

manities are presently following at Harvard and its peer institutions. He focused in particular on what he felt to be a growing misunderstanding between universities and the nonacademic community—typified, he said, by an apparently dismissive *New York Times* obituary of Jacques Derrida that had ruffled the feathers of scholars across the country. “I’m one of those people who reads the paper every morning and feels as though I’m living in the Dark Ages,” Menand explained, referring to the state of current events. “I am one of those who thinks that the contribution humanists can make to culture...has never been more important.”

Menand diagnosed six points of weakness in the current academic role of the humanities. Many prominent scholars who waged intellectual battles against traditionalists in their youth, he said, currently suffer from a “Greatest Generation syndrome”: complacency at the prospect of continued change. This problem, he suggested, is more broadly related to “Turk death” in the humanities. “A critical field requires young Turks,” Menand said, “and it’s often difficult to see them on the horizon.” He also mentioned “paradigm fatigue”—a sense that many academics have become one-trick ponies in their work—as a blow to scholars’ appeal both inside and outside the university.

But Menand centered his discussion on what he called “reproductive issues”: the system of graduate education that supports fledgling scholars. Finishing a humanities doctorate at American universities takes an average of eight and a half years, he said, and about half the enrolled students leave their programs before graduating. “It’s not always the weaker half that drops out,” Menand explained. The walls between universities and the public have only grown higher as a result, he said, leading to a popular antipathy toward academic pursuits. Meanwhile, students who finish their dissertations often find themselves poorly equipped to enter the shrinking academic job market, where they will probably have to teach introductory survey courses along sharply delineated disciplinary lines.

Menand added that scholars falsely saw themselves as perpetually “fighting the last [culture] war.” In fact, he said, higher

## Accomplished Contributors

The editors take great pleasure in recognizing three contributors to *Harvard Magazine* during the past year, awarding each \$1,000 for their distinguished service to readers.

The McCord Writing Prize, named for David T.W. McCord ’21, A.M. ’22, L.H.D. ’56, recalls the lively prose and verse he wrote at this magazine and at the Harvard College Fund. This year’s prize honors contributing editor Adam Kirsch ’97, book critic of the *New York Sun* and author of the forthcoming book *The Wounded Surgeon*, a study of modern American poetry, for “The Brahmin Rebel” (May-June) and “The Hack as Genius” (November-December). Kirsch’s fluidly crafted essay-reports, on Robert Lowell and Dr. Samuel Johnson, respectively, set a very high standard for absorbing, informative, and engaging assessments of these towering figures in American and English letters.



COURTESY SERGE BLOCH

Serge Bloch

Illustrator Serge Bloch created a memorably simple and humorous cover and accompanying art for the March-April feature on exercise. It takes great discipline and vision to achieve such clarity and wit; we look forward to presenting more of Bloch’s work in future issues.

It seems inescapable, and entirely fitting, that we again cite contributing editor Jim Harrison for his photography for the magazine. As he has done so often in the past, Harrison created compelling portraits for the May-June feature on diet and nutrition, and completed countless other assignments with a fresh and vivid eye. He does so again in this issue, in the feature on nanoscience (see page 50).



COURTESY ADAM KIRSCH

Adam Kirsch



JENNIFER BEAUMONT

Jim Harrison

education still suffers collectively from “conjunctivitis”—“the allergy to combining disciplines.” He suggested that the illness might be cured if universities offered courses that taught skills from one discipline helpful to budding scholars in another, such as history courses designed specially for literature students.

Yet during the day, several faculty members complained about already finding themselves forced across disciplinary boundaries they didn’t want to cross. At a pre-lunch panel, professor of the practice of Arabic William Granara chastised the University for forcing his field back into the mold of “area studies”—scholarship based on geographic region rather than on discipline—and thereby making scholars teach an unmanageable range of material, with the result of fusing several cultures and literatures unreasonably. Professor of Romance languages and literatures Brad Epps, a Spanish literature scholar, said that he sometimes found himself teaching history, too, because Harvard currently has no Spanish historian on its senior faculty. “The good thing is that it pulls me out of this reified understanding of litera-

ture,” he said, “but it certainly exhausts the limited resources of a few professors.”

Garber concurred. “We have neither enough faculty members nor enough buildings,” she said during her discussion with Menand. “I worry very much that the humanities asks for too little.” She proposed the possibility of a “big humanities” to rival the “big science” that has become a buzzword of Harvard’s academic redevelopment. “What does ‘big humanities’ produce? It produces people. It produces thought,” she said. “I often say to scientists, ‘We are what you save the world for.’”

After the conference, she described her notion of a “big humanities” as a series of programs that are “well funded and integrated, with significant space, working collectively among the humanities and arts.” And Garber, who also heads the department of visual and environmental studies, stressed the importance of maintaining a vibrant exchange between the academic humanities and the creative arts.

She said that her concept also encompassed scholarly publishing—a topic that several speakers mentioned in panicked tones during the conference. Many profes-