States of the Union
LETTER FROM CAMBRIDGE
BY RICHARD J. MARGOLIS

It's been a long, difficult summer for us Cambridgians, what with the heat and humidity, the on-again-off-again Red Sox, and the good old MBTA tearing up Harvard Square for a new subway station that was supposed to have been finished last year but now, like everything else in the Western world, is being promised for 1984. On top of it all, the Prep Shop over on Church Street—"a fixture in the lives of preparatory school boys for nearly a quarter of a century," according to the Boston *Globe*—is going out of business, a victim of soaring rents and, if our eyes do not deceive us, of sinking sartorial standards among the preppies. Instead of the once obligatory button-down shirt, what one mainly sees around "the Square" these days are tattered T-shirts bearing the remarkable news that "God is dead," or "I don't believe in miracles—I depend on them."

Diane and I settled in here on the hottest day in July, she with a most happy fellowship from Harvard, I toting a scarred Royal from Norwalk, Connecticut. As near as I can tell, Diane's chief responsibility this year will be to think hard in a sociological manner, and she has been provided with a small, monastic-like office for her meditations. She has also been given an "Officer of Harvard" card, which is not as good as American Express but is useful all the same for gaining admission to tennis courts, swimming pools and libraries. What *I* got was a "Spouse Privileges" card, a derivative form of plastic that I keep sequestered in my billfold. Role reversal comes hard at Harvard.

Still, I was able to spend a recent afternoon wandering around the basement of Pusey Library, browsing among the eternal stacks, ducking under huge, gurgling pipes and—in hopes of some day finding my way out of there—following mysterious red lines painted on the floors and walls, as in New York's 42nd Street shuttle. "Basement" is not exactly the *mot juste* for Pusey, since the entire building is buried beneath Harvard Yard. (Yes, you can find *Notes from the Underground* there, not to mention *Darkness at Noon.*) For Nathan Marsh Pusey, Harvard's president from 1953 through 1971, this tomb of tomes must have seemed a dubious honor, something like spouse privileges.

You can enter Pusey directly from the Yard through a single cellar door, but the easier access is via tunnels emanating from the Widener Memorial Library next door. Widener is the mother ship of Harvard's considerable library fleet —a tasteless metaphor, I fear, for the building was given to Harvard in memory of Harry Elkins Widener, a Cambridge bibliophile who died on April 15, 1912, aboard the Titanic. In making her gift, Widener's mother imposed the condition that henceforth all Harvard students would be required to pass a swimming proficiency test before graduating. Talk about blaming the victim!

We are renting an apartment off Trowbridge, a street that Octavio Paz, the Mexican poet-philosopher who taught for a time at Harvard, once frequented and even apostrophized in a characteristically airy poem. In "Trowbridge Street," it appears to be late autumn. The poet gazes out a window of his apartment, whence he sees

Nobody on the streets
parked cars
Still no snow
but wind....

"I am in a room abandoned by language," he says—a serious complaint from a man of letters—and goes on to note that

Doors open and close by themselves
Air
enters and leaves our house
Air
talks to itself talking to you
Air
nameless in the endless corridor....

As a Trowbridger, I know what he means. You leave the windows open to catch a breeze, and suddenly all the

doors slam shut. To a writer that's distracting. As Paz observes later in the poem, "The lightest sounds build/ quick sculptures. . . ."

Pace Paz, the poetry that saturates the air around here is mostly the old-fashioned kind suggested by the lambent (and iambic) shades of Emerson, Lowell and Longfellow. It is Emerson who was alleged in his youth to have seen "Greek islands floating over Harvard Square," a vision surely more attainable back then, before the MBTA hit town. In today's hubbub of pneumatic drills, trucks and motorcycles, the transcendental voice has little chance to get a word in edgewise.

A plaque on Brattle Street marks the spot where once the village smithy stood under the spreading chestnut tree. One can sample quiche or a pastry at the small outdoor cafe that now flourishes atop old chestnuts and brood over life's lost anvils and vanished virtues:

His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.

The cafe accepts both Visa and Master Charge.

The building we live in, a squarish brick structure with plenty of Ivy League cover, went up in 1899, the work of a local architect named Edmund March Wheelwright. He was better known for his bridges than for his buildings (the Longfellow bridge, spanning the Charles, is one of his), but in Brahmin circles he may have been *best* known for being a descendant of John Wheelwright, the sometimes gutsy clergyman who in 1636 became embroiled in an "Antinomian controversy." The tale is as old as heresy, and as fresh.

The Antinomians in those days were led by Anne Hutchinson, a woman who looked the whole world in the face, for she owed not any man. She and her followers held that in the pursuit of salvation it was not necessary to practice prescribed ritual or to observe scriptural law; what really mattered was faith. If Anne Hutchinson's ghost were seen on Harvard Square today, its apron would bear the inscription, "I believe. Therefore, I am saved."

In any case, the Puritans of Massachusetts brought her to trial, convicted her of "Traducing the ministers and their ministry" and banished her from the colony. Wheelwright, who had bravely defended Hutchinson at the trial, also was exiled. And there the matter stood for six years, at which time poor Wheelwright recanted and was allowed to return to the fold—a repentant no longer banned in Boston. His life thus anticipated by a couple of centuries at least two of Emerson's more sententious mottos: "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist," and "To be great is to be misunderstood." (In 1643, near Pelham Bay, New York, Anne Hutchinson and her family were killed in an Indian raid.)

Banning and banishment are still widely accepted practices around here. Boston authorities recently seized several copies of *Caligula,* that Roman orgy on celluloid, and tried to get a court order prohibiting the film's use. But the judge ruled that Bostonians have a right to see lousy movies.

EVEN THE unhappy Boston Red Sox cannot resist throwing an occasional spitball at the First Amendment. A few weeks ago, they banned *Herald American* sportswriter George Kimball from setting foot in the clubhouse, because of "the totally negative tone of what he has written." The newspaper struck back by reprinting Kimball's offending column, a silly, innocuous piece that hardly deserved to be published once. The same paper has been running a daily feature at the top of Page One that has readers "from all walks of life" earnestly explaining what they would do "If I Owned the Red Sox. . . ." Most of these readers want to fire the manager, a form of banishment practiced in more places than Boston. (If the Red Sox happened to own a newspaper instead of a baseball team, they might be forgiven for inviting readers to expatiate on measures they'd take to improve the *Herald American,* a poor excuse even for a Hearst publication and certainly a losing proposition.)

The Red Sox this year may be misunderstood but they are far from great—just talented, erratic and, like all Red Sox teams, a little crazy. By early August they had slipped in their seven-team division from second to sixth place, only a few embarrassing points ahead of the feeblest team in the league, the Toronto Blue Jays. Then, for reasons no one could explain, they started doing everything right, and as of this post-Labor Day writing have struggled back to within five games of the leader. Whoso would be a champion must be a nonconformist, and pretty strong up the middle to boot.

The Fenway Park fans, meanwhile, remain the least lovable in the majors. When they are not swilling beer they are snarling at the players—not the other team's players, *their* players. One finds no Antinomians at Fenway. The slightest miscue or setback—a bobbled ball, a bunt that goes awry—signals an erosion of faith as well as loud recriminations. On a night Diane and I were there, they even booed the National Anthem, possibly because it originated in that hateful city to the south, Baltimore.

Boston's population is about 20 per cent black, but the population at Fenway is almost exclusively white—a tribute to the local white citizens' demonstrated ability to hang on to all preferred seats, whether box or catbird. The teams' racial makeup is about as badly skewed as the spectators', though the most racist of fans concede that this has been "counterproductive." The other day my Italian barber told me with admirable candor, "What the Red Sox need is more niggers."

Well, as Jeremiah observed, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." The wind that blows across Trowbridge finds my lair, grazes the hair on my head, excites the page in my typewriter. With Paz I marvel at the Cambridge air, a mysterious force compounded of history and heresy, making "Doors open and close by themselves," fluttering my sails, stirring my Sargasso soul.