

An Eternal Villanelle  
For Michael's Feast

(For S. Michael Halloran, mentor, colleague, "father," friend,  
On the occasion of his retirement  
Delivered at RPI on May 2, 2003)

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?  
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.  
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.  
I do not think they will sing to me.

--T.S. Eliot, "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock

You can still hear the wind in West Hall sigh.  
This is the day of *our own* Michaelfest.  
We had to leave so you could say goodbye—

didn't: at conference dinners you preside,  
surrounded by students who are the best.  
You can still hear the wind in West Hall sigh.

Italian in Vegas: in neon light  
a Pope's head turns a table, comes to rest.  
He had to stop before we said goodbye.

You're the Pope of classical rhetori,  
whose one turn as "head" has gratefully past.  
We can still hear the wind in West Hall sigh.

We're all gathered again in this place. *Why?*  
Returned for that final Ur-graduate.  
You have to leave so we can say goodbye.

Blizzards of paper snowed before his eyes  
that peeked out over the banks on his desk.  
We can still hear the wind in West Hall sigh

as a voice behind the high piles of white  
softly says: "Oh, did I forget your test?"  
We had to leave so he could start to write

it. Ski on Ideal Forms down slopes of sky;  
go boat on symbolic seas. So Phaedrus  
left Lysias, kissed poetry goodbye

and Plato, Socrates before he died.  
On consubstantial seas the sun won't set.  
We won't leave so that you can say goodbye.

Our minds with colors of words are alive;  
Sprat said they would cheat and deceive the sense.  
We can still hear the wind in West Hall sigh.

Sitting in an Irish pub, ale held high,  
saint you ain't, rhetorical Dad of us.  
We have to leave so you can say goodbye.

Over bridges of sneezes your glance flies,  
surveys the students—confusions of glass:  
You can still hear the wind in West Hall sigh.

There are years of nostalgia in your eye—  
don't worry Greg: Dad still likes you the best.  
You'll have to leave so we can say goodbye.

You're retiring, but still wants to teach;  
Even Demosthenes had to catch breath.  
We can still hear the wind in West Hall sigh.  
You don't have to leave. We won't say goodbye...