A Hermes man, I call on you,
Phi-Beta-Kappa brethren, to
Defend his cause.

If he would leave the self alone,
 Apollo's welcome to the throne,
 Fasces and falcons;
 He loves to rule, has always done it:
 The earth would soon, did Hermes run it,
 Be like the Balkans.

But, jealous of our god of dreams,
 His common sense in secret schemes
 To rule the heart;
 Unable to invent the lyre,
 Creates with simulated fire
 Official art.

And when he occupies a college,
 Truth is replaced by Useful Knowledge;
 He pays particular
 Attention to Commercial Thought,
 Public Relations, Hygiene, Sport,
 In his curricula.

Athletic, extrovert and crude,
 For him, to work in solitude
 Is the offense,
 The goal a populous Nirvana:
 His shield bears this device: *Mens sana*
 Qui mal y pense.

Today his arms, we must confess,
 From Right to Left have met success,
 His banners wave
 From Yale to Princeton, and the news
 From Broadway to the Book Reviews
 Is very grave.

His radio Homers all day long
 In over-Whitmanated song
 That does not scan,
 With adjectives laid end to end,
 Extol the doughnut and commend
 The Common Man.

His too each homely lyric thing
 On sport or spousal love or spring
 Or dogs or dusters,
 Invented by some courthouse bard
 For recitation by the yard
 In filibusters.

To him ascend the prize orations
 And sets of fugal variations
 On some folk ballad,
 While dietitians sacrifice
 A glass of prune juice or a nice
 Marshmallow salad.

Charged with his compound of sensational
 Sex plus some undenominational
 Religious matter,
 Enormous novels by co-eds
 Rain down on our defenseless heads
 Till our teeth chatter.

In fake Hermetic uniforms
 Behind our battle-line, in swarms
 That keep alighting,
 His existentialists declare
 That they are in complete despair,
 Yet go on writing.

No matter. He shall be defied.
 We have the ladies on our side.
 What though his threat
 To organize us grow more critical?
 Zeus willing, we, the unpolitical
 Shall best him yet.

Lone scholars, sniping from the walls
 Of learned periodicals,
 Our facts defend,
 Our intellectual marines,
 Landing in Little Magazines,
 Capture a trend.

By night our student Underground
 At cocktail parties whisper round
 From ear to ear;
 Fat figures in the public eye
 Collapse next morning, ambushed by
 Some witty sneer.

In our morale must lie our strength:
 So, that we may behold at length
 Routed Apollo's
 Battalions melt away like fog,
 Keep well the Hermetic Decalogue,
 Which runs as follows:

Thou shalt not do as the dean pleases,
 Thou shalt not write thy doctor's thesis
 On education,
 Thou shalt not worship projects nor
 Shalt thou or thine bow down before
 Administration.

Thou shalt not answer questionnaires
 Or quizzes upon World Affairs,
 Nor with compliance
 Take any test. Thou shalt not sit
 With statisticians nor commit
 A social science.

Thou shalt not be on friendly terms
 With guys in advertising firms,
 Nor speak with such
 As read the Bible for its prose,
 Nor, above all, make love to those
 Who wash too much.

Thou shalt not live within thy means
 Nor on plain water and raw greens.
 If thou must choose
 Between the chances, choose the odd;
 Read the *New Yorker*; trust in God;
 And take short views.