AT TWO SWORDS’ LENGTH
by Craig Hollander & Caleb Vognsen

FIZZLED OUT
by Hector Chavez

CONVERSATION
WITH DAVID MCKENNA
CONTENTS

Columns
127 Introduction
128 Campus Characters
131 Blue J
132 Curio Columbiana
133 Book Review
134 Measure for Measure
138 Conversation
143 Told Between Puffs
144 Digitalia
146 Booze Humanities
147 Lecture Notes
150 Culinary Humanities
151 Campus Gossip

Features
136 Fizzled Out
141 Fiction
148 At Two Swords’ Length
149 Advice for the Ambitious

Cover by Michael Mallow

Typographical Note
The text of The Blue and White is set in Bodoni Old Face, which was revived by Günter Gerhard Lange based on original designs by Giambattista Bodoni of Parma (active 1765–1813). The display faces are Weiss and Cantoria.
Reading the newspaper just keeps getting harder, it seems. Afghanistan. Madrid. Haiti. Gaza. Iraq. With struggle and sorrow rolling off the presses and streaming down the wires, it’s a miracle that anyone gets out of bed at all. But the Columbian behemoth lumbers forward, insensibly, in her springtime rhythms. The seniors will take the swim test, hung over, at the last possible second, and professors will presciently base their finals on the one chapter we didn’t read. You can set your watch by the replanting of South Lawn, and rest assured that this year, too, inebriated Commencement celebrants will trample it.

Perhaps that’s as it should be (except for the resodding, which is just plain wasteful), but we are not entirely content. The Blue and White has seen classmates braving both blustery days and blowhard companions to debate issues dear, and it is in celebration of intelligent contretemps that we humbly present our Conflict Issue.

In case you’re in need of something new to go on about, Blue J is still squawking, this time about the deplorable condition of Low Plaza. Pontius Palate is up in arms about what may go down our throats. Looking for more familiar themes? Check out Craig Hollander and Caleb Vognsen’s fair and balanced treatment of Columbia’s expansion plans in “At Two Swords’ Length.” Avi Zenilman, our investigative ingénue, has compiled his notes on the Columbia College Student Council election in “Advice for the Ambitious.” It’s an essential read for those plotting regime change under the Harrison hegemony.

King Solomon, who saw a fair patch of trouble himself, said there is a time to keep silence and a time to speak; Alma’s presided over both this semester. Voiceless protest is commendable, but The Blue and White prefers to have the last word (or several), and we hope you’ll enjoy these.
Ganesh Betanabhatla

Before he turns twenty, Ganesh Betanabhatla (C’06) will have held meetings with Karl Rove, written speeches for Senator Chuck Hagel, and appeared on MTV’s *Rock the Vote*. And this summer, Ganesh will serve as the Area Deputy Director for the Republican National Convention, a position which gives him a staff of over a hundred people, and perhaps more political clout than any teenager in the country. Holding meetings with corporate heads, millionaire lobbyists, and Republican officials (Rove and Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie included) in order to create the next Republican Party platform will be a young man who failed seven times to win election to his high school student council.

However, this is somewhat understandable given that Ganesh’s speaking style — polite, eloquent, and filled with conviction but without a trace of bombast — is more appropriate for an interview with Jim Lehrer than for winning the votes of vacuous pop-culture teens. Ganesh maintains that words were never his strength until he joined the high school debate team, but after winning the national championship in extemporaneous speaking his senior year, his claim is at least a little suspect.

Ganesh is rapidly emerging as a major leader in the grassroots Republican movement that has spread across the country. “I am one of a new brand of people,” declares the president of Columbia’s Bush reelection campaign, “who possess what many consider in college to be cynicism, but what I consider to be a pragmatic dose of compassionate conservatism.” If the scowling Dick Cheney represents an unbearable form of Republicanism, Ganesh, often beaming a smile, represents a digestible and mellifluous one. Originally a moderate Democrat, Ganesh turned towards the Republican Party when he arrived on Columbia’s campus and judged the liberals to be out of touch with reality. His story of feeling disillusioned with the pervading campus politics, and fighting back, is a story to be told this summer on an episode of MTV’s *Rock the Vote*.

Now heading up the College Republicans, Ganesh has significantly expanded its role on campus and greatly increased its membership. He has also secured Columbia as the site of the Republican National Youth Summit. Last summer, while working for Senator Chuck Hagel of his home state of Nebraska, he drew up the framework for a congressional bill to consolidate Medicare and Medicaid. As for his career, nothing but the presidency seems beyond Ganesh’s reach, and only because of the constitution (he was born in India) and his name (too long for a placard).

—MSS
Matthew Harrison

Oversized glasses. Nasal voice. Awkwardly tucked-in shirt. Wild, staccato gesticulations. Columbia College, that’s Matthew Harrison, C’05 — your new Student Council President. No, he doesn’t look the part. And, yes, he does resemble a post-pubescent Harry Potter (see accompanying portrait). But resist the temptation to give him a wedgie; this boy has power now. How, you wonder, did that happen?

Considering that Matthew looks like he would blow over in a stiff wind, his campaign advisors quickly ruled out staging a coup d’état. Matthew, they decided, would have to get elected democratically. And for Matthew, who is an admittedly bad politician, that was no easy task. For one thing, he is prone to slashing people with his rapier wit. A student council member, for instance, once referred to a professor as a “preeminent scholar.” Matthew tactlessly blurted, “So he’s not eminent yet?” On other occasions, Matthew outright refused to participate in Columbia’s political arena. When, for example, he was asked a particularly stupid question during the candidate forum, he simply declined to answer it. “Whatever,” he shrugged, “I don’t have an articulate answer to that question.” Luckily, the electorate found his candidness refreshing.

The voters also seemed to sense that Matthew was a sincere and principled person. To illustrate, during the Fed cartoon fiasco, Matthew dressed in black and protested racism every day on the Steps. At the time, I warned him that he looked like he was shamelessly pandering to get votes. “Matthew,” I implored, “you’re a white boy from Texas. Nobody’s going to believe you’ve been silenced by racism.” He unhesitatingly responded, “So then I won’t get elected. Big deal. I’m going to support this cause.” Maybe, just maybe, democracy does work.

But enough about the past. You want to know how the newly-acquired power has affected our President-elect. By some accounts, Matthew has become drunk on success (and Jack Daniels) and has been observed channeling his momentum violently. Indeed, according to the B&W’s resident information whore, Avi Zenilman, Matthew belligerently tries to pick fights with other nerds (like Avi) at parties. Our new Editor-in-Chief, Cara Rachele, recalls that Matthew recently burst into her room and began ripping books from her shelf. Gripping feminist classics like Sylvia Plath’s The Bell Jar and Helen Fielding’s Bridget Jones’ Diary, he insisted, “These books need to be liberated from the pretension of your bookshelf.” And rest assured that Matthew has retained his trademark wit. Consider, for example, his only contribution to the fictitious timeline that the B&W authored for the Varsity Show playbill: “1941: the Manhattan Project is created and begins researching nuclear fission in the Pupin laboratories. The V-Show bombs.”

What a nerd. But, in a way, Matthew’s election is the logical result of representative government around here. Look at yourselves, Columbians. There’s a little bit of Matthew Harrison in every one of us. —CBH

Illustrated by Ajay Kurian
Dining Services presents
more
REWARDS

UPPER-CLASS MEAL PLAN PRE-ENROLLMENT

more MEAL PLANS

150 MEALS PER TERM
PLUS SIX GUEST MEALS
PRE-ENROLLMENT BONUS:
$150 FREE DINING DOLLARS

75 MEALS PER TERM
PLUS FOUR GUEST MEALS
PRE-ENROLLMENT BONUS:
$75 FREE DINING DOLLARS

45 MEALS PER TERM
PLUS TWO GUEST MEALS
PRE-ENROLLMENT BONUS:
$45 FREE DINING DOLLARS

30 MEALS PER TERM
PRE-ENROLLMENT BONUS:
$30 FREE DINING DOLLARS

more DINING DOLLARS

NEW AND EXISTING ACCOUNTS
DEPOSIT $100-$199
WE ADD 5% FREE

DEPOSIT $200 OR MORE
WE ADD 10% FREE

April 26-28, 5-8 pm
John Jay Dining Hall

May 3-5, time TBD
Ferris Booth Commons

For further information, visit the Dining Services website at www.dining.columbia.edu
The Blue J, being but a bird, spends more time lounging on Low Steps than even the laziest Columbia student. In doing so, she has learned that our home at Columbia has a place that rivals the best of them in its social life, if not its physical condition. Fly out over South Court (or “Low Plaza” as you may know it) on any good day this season, and you will agree. A whole flock of undergraduates basks on the Steps, while the rich red bricks of South Court accommodate the busier half in its daily migration across campus. On a good day, all of South Court seems like a choreographed performance starring a student mob, some communists, and the folks from Collegeboxes. The J watches Low Plaza accomplish feats of social fusion that put to shame the cold and empty “student center” across the lawns. It isn’t a building or a famous statue, but it is undoubtedly the most precious anchor the university has, tying together all that is Columbia lest it break apart and dissolve into the city. So why, wonders this Blue J, is the space itself breaking apart beneath our feet?

You don’t need a bird’s eye view to understand the sorry state of South Court. Just walk across it on your way up the steps, and be careful not to dislodge cracking pieces of concrete patching. If you happen to trip on a loose brick, just know that you are upsetting history: most of those bricks are original. When 116th Street was a through street, South Court was the expansive meeting point between university and city. As Columbia expanded, the area literally became the heart of the campus. Seeing it today, the Blue J wonders if we are surely such indifferent stewards to our social and historical core.

Now, the Blue J never flaps her wings prematurely, so she decided to speak with someone who would know things around here. Andrew S. Dolkart is the James Marston Finch Professor of Historic Preservation, and he has written a much-lauded history of Morningside Heights. He has also been dissatisfied with Low Plaza’s state for some time. Dolkart is particularly annoyed by the irregular and messy concrete patchwork that eventually replaced the original limestone panels. Ideally, they would have been replaced by another white stone, though more resilient, to maintain the stark contrast with the deeply red and exquisitely patterned brick. Unfortunately, the space was filled with concrete, which subsequently deteriorated in spots; Dolkart remarks that “it looks diseased.” He insists that while a thorough overhaul of South Court would be a substantial project, it would ultimately require less maintenance to do it correctly than to keep applying bits of concrete patching while the whole space deteriorates. Unfortunately, the J must conclude that this is not a great priority. Indeed, Low Plaza has a history of being undervalued.

When McKim, Mead and White proposed their plan for South Court, they met with great opposition from those who thought it would be an “empty desert of stone.” Charles McKim vigorously defended the proposal as an heir to the Italian Renaissance tradition of public spaces that leave themselves open to their users — spaces in which almost anything can happen. Professor Dolkart cites the current vibrance of the space as a final vindication of the firm; Columbia has taken the generous gift of space and made a remarkable place of it. “I like to think of Low Plaza as Columbia’s Piazza Navona,” he said. Unfortunately, its state today attests to a history of Columbians who have not seen it as such. The Blue J can only hope that someone inspired by the singular experience of Low Plaza on a good spring day — perhaps someone sitting there and reading this very squawking — will understand that spaces this precious must be treated precious.
Last Sunday was a great day over in Hoboken. It was the occasion of the annual Midwinter fete of the “Patsy Bolivar” Club.

All the animals were there, from the Wall Street lamb to the panned oyster, and they sat around the tables at Jones’ Gardens, under the shade of the palmetto trees, sipping their Pilsener and enjoying the sweet strains of “Hum, Sweet Hum,” as played by the native mosquito band.

“Who’s the next speaker,” said his “nibs” [the elephant] as he fanned away a blue bottle fly with one of his ears. “I bee,” said that insect. “With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I will recite a short original poem, entitled —” and he gave a little preliminary buzz.

At this the Chicago pig jumped up in great excitement —

“Mr. Chairman, I object. It waxes late, and —”

“Set ’em up for the crowd,” said the bee, “of course I wax late; that’s my business. What the deuce do you take me for — a hornet?” And he was about to proceed with his poem, when the fried smelt, said, “I’m really afraid we won’t have time, my boy, night’s coming on apace.”

“Neigh, neigh, Pauline,” remarked the horse, who’s quite a sport, and wore one of his old shoes as a scarf pin. “I’ve known Night quite a while, she’s a good enough little filly and can trot in about 2:30 when there ain’t too many stars in the road, but she never came on apace in her life, I’ll be a bran mash to a whisky straight.”

“There’s mischief brewing here,” said the kangaroo, in a sepulchral tone, as he swallowed the bear’s beer when he thought that gentleman was engaged in squeezing [sic] the flapper of his financee, the mock turtle.

“You bet I’m brin,” said the bear, “and if you don’t order me a stein of Annhauser-Busch pretty quick, you’ll go off in hops — see!”

The kangaroo apologized, and all was harmony once more. Nothing could be heard save the rhythmic gurgle of the beer. The bee had forgotten his poem, and the crab, who had drunk five glasses, was trying to walk backwards and forwards at the same time.

At this hour all were feeling merry, so naturally enough, the horned snail proposed a “Hoboken reel.” The sand-piper got out his pipes, and they all went at it heel and toe, all except the giraffe who was handicapped by his legs, and who shouted out the figures, keeping time with his neck. Their joy was unconfined; the billy goat even went so far as to buck the tiger in the ribs, while the rhinoceros went off in a corner, waved his legs in the air, and offered to treat anybody to a horn.

The seal who had temporarily taken off his $500 coat, and the camel who was humping himself just to show what he could do, were just going “up the middle and down again,” when all of a sudden the sand-piper stopped playing, and informed the company that he was going off on a bat, who was waiting for him in the hall. The festivities came to a sudden end, the leader of the mosquito orchestra presented his bill to the elephant, the lightening bugs turned off their currents, the guests dispersed, and the grand Midwinter fete of the “Patsy Bolivar” Club was at an end.

CURIO COLUMBIANA

From *The Blue and White*, Vol. III No. II (1892)

Illustrated by Michael Mallow
The Fall of Berlin 1945
Antony Beevor
Penguin Books
431 pgs; $16.00

"One good book deserves another"—perhaps the foremost principle of academia, and one Antony Beevor, Visiting Professor at the University of London, is not inclined to ignore. In 1998, he published Stalingrad, which garnered numerous prizes and sold over 1.1 million copies. Four years later, Beevor published a stirring sequel to Stalingrad, entitled The Fall of Berlin 1945. The book meticulously chronicles the last two years of the Third Reich, drawing equally upon Beevor’s dramatic prose and his extensive use of eyewitness sources.

Unfortunately, Beevor’s descriptive accuracy does not extend to his publishers. The Fall of Berlin 1945 is an extraordinarily misleading title, as only a few chapters deal with the actual “fall of Berlin.” Beevor, instead, focuses on Germany’s political and military collapse following the Red Army’s counter-invasion of Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe. As in Stalingrad, Beevor’s historical scope is impressively wide. Through extensive use of primary sources, he describes how nearly everyone, from Hitler and Stalin down to the combatants and civilians, viewed the Soviet onslaught and the Red Army’s conquest of Berlin. The battle narratives, for their part, are informative, but not overwhelmingly detailed, with modest and comprehensible descriptions of WWII-era weapons and tactics.

In most cases, the battle scenes are gripping and superbly written, which is not surprising considering that Beevor studied under John Keegan, arguably the world’s most renowned military historian.

In keeping with such a broad scope, The Fall of Berlin 1945 is much more than a chronology of political decisions and military strategy. Indeed, Beevor devotes an enormous amount of attention to the sickening atrocities which took place behind the lines of both armies. The German crimes against humanity have, of course, been well-documented, but few realize that our ally, the Soviet Union, committed similarly reprehensible acts during its drive toward Berlin. While rampaging through Eastern Europe, Prussia, and Germany, the Red Army sacked and looted towns, murdered civilians, enslaved thousands, and gang-raped nearly anything that moved. According to Beevor, Red Army soldiers didn’t believe in “individual liaisons with German women... Nine, ten, twelve men at a time — they rape[d] them on a collective basis.” Even liberated Soviet prisoners were treated without mercy. In most cases, they were dubbed “Traitors to the Motherland” for having surrendered to the Germans and were used as cannon-fodder, sentenced to toil in Soviet gulags, or summarily executed.

In The Fall of Berlin 1945, the suffering and bloodshed that Beevor describes often seems suspiciously amplified, almost too horrific to have actually happened (few other accounts match The Fall’s level of gruesome detail). Rest assured, however, that Beevor did his homework. He masterfully weaves passages and quotes from diaries, letters, interviews, and post-war memoirs—many of which are newly declassified—into the text, dispelling any doubts about the book’s veracity. Which is not to say that Anthony Beevor relied on the words of others to write his book; on the contrary and above all else, he is a storyteller. Before becoming

BOOK REVIEW continued on page 142
THE YEARLING

He burns the scenic bauble, the prospects and medicines,
Fathering all flatness. No bush has not left its flesh on his back.
He spat out of the pit—new powers of greed and motion!
He spat into the pit—new powers of greed and motion!
Can the ground be encumbered with heavy rivals?
The lantern cannot hide the friends of vital pity.
Breaking open his eldest father, he bids the poor
Be victualled and clothed.

   War on the conquered and spare the proud.
Music and light attend our head. This is his perfect treason,
His evil forms the bowels of a tutelary gleaming,
His purposeful heart is the dawn of the orient,
A festival we celebrate.

   He proves the tongue cannot suffer by itself.
He is somebody’s mother like everyone else.
Clear stamen of need and palace of bread.
Risible wind, in the trees, in the children, and everywhere else.
His hair is an arbor, he curses the genius of giants,
He shall one day be the polestar for a thousand years.
He travels so far that he comes to our door.
What pomps will come to activate the ban
On former arrivals?

   What is the water-lamb full-grown?
In this season of deliberate giving, what gifts will detain him,
So eager to go? A horse like a sieve, what he knows by heart:
The story of what didn’t happen so long ago.

—Michael Paulson
The radio was exactly one point from any station.  
I adjusted the dial until I found some popular music.  
I had just encountered a book on religious experiences.  
Some of them took the form of a palliative music.  
I had never known one except as unheard music.  
Sometimes the senses are thus amaranthine.  
One has to wait for these tattling vocations.  
When it occurs it will hemorrhage such music.  
Although I had lost much time in contemplating.  
How else to advance but simply to abut it.  
Otherwise one walks as on an esplanade of music.  
It was nothing if not this abstruse music.  
What useful old saws, what castaways.  
They were bins of a like fabric.  
Yet better than gold is the sculptor’s music.  
The truth of the matter is so much contumacy.  
It glanced at the window, as though it were frozen music.  
What else is there to do but drink and read music.  
There is no gainsaying my music.  
The day was carrying on like words without music.  
It stopped in the middle of music.  
Weather and news came on the sevens.  
They had to be understood as tidings not music.  

—I. Davey Volner
In the 1950s suburban childhood I never had, the noble milkman stands out as the archetype of archaic services, their purveyors, and a profession lost in the modernizing battle of plastic containers and supermarket ubiquity. Our recollection of Eisenhower America, however, unfairly overlooks another carrier of bottled, liquid refreshment: the seltzer-man. Though the collective social memory favors the milkman, the seltzer-man offers a strong case for his (or her!) fascinating and necessary gastronomical and anthropological role.

We’ll begin in the traditional strongholds of the seltzer phenomenon, Brooklyn and Long Island, where once there thrived a multitude of deliverymen. Bagels, bread, and beer could be brought to the doorstep as dependably as a week’s worth of baby-litter was whisked away by the diaper service. A courier from Cott Soda proffered his pop; the Fuller Brush Man replaced your mom’s mop.

“An interesting lot of goods, indeed, but does plain carbonated water demand household delivery?” pondered this naïve southern gentile. I brought my question to several classic New York-types and received the following general answers: “In the 1950s [when the world was better and lifestyles were friendlier], we’d socialize and have parties all the time, so we’d have scotch and sodas and whatnot. You know, seltza.” Or, “Seltza is as Jewish as the bagel [without the universal acceptance from younger generations].” Finally: “Boy, did I love egg creams as a kid.”

Egg...cream? The high cause of investigative journalism demanded that I study this mysterious beverage first-hand. My sources told me it was chocolate syrup, milk, and seltzer in a glass — curious, to say the least. On March 3, at 3:00 p.m., a chocolate “egg cream” was ordered “to go” at the local “Tom’s Restaurant”. It was found to be severely delicious. The egg cream alone offered a strong argument for the seltzer-man in my book, but to fortify my subjective speculation I sought the real authority on the matter: the seltzer deliverers themselves.

Today, the Seltzer Sisters in Redwood City, California continue the tradition and duty of the seltzer-man, delivering joy and, yes, seltzer water to residents in the greater Bay Area since 1982. Founder and “Seltzer Babe” Frada Silver gave me the real rundown on the history of seltzer-delivery in the US, beginning with the European Jews who brought the delightful beverage to America in the nineteenth century. (An aside: one of the previous New York sources, in an astoundingly tangential sidetrack, mentioned how certain ethnic groups, including eastern Europeans, are more susceptible to lactose intolerance. Perhaps therein lies some of the cultural reliance on an alternative beverage?) Eventually, the bubbly drink spread to the Gentiles and enjoyed the status of an upper-class companion to scotch. But seltzer was not to remain in the realm of the bourgeoisie; soon thereafter it heroically crossed boundaries of class and geography. By
the late 1800s, Frada estimates, thousands of seltzer companies operated in the States. In 1904, the egg cream was invented, garnering praise at diners, pharmacies, and candy stores from coast to coast.

Without consistent carbonation, sparkling water would not have reached such success, for a sip of flat seltzer is a dud indeed. Key to keeping the bubbles was the classic seltzer bottle, the beautiful one-liter receptacle that dependably shot a spritzy spray of soda. But the glass bottles were cumbersome, so ma and pop looked to the seltzer-man to haul the full bottles to their door, taking away the empties for eventual reuse. Despite this perilous transport, many of the green, amber, crystal, or indigo European bottles have survived the years and kept their kaleidoscopic beauty.

The bottles have survived more than clumsy deliverymen, though. WWII and the Holocaust destroyed much of the production of European glass seltzer bottles. The industry also suffered from the general inconvenience of the bottles, since they can be difficult to chill (using ice cuts down on carbonation) and unwieldy to transport (say, to a picnic, as Frada pointed out). Eventually, plastic screw-top bottles gave seltzer a convenient, though less elegant, container. And as the latter half of the twentieth century gave rise to the colossal corporate threat of soft-drink companies and their saccharine beverages, the seltzer-man slowly faded from view.

Still, our sparkling seltzer lives on strong, as many continue to enjoy its crisp, clean taste and refreshing carbonated bite. Outside of its role as refreshment, the CO₂ in this H₂O offers an array of surprising advantages over your hum-drum Évian. Got a headache or some indigestion? Seek a glass of seltzer to ease your maladies — where do you think the idea of Alka-Seltzer came from? For a stubborn stain, utilize the bubbles in this fizzy drink to recondition your nearly ruined blouse. Savvy expectant mothers and patients with nausea rely on seltzer to restore their appetite, since it speeds up digestion nearly three-fold.

Frada boasts that the delivery of seltzer provides all the benefits listed above while easing the load on Mother Earth through the continual reuse of the bottle supply. The Seltzer Sister’s NoCal customers, ranging from displaced New Yorkers to caterers to coffee bars and restaurants, love their seltzer delivery for its convenience, its healthiness, its environmental friendliness, and above all, the pure enjoyment of spritzy seltzer. Their seltzer demand today remains so strong as to exceed the capacity of the company’s two trucks and rigorous delivery cycle. “We are like God to them,” confides Frada.

I was quite pleased to hear the heavenly success of these Sisters of Seltzer, but I didn't get off without a reprimand. Drinking an egg cream to go and through a straw amounts to sacrilege for a devout seltzerist. Frada suggested I find a place that served a real Brooklyn egg cream, with Fox’s U-Bet chocolate syrup and three distinct layers: foam on top, light brown in the middle, and dark brown at the bottom. In search of this authentic experience, some friends and I (too lazy to leave Manhattan) sauntered midtown to the Brooklyn Diner on 57th, hoping that the establishment’s name would lend some authenticity.

The bartender pulled out a gallon jug of U-Bet syrup and began the assembly of our egg creams. With a trickle of this chocolate and a quick pour of half and half, the seltzer was carefully added down the side of glass, completing the karmic balance of the three ingredients. My egg cream arrived on the counter with a foamy white top drizzled with chocolate. I lifted the glass to my mouth, blessing my upper lip with a seltzery white moustache, while the sweet nectar of the egg cream flowed across my palate. It was reminiscent of a shake, but the seltzer gave a smoother texture and a bite to the tongue. My straw looked on, neglected, as the final smears of chocolate and foam slid down my throat.
CONVERSATION WITH
DAVID MCKENNA

Seeking to investigate conflicts fictional as well as factual, The Blue and White recently sat down for an interview with Adjunct Professor David McKenna of the film department, who currently leads a seminar on horror in American film. Here we reprint for your enjoyment excerpts from our thrilling discussion.

Conversation with David McKenna
9 March 2004

B&W: We’ve learned that apparently you can be mistaken for others.
DM: Oh, no!
B&W: Yes! … There’s some dude who wrote American History X, right?
DM: He’s pretty good. There’s also a phenomenal jazz pianist.
B&W: Also somebody who was a film editor on Andy Warhol’s BAD?
DM: I got invited to a dinner [meant for him].
B&W: And nobody noticed?
DM: Hey, you know, I can pass for David McKenna! I even got the ID. … I’m the David McKenna who’s famous for being obscure. Those other guys all rely on celebrity. I am the facilitator.
B&W: If someone were to make you a [speaker at a fundraising dinner] and you got there and they said, “You can’t talk about screenwriting, movies, film, or anything related to what you do,” would you end up talking about the women in the front row?
DM: Oh, I would talk primarily about free will.
B&W: Free will versus determinism?
DM: This is a horror class … so you ask, where’s the first horror story? And the first horror story’s got to be the Garden of Eden, right? You’re in a situation in which – there you are, we’re romping around, we’re naked, we’re having a fine time, everything that we can eat, everything that we can drink, there’s no “no,” everything is just dandy. And every time we do anything that’s remotely wrong, God is going to forgive us because, you know, we didn’t mean any harm. We didn’t know the difference! And we’re kind of cute to look at – we’re pets! … There’s only one thing that we’ve gotta do – it’s like, you know, “don’t do it on the couch” – and for us, for these pets, it’s “just don’t mess with that tree, waaay over there in the corner.” …
And we could’ve spent eternity in that garden being really beloved pets, but there’s something inherent in human nature that needs to know. And that’s the first horror story. As human beings, we need to know. And that process of needing to know means that we’re not satisfied being pets. We are working through evolution to be gods.
B&W: How do you connect that back to horror?
DM: There’s a scene in almost every mad-doctor horror movie – and this goes to Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde in particular. You get some guy that you like at the get-go. In the Jekyll & Hyde we looked at, it was Fredric March. And he’s young, and, boy, he’s charming, and he’s all full of piss and vinegar, and he loves the girl, and he expresses it ardently, and she loves him back, and he’s smart, and he’s got this idea. And you’re looking at the idea and going, “Yes, you’ve got to follow through on this, this is really light in your candle; you’ve got to figure out what the answer to this is.” And it’s a big question about the dual nature of man.
And he goes on this quest, the same as Dr. Frankenstein opening the secrets of life, or Dr. Faustus opening the secrets of death, or any of these mad doctors. And you want them to push the envelope. You want these guys asking questions. But at some point, they’re going to be faced with something that’s really quite, quite, quite horrific, and be brought low. And, in American horror movies, they wind up on their knees, begging to God and saying, “I have tread on your province. Please forgive me. I’ve been a bad guy. … please take me back as a pet!”
So on the one hand, you get set up with
"I want to go as far as I possibly can and be god-like." But then the consequences that God throws you — because trying to be god-like is like trying to get your Ph.D., if you want to put this in academic terms. Your teachers are going to have a pretty easy time passing you and giving you a B.A. or a B.S. degree, right? And the Masters, yeah it'll be a little harder but you know, yeah, we’ll give you a Masters degree. But if you’re going for a Ph.D., these guys are going, “You’re going to be my peer! You could take a job from me! I’m going to make it really, really hard for you guys to get a Ph.D.” And you’re going to have to crawl through broken glass.

Well, if human beings are attempting to fulfill their god-like nature, who’s the judge of that? That’s God. God’s going, “You know, you gotta come up to my standards, and my standards are real, real high about getting to be God. And I’m going to throw curves at you — I’m going to throw really big rocks at you.” Because God knows what God had to go through to get to be God.

B&W: I was thinking of all the horror movies I’ve seen, and they have a lot of Pandora’s box moments. Think of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre: everyone says every five minutes, “Don’t do that; don’t go there!” And their response is, “Maybe I should explore this house,” or “Do you hear those generators?” Nobody would ever do that. And yet, when you find yourself in situations like that, it’s kind of creepy, but you find yourself doing the exact same thing.

DM: You gotta go! We have to know! … okay, I’ll give you a situation: you’ve been terribly wounded, you’ve been in some kind of accident and you’ve awakened in a hospital and you’re terribly wounded. And they’ve swathed you whatever-the-hell-it-is so that you don’t have to look at it; it’s in a nice antiseptic bandage; it’s all wrapped. How long is it going to be before you gotta know? You gotta look. And then after you look, you’re really sorry you looked, but you had to look! I mean, that’s the reason that when there’s a noise in a horror movie basement, somebody in the horror movie has to go. And we’re sitting in the audience going, “That’s really stupid,” but you gotta look.

B&W: So it sounds like some of what you’re talking about is really transgressing social boundaries. How much of this is really social commentary for you?

DM: I think you wind up going in that direction. … Next week we’ll look at Rosemary’s Baby which is certainly designed as a very conservative 1960s cautionary tale. This Satanic stuff wouldn’t be happening in the society if you weren’t questioning whether God is alive, if you weren’t taking birth control pills and having all this sexually licentious behavior going on. That’s the morality that Rosemary’s Baby is coming out of. …

Again, it gets back down to this notion of who are we, what are we doing here, what’s God? Does God exist in the way that we think of Him; what way do we need to be thinking about God? And horror films do two things: they push the envelope to get you thinking about that, and at the same time they also warn you, “Don’t leave the path.” So that on the one hand, you get to muse over this nature of godliness and our existence, and you also get to watch what happens when people leave the path.

B&W: And if they’re intensely sexualized, too?

DM: I mean, well, maybe I’m just a perverted beast, I don’t know. … Okay. Anything else? What else you got?

B&W: So we know what fascinates you as a teacher of horror movies; what scares you today in 2004?

DM: [sighs] The one that always gets me is Hitchcock plays around with this notion of the wrong man accused. You’re innocent, and the society is working against you. Yeah, that’s pretty scary. But the one that truly gets me is that you did everything right; you did everything that seemed appropriate, and just as soon as you have finished it and it’s gone...
public, they come in and go, “We’re busting you and that’s the death penalty.” What you did was entirely appropriate to the moment, except you broke a really, really big rule, and they got you! It’s one of the things that gets me about this interview (which is why I’d like to see the transcript, please), because you guys ask me questions and it’s my nature to respond candidly, probably way too candidly. And I don’t seem to have that editor in my head that goes, “This is important information to relate,” and I don’t much have the editor in my head that says, “Yeah, but if you say this, they can nail you. If you say this, you can be fired. If you say this, they can throw you in jail.”

**B&W:** You and Martha Stewart both.

**DM:** Well, two things on that. First of all, would they have busted her if she were anybody but Martha Stewart? There was that. And the other thing is, is she an idiot or what? It just gets down to the matter of it doesn’t make any difference if you’ve got the Mercedes and the fourteen houses; you’re still going to be petty. Martha never seemed quite so human to me as when she was bailing out for, was it like twenty thousand dollars, that’s like a couple hours’ pay for her? That’s like watching Leona Helmsley go down the tubes because she wrote off her girdles on her income taxes. This is a woman worth quite a few million dollars and the girdles must have gone for what, $89.95, but she wrote them off on her taxes and wasn’t going to back down. Come on! But it’s petty. We’re all tiny little monkeys. Awfully tiny little monkeys. Dear God.

**B&W:** How’d you end up in teaching?

**DM:** That was interesting. My intention at all points was to come to New York and be a Broadway director, which is something I got to do for a minute. I found a play in the early eighties and then developed it and performed it out of town and attracted investors and then the investors raised money to get it to Broadway, which is a process that took like, four years. And when we got there, we didn’t get panned; we just basically got ignored to death. …

What I learned at the time is that there are about twelve guys. I don’t know if there are even that many anymore. But there were about twelve guys who got to do that, who got to be Broadway directors. … And I don’t know whether I was the thirteenth or the forty-five millionth, but it doesn’t make a difference. Because there’s only twelve anyway, unless you want to hang around and wait for somebody to die, but by that time there’s a whole new busload of guys. And when you go to the oracle of Delphi and you ask the question and he says no, you don’t sit around waiting to ask again tomorrow, because you may get a, “Oh, oh, you’re back! I was wrong last week! It’s not your mother! It’s not Corinth, I meant Thebes!” …

So when I got the answer that “okay, you’re not one of the twelve, and it’s dying anyway”, the question became what the hell can I use this craft I’ve learned for? Clearly it’s not to go and direct Katherine Cornell in the brand new Ibsen play! That’s a previous generation. … Well, I’d been taught to create atmosphere, for one thing, to create circumstances which make people conducive to play. And that can translate into a lot of things. So one of the things that happened was that I coach actors. I coach writers. I teach you guys.
Breakfast
by Anna Bulbrook

Based on Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, “Breakfast.”

Breakfast was potatoes and fish. The fish was not so important, however, as the feeling that something was about to be revealed, which hit me just as I looked down at the mash of potatoes and cheese in front of me. It was a quiet breakfast. Quiet like the whole string of breakfasts that had come before it, mirroring this one and in which I and others in other times and places had sat in front of steaming mashed potatoes and salmon and contemplated greatness.

I believe I took a little more salmon, which looks a lot like tongue. The salmon is like the tongue of the sea. But where tongues may wag and cluck or interrupt the quiet of breakfasts, salmon is always quiet. If the salmon were to speak, interrupting this quiet – only quiet for its absence of clamor (which will arrive sooner or later), well, there might be tears. But there won’t be, because salmons don’t speak, and this morning is so pleasant only because of the absence of the salmon’s tears and the knowledge of their lack.

A cup, though, that is a curious thing. Imagine a cup with nothing to hold. There was no beer at breakfast, for example. What is a cup without something to hold? Big cups are bowls, which usually hold the solid things; are better for breaking the quietude of the morning if you have to. They shatter better against a cabinet, or a wall, or the thick skull of a numb-nuts.

Even Ancient tribes people in the dustiest and remotest areas of Central Africa and other such First Peoples used cups. It was an extra hand to help you while you cook or drink or carry water even while there were nobody else’s hands in sight. In cultures where it was dangerous to be alone and scary (and therefore important to be with others while doing things), the cup would have been far less necessary. Now we are so rich, we are alone all the time. Even when there are others around.

The “quiet breakfast:” the impression of potatoes and tea, the feeling of the wooden chair pressing into my hamstrings, the lack of sounds louder than birdcalls or chewing, the presence of some misty sunlight, my location at the table, the time of day, the invisibility of the cook and my solitude as I ate. These characteristics are customarily what most people view as breakfast. But what is custom, in reality, to me? I suppose the cup makes a certain amount of sense. But then again, what is sense but what you touch or taste or smell interpreted through eyes trained by custom. The cup, it holds the drink; the coffee, or beer, or water. It allows you to transfer the liquid into your mouth without losing it to the hard dirt floor, if that’s your floor, or ruining your Orientals. And when you drink it the liquid is gone, a colored loss, brown, or watery-looking, or red if it’s juice.

There are meals other than breakfast. The “meal” is an even stranger accident: a formality to regulate the space (after years of fine-tuning) between the food and the face. Does it really matter how you get the food up there as long as you eat it? Perhaps it does, because even though I sat alone that morning at the place left for me by my wife, I used a fork to poke things and the knife to cut things. The potatoes stayed in a bowl, the fish on a plate. I wore a piece of cloth to protect my knees from the buttered flakes of gray salmon skin. I felt the joy of communing with custom, like when you stab at a morsel of salmon, the same joy, or drink coffee from your cup.

Potatoes are grainy and warm and buttery even if there’s no fork. But if it is lying, squished, on the table-top and on nothing nearly like a plate, would custom make them into trash, or dirt, instead of into mashed potatoes? Something to be scraped up with a Brillo pad or some steel wool?

I nearly choked violently on the
potatoes. I say “nearly” because it was more of a gurgling in the throat at the point in the swallowing where if it doesn’t go one way, it goes another way. Breakfasting, you could choke a hundred times. Plus the other two meals a day, and drinking in between, that’s a thousand or a hundred thousand swallows a day. It’s a wonder we don’t choke more often. I wonder that I’m still alive.

The mashed makes a blossom on my fork. Looking at the blossom doesn’t change its shape or size or how it is made out of potatoes and salt and a little butter, but whether or not it looks like a flower or just potatoes. Just like when you gaze at someone, maybe a loved one, the only thing that changes is how you look at them. Whatever boorishness they own, the way they take up a space and eat the air out of it, is always the same. Just like the gorgeous things. But this is why breakages occur; a broken cup, heart, bowl, routine are all part of the traffic between everyone. And in many ways, the geology of the earth, the healing and breaking that occurs and knits and rup-
tures and explodes and covers over again, is less miraculous and tenuous than the fact of someone’s wife handing them a steaming bowl of potatoes for breakfast in a room called the kitchen and retreating to the bedroom until the eater has left the dishes in the sink for fear of however today’s eyes will view the cook. Tectonic plates, much like china, break according to processes and codes much bigger and simpler than the customs and habits of men. A cook! A miraculous accident of culture indeed.

You could get a stomachache ache just thinking about it, or perhaps appendicitis. What is the color of appendicitis?

What we all want, and almost as much as we want to not feel pain, is to be rescued. To relax into the arms of one who, though being simply another accident of nature, just like ourselves and external to our body, can somehow get inside through conversation or mating, but more like osmosis. Intimacy is no more than a disguise for being lonely and scared and an extra pair of hands; a sometimes dainty or winsome cup, but still a cup. It certainly shatters like a cup hurled at someone’s head or placed in a paper bag and smashed with a hammer.

One thing will never be another thing, that’s for sure. This cup is only this cup, and there will never be another one like it in this lifetime or any other, or even another instant. A whole army of cups, and we can never meet or share a moment, even an accidental moment like a breakfast, because there is too much time between us.

And what is this all but a sign. My mother once said, “Seat a knife near a cage and very near a decision… Do this temporarily and make no more mistake in standing.” And it is thus that I, being only one man, and being never quite defined, as I will never be the same me molecularly or electrically or spatially at any point in time, cannot explain the mere moment of a breakfast, and a quiet one, while standing. This whole story that I am giving you is a nothing, is as incidental and nothing as water, or as a woman. See this shelter and see this moment — dainty, a dainty, and ordinary.

BOOK REVIEW continued from page 133

a historian, he published four novels, and his strikingly dramatic prose in The Fall of Berlin 1945 is refreshing for any avid reader of non-fiction. Here, for example, is a taste of Beevor in action: of the Soviet conquest of Berlin, he writes, “it was the apocalypse of totalitarian corruption with the concrete submarine of the Reich Chancellery underworld providing an existentialist theater set for hell.” Clearly, this is not your ordinary sleep-inducing work of nonfiction.

Although The Fall of Berlin 1945 was a New York Times bestseller, it received noticeably less fanfare than Stalingrad. Perhaps the topic is not as sexy as the Battle of Stalingrad. Perhaps the book’s title is to blame (note to Penguin Books: Berlin has not fallen enough times to warrant the “1945”). Still, Antony Beevor’s latest work should be considered a must-read for anyone who wants to experience military history at its best. For that matter, it’s also a good book for anyone who likes reading about dead Nazis and blood-thirsty communists.

142
Spring — or something quite like it — has sprung. The sun peeks wanly out now and then. The park’s eternal joggers seem less haggard. Squirrels chase one another around tree trunks in dizzying, playful circles. It is nearly enough to force Verily’s chin from underneath his turtleneck and make him declaim, Ah, Spring!

Ah, Spring!, when a young man’s thoughts turn to pass/fail credit; Ah, Spring!, when a young man’s thoughts turn to swimming lessons; Ah, Spring!, when a young man’s thoughts turn to love — or, rather, Ah, Spring!, when a young man’s thoughts turn to love, and a young man’s love turns to thoughts. Ah, Spring? Bah, Spring! Where have all the young women gone?

In such glorious weather, Verily had planned to amble among the first tentative flowers, twirl his swordstick without the usual bellicosity, and concoct sweet, dulcet-toned pickup lines (most of which, admittedly, would have involved indecorous comments about the latest fashions and their dual purpose as carpeting). But, this unfair Spring, not a sassy soul is in sight; all the snow bunnies have disappeared into rabbit holes, leapt behind looking glasses, or left on very important dates.

If only those frisky Ariadnes, snuggled delightfully into their wintry wear, could distract themselves from their theses for the sake of their modern-day Theseus, Verily would be content. But while it seems that college does indeed break for Spring, it also seems to do so ten seconds too late, shifting into reverse to plow over Spring once more, snow chains firmly affixed. School barrels on, full steam, and it isn’t too hard to imagine that, this year, the only reason the groundhog had for running back into its hole was that it had to finish printing its midterm take-home, paper quota nearly full.

But more to the point, with all this frenetic shuttling about between classes, job interviews, and applications to institutions of still higher learning, Verily has lost literal sight of lasses. Without commensurate visual connotation to throw dense lines of Marx and the Political Economy into sharp relief — without the occasional butt leer to compensate for Butler — Verily foresees a very dreary few seasons. After all, the Boys of Summer exist only to follow the Girls of Spring, and with those coquettes conspicuously cloaked, nothing more than the Proletariat will be a-roused.

All this rhetoric, thankfully, is rhetorical; Verily would never torture you with such dystopian visions if he hadn’t a sly homily the size of the remaining column. Verily has, indeed, hit upon a solution, although — full disclosure being what it is — said solution arrived via Pontius Palate and Mephiscotcheles, his two most Mack-iavellian and conniving coconspirators, so it is to be taken with a grain of salt — preceded by two shots tequila, and lime.

So, simply: Where are the fillies? Why, they have retreated to their stables. So, if you can’t beat — or beat off to — them, join them. Saddle up, and share their displeasures; transform such into your joys. If you have Lit Hum with her, let her chance upon your leather-bound, gold-embossed first edition of the Cambridge Complete Catullus (you know the one, with those two pages stuck curiously together). If you’re slogging though Major Cultures, explore the possibilities of multicultural study sessions, and sprinkle your de Sade with a pinch of ‘ma Sutra. As for the medically minded, “Orgo” should be self-explanatory. And, in all your attempts, remember the eternal words of the Bard: “Oh, how this spring of love / resembleth the uncertain glory of an April day!”

—Verily Veritas
I dropped her body in a heap of trash bags in the middle of Times Square. Dawn was peaking over Brooklyn and I climbed on top of an empty taxi cab. The buildings melted away and all I saw was light. Mon beau coeur.

If you come I will make the best colorless coffee you can imagine! I think I will give you a towel as well.

Its creativity could only be phrased in terms of its willingness to boldly go where no sensible paper would before. Also, its accessibility can only be understood in terms of its ability to simply state its simple errors, and to broadly render its overly broad conclusions. Subtlety, as you can imagine by now, if it has been used at all, has been used with such subtlety that it may well be the most unsubtly unsubtle (?) piece I have ever encountered. All in all, a fun read.

The young lady seems to have died her hair blonde and is wearing skimpy clothing giving off an impression of being a “bimbo.” Of course, this is of no consequence to the master of the house who is surveying his gun and most likely regards her as another object in the house that he owns and is meant for his pleasure much like the can of soda or bag of chips that are haphazardly lying around.

The blindness wouldn’t be so bad, however, if I didn’t have a large, glowing ex-boyfriend lurking in the flimsily sealed storage units in the back of my mind. This boyfriend, aside from actually being fat, is consuming.

I fter were a city, society X. let’s say society’s values were to be honest, hard working, and a good citizen. Now, let’s say society X is wiped out, by a nuclear holocaust or something. Now the value of “honesty,” “hard work,” “good citizenship” still exist? Postmodern critical theory would say no.

Their dark lesson on the products of excess could suggest painful consequences for the muffin eating, dog cart calling, money loving crowd of “Earnest.”

The origin of Christianity did not happen at one specific date, but rather the culmination took place over a few centuries, holding many men to be leaders within the process. The most significant figure within this process was Jesus, a man whose life contains few concrete details, except for those found within The New Testament, which cannot be taken as a purely historical documentation, as it serves to be the religious scripture of Christianity.

Self-confidence reached alluring heights; did the Italian fashion industry not make it through an entire war without the help of the French?

There is a void at the point of origin as the sin of being flows from “dark female powers” that are inescapable, allowing no possibility for “the emergence of the purified Son.”

Processing Speed: Why are adults better at many things?
I am eighteen years of age, I have not lived very long, but I have pondered enough to have lived a million years.

What type of male influences are you referring to... influences from your childhood maybe? I am referring to the type of male influences that molest children. I suppose that is what you want to hear. To be honest with you, I don’t think that you are funny. I decided to see a shrink for other problems, not to sit around and talk about my upbringing. This concludes our session.

In almost all historical cultures, it appears that novelty was not a coveted title for any religious formation.

I believe that Hegel’s complex philosophical view of history can be summed up in one phrase, everything happens for a reason.

The wartime depictions in this week’s reading, told the facts, but was portrayed on a plane of layers and overlaps, set up with, contradictions and shifts.

Boyfriends Esquire is a not for profit organization dedicated to providing romantically challenged boyfriends with the skills necessary to successfully navigate any romantic enterprise. Mr. [name omitted] has chosen Romantic Dinner for two as his romantic enterprise. He will undergo thorough and intense training of all the necessary elements to provide his special someone with an evening to remember. © Boyfriends Esquire 2004. We are not affiliated with Queer Eye for the Straight Guy. They stole our ideas!

(Wolf drools as Red looks away and bends over to pick up the fallen bottles. He opens his jaws wide revealing yellow-stained teeth framing her rear end in the semicircle his mouth makes. Children in Audience gasp.)

I think this terrorist-fighting binge is an excuse to keep from finishing your masters.

STEVE enters under a sign which reads “Richard Piñata: Public Accountant”. A wooden donkey hangs on a chain. The prose poem is like a dog that talks.

I pretend to write:
Strange man walking from beneath the scaffold
No coat, just scarf and a purple sweater,
pretend to ignore attempt number one.

The Norton romance collection is a critical edition because this edition was rendered from the best manuscripts and it is also annotated and glossed.

Finally, Ivan found Marya and they tried to escape, but Koshchey caught up with them and cut Ivan into small pieces. Fortunately, Ivan’s brothers-in-law, with whom he left his spoon, fork and the snuffbox, were able to bring him back to life.

He opened up his bag — his manpurse, as Sophia teased him earlier that evening — and rummaged through his now wrinkled uniform, his copy of Catcher in the Rye (the last time he had read the book was in tenth-grade English class but he bought it upon moving to New York to keep in mind to himself that he was the epitome of Holden Caulfield), and the few condoms he stole from his dorm’s safer-sex bag, until he found the cheap, blue plastic lighter at the very bottom.

Looc
Looc
Looc
Think of someone reading this. They’re like lay off the drugs
Let’s face it, we’re amusing.
Cool. Coo. We’re coo yo’l. WE’re like the coolest people I know.
Seriously, don’t even laugh.
What’s about Charlie?

From girl to girl. From parent to parent. From partner to partner. From teacher to teacher. And, then, a mix of all of them: from girl to parent to partner to teacher to girl to boy to... until everyone knows.
Even Mephiscotcheles is not immune to peer pressure. The other evening, as I stumbled from bar to club to bar, I encountered a most compelling group of gals. They had much more than personality, to say the least. Flawless skin. Ample ratios. A come-hither demeanor. And thankfully, the too-tight t-shirts did little to conceal these realities. With PBR in hand, I crouched, and then sprung upon my prey.

As I approached, I noticed that every one of these maidens was drinking the same alcoholic beverage. I was unfamiliar with the drink and its mysterious appearance: green, misty, served in a tall glass with an even taller straw. Hmm ... curious.

Dismissing this novelty, I began to employ my standard charm tactics to seduce these elegant ladies. Yet try as I might, they appeared much more taken with their drink than my gentlemanly allure. In fact, every other sentence seemed to reference that drink of theirs — that apparent origin of their libidinous urbanity. “Oh, I just love [it].” (Note: the B&W does not advertise without due payment, so the beverage shall remain unnamed). “Wow,” one of the maidens whispered. “This drink has really made my night, just like you might, if you drink it, too.” I wondered whether I was missing out on something. In an effort to join these women in their topic of conversation, I ordered this supposed ambrosial intoxicant. Puckering my lips — in masculine fashion — I composedly sipped my first sip.

Rot! What a rancid rum! What a concocted concoction! This was no PBR. Repulsed, I hurled my glass against the wall and staggered away from the bar counter. “Palatableness before passion!” I declared. It would be a temperate day in hell before Mephiscotcheles would suffer gastronomic indignities for the betterment of his libido!

I paused momentarily at the door and longingly looked back. Oh, those sublime sirens. Curses. The hopeful fellows surrounding them continued to gulp their repugnant booze. Certainly, I understood on some level their acceptance of these emperor’s clothes. But why would these women hoodwink us credulous men into purchasing that spoiled brew?

Money, it turns out. Money — earned by the hour, promoting that unmentionable swill. Those Trojan horses — fillies, really — caught me unawares, whilst I merely pondered Trojans.

Amidst the commercial battle over big-spending twenty-something trendsetters, marketers have ventured into underground advertising. Paid actors and actresses now show up at the hip downtown bars and subtly place a product as central to their enjoyment. The word spreads. And the product sells. Leading the marketing trend is Big Fat Inc., with over fifty “brand ambassadors” in thirty cities. Though ethically dubious, the effort has nonetheless survived some attention from the Federal Trade Commission. And the seduction operation continues unabated.

True, Mephiscotcheles may have suffered briefly because of this scheme, but the B&W is never one to disparage impropriety. Far from it. Instead we learn to harness its powers. In fact, we’ve decided to hire our own brand ambassadors: those leggy, high cheek-boned NYU students — only now, we’ve clothed them in elbow-padded smoking jackets and handed them copies of the B&W. Even though we don’t actually sell copies of our eminent magazine, we nevertheless seek to proliferate the B&W among the proper social set. Accordingly, we’ve placed these faux, yet beaux, literati at strategic locations throughout the city. That beautiful gal reading aloud from the B&W at the Nuyorican may not truly love Mephiscotcheles as much as she shows, or should. Cheers. —Mephiscotcheles

Illustrated by Cara Rachele
LECTURE NOTES
BULLIET POINTS

The consequences of the Iraq War are frustratingly complex and hotly debated. Boldly going where many men have gone before, Professors Richard Bulliet and Michael Doyle attempted in a recent lecture to make sense of the conflict and its aftermath.

Professor Bulliet, Professor of History and former Director of the Middle East Institute, first attacked the Bush administration for its “Machiavellian manipulation of the American fear of Al-Qaeda.” He noted that tentative trial dates were just set for two Guantanamo detainees, with proceedings scheduled to begin in early summer and end “around the second Tuesday in November.” Bulliet suggested that such coincidence was anything but unintentional on the part of the current White House. “They have no idea what’s going to happen in Afghanistan, or in Iraq, nothing except [what’s going to happen] in a courtroom in Guantanamo.” While control changes hands in Iraq — an uncertain process at best — and the campaign season heats up, the public will be engrossed in the trial of “genuine bad guys.” The proceedings, Bulliet argued, would be cannily orchestrated solely to remind us that security threats are still extant — and to prompt us to vote Bush.

Professor Bulliet commented next on what he called “unreasonable” American fears of an Iraqi Shiite theocracy. According to Bulliet, a primary cause of this prejudice is American reliance on Sunni-dominated foreign intelligence services, the anti-Shiite views of which are “often tinged with a racist element.” Bulliet also suggested that many American policy-makers have misinterpreted the relationship between Iraqi Shi’ism and the Iranian Revolution; the senior Shiite clergy in Iraq, he noted, have never endorsed the theocratic ideals of Ayatollah Khomeini.

But would a Shiite-majority government be hostile to other Iraqi factions, like the Sunnis or former Baathists? Could it be anti-Israeli? Bulliet had a ready answer: “Is a pig’s ass pork?” Conceding that a “liberal, pluralistic, human-rights regime in Iraq just might not be possible right now,” Bullet nevertheless urged American administrators to endorse the concept of “one voter, one vote.” He argued that, having failed disastrously in its post-war reconstruction efforts, America should at least “let the Iraqi people choose the government they desire.”

Professor Doyle, SIPA faculty and recently an advisor to the UN Secretary-General, took a different tack, examining the post-war status of international law. Seemingly undaunted by his colleague’s indiscriminate use of conjunctions, Doyle found the Bush characterization of “pre-emptive war” to be highly inaccurate. The formal legal doctrine of preemption, apparently, dates to the Caroline incident, when British authorities destroyed an American ship that was smuggling arms to Canada. An angry Daniel Webster charged that pre-emption could occur only “if there is a necessity of self-defense without the chance for deliberation.” Boyle admitted that this standard is unrealistically strict, but argued that America’s war opens the door for a dangerous wave of “unchecked aggression.”

Other legal implications of the war, by Doyle’s account, are less clear, as even the scrupulous lethality of modern technology has become a two-edged sword. The Predator drone, for example, allows its handlers to better discriminate between civilians and combatants, but unfailingly ignores any plea for surrender — thus violating a basic condition of ius in bello. Doyle added that the administration’s initial failure to provide security and basic services had further complicated the legality of an American presence in post-war Iraq.

During the course of the lecture, both Bulliet and Doyle dodged queries from an elderly gentleman, who vigorously accused Bush and Cheney of everything from nepotism to corruption to the Fall of Man. My fellow students and I were outraged at this upstart, who dared to challenge our exclusive right to dogmatic liberalism; accordingly, we met each of his questions with a hostile shuffling of papers. —David J. Kim
At Two Swords’ Length

Once again, US News and World Report has ranked Columbia outside its top-ten list of best universities. Surely, you say, this is some sort of April Fool’s prank; we have Nobel Prize winners, two girls for every male, and one of the Jones brothers! What do higher-ranking schools have that we lack? I’ll tell you: L-A-N-D. Columbia is the Luxembourg of the Ivy League — distinguished, but also tiny and landlocked. As a result, while we expand our minds, our peer institutions can expand their campuses, erecting shiny new buildings and plush “quads.”

Land is valuable and God isn’t making any more of it. Julius Caesar knew it, Genghis Khan knew it, and Starbucks knew it. So if Bollinger wants to enhance Columbia’s reputation, he needs to wake up and smell the lebensraum. Now, some of the kookier members of our community have qualms about expanding into Manhattanville. They use nasty words like “gentrification.” They shouldn’t take Columbia’s growth so personally. Heck, we’d spread into Manhattanville even if it were a breeding ground for seriously endangered species. Goodbye condors, we need room for a new environmental biology building!

Remember Disney’s The Alamo; history is written by the manifestly-destined. So while we raise our light-blue flag over Manhattanville, let’s also take the opportunity to intellectually colonize our neighboring institutions. Naturally, we should start with Barnard and finally complete the Anschluss that should have happened years ago. Then we can move southward to NYU and impose our Core upon those unwashed denizens of Greenwich Village. We could even rename Lower Manhattan “Low Manhattan!” And, in time, we’ll be Columbia University in the City of New York — and Newark, and Hoboken, and Hartford. Heute New York morgen die Welt! Wunderbar!

—The Baron Craig von Höllander

It is no secret that US News and World Report — a magazine that, of all things, rates elitist and ponderously cancerous institutions by “peer review” — is a tool of the imperialists. Columbia has attempted for years to stave off the peer pressure of other colleges by growing and growing, only to be met with continual scorn and more attempts to get it to smoke behind the cafeteria. The time has come for Columbia to announce its individuality. Rather than expand, Columbia should contract.

You say we should raise our rankings — what better way to do so than to increase our selectivity? We are already plagued by unnecessary numbers of GS remedial students and unaccountably persistent Lifelong Learners. And with decreased matriculation will come decreased land use. It is an oft-touted fact that well over a third of Columbia already sleeps in Butler; why not make those berths permanent? Lie cots on tables; stack bunks in the Stacks. Students could wake up in class — then shower and brush their teeth in class.

Arguments have also been made in favor of Columbia expanding so that it can beautify the surrounds. Allegedly, we have uncouth barbarians at our gates — where once were Gauls and Vandals, there are now Harlemites and … Spanish Harlemites. Well, If they are at our gates, I say let them have our gates. Who leaves these premises anyway? Our benighted school has spent tens of years pushing undesirables beyond its borders. What, do you think, would happen if we absorbed those borders? NYU students would breed drunkenly with the cockroaches in your Claremont suite, spawning surprisingly attractive yet ravenous offspring that could live for weeks without their heads. New Jersey mobsters, having benefited from snooping outside Core classrooms, would break your legs to Homeric hexameters. No, our knowledge and our cockroaches are best kept to ourselves.

—Bauer Caleb Vognsen

—The Baron Craig von Höllander

At Two Swords’ Length

Once again, US News and World Report has ranked Columbia outside its top-ten list of best universities. Surely, you say, this is some sort of April Fool’s prank; we have Nobel Prize winners, two girls for every male, and one of the Jones brothers! What do higher-ranking schools have that we lack? I’ll tell you: L-A-N-D. Columbia is the Luxembourg of the Ivy League — distinguished, but also tiny and landlocked. As a result, while we expand our minds, our peer institutions can expand their campuses, erecting shiny new buildings and plush “quads.”

Land is valuable and God isn’t making any more of it. Julius Caesar knew it, Genghis Khan knew it, and Starbucks knew it. So if Bollinger wants to enhance Columbia’s reputation, he needs to wake up and smell the lebensraum. Now, some of the kookier members of our community have qualms about expanding into Manhattanville. They use nasty words like “gentrification.” They shouldn’t take Columbia’s growth so personally. Heck, we’d spread into Manhattanville even if it were a breeding ground for seriously endangered species. Goodbye condors, we need room for a new environmental biology building!

Remember Disney’s The Alamo; history is written by the manifestly-destined. So while we raise our light-blue flag over Manhattanville, let’s also take the opportunity to intellectually colonize our neighboring institutions. Naturally, we should start with Barnard and finally complete the Anschluss that should have happened years ago. Then we can move southward to NYU and impose our Core upon those unwashed denizens of Greenwich Village. We could even rename Lower Manhattan “Low Manhattan!” And, in time, we’ll be Columbia University in the City of New York — and Newark, and Hoboken, and Hartford. Heute New York morgen die Welt! Wunderbar!

—The Baron Craig von Höllander

It is no secret that US News and World Report — a magazine that, of all things, rates elitist and ponderously cancerous institutions by “peer review” — is a tool of the imperialists. Columbia has attempted for years to stave off the peer pressure of other colleges by growing and growing, only to be met with continual scorn and more attempts to get it to smoke behind the cafeteria. The time has come for Columbia to announce its individuality. Rather than expand, Columbia should contract.

You say we should raise our rankings — what better way to do so than to increase our selectivity? We are already plagued by unnecessary numbers of GS remedial students and unaccountably persistent Lifelong Learners. And with decreased matriculation will come decreased land use. It is an oft-touted fact that well over a third of Columbia already sleeps in Butler; why not make those berths permanent? Lie cots on tables; stack bunks in the Stacks. Students could wake up in class — then shower and brush their teeth in class.

Arguments have also been made in favor of Columbia expanding so that it can beautify the surrounds. Allegedly, we have uncouth barbarians at our gates — where once were Gauls and Vandals, there are now Harlemites and … Spanish Harlemites. Well, If they are at our gates, I say let them have our gates. Who leaves these premises anyway? Our benighted school has spent tens of years pushing undesirables beyond its borders. What, do you think, would happen if we absorbed those borders? NYU students would breed drunkenly with the cockroaches in your Claremont suite, spawning surprisingly attractive yet ravenous offspring that could live for weeks without their heads. New Jersey mobsters, having benefited from snooping outside Core classrooms, would break your legs to Homeric hexameters. No, our knowledge and our cockroaches are best kept to ourselves.

—Bauer Caleb Vognsen

—The Baron Craig von Höllander
Advice for the Ambitious
by Craig B. Hollander & Avi Z. Zenilman

On March 31, the Columbia College Student Council election season ended with Matthew Harrison’s Vision party soundly defeating Wayne Ting’s Ignition party and Anil Kumar’s CU Pangaea party. Not including its extended Spring siesta, The Blue and White covered the election assiduously via its “CCSC Campaign Weblog,” which was posted at www.theblueandwhite.org. For those considering running for office next year, we offer the following words of wisdom:

1 Don’t give your party a lame name. Try to avoid picking something cheesy that seems like a headline writer’s dream – “Vision Goes Blind,” “Ignition Flames Out,” and “CU Pangaea Breaks Apart” come to mind. Instead, choose something cool, like “Ba’ath.”

2 Being vague is, like, bad. CU Pangaea stressed “community building” ad nauseam. Anil Kumar’s main weakness was his failure to articulate specific policy ideas beyond vagaries about “reaching out” and “expanding communication.” Columbia students don’t want to hear about community. We want unrealistic promises of block parties, loud concerts, and free tuition.

3 Don’t lie to the press. Early in the campaign, a prominent candidate fibbed to us. Two hours later, we revealed a paper, e-mail, and voice-mail trail which proved that she was lying. That didn’t look good, and she quickly learned that we political pundits are a spiteful bunch.

4 Don’t pick a candidate with a one foot still in her prom dress. Given recent election history, running alongside first years seems to be a one-way ticket to second place. Ignition picked cheerleader Jordy Lievers, C’07, as their candidate for Secretary, thinking she’d be able to attract a lot of first year constituents. However, without any sort of track record at Columbia, she was forced to embarrassingly cite her experience on high school student council. Ignition, incidentally, lost the ’07 vote to Vision by a sizeable amount.

5 Affiliation with Beta Theta Pi is funny, not impressive. It’s a dry fraternity that instead of hazing, makes its members run for student government office (roughly a quarter of Beta brothers are involved in student government). Beta is, indeed, a “different kind of fraternity.” A lame kind.

6 Seniors are malleable sheep, too. Working on behalf of Matthew Harrison, social whores (and former Campus Characters) Mohan Ramaswamy, E ’04, and Jacqueline (Jax!) Russo, C’04, aggressively cajoled a shocking 22.9% of seniors into voting, where 95% of them cast their ballot for Vision. It should be mentioned that haranguing a la Jax! is technically considered a violation of election bylaws.

7 Pandering is obvious. If you, like Matthew Harrison, manage to construct a ticket with an African-American, an Orthodox Jew, and a Korean Christian, you shouldn’t be running for office – you should be designing college brochures.

8 Flattery is obvious. A quick sampling of Wayne Ting’s CUCommunity posts: “I love ANNE!!! Happy 20th!!!” “Min is hot….” “Jess is my girlfriend…,” “Cesar is my favorite Asian-Wannabe…,” “hmmm… I never knew anyone could look hot in silver…” “I love Betsy…! Call me for some fun this weekend….” “ummm… Alexa is hot…” The subtext of these posts: I am awesome! Be flattered! Vote for me!

9 Columbia spectators read the Spectator. Before Columbia launched its “Collegiate Readership” program and littered the campus with free newspapers, people used to read the Columbia Daily Spectator. If the program is cancelled before next year’s election, people may yet again read the Spectator. In that case, the Spectator’s endorsement could make or break a candidate’s chances. Therefore, if you don’t wine, dine, and send Madison Avenue call-girls to the opinion page editors, you obviously don’t want to get elected badly enough (please note that op-ed editors Zachary H. Bendiner and Chase Behringer are especially interested in meeting new “friends,” provided that you’ve already paid for the night). ☰
CULINARY HUMANITIES

Genetically Modified Feud

While Pontius Palate was poring over a menu at one of London’s new havens of good eating, he was confronted with a prominently displayed note which read: “To Our Knowledge Nothing From Our Kitchen Contains GM Ingredients.” Although he never journeyed beyond the Frontiers of Science, Pontius Palate understood that “GM” referred to “genetically modified” foods.

There is a raging international debate over genetically modified foods, the most common of which have been altered to make them either resistant to certain insects and herbicides, or to enhance their appearance and size. In general, European nations have fought to require that all modified foods be labeled as such and have banned American imports containing GM ingredients from the European market. But the proponents of GM foods claim that they constitute the most recent revolution in food production. They contend that GM ingredients will lower the cost of food worldwide and thereby help eliminate global hunger.

At first, the GM food advocates seem to have a valid point; if a plant can produce its own internal defenses from scourging insects, farmers can spend less on pesticides, and the price of food will consequently drop. Yet, evolutionary theory teaches us that bugs and diseases will eventually adapt. Therefore, many scientists have voiced their concerns that economies which are based on a genetically homogenous group of plants runs the risk of losing the entire investment. Moreover, increased food production will not necessarily alleviate hunger. There is already enough food to go around. Hunger exists today because of difficulties reconciling advantageous economic policies with ethical food distribution. And, while there is no evidence suggesting that GM foods are unsafe, the Brits, in particular, insist that it is too soon to tell.

Although Pontius Palate is usually inclined to dismiss the British carping as a luxury of the affluent, our overseas partner is not the only member of the Coalition of the Unwilling when it comes to GM foods. Despite facing widespread starvation, several African nations have recently turned away American food donations because the corn and soy products were genetically modified. The President of Zambia called the food “poison.”

The long-term effects of GM foods are, clearly, still up for debate. In the meantime, the most pressing issue concerning GM foods is the difficulty in preventing genetically modified crops from mixing with unmodified ones. Pontius Palate found herself particularly disturbed to find that many genetically modified crops permitted for animal feed do not have the FDA’s approval for human consumption. And, two years ago, these crops contaminated over 430 million bushels of American corn, which the FDA declined to recall, citing difficulties in tracing where it went in the food supply.

In light of such scandals, it is curious that Americans pay such little attention to the controversy over genetically modifying food (is Laci Peterson that much more exciting?). GM producers claim that Americans appreciate the benefits of engineered food and are more eager to embrace new technology (in contrast to those backward Europeans). But, in actuality, ignorance seems to be the likely explanation for American apathy toward GM foods; more than half of Americans continue to believe their food is free of biotechnology. Thus, Pontius Palate suspects that American complacency in eating GM food is yet another example of that frequently occurring device of political decision-making: widespread misinformation. – Pontius Palate

Illustrated by Allen O’Rourke
Professor of English Roddy Doyle tried to explain to his Contemporary Irish Literature seminar that American stereotypes about the Irish are just as offensive as those regarding other ethnic groups: “I find it amazing that there is an Ivy League university here in the States that calls its sport teams the Fighting Irish. I mean, would they have a team called the Unreliable Mexicans?” While his students’ opinions varied as to the validity of the comparison, several made sure promptly and politely to inform Mr. Doyle that the University of Notre Dame is not, in fact, a member of the Ivy League.

It has become something of an annual tradition for each senior to drink forty ounces of malt liquor on the Steps on that day that marks forty days until graduation. This year, a B&W staffer noticed his history professor, Kenneth Jackson, cutting through the intoxicated crowd. The staffer approached Jackson, who immediately switched into lecture mode. Gazing at the Steps, Jackson noted: “This is one of the finest open areas in New York. But nobody ever sat here like this until about fifty years ago.” Turning to the staffer, he asked: “Do you know why?” The staffer shook his head. Chuckling, Jackson answered: “Because there weren’t any girls around.” Touché, Professor.

PROFESSIONAL HUNTER
Jax! Russo, C’04, was a member of the team that won Assassins and the team that won the College Days Scavenger Hunt. Jax!’s combined earnings were $200, though she donated $50 to charity.

Overheard in an EC hallway:
Student A: I have to go see some shitty movie on human rights in Central America.
Student B: That’ll be a short film.

In Philip Kitcher’s Philosophy and Economics Seminar, students were debating how someone could abuse John S. Mill’s harm principle when the professor suddenly interrupted: “I’m sorry, you have to stop now because you are causing me harm.” The class fell silent. Realizing that his statement had been misunderstood, Kitcher exclaimed: “Well I expected you would say, ‘stop being frivolous, Kitcher! You’re not being caused any harm. Shut up!’” Silence persisted.

From an e-mail sent by Will Simpkins, Associate Director of College Activities at Barnard: “Dear Student Organizations…or as you kids like to say these days…’Hey, ya!’” Damn kids and their rap music. Just remember Will, it’s hip to be square.
The Blue and White posted on the FEEDback Board in the John Jay dining hall was a comment which read: “PLEASE get soup spoons! Even plastic ones would be OK.” The author then proceeded to draw a “glorious soup spoon,” a “weenie spoon,” and “delicious JJ soup” (note: the B&W can’t distinguish between the “glorious soup spoon” and the “weenie spoon”). Dining Services responded: “OK, we get the picture.” Get it? Picture?

The Blue and White was among the many to notice that four circles were recently inscribed on South Lawn. Four O’s, to put it another way. O’s – four of them. Eureka! ’04! Those seniors obviously have far too much time on their hands. We’d better get them jobs.

Varsity Ego

This year’s production of the Varsity Show featured a chorus, which was composed of ten singers. But, when the cast was informed about the addition of the chorus, it nearly rebelled. According to the creative team, the cast was worried that the audience would “somehow mistake the chorus for the leading roles.” A compromise with the cast was eventually reached: at no point was the chorus ever allowed to be in front of the cast members.

The powers behind University Writing, otherwise known as “Logic & Rhetoric: the Next Generation,” have mandated that students will be forced to present their research papers at a series of “mock academic conferences.” The Blue and White hopes that our friends in the English department will help first-years experience the real joy of academic conferences: not spouting jargon and formalities, but drinking on your employer’s tab, dismissing the success of your colleagues as “all politics,” and sleeping with the geriatric thesis advisor of your thesis advisor.

Reported in The New York Times, 23 November 1890, page 11:

“Last week a rather humorous case of hazing occurred at college. Several Sophomores took offense at a luxurious growth of down that had never been touched, and which was worn around the face of a Freshman. They carefully abducted him one noon, and after having shaved one-half of his face brought him back on the campus and turned him loose.”

While perusing through the television channels one afternoon, a Blue and White staffer noticed that CTV (channel 11) was only displaying a message which read: “HELP! I am stuck in CTV and I’m afraid of cameras!!!” Disturbed by the broadcast, the staffer quickly turned the channel to HBO, where he was thankfully greeted by a re-run of the Sopranos.

Teaching Assistant Sihut Gupta posed a question to the students of Introduction to Computer Science/Programming in Java that no one was able to answer. “Somebody?” he asked. “Anybody? Someone sleeping?” Gupta suddenly pointed to a student dozing in the back of the classroom. “YOU! I don’t know your name. I only know you by CUnix account, xh356, right?” The Blue and White would like to express its concern over this troubling display of numerical reductionism. There was a glorious time at Columbia when we were known by more than just our e-mail addresses. There was a time, believe it or not, when we were known by our social security numbers — all ten digits of them.

Professor Stephen Massimilla on the cruelty of life in King Lear: “I once fed a booger to my hamster. I still feel guilty about that.”

Hector Chavez… He’s Catholic!!!