systems are to understand, whatever risks we have to take to critique them. Hardest of all is finding the courage to do this—to make the effort and build something right—knowing that it might not last. That no building is earthquake proof.

This is the kind of courage Theodore Roethke describes in his poem “The Waking.” It’s a poem I turn to when I’m not feeling so brave. Roethke writes:

God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.
This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
As we go out today, on the many paths of our future, I have no advice, just these words, part prophecy, part prayer. This shaking keeps us steady. What falls away is always, and is near.

“Producers of Doubt”

From the afternoon address by Drew Faust
Universities serve as society’s critics and conscience. We are meant to be producers not just of knowledge but of doubt—of understanding rooted in skepticism and constant questioning, not in the unchallenged sway of accepted wisdom. More than perhaps any other institution in our society, universities are about the long view and about the critical perspectives that derive from not being owned exclusively by the present.

For nearly four centuries now, Harvard has looked beyond the immediately useful, relevant, and comfortable to cast current assumptions into the crucible of other places and other times. Universities are so often judged by their measurable utility—by their contributions to economic growth and competitiveness. We can make a powerful case with such arguments...But such contributions are only a part of what universities do and mean. We need universities for much less immediate and instrumental ends.

I worry that we as universities have not done all we could and should to ask the deep and unsettling questions necessary to the integrity of any society. As the world indulged in a bubble of false prosperity and materialism, should we—in our research, teaching, and writing—have done more to expose the patterns of risk and denial inherent in widespread economic and financial choices? Should our values have posed a firmer counterweight and challenge to excess and irresponsibility, to short-term thinking with long-term consequences?

The privilege of academic freedom carries the obligation to speak the truth even when it is difficult or unpopular. So in the end, it comes back to veritas—the commitment to use knowledge and research to penetrate delusion, cant, prejudice, self-interest. That truth may come in the form of scientific insights freed from ideology and politics. It may come in the interpretive work of humanists who show us how to read and think critically and offer us the perspective of other places, other tongues, and other times. It may come through the uniquely revisionary force of the arts—which enable us to understand ourselves and the world through changed eyes and ears. It may come through placing questions of ethics and responsibility at the core of our professional school programs....

The enhancement of our role as critics and doubters must come as well through the education of our undergraduates, where we seek, in the words of the new General Education program, “to unsettle presumptions, to defamiliarize the familiar...to disorient young people and to help

“If You Love Rats”

Stephen Bergman ’66, M.D. ’73, writing as Samuel Shem, published a novel, The House of God, in 1978—a biting comedy about the lives of medical interns, among whom it remains immensely popular. It has not always been so kindly received within the medical hierarchy. So it was a surprise that Bergman, who spent decades on the Medical School faculty, teaching psychiatrists-in-training at McLean Hospital, was named the school’s Class Day speaker. This excerpt is from his introduction.

In rough economic times like these, perhaps we should offer a prayer of thanksgiving—how thankful we are that you are not graduating from business school. Healthcare is a glorious profession. It is so broad that each of you will find a job. If you love people and hate rats and molecules, you can be a clinician. If you love rats and molecules and are not so hot with people, a researcher. If neither, and you like travel to exotic places to help millions of people, public health or politics. And if, like me, you are a Jewish doctor who can’t stand the sight of blood, there’s always psychiatry.