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Celestial Cities Meet Vanity-Fair

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They presently saw a town before them, and the name of the town is Vanity; and at the town there is a fair kept called Vanity-Fair. . . . The way to the Celestial City is through this town. . . . Now, I saw that there stood. . . a chariot and a couple of horses, waiting for Faithful, who. . . was taken up into it, and straight-way carried up through the clouds, with sound of trumpet, the nearest way to the Celestial Gate.

—John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*

American universities, filling the role of celestial cities, i.e., goals for the pilgrim students, often make an official presentation of themselves across a major street to the non-campus Vanity-Fair where students will be buying books, clothing, stationery, CDs, fast food, and entertainment. Across these streets, avenues, or boulevards many universities announce: this is where our campuses begin, judge our character by the way we build our walls and set our buildings behind them.

The set of twelve photographs in this issue illustrates how six universities manage doing this (or avoid doing it). The pictures are in most instances meant to provide recognizable views to either side of the streets: of Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge where Harvard makes its presentation, of Church Street in New Haven where Yale does so, of Broadway in New York where Columbia put up its wall.

On page 2 and on the cover two images of Harvard begin the set. On its side of Mass Ave. Harvard presents packed energy in a view between Wadsworth and Wigglesworth to Boylston and Weld with a hint of University Hall beyond (1), whereas the city presents on the other side the confident conservatism of Leavitt and Pierce's ancient (1880s) promise of GIFTS! TOBACCO! (the SMOKING kind) and GAMES! next door to J. August below the Porcellian Club (2). Even the Serendipity store to the left of Leavitt & Pierce, though relatively new, hints at a literary past and ironically reminds us of an urgent current need, the latter probably unconsciously. Its name comes by way of Horace Walpole from an early name of Sri Lanka, in a word "Serendip."

Brown University and New York University play the game differently. Brown seems resolved to avoid even meeting the city at Thayer Street. A new Life Sciences Building, now under construction, will not reach it—though the nondescript Brown Office Building, where students buy books, does. Farther north, the New Pembroke dorms, which were designed to meet the street and come to terms with it, turn out to have had their passageway to Thayer Street bricked up (3).

New York University in meeting its town has entered something like a space-warp. Where is the campus? Wherever it is, its buildings, some of which reach 16th Street to the north while others reach Houston Street to the south or cross Third Avenue to the east, have mostly surrounded Washington Square as though, if Harvard can have a "Yard" with a Widener, NYU too must have one, sort of, with its Bobst Library facing it (4). Just east of this, the university and the city face each other at Broadway. There the city does its best to offer Vanity-Fair; but the university, instead of offering any Celestial Gate, presents something more like the rumps of several elephants (in this instance that of the Meyer Hall of Physics) (5).

Columbia presents a wall of buildings, in this example formed by Journalism and Furnald, its bottom actually battered (6). Though access to the campus is open, it is about to be partly restricted by bollards that are now under construction. This clear-cut campus sees itself as separate but more or less equal to the city's main boulevard, Broadway (7).

Princeton (the town) has not the pressures of a city, and there the university presents, on the other side of a fence (not a wall), dignified parkland leading to Nassau Hall looking more aloof than energetic (8). On the town's side the presentation is of an opportunity for some upscale suburban shopping (9).

Yale offers monumentality so confident, in the form of the Old Art Gallery, High Street Bridge, and Street Hall, that it does without a special wall (10). The town on the other side of the street offers the full gamut of pleasures, from a traditional greasy breakfast (the Copper Kitchen) to a popular vegetarian lunch (Claire's Corner Copia) (11).







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