Cambridge 02138
Fairy tales, Chekhov debuts, more on campus architecture

NOT DAZZLED
I sympathize with the shocked Athenians and disgusted Germans who visited the exhibit of ancient sculptures that had recently been colored, as depicted in “Dazzlers” (November-December 2007, page 32). Those tarted-up objects have been rendered loathsome—tastlessly. Sculptures that have retained the paint put on by their creators, such as the German religious sculptures of the late Middle Ages and the contemporary Indonesian wooden carvings, are immensely appealing. It is certainly likely that the Greeks and Romans who created those statues had the talent and taste to paint them in a way that would appeal to us as much or more than their unpainted ones do.

Barbara R. Bergmann, Ph.D. ’58
Washington, D.C.

AUDEN, AGING
I was delighted to see Adam Kirsch’s article on W.H. Auden’s “Under Which Lyre” (“A Poet’s Warning,” November-December 2007, page 23), but was surprised that he misinterprets what seems to me the clear sense of one spot in the poem. He writes of the line “the fattening forties” as follows: “The comedy of the poem, and its prescience, lies in Auden’s description of Apollo, the presiding spirit of what he calls ‘the fattening forties.’”

But the phrase appears in this context:

As we approach with raggeding sail
And those who like myself turn pale
With prairie squints/As stout as Cortez”;

now he makes fun of himself.

Wayne D. Shirley ’57
Durham, N.H.

MYTHS OF CHILDHOOD REVISITED
As the husband of an alumna (Roselyn Juditham Pill, A.M. ’49), I am privileged to read your excellent magazine. I particularly appreciated “The Horror and the Beauty” (November-December 2007, page 36), both for its specific content and for stimulating me to remember some of my much-loved childhood reading. While I have little memory of reading or hearing the sort of fairy tales recounted in the article, I have very strong and exciting memories of the King Arthur stories, the Robin Hood stories, and the legends of the Scandinavian gods. I am delighted that Maria Tatar persisted in her efforts to study and analyze the myths of childhood, and I thank Craig Lambert for bringing her work to your pages.

Robert F. Steinhardt
Springfield, N.J.
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CHEKHOV CHECK-UP
The Russian theatre history conveyed by Craig Lambert (“The Actor Explores,” November–December 2007, page 19) is off the beam. Only two, not three, of Chekhov’s four major plays received their “world premieres” at the Moscow Art Theatre: Three Sisters (1901) and The Cherry Orchard (1904). The Seagull was first staged at the St. Petersburg Alexandra Theatre in 1896. As for Uncle Vanya, it was first produced by the Rostov-on-Don Dramatic Society in 1897. Nor could Nemirovich-Danchenko have founded the Art Theatre school in 1943: he died in April of that year, while the theatre’s staff and leaders were scattered, due to evacuations during the Nazi onslaught on Moscow. The studio-school was indeed founded that year, but in his name and memory, not by him.

ROTC
It was a nice touch to mention the ROTC color guard’s participation in President Faust’s installation ceremony (November–December 2007, page 57). I hope it is not lost on the University community and alumni that despite the debarment of ROTC from Harvard, these excellent young Americans did their duty to Harvard on [this occasion]. I hope that I am able to receive my January–February [and subsequent] editions of Harvard Magazine during my upcoming return engagement in Iraq. I pray that the Harvard community enjoys yet another delightful spring in Cambridge, basking in the warm glow of self-righteousness of a University policy that works to deny a handful of students the opportunity to explore the fulfillment of duty and the kinship of service to our nation, in a misguided effort to promote equality.

Lt. Col. Robert Bracknell, LL.M. ’06
U.S. Marine Corps

BIRDING STILL
I enjoyed the biography of ornithologist William Brewster (Vita, November–December 2007, page 42), although a statement about the Nuttall Ornithological Club, which he helped found, is misleading: “The club flourished for years, and issued regular bulletins.” Indeed, the club still flourishes to this day, still regularly publishes ornithological works, and still meets monthly at Harvard, as its website attests [http://nuttallclub.org]. I trust that it also still encourages undergraduates to devote their lives to the study of birds, such as I have done.

Jack P. Hailman ’58
Professor emeritus of zoology
University of Wisconsin–Madison
Jupiter, Fla.

With great thanks, the editors wish to recognize three contributors to Harvard Magazine during 2007, awarding each $1,000 for their distinguished service to readers.

The Smith-Weld Prize—in the memories of A. Calvert Smith ’14, formerly secretary to Harvard’s Governing Boards and executive assistant to President James Bryant Conant, and Philip S. Weld ’36, former president of the magazine—celebrates thought-provoking journalism about the University. Joan Wickersham’s perceptive September–October cover story, “Bricks and Politics,” on the design of campus buildings in Harvard’s urban setting, is especially timely at the dawn of new construction in Allston.

Photographer Robert Adam Mayer wonderfully portrayed columnist and critic Frank Rich in his New York City milieu for the March-April cover article. We have been pleased to feature his lively, creative work on several previous occasions as well.

Illustrator Dan Page has demonstrated uncommon skill and style in bringing memorably to life complex and abstract ideas, as he did for the July-August feature, “Debtor Nation,” on America’s finances and economy—an unusually challenging assignment.

Exemplary Contributors

Joan Wickersham

Robert Adam Mayer

Dan Page

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ARCHITECTURE ENCORE

Joan Wickersham’s “Bricks and Politics” (September-October, page 50) provides a fascinating glimpse into the inner workings of how Harvard’s architectural decisions are made, which is critically important given the development of Allston. Unfortunately for Harvard, it seems that the cacophony of voices that have shaped recent construction have resulted in a series of discordant buildings (including One Western Avenue) that can politely be called unattractive. But it shouldn’t be that hard to agree on at least some of the elements of an attractive building: the use of stone over concrete, detailed masonry, stained and leaded glass, woodwork, and buildings consistent in size with the community. Perhaps Harvard should consider Princeton’s recently constructed Whitman College as a reasonable example. Or for true inspiration, a nice visit to Cambridge, England, wouldn’t hurt.

Jay Bikoff, Ph.D. ’07
Cambridge

Joan Wickersham uses as a measure of architectural excellence at Harvard and other area colleges the Harleston Parker Medal awarded annually by the Boston Society of Architects, and ponders why Harvard, by this measure, hasn’t fared better. Since she evaluates only the years 2000 and later, the Carpenter Center does not come up. The selection of Le Corbusier as the architect for the center was one of the most significant in Harvard’s history and one of the most controversial: In 1963 I chaired the Harleston Parker Committee which chose the Carpenter Center for the award...only to have our selection overturned by the BSA membership voting in its annual meeting, the first time in the medal’s long history that that had happened. The following year a new committee again selected the Carpenter Center for the award. And this time it passed...a sort of redemption for everyone.

Walter S. Pierce, F.A.I.A.
Lexington, Mass.
PROFESSORS' POLITICS ENCORE

I can’t let Park Weaver Jr.’s sly insinuation (Letters, November-December 2007, page 7) that “Tenured professors... are just extremely jealous of the harder-working citizen...” stand. The tenured professors I know are harder-working than anybody else, working essentially all the time to find and codify knowledge while teaching their students. Weaver misunderstands higher education if he thinks that tenured professors on the whole aren’t extremely hardworking.

Jay M. Pasachoff ’63, Ph.D. ’69
Field Memorial professor of astronomy
Director, Hopkins Observatory
Williams College
Williamstown, Mass.

It makes a distinctly bad impression if the only letters regarding the Harvard Portrait of Howard Gardner (September-October 2007, page 61; letters, November-December, pages 6-7) represent the antediluvian attitude of the most naive free-enterprise ideology. If no one has the right to tell economic freeloaders how much money they can make, it must be that all anti-monopoly laws and all taxes on income are absolutely immoral. Without some constraints, which can be exercised only by government, private enterprise will achieve its natural goal of universal monopoly. Besides, there is an elementary moral argument against those super-confidently “self-made men,” most of whom made their pile by not giving much of a share to those who did their work and made them their money.

Arnold Simmel ’47
New York City

THANK YOU, TOO

Publisher’s note: A list of magazine donors published in the last issue inadvertently omitted Arthur D. Levin ’54, M.B.A. ’60, who generously donated $500 in 2007. Our apologies—and our sincere thanks.