DEWEY DEFEATS HATERS
The analytical/Continental divide! Pragmatist philosophy!
The reason why Columbia and Barnard metaphysicians all get along!
Only in this issue of The Blue and White!
by Paul Barndt

THE DUKE OF SPADES A conversation with poker superstar Annie Duke

ALSO: FACULTY CRUISES, FIGHTING ILIADS, CELEBRITY DIGITALIA
THE BLUE AND WHITE

Vol. XIII            FAMAM EXTENDIMUS FACTIS            No. IV

WWW.theblueandwhite.org    COVER: “Dewey’s Head” by Alish Erman

DECEMBER 2006  3

COLUMNS

4  Bluebook
8  Campus Characters
19  Verily Veritas
20  Digitalia Columbiana
26  Measure for Measure
31  Campus Gossip

COVER STORY

Paul Barndt  10  Dewey Defeats Haters
A logically salacious history of Columbia’s philosophy department.

Features

Ethan Pack  16  Can’t I All Just Get Along?
For international students of opposing ethnicities, there are no easy answers.

Brendan Ballou  22  The Duke of Spades
A conversation with Annie Duke, poker superstar.

Arts

Anna Corke & John Klopfer  28  Translate, Muse
A look at new Italian and English versions of the Iliad.

David Dunbar  30  Super Mario Barrister
A review of the video game Phoenix Wright: Justice for All.
I want, I need, more coddling!

During Orientation, I attended stern lectures by OLs (put a towel under the door), librarians (put a cap on your mug), and RAs (put a towel under the door). But after that week of teenage bliss, Columbia put me up for adoption. Orientation gave way to disorientation, which must give way to…yes. Re-orientation!

It must happen in the cold of winter, right before we seniors begin our final semester. On the first day, half of us will be made to sit down and adjust the font on our résumé. The other half will be sent to one of the tunnels and strapped to a table, receiving electric shocks for every time we mention the job offers we’ve received. No one will be allowed to use the words “private equity.”

On the second day, there will be a mandatory trip to the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, and Radio City Music Hall. Just in case anyone asks.

On the third day, hang out with friends from freshman year. Wake up the next morning to a hangover and a nervous breakdown.

On the fifth day, find God again. Then reject Him. Then go to a cooking class.

On the sixth day, we will rest. Because we’re second-semester seniors, and we can do whatever the fuck we want. Except rent a car or get out of the swim test.

—Avi Zvi Zenilman
Editor-in-Chief
COME AGAIN...?

“No way Columbia is going to steal this property right out from underneath me. Remember that man who stood in front of the tank at Tiananmen Square? That’s me.”

—Hudson Moving and Storage owner Anne Z. Whitman, who has refused to sell her land in Manhattanville, in *The New York Times*.

**DIGIT TALES: VACATIONS V1100**

Prices to tour the world with the tenured and mighty, as part of the Alumni Travel Study Program:


“Antarctica” with Dr. Trevor Williams, Jan. 9-22, 2007: starting at $7,995 per person, penthouse suites available for $14,995.

“Around the World by Private Jet” with Professor of Populations Joel Cohen, (the 13 stops include Machu Picchu, Easter Island, Samoa, the Taj Mahal, the Serengeti Plains, and the Great Barrier Reef), Feb. 13-March 8, 2007 (waitlist only): $49,950 per person, double occupancy.

**REVELATION OF THE MONTH**

There is something called the Alumni Travel Study Program, which “allows alumni to combine learning and pleasure through domestic and international travel.” This means that rich alums pay insane prices to take sick-ass global jaunts with our professors. Highlights include “Baltic Sea & the Norwegian Fjords” with Anders Stepanson, “Croatia & Dalmation Coast” with Kenneth Jackson, and “A History of God: Part I” with Richard Billows.

**CALENDAR**

**December 15-23, Chanukah**
Shuttle between three clubs at the Matzoh Ball, an all-night bash put on by Letmypeoplego.com. Dec. 24 from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. 3,500 young Jews will be there—will you? $25.

**December 21, Winter Solstice**
The American Atheists will be getting their inner pagan on at a “Winter Solstice Meet ‘N Greet” on December 16 from 12:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Clark, New Jersey. You’re welcome.

**December 25, Christmas**
St. John the Divine will host a Festival Celebration of Christmas, the choral Eucharist with carols and a sermon by the Bishop of New York, at 10:30 p.m. on Christmas Eve. Jews for Jesus welcome!

Bluebook compiled by Jessica Cohen, Josie Swindler, Chris Szabla, and Avi Zenilman. Illustrations by Jerone Hsu.
It’s a difficult job, running for student council. Posters get torn down, handcards get thrown away, and dorm storming yields quizzical glances at best. Last spring, sophomore class president Isaac Silverman C’09 (formerly C’08)—who was “looking for a cool project” anyway—decided the campus needed a central place where students could advertise themselves, flyer-free.

Ashish Kundra E’09, had been working on a similar idea for the Engineering Student Council. When the two discovered their shared brainchild while waiting in line at M2M, an alliance coalesced, and work on www.campusboxoffice.com began.

“Starting that day, I stopped studying,” Silverman said. The boys, looking fresh out of a Morgan Stanley recruitment brochure in their starched shirts and slacks, are now taking the year off from school to build their business (although Silverman also acknowledges “personal reasons” for the break).

With bar mitzvah money as startup capital, the CampusBoxOffice concept quickly moved from a wall of Post-Its to the web, as an online calendar where students can post their events for free and buy tickets on a credit card (but not Flex). Since posterizing for the launch in late November, a few groups—which Silverman calls “customers”—have signed up. (At print time, seven events were listed.)

The money-making part of the business model kicks in when they can coax advertisers on board and expand to other schools.

E-commerce is littered with the carcasses of dead start-ups, and team Kundra-Silverman recognizes that success is anything but guaranteed. These two are set on going back to school when their year is up, and both hold down white-collar jobs to pay the rent.

How to describe the life of a young entrepreneur? Not that differently from a college student’s, actually.

“I get up at 10 a.m., roll out of bed, check the website, call some organizers,” said Silverman. Kundra, who still lives in a fraternity house on campus, will trek up to Silverman’s apartment on 207th, where the two might make bacon and eggs, work on the website for a while, and then take a walk. Life outside of school, however, may have limited their social lives (and spelling—“acapela” and “whats” are but two of the website’s offenses).

“We live, sleep, eat, breathe, whatever else the CampusBoxOffice,” said Kundra as they showed off the interface, looking on like proud parents. “We’re our only friends.”

—Lydia DePillis

The scent of teenage boy confronted me as I opened the door of W503 Lerner. As it does every Friday night, the Games Club was gathering. No, not that Gathering—too mainstream.

One particular Friday night, the sweaty men (and one woman, but clearly someone’s girlfriend) in the room were clustered around cryptic cardboard otherworlds. The conference table was littered with tiny black and white discs and stacks of clear plastic pyramids, a far cry from the Monopoly thimble.
The only game I recognized was the classic card game Mille Bornes, but club members assured me it was only there to weigh down the acetate sheet resting on top of the patterned hexagons of Roads and Bridges, a game of conquest.

Pushing back his mane of fuzzy hair, the club’s former president Nunzio Thron E’06, said this was the first time they had embarked on Roads and Bridges.

I didn’t catch all the details, but it has something to do with turning gold into money, money into stocks and stocks into points, which are then added up on something off-handedly called “the wonder.”

“We have violated the rules egregiously at many points,” Thron said.

Four players immersed in Settlers of Catan appointed James Gambino E’08, to explain the game.

“It’s an abstraction of settling a continent,” he said.

“Who’s settling the continent?” I asked.

“You consider them to be people, but there are no people in this game. You generate the resources but you don’t worry about the populace.”

I felt out of place.

According to one of the players, Games Club broke off from the Science Fiction Society sometime before 1986. It is not uncommon to find Games alums and current students challenging random visitors and friends of friends to games like Zendo, a Zen Buddhist twist on Eleusis, a game that was apparently “not playable.”

“It was published in the February 1959 issue of Scientific American,” said a visitor from Johns Hopkins.

The rules of Zendo went way over my head, even when compared to the more mainstream Mastermind.

“Oh, that’s the game that comes with your computer, right?” I stupidly asked. “Oh wait, no, that’s Minesweeper! Sorry!”

On my way out of the hotbox, I stopped off and eavesdropped on the Settlers of Catan table:

“I need three woods for a stone.”

“That doesn’t get me anything.”

“Four woods for a stone?”

“Fine.”

—Sara Vogel

Tom loves Columbia’s suburban imports—students who have been living on the rim of some major city and stumble into urban life when they come to New York. Tom dropped his last name somewhere on the path from his hometown Malvern, Pennsylvania to Chicago to Morningside Heights. He, too, once was a suburban kid, but currently he panhandles at 111th Street and Amsterdam and in Riverside Park.

“I can tell which Columbia students will give money and which ones won’t,” he declares. Tom claims it is the “scared-looking ones from the suburbs” who are most generous with their cash. Why does it make a difference where they come from? Tom shrugs. “When I was growing up outside Philadelphia, I didn’t see many guys on the street. I guess I surprise them.” He came up with his generous-suburban-kid theory after noticing that students donate most when the fall semester begins, but less after freshmen start the long neurotic slide toward city-dwellerdom.

His roster of the stingy also includes “math nerds, kids who wear sunglasses, and ladies in hot boots.” He says all this with nonchalance, even pride. Tom claims, “I know how rich people are.” He knows their habits and moves, because growing up poor, he’s always “stood on the lip of privilege.” He also sleeps in its doorway and lives on its benches.

—Karen Leung

Illustrations by Jenny Lam
Adrienne Herrera G’08, stands out in the Hungarian Pastry Shop’s sea of grad-student drabness. She wears a red shirtdress, black velour scarf, and a leopard-print coat; long, brown hair covers her entire back. I notice the pulp-art charm hanging from her neck, adorned with a lounging pin-up girl and the words, “Everyone Loves a Looker.”

Growing up with a musician father in Orange County, California, Herrera saw a career in the performing arts as a natural alternative to a college education. After starting as a work-study audition actress in order to take free courses, Adrienne ended up in the music business, in gigs from off-Broadway plays to roles in music videos for REM. and the Foo Fighters (“it’s sort of embarrassing, actually,” she says when I look incredulous). Her stage career culminated with a stint in an Elvis-themed rock’n’roll cabaret, touring little venues in Europe wearing a beehive wig and false eyelashes. Finally, she became a crew hand, touring with bands like Fleetwood Mac and Jane’s Addiction. “It’s a different kind of life, you don’t even know what home is on the road,” Adrienne says. “Some people don’t think it’s a valid life, but I enjoyed it.”

After years of living the wild life of a performer, Adrienne figured it was time to settle down and find a career. For a while, she worked for a talent agency in Beverly Hills. She frequented the Academy Awards and Vanity Fair Oscar parties, rubbing elbows with Hugh Hefner “and his bimbos” and Václav Havel at an international film festival in the Czech Republic. Glamorous as the career was, Adrienne walked away from showbiz when she realized her heart wasn’t in it. “I felt like I was stealing,” she says of her big paychecks, “so I traveled for awhile, spent a lot of money, was stupid, had a rich rock-star boyfriend.”

Her next move was decidedly less glamorous. “One of my girlfriends was like, ‘Why don’t you go back to college?’ I thought I wasn’t smart enough, you know, I felt like the ship already sailed.” But Adrienne enrolled in a Los Angeles community college to pick things up. She heard about Columbia’s General Studies program at a college fair and, struck by the opportunity to make amends with her educational career, she applied.

Two years later, Adrienne is worried about the Greek-heavy first semester of Lit Hum, preparing to start mentoring a disabled second grade boy, and working with No Limits, a program that encourages local high school students to pursue higher education.

Adrienne seems content to be just an academic success now, and has found her experience at Columbia very humbling. “I thought I was going to come in and get my degree, but I’ve been so moved by the people I’ve met...I had one sort of mindset, but I was so pleased to be wrong.”

—Maryam Parhizkar
MAX FRADEN

It is December 2005. Three prominent Indian doctors sit in a conference room awaiting a meeting with researchers from Columbia University’s Earth Institute. They are here to discuss a new diagnostic test for tuberculosis, which currently takes the life of one person in India each minute. But as the research group files in, the middle-aged doctors grow skeptical. The first two members of the team both look about 25 years old. Then, there’s Max Fraden C’08. Max is 19, but looks like he might still be in high school. He is skinny and tall, as if fresh off a growth spurt, with a pronounced Adam’s apple and hands perpetually in his pockets. He has no glasses, no white coat, and certainly no PhD. Outside the set of Doogie Howser, Max seems an unlikely hero in the fight against one of India’s deadliest epidemics.

In a field populated by Earth Institute and United Nations suits with doctorates to spare, Max is a bit conspicuous. His uniform: khaki pants, New Balance sneakers, a non-descript gray sweatshirt, and a weathered Boston Red Sox hat. “My mom is always trying to get me to wear nicer things. She buys me dress clothes every Christmas. I usually wait ’til the day after and then return them,” he says.

Given his laid-back get-up and his econ major, you might imagine Max as just another in the long line of students who arrive at Columbia, read Stiglitz, jump on the Jeff Sachs bandwagon and catch the next plane to Africa. But Max was globally-minded long before Thomas Friedman had droves of American college students applying for internships at Infosys. In elementary school, Max spent hours coloring maps of the world to put up around his room. “It must have been around third grade,” he recalls, “because I remember doing a Zaire flag.”

Clearly, a kid who marks his childhood timeline with coups d’états in Africa isn’t booking time in Rwanda to flesh out a Goldman Sachs application. Max’s childhood was interspersed with trips to places like China, Turkey, Bolivia, even Iran. A chance meeting with a South African student studying development in the US served as a catalyst, quietly transforming hobbies and family vacations into genuine interests. He joined Model UN. He went to Washington to protest the World Bank. Eventually he found himself at the Earth Institute.

A research assistant position at the Center for Global Health his first year quickly started opening doors. First was the trip to India—all expenses paid. Then, in the summer of 2007, Max worked at the Millennium Village in Rwanda. There he did everything from distributing health insurance and mosquito nets to the villagers to testing the efficiency of cook-stoves. One phone message from him in July said: “It’s Max. I just got back from the field. We’ve been harvesting…I’ve learned a lot about storing corn.”

Max’s attitude about his work is refreshingly free of self-importance; it smacks of the same enthusiasm he typically reserves for talking about the Red Sox and his hometown of Newton, Massachusetts. On a Thursday night at 1020—where he’s almost sure to be found—he’s just as likely to be talking about TB and HIV co-infection statistics as he is about Ted Williams.

Last month, Max got an unexpected phone call from a doctor friend in Rwanda. She was coming to visit New York. “It’s awesome that she’s stayed to work in the country,” he said, beaming as he hung up the phone. “No one is doing that.”

There are only 200 doctors practicing in Rwanda. But if you’ve met Max, you probably already knew that.

—Merrell Hambleton
DEWEY DEFEATS HATERS

The analytical/Continental divide! Pragmatist philosophy! The reason why Columbia and Barnard metaphysicians all get along! And more!

BY PAUL BARNDT

ILLUSTRATED BY BEN GROHSGAL

When University of Chicago President William Harper told John Dewey that his wife Alice would not be appointed as head of the Laboratory School, he immediately resigned from his post as Philosophy Department chairman. Dewey’s wide-ranging work had brought a new legitimacy for the distinctly American school of philosophy known as “pragmatism,” which considered the value of an idea to be determined by its practical, observable consequences. Children at the “Dewey School,” which he had founded in 1896, learned arithmetic by measuring ingredients for a meal, physics by cooking them, and biology by digesting them. Columbia President Nicholas Murray Butler soon offered Dewey a job, and he started in the fall of 1904. He would teach here until 1930 and remain productive as an emeritus until his death in 1952. His work addressed everything from religion to morality, from aesthetics to societal reform—for him, philosophy meant tackling the problems of contemporary society and culture.

Philip Kitcher is currently the John Dewey Professor of Philosophy at Columbia, and the chair of Contemporary Civilizations. He is a thin man with a well-groomed grey beard, and although he is almost sixty, his small, intense eyes give him a somewhat younger appearance. A preeminent philosopher of science, he
and his wife Patricia Kitcher (a Kant scholar who is currently the Mark van Doren Professor of Humanities) came to Columbia from UC San Diego in 1997. Since arriving, he has begun to reconsider his own thought in light of Dewey's.

His forthcoming book, *Living With Darwin: Evolution, Design, and the Future of Faith*, addresses the tension between religious belief and modern science; Kitcher cites Common Faith—a slim volume by Dewey on the subject—as an influence. He has been giving a series of lectures on knowledge and democracy, which he says are informed by Dewey's social philosophy, and plans to write a book “on pragmatism that will elaborate a general Deweyan approach to philosophy.”

“I re-read some of his writings, and realized how close his thoughts were to those I’d been struggling to articulate,” Kitcher said. “Dewey’s prose seems very plain and somewhat turgid, so it’s easy to miss what is going on. If you have independently latched on to similar ideas, though, it can be electrifying.”

What makes this somewhat exceptional is that, although John Dewey is a household name among professional educators, his work holds little sway in today’s philosophical community, nor has it done so since before the Second World War, when philosophy split into two camps.

The split, which can be traced to the mid-1920s, was between what became known as the analytic and Continental schools of philosophy. The former is generally associated with the use of rigorous, formal logic to solve very specific problems, and an indifference to the history of philosophy; the latter is more “literary,” less formal in its logic, and more concerned with historical context and the texts of past authors. Famous analytic philosophers include Bertrand Russell and W.V.O Quine; famous continentals are Michel Foucault, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Martin Heidegger.

One of the earliest key events in the split was the conflict between the Vienna Circle of philosophers—especially logician Rudolph Carnap—and Martin Heidegger. The Vienna Circle believed, in the words of member Otto Neurath, in “science free from metaphysics,” or subjects outside of the physical world. It advocated a scientific conception of the world achieved through logical analysis, giving birth to the school of thought known as logical positivism. Heidegger argued, laughably to the Vienna Circle, that metaphysics is the very basis of science, and that only on a ground beyond physical reality can science have any value or reveal any truth.

After Hitler’s rise to power in the 1930s, most of the largely-Jewish Vienna Circle left Europe for America and Britain. (Heidegger, incidentally, embraced Nazism.) Their arrivals triggered a reshaping of philosophical thought, and throughout the 1940s and 1950s, universities in Britain and the United States became mostly analytic. Continental held sway, as its name suggests, throughout continental Europe.

The two groups largely ignored each other’s thought, and there is a still a reluctance in traditionally analytic departments to even touch the Continentals, and vice versa. (In a Bwog feature this past March, Professor Kitcher, who would be considered more analytic than Continental, although he asserts the worthlessness of that distinction, expressed embarrassment over having never read any Heidegger.)

And pragmatism? It didn’t fit in either camp. The analytics thought it was too broad and fuzzy, not rigorous enough in its analysis, and the Continentals thought it was too...well, pragmatic, indifferent to issues like “being.” This is not to say pragmatism was completely ignored—Neurath asked Dewey to write an entry on ethics for his *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, a large compilation of intellectual inquiry that includes virtually no entries from Continentals—but that may have had more to do with Dewey’s renown than with any agreement with his philosophy. And after his 1952 death, Dewey’s ideas were almost entirely swept away by the prevailing analytic winds.Columbia continued to be, and was long known as, one of the few places where professional philosophy indebted to Dewey continued to flourish. As analytical philosophy gave rise to branches of thought—philosophy of mind, philosophy of language—that were concerned with specific,
abstract problems, the Columbia faculty continued its inclusive approach.

“Philosophy has been conceived at Columbia not as a narrowly technical discipline and subject matter, but as a clarification and criticism of the intellectual life of man—the life of reason,” wrote Professor John Herman Randall, Jr. C’18 PhD’22, in his 1957 A History of the Faculty of Philosophy. “This conception has made possible the notably close cooperation of the Department with scholars and inquirers among its colleagues in many other fields.”

A History, which was commissioned for the 200th anniversary of Columbia, described a department that believed in Columbia, the College and its Core, its education in the humanities, sepia-toned images of Lionel Trilling teaching Lit Hum and all that. The professors had Columbia BAs and PhDs. Philosophy professors such as Randall, Horace Friess C’19 PhD’26, and James Gutmann C’18 PhD’36, were strongly influenced by Dewey’s approach to ethics, which replaced the search for a “supreme principle that can serve as a criterion of ethical evaluation” with an empirically-grounded search for a “method for improving our value judgments.” Randall was probably the strongest philosopher of the three—when Thomas Merton C’38 MA’39, the Catholic activist and famous trappist Monk, left Columbia to teach at St. Bonaventure’s College, he riffed on the Columbia motto In Lumine Tuo Videbimus Lumen (“In Thy light shall we see light”) by cracking, “In Lumine Dewey, Videbimus Randall.”

Dewey’s approach also extended to Ernst Nagel, a City College-educated logical positivist and philosopher of science who tried to combine a Deweyan approach with his own brand of philosophical realism.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the philosophy department hired Columbia alumni such as Arthur Danto PhD’52, Isaac Levi PhD’57, and Sidney Morgenbesser JTS ’43. They formed the core of a world-class department that would use the Deweyan approach for the coming decades, long after most of America had left it behind.

Danto, who taught at Columbia for 50 years and is now an emeritus, was The Nation’s art critic and became famous for his work on aesthetics and the philosophy of art. After several years at Case Western Reserve University, Levi came back to Columbia in 1970 to continue his “inquiry into how to justify changes in belief, or changes in points-of-view,” work that is, in his words, “sympathetic to some of Dewey’s problems. In those respects, yes, I am a Deweyan—how people should act, how they should make decisions.”

Morgenbesser, a former Dewey Professor of Philosophy who passed away in August 2004, did not publish much—he was too much of a perfectionist. But he is remembered as a great teacher and a legendary wit. When Oxford philosopher of language J.L. Austin claimed in a lecture that the double positive in English never has a negative meaning, Morgenbesser responded, “Yeah, yeah.” He summed up his engagement with pragmatism with the aphorism, “Pragmatism is great in theory, but doesn’t work in practice.”

Charles Larmore, a professor of philosophy at Brown, who taught at Columbia from 1978 and 1997, said, “It was, in a general sense, a pragmatist department. Isaac Levi, Sidney Morgenbesser, and Arthur Danto (who wouldn’t want be called a pragmatist, but nevertheless), were all broad minded thinkers who reached out into other disciplines.”

This was at great odds with almost every other
major department. “The philosophy department of Princeton in the ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s,” Larmore cited as a counterexample, “where philosophy of language was the center of gravity, so to speak. Not that the work being done there wasn’t valuable, but you don’t really need to know that much about other disciplines to do philosophy of language.” When I asked Kitcher what the perception of the Columbia department was when he was a grad student at Princeton in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he said, “It had faculty who swam quite strongly against the current. But it was a great department.”

Levi, a Dewey Professor Emeritus, lives in one of those swanky, Columbia-owned apartment buildings on Claremont Avenue that makes a junior stuck in Wien jealous. His apartment is filled with books, and a shelf in his study is comprised almost completely of books he has written, edited, or to which he has contributed. On the departmental website, his picture sits in between those of Nagel and Dewey. What does he think about the analytic/Continental split, which was still raging when he was a student and a young professor? “In the work that interests me, these distinctions…” He paused. “I really don’t give a shit.”

Levi described his colleagues with serious respect, “Danto, [philosopher of mathematics] Charles Parsons. These were people to conjure with.” The impression is of great minds who respected one another, but who each pursued his own work and did his own thing.

Larmore, after leaving Columbia, taught at the University of Chicago before going to Brown. He chalked up his departure not to any friction in the department, but to “sheerly economic” reasons—the university’s unwillingness to help pay for his son’s private high school tuition. But he added, “I’ve been in more peaceable departments, and I haven’t been in, but I certainly know of, departments that are more rancorous. Generally speaking, academics are a testy bunch, and philosophers are at the more testy end of the spectrum.”

The rancor came hard on the heels of the 1968 protests and a resulting dip in fundraising that made the administration loath to fund any more positions. In the 1970s and 1980s, Columbia stopped hiring homegrown talent and basically stopped giving out tenure to philosophers. A rotating pool of junior faculty waded in and out of the department; there were rarely any openings. But in 1989, Charles Parsons and Gisela Striker, both full professors, left for Harvard. Danto and Morgenbesser retired soon after. Levi stayed on and served as departmental chair in the early 1990s.

“Those were troubled times,” Levi said. “You had a faculty of maybe 12, 14 members, and six or seven of them left in a short span of time. It was difficult—I could talk all day about those times—but it ended up a good, solid, professional department.”

A few of the members of this new department were drawn from junior faculty, like Larmore, who finally broke the tenure drought in 1987, and Akeel Bilgrami, who was appointed to Danto’s former position as the Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy. Carol Rovane, current Department Chair (and Bilgrami’s wife), came soon after. Ancient philosopher Wolfgang Mann, philosopher of music Lydia Goehr, and others filled the gap. The prestigious new hires—unlike Columbia alumni Isaac Levi, Arthur Danto, Sidney Morgenbesser, and political philosopher David Sidorsky PhD’62—came from around the world, and rarely had Columbia degrees.

The turnover in faculty undoubtedly left several junior professors feeling jilted as Levi and afterwards Larmore (who served as chair from 1992 to 1995) attempted to reconstitute the department. Take Bonnie Kent, PhD’84, currently a professor of medieval philosophy at UC Irvine. She worked under James J. Walsh, a renowned medievalist who taught a popular two-semester course at Columbia on the history of medieval philosophy. Kent taught here an assistant professor, but when she came up for tenure, the department was uncertain.

“There may have been some resistance to her getting tenure,” Professor Bilgrami said, in a smooth, diplomatic tone, but the general consensus, fair or not, seems to have been that Kent’s work was not quite
up to snuff. “We were always ranked number two or number three in medieval philosophy among secular schools,” Professor Levi said, “and not through any great effort on our part—we simply had one of the eminent figures in the field [Walsh].” The implication being that if you didn’t have that “eminent” potential, don’t bother, even if you do have a Columbia degree.

Another conflict that came to a head in these years, and which perhaps was avoidable, was the festering relationship between Columbia’s philosophy department and the department across the street, at Barnard.

Today, the Columbia and Barnard philosophy departments operate very much as one. “Philosophy went the furthest of almost any department at Columbia of simply meshing the two departments,” Larmore said, and other professors agree. The two departments have their own chairs—Barnard has its own undergraduates, after all—but professors can teach in either department with fluidity, and Barnard’s professors can advise Columbia’s graduate students just like CU professors can.

Fifty years ago, the two departments were virtually separate, to the relative satisfaction of both parties. Barnard was a senior women’s institution, and it taught its own curriculum. Columbia students were not allowed in Barnard classes, and vice versa.

The wall was torn down by Barnard professor Mary Mothersill, who served as chair of the Barnard department in the 1970s and 1980s. A distinguished aesthetician, former president of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, and member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Mothersill was the first to start the process of deal-making with the guys across the street. Professors were loath to talk to me about the specifics (“She played a little hard and fast with the rules,” one faculty member opined), but progress was being made. Students could utilize both departments, if only for certain classes with certain teachers.

“Barnard was an object of benign neglect for Columbia,” Professor Levi said. “People were ultimately unwilling to make changes. That Barnard was second-rate was denied with great indignation by the Columbia faculty, but when it came down to it, how they treated it…” Levi trailed off, then picked up. “Real diplomacy came later. I was one of the few who was vocal about this problem,” he claimed. “I was not popular for my views.”

Frederick Neuhouser PhD’88, who specializes in 18th and 19th century European philosophy, and is the current Chair of the Barnard Philosophy department, observed the condescension from both sides: first as a Columbia grad student, then as a Barnard faculty member. “For some time, all the Columbia senior faculty were male, and all the Barnard ones were female,” Professor Neuhouser said, “There was sexism, pure and simple. It was an older generation. It just was.”

The interdepartmental administration did not help matters.

Junior Barnard professors needed to go through both the Columbia and Barnard tenure process to get approval, which rarely happened. “For decades there was no chance of advancement,” Neuhouser said. “And [Columbia] always had the threat in its pocket of refusing to let a Barnard professor teach Columbia graduate classes. Which essentially put

Professor Sidney Morgenbesser did not publish much—was remembered as a great teacher and a legendary wit. When an Oxford philosopher claimed in a lecture that the double positive in English never has a negative meaning, Morgenbesser responded, “Yeah, yeah.”

...
Barnard at the mercy of the Columbia department.”

Barnard had its own concerns about integration. “If Columbia tried to step in, the response was ‘You can’t do that,’” Levi said. “It was accused of bullying the small school. Eventually, Columbia stopped bothering.” It was the common story: Barnard is a strong, independent institution, but it would not necessarily be averse to help from its brother school.

But it was a fine line between helping and bullying, and these problems lingered through the 1970s and 1980s. According to Neuhouser, they actually got worse after he finished his PhD and left to teach at Harvard (he returned in 1994). As unification was seriously discussed, tension mounted, and it seems to have taken Levi and Larmore’s overhaul to straighten things out.

“In the late 90s, the real push took place,” said Professor Levi. “There were a few retirements, and, things started to move.” He did not indicate whether this was on the Columbia or Barnard side. “Essentially, some very diplomatic people came in, and created peace and cooperation.”

Neuhouser agreed. “[Barnard philosopher of science] Alan Gabbey and [Columbia logician] Haim Gaifman made a concerted effort to restructure the department.”

Columbia and Barnard faculty now make all hiring decisions together, and former junior professors such as Professor Neuhouser have successfully worked their way up the ranks. Neuhouser points out, “the proof of unity is that the first person to come up for tenure under this system was [Heidegger specialist] Taylor Carman,” a Barnard professor and the current acting departmental chair for Neuhouser, who is on leave.

“[S]everal times during our interview, Professor Levi criticized philosophy that “reflects on self-contained problems rather than the outside world, science and the arts and society” as “philosophy that gnaws at its entrails.” It is perhaps a testament to professors like Danto and Levi that they did not aggressively groom successors to carry on their pet projects, so what did the new order bring? Will Columbia philosophers gnaw at their entrails?

“If it wouldn’t be grinding any doctrinal axes to say that [Columbia] is no longer the emblem of American pragmatism that it was in the ’70s or ’80s,” Larmore said. Even if the faculty is not as committed to pragmatism, they certainly seem to be carrying on Dewey’s dictum to tackle problems in contemporary culture and society.

Professor Bilgrami, for example, has an upcoming book, *Politics and The Moral Psychology of Identity*, which addresses identity (ethnic, political, and otherwise) as a philosophical concept. He is the also the Director of the interdisciplinary Heyman Center for the Humanities.

I asked Professor Kitcher how he thinks Columbia is seen by the philosophical community.

He told me, “my guess is that we’re perceived as weak on core issues: allegedly cutting-edge work in metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of mind and language.” It was a suggestion that the department still wears its skepticism of analytic philosophy, its efforts to cut across disciplines and grapple with pressing issues, as a badge of honor. As Kitcher put it, “Philosophy is alive here.”

---

**Professor Isaac Levi**

criticized philosophy that “reflects on self-contained problems rather than the outside world, science and the arts and society” as “philosophy that gnaws at its entrails.”
Can't I All Just Get Along?

For international students of opposing ethnicities, there are no easy answers.

BY ETHAN PACK

For Ajay Singh Chaudhary, a third-year PhD candidate at Columbia who is writing his dissertation on Islamic political philosophy in Iran, international travel is a pain in the ass. The child of an Indian Hindu and an American Jew, his indeterminate ethnicity alarmed security guards before his first flight to Israel: if he was Jewish, they asked, why didn’t he know Hebrew? By the next time he traveled there, Chaudhary had studied some Hebrew and was literate enough in Jewish culture to answer the guards’ trivia questions, but was led again to the interrogation room. This time: why did he know so much? Later, while trying to enter Egypt from Israel, Chaudhary was rejected outright. After all, how could anyone who looked like him possibly be an American?

On the other side of that border, Mai Eldib B’08, nurtured an unlikely interest in Jewish culture. Eldib, who hails from Alexandria, Egypt began studying Hebrew and Israeli culture during her sophomore year, with no previous exposure to the subject matter. “I enjoy it tremendously because I see so many similarities [to Arab culture],” she said. “There are traditional aspects that I respect tremendously. They are so congruent to the ones in Arab culture that I can get along with it.” Although Egypt and Israel officially have peace, bureaucratic headaches and a legacy of mutual suspicion have prevented her from traveling to Israel.

Illustrated by Sumaiya Ahmed
that used to comprise Yugoslavia. At a university
famed for exacerbating political tension, however,
getting an education means grappling with stereo-
types and co-existing with so-called enemies on a
daily basis. They must contend with an academic
climate that pits ethnic groups against each other
while simultaneously encour-
aging students to look beyond
labels.

Hannah Assadi C’08, Shira Danan C’07, and
Tina Musa C’09, spent last
summer in the Balkans with
Abraham’s Vision, a compar-
ative conflict analysis pro-
gram for Jewish and Palestin-
ian students. (Assadi wrote
about her time in Belgrade
for the Fall 2006 Columbia
Current.) Each found that
witnessing the intensity of a different ethnic war
with her supposed adversaries put a human face on
the violence. “It was a total shock to my system,”
said Danan, who is Israeli-American. “My Israeli
relatives don’t interact with Arabs—they live side-
by-side without interacting.” An extraordinary ex-
perience in its own right, the mid-summer erup-
tion of war between Israel and Lebanon only made
the issues at stake feel more urgent—students on
both sides had family in the line of fire. “It started
with politics,” said Musa, a Palestinian-American.
“Then it got really personal.”

Those who have participated in Abraham’s Vi-
sion find Columbia’s atmosphere somewhat less
conducive to dialogue. Efforts to avoid the cam-
pus’s regular clashes, they say, merely cause a
temporary suppression of the problems. “The issue
is always going to polarize people,” said Assadi,
the daughter of a Palestinian and an American
Jew. “But I think what’s worse is the silence that’s
been really pervasive. Now there’s this fear of even
being open about certain beliefs—for example,
support for Israel” in a dialogue setting.

These issues have crystallized in the after-
math of recent campus controversy. When The
David Project, a Boston-based group, produced
a documentary alleging anti-Israel intimidation
in Columbia’s Middle East and Asian Languages
and Cultures Department in 2004, a media-satu-
rated debate about academic freedom and censor-
ship ensued. Both pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian
groups accused the other side of stifling dissent.
A faculty investigation yielded inconclusive re-
results.

Since then, both camps have shied away from
taking controversial stances for fear of being associated
with extremists and subse-
quently discredited. This
caution can often be counter-
productive. “There’s an issue
if you never really delve into
the problems. We all have
anger, we all have passion,
[but] you need to talk about
things that are relevant,
that will actually get people
emotional,” Musa said. “You
can’t sidestep around each
other.”

Considering the very real
censorship in Mai Eldib’s
native Egypt, she is aston-
ished that an American
university can end up facili-
tating a similar fear of open
discussion.

Considering the very real censorship and lack of
free expression in Eldib’s native Egypt, she is as-
stonished that the political climate at an American
university can end up facilitating a similar fear of
open discussion. “In Egypt, it’s very problematic,”
she said. “Israel is regarded very much as the en-
emy, something you shouldn’t be affiliated with.
The more we believe in that strain, and construct
this idea of the Other, the more it will perpetuate
and the greater the divide will be.”

The demographics at Columbia reinforce the
separation between rival ethnic groups—especial-
ly with the large Jewish presence and relatively
small Arab and Muslim communities. Eldib, Assi-
di, and others observed that classes on Islamic
and Arab culture are often filled with Jews. Yet
they find that few fellow Arabs cross over to study
Israeli and Jewish culture. This trend was often
cited during The David Project controversy.

New York City itself adds tension. In the city
with America’s largest Jewish community, the Is-
raeli-Palestinian conflict attracts disproportionate
scrutiny. Given Columbia’s visibility, the univer-
sity becomes an overheated battleground of politi-
cal groups jockeying for position. “I went to one
speech [Harvard Law Professor] Alan Dershowitz
gave, and it was such crap,” Danan said. “It was
just people yelling at each other—who has the
biggest sign, who has the most pithy statement to
The students who participated in Abraham’s Vision witnessed enemies violently talking past one another, clashes between those who commemorate massacres and those who deny them. And they learned, they told me, that political stances can often become alienating. “One of the only effective means of doing anything for this issue is to become involved in political action groups,” said Assadi, the Palestinian Jew. “A lot of times, though, it’s like ‘well, if you are going to join this activist group, you cannot understand them.’”

Students and scholars are often accused of promoting the political agenda generally associated with their ethnicity. Some Jewish students have claimed that MEALAC academics push pro-Palestinian positions through selective scholarship. In the Balkans, the Palestinian students grew exasperated with the Jews’ insistence on emphasizing the historical context that led to Zionism. In Jewish-Arab dialogue groups on campus, such as Project Tolerance, Musa and Eldib have encountered Jewish historical perspectives that are in conflict with what they grew up learning. “If you’re going to bring people together for dialogue, who are you going to bring in to teach them?” Musa asked. “There is no way you can cover every part of both sides.”

She recalled an Abraham’s Vision session where the Jews and Palestinians observed a Bosnian-Serbian version of their dialogue. “We saw the same tensions—the need to correct each other in terms of politics—that we always see in ourselves,” she said. “It was a completely different conflict, but you still see how everyone is so messed up in terms of these issues, of what actually happened.”

Students whose ethnic identities aren’t associated with the Middle East tend to feel less pressure to defend them. Waqas Shaikh E’07, who is Muslim, was raised in Queens but born in Pakistan. At Columbia, he participates in Indian cultural events, such as Hindu Diwali dinners, often at the invitation of his Indian brothers in the Beta Theta Pi fraternity. He has rarely felt political ramifications from his friendships with Indians. “The Kashmir conflict [between India and Pakistan] doesn’t get that much news and hype here,” he said. “That’s why there’s no lobbying, or trying to present your case, or make people understand your argument.”

B&W staffer Jessica Lin E’08, is a first-generation Taiwanese-American. Last summer, she visited China—which claims sovereignty over the island of Taiwan—for the first time, with her mother. While the trip reminded Lin of the political and cultural differences between Taiwan and China, it also reinforced her belief that the divide barely registers with most outsiders. “People play less of a role in the conflict than the government does,” Lin said. “It’s kind of out of our hands.”

At Columbia, Lin finds her social affiliation with the greater East Asian community to be most important, rather than her identification with Chinese or Taiwanese subgroups. “I don’t think Americans know the difference between China and Taiwan. If I made an effort to make a distinction, people might not agree. In everyday life, you’re not always politically charged.” Similarly, Shaikh finds himself identifying with the South Asian community rather than the smaller Pakistani one.

Meanwhile Chaudhary fears he will be forced to confront hostile political dynamics once he starts teaching Islamic political philosophy. “There’s nothing less Muslim than a Jew with Hindu background,” he said. On the other hand, it’s possible that our particular academic setting may foster unique opportunities for breaking down the tension. “Columbia, as part of the academic world, absorbs things differently,” Chaudhary said. “Out there, this stuff isn’t even a question. We tend to focus, for very good reasons, on the borders between things—where things get fuzzy, where central narratives fall apart. Out there, central narratives are what it’s all about.”

“We live in an idealized bubble that describes itself as an idealized bubble,” he concluded. “Out there, an Arab is an Arab; a Jew is a Jew.”

At Columbia, “we tend to focus on the borders where central narratives fall apart. Out there, an Arab is an Arab; a Jew is a Jew.”
Enough with the lies! Verily has been untruthful with you, dear reader, lo these many years. It hasn’t been deliberate, or at least not malicious; you are a victim of mere laziness, and ought to feel sorrowful, not angry. You are hardly the worse for it: you look more or less the same as when you began reading Verily’s regularly dishonest dispatches in the formidable journal you hold in your hands. Your cheeks are still healthy, your smile still kind, the birthmark on your thigh still gorgeous to Verily’s besotted eye and, finally, neither time–nor, sadly, Verily–has yet ravaged you.

So now Verily is washing the blood clean from his hands. The column is “Told Between Puffs.” But rarely is Verily telling it between puffs! Yes, perhaps according to the letter: he is indeed often inhaling as he scribbles from the Ledge. Yet the title and that illustration to the right of these words connote a tale told from a damp, cold bench outside Butler amidst a pungent mist of tobacco smoke. But Verily usually types—and, horror, revises!—his writings in the cobwebbed corner of his secret lair (alias the basement of Avery). He hasn’t felt so ashamed since he took a jaunt to Paramus to purchase a prom dress—a concession to bad taste that at least held the promise of a seven-second-long reward.

So now Verily does penance, and tells it between puffs. Of course, you’ll have to take his word for it. But it’s true. It’s warm and rainy now—much like it’s been the past 80 months or so. Verily sits outside the bard-spangled fortress of knowledge. And Gary, this fall’s B&W intern, sits too, transcribing. Gary is a competent, supple boy of 15; he seems fairly wise and eager; contains a faint Semitic strain; and apparently they grant credit at Dalton for this sort of thing. Say hi to the good people, Gary.

Now where were we? (Other than on our fourth cigarette. Counting cigarettes over one sitting is like counting lovers over a year: you won’t be happy until you’ve broached double digits.) Verily had labored over and been beleaguered by a “Lens” essay.

To back up—ahem, to “zoom out”—and explain: Verily feels the need to stay as abreast of Columbia’s curricular changes as he is of female first-years at the School of Mines. Verily recalls Logic & Rhetoric, the regal precursor to the monstrous vapidity of University Writing, with a nostalgic fondness not unlike his feelings towards that central ampersand. And this fondness tore Verily away from dipping his toes into this Timothy Dalton of a writing program for the past five years.

But, as with the eighth issue of The Eye, enough is enough. Verily enrolled this year, and has regretted it ever since his instructor, a candidate for a doctorate in Postmodern Studies or some such thing, assigned him the first of eight consecutive essays written by various lifetime members of the Académie Française. Verily last used a lens one particularly passionate summer, when he went to a lost love’s front door, spelled her name in honey, waited for the ants, and with the lens’s godlike power created an indelible homage. So the prospect of lenses has ever since produced a bad taste in his mouth: restraining orders and burnt honey tend to do as much.

Enough about Verily. Twelve cigarettes is a respectable count, and besides, Verily’s pack is empty. Now to the innards of the concrete prison. Verily needs a public computer to purchase several Christmas scarves, and a cubby to construct his Lens, like a prose optician. From Verily and Gary, Jesu Natus Felix!

[begin puff]

—Verily Veritas
In his essay “The Sweatshop Sublime,” Robbins examines the role of the consumer in the moment of consciousness similar to the moment of Kanye West when realizing the origin of a product.

She started dating Prince Charles in the 80s when she was called “whore.”

Little children in rich families grow up with parents telling them to avoid homeless people. Don’t make eye contact.

From first beginning to farm the land for food, to blazing a trail for colonization of the American West, to surviving the brutality of natural disasters, our race has always managed to press on and thrive despite the adversities we’ve faced.

What I found was far from awe-inspiring. Instead of wildlife I found manicured lawns, instead of a diverse spectrum of animals I saw piggish pigeons and domesticated squirrels.

A private equity manager who sat in the office next to me saw me and boomed from across the hall “What kind of beer is that?” When he saw what I was holding, giddy can’t really begin to describe his reaction.

The bar owner delivers an ultimatum to the women who patronize the establishment which I find unsavory at best. Similarly, the grandmother mentioned was responsible for making a round of calls to all the parents to remind them of their commitment to the program; this has the distinct flavor of a mother calling to nag.

I will not only have the chance to speak with the patients, but also to learn about their lives. Similarly, observing group therapy is a rare opportunity to understand the difficult lives of patients.

Paper is not a new product by any stretch of the imagination, having been invented and used more or less globally prior to the advent of advanced capitalism, to be sure.

Interference explains how these new memories “interfered” with or distorted the original OJ memory, resulting in the observed decline in participants’ accurate recall of their OJ memory over time.

I initially perceived the Chamunda’s countenance to look very inhumane. I closely examined Chamunda’s countenance and noticed that his eyes and ears were in a disproportionate arrangement. For instance, one eye was bigger than the other eye and the ears were vividly lopsided.

Heat radiated from her back and shoulders, staining her t-shirt and making her feel tired and suffocated. Fumbling for her metro card in front of the turn style, Atara noticed with irritation that her water bottle had been leaking, the puddle on the floor already brown.

Lydia had already woken up and had already gone to class but I didn’t know where she was, because I had just woken up, and I hadn’t even put in my contacts yet because I had just woken up even though, they were sitting on my nightstand but I can’t see without my contacts because I’m legally blind!!!
As a member of The Sierra Club, I am aware of the issues affecting our plant.

My writing is constantly at odds with my living. When not writing, disorganization is my method of organization.

I imagine a scenario in which I am walking through a market and I happen to see a boy around eleven years of age stealing groceries from a food stand by putting it in his bag. Clearly I would be angered if I see someone stealing but how do I manifest the virtue anger properly in this situation?

Tendency for strong, independent women and self-centered, obsessive, narcissistic men in the plots.

And now we shall put my time machine into action. You are about to witness an historic event. First we will try a short distance. Watch as we travel through space.

Aleksandr Sergeevich, where did the wall disappear? Comrade Timofeev, you will answer to the law for this wall.

Do you make your own coffee or do you buy it and bring it back—and if so—from where? I go to Pinnacle usually to buy my coffee every morning. Why? It’s cheap and close to my building. Who else goes to Pinnacle? Old people, people in suits, minorities (who you almost never see at Starbucks), and students.

I believe that my diverse background in Medicine, Biological Sciences, Marketing, Psychology, English, Accounting, e-commerce, Marketing Research and Treasury have certainly broadens my abilities to meet the challenges of the ever-changing economy and market. I am also very interested in expanding my interest and applying my abilities in available global projects.

The primary motif in a portrait is the sitter.

So we can conclude that the moving of a finger is an intricate detailed process, yet it all happens in much less than a second’s time.

I squeeze 12-ounce Poland Spring water bottles into the white mini refrigerator as close as sardines are in a can. I check the shoe rack for mismatches and pair up the navy hand-woven Espagole sandal my sister Maxine bought me as a souvenir from Madrid with its proper mate. I search for the 2X4 inch black LG cell phone in the oversized tote bag, which was peacefully resting on the white, plump, down feathered comforter. After much endless searching for the phone, I am persuaded that the garbage can at lunch stole it, but Madonna’s ring proves me wrong. I adjust the knob on the Feature Comforts black and gray, circular fan to full speed and finally take a seat in front of my two pound Dell laptop, whose child-like size creepily brings back to memory what I was trying to run away from: the days of school lunches.

Maybe you want to return to Shpak’s living room? I will open the wall for you.

Depending on serious circumstances of The Hall Monitor, including male and female symptoms of PMS, a citizen will be granted access to an island through the most highly selective type of honor of our time, the holy signature.

If the burger bounced only twice, it was not homemade and you should be sure to ask for your money back.

The consumer can choose to boycott or spread awareness, but they cannot battle a corporation. Kanye West faces a similar dilemma. He raps in his song, “People askin me if gonna give my chain back, that’ll be the same day that I give the game back.” In other words, he would not give his chain back, in “the game” he is referring to the success he has made in the rap industry. As a fellow consumer I feel I cannot blame Kanye.

Basically, I wiped bird poop off seats for $6 an hour. And it was glorious.
THE CONVERSATION

THE DUKE OF SPADES

Columbia alums can impart some valuable lessons: when life gives you lemons and Penn almost gives you a PhD in Neuropsychology, move to Montana and win more than $3,250,000 playing poker. Meet Annie Duke, C’87, the world’s top female poker player.

B&W: I was reading your book. Your family sounded like The Royal Tenenbaums.

AD: It was a little like that.

B&W: When did you realize that your family was different?

AD: It depends on what kind of different. I grew up in this very strange location, on the campus of a boarding school. Everybody at boarding school is kind of weird. The kids at this school were very moneyed East Coast families. There was a Pillsbury when I went there; the Houghton-Mifflin company, their kids went there; DuPont went there, and so those kids were seriously setting off for Aruba for the weekend. I was going home and doing my laundry.

B&W: Did your personality change when you left St. Paul’s [boarding school, in New Hampshire]?

AD: I think that at St. Paul’s I was definitely more closed up, less gregarious because I really fit in so badly. When I got to Columbia, that’s where I really became confident. There you had a place where being different was valued; that’s one of the reasons why I chose Columbia as opposed to a Harvard or Princeton. It attracts a much more eclectic group of people who really value intellect and differences and being eccentric.

B&W: Was your family extremely competitive?

AD: That would be an understatement. My dad was a very good regional amateur tennis player and he still competes on the senior circuit. He had an issue with dehydration, and he would play these finals and get home and his whole body would cramp up, and my mom and brother and I would seriously be carrying this 6’4”, over-200-pound man downstairs, cramming him into the car because he...
couldn’t move and bringing him to the hospital for electrolytes—and he’d be out on the court the next day. So I grew up with this father where I learned that it was all about winning, and you will do anything and go through any kind of pain you need to go through in order to win.

B&W: Did you react against that competitiveness?

AD: No, I embraced it. I became the most competitive human being on the planet. I really did. We would play cards every single night and I always lost, and literally every night it would end with me throwing the cards against the wall or throwing the Scrabble board in the air, in tears, stomping up the stairs. I just wanted to win so badly.

B&W: So were you as competitive in college?

AD: Not so much in college. It sort of went by the wayside in college because for the first time I was so socially successful and I was very much focused on the social side of my life. In college people didn’t like to play games with me. I spent a lot of time going out.

B&W: What brought you to grad school—inertia?

AD: It was complete inertia. That is so the best word for it. By the time the end of college rolled around I was a double major in English lit and experimental psych, which seriously gives you no job skills. So at the end of it I was like, “Oops.” I hadn’t done any internships, and I hadn’t done anything during the summer except hang out in New York. I was a very good student, I got very good grades, and so I was like, “I’m going to keep being a student—that’s what I’m going to do.” So I took the GREs and did really well and sort of had my choice of graduate schools. I ended up going to UPenn in psych, which was considered the number one program in experimental psych at the time.

B&W: You were studying psycholinguistics—what is that?

AD: It’s the study of language acquisition, processing, and comprehension. So basically we work out when I’m speaking to you, how you understand what I’m saying. How do you learn speech, and how do children learn their first language?

B&W: That’s kind of cool.

AD: Yeah, it’s a really interesting topic. Completely useless, but an interesting topic.

B&W: Did you have fun in grad school?

AD: I had a great time in grad school—I really did. I did very well, I had a National Science Foundation fellowship, I really enjoyed teaching, but by the end of it I was just like, “This is not at all what I want to be doing with the rest of my life.” I really enjoyed teaching, but by the end of it I was just like, “Oh my God, if I have to do this for the rest of my life I’m going to kill myself.”

B&W: So what were you thinking you would do?

AD: When I quit? I had no idea.

B&W: How did you end up going to poker?

AD: I was going to a job talk over at NYU and I just started throwing up. It was really a break-down moment, and I landed in a hospital for two weeks because I was so dehydrated because I could not keep anything down. My whole future lay before me and I didn’t want it and I didn’t know how to get out of it.

B&W: So you broke down.

AD: I was going to a job talk over at NYU and I just started throwing up. It was really a break-down moment, and I landed in a hospital for two weeks because I was so dehydrated because I could not keep anything down. My whole future lay before me and I didn’t want it and I didn’t know how to get out of it.

B&W: So what were you thinking you would do?

AD: When I quit? I had no idea.

B&W: How did you end up going to poker?

AD: I moved to Montana because I had just gotten married, and I moved into this house that cost $11,000, made of chicken wire and stucco. I really needed money. So basically I called my brother [professional poker player Howard Lederer] up, and discussing my options he was like, “I’ve watched you play a little bit of poker, why don’t you try that?” Because gambling’s legal in Montana. I started to
play poker to pick up extra money until I decided what to do with myself.

B&W: When did you decide that this was something feasible and permanent?

AD: When I won $2,800 the first month. Honestly.

B&W: What worked about poker that didn’t about academia?

AD: The money’s better. Look, I grew up playing games, so when I sat down at that poker table it was like sitting down on the shag carpet in my dad’s study. This was what I had sort of been brought up to do, because we played cards like five nights a week. It was something where I sat down and was like, “Oh—this is what this is.”

B&W: Are there any skills that transfer over from grad school to poker?

AD: The only thing is that you do a lot of statistics and probability theory in Experimental Psych, so that was a skill that transferred over well. As far as people skills—no. Academics are among the most socially inept human beings on the planet.

B&W: How long did it take you to build a poker career?

AD: I built it really quickly. I started and within a year I won $70,000 at the World Series. But that doesn’t speak to my abilities so much as my brother’s teaching abilities.

B&W: Now that you’ve been getting a lot of media attention, when you’re at a table, does being famous give you an advantage or a disadvantage?

AD: It actually cuts both ways. It gives you an edge because people are scared of you. Sometimes it puts you at a disadvantage because people are coming after you. Probably the majority of people are like, "If I get knocked out by Annie, that’s cool, I can say I got knocked out by Annie Duke. And if I beat Annie Duke—ooh—I get to beat her, or I get to say that I bluffed Annie Duke." So it actually injects a lot of variance into your game, because generally good poker players are very good at managing their variance—in other words, they tend not to get their money in high-risk situations. If for the rest of my lifetime I’m going to get my money in pots where I’m going to win 54 percent of the time, I will win tons of money. But on a single variation it’s highly likely that that’s going to damage me. When players feel they’re much better than the field they tend not to want to take those breaks away where it’s 54-46, and they tend to be very good at managing their chip stacks and keeping pots small and doing everything they can to lower their variance and increase their likelihood for success. When you’re playing people who are going after you, you don’t have any choice. They’re putting you in a strategy where you have to put in a lot of chips every time. It’s not a bad strategy for them if they’re unsure of themselves. In the long run the risk of ruin is a lot higher in an individual tournament if you have people who are playing like that.

B&W: So you’ve really had to adjust your strategy because of your fame?

AD: Oh for sure, yeah.

B&W: Why has poker as a sport become possible?

AD: Well here’s the interesting thing—poker hasn’t really become more popular. Poker is woven into our history. Wild Bill Hickok got shot in the back holding a poker hand. Richard Nixon financed his first congressional campaign on poker. Truman was a big poker player. Poker is something that everyone has always played. The question is—how do you make that accessible on TV? There are kind of two pieces to the equation. The first thing they did to make it a successful TV event is they showed
the hole cards. When you’re playing poker it’s re-
really interesting because you know what your cards
are and you’re trying to figure out what everybody
else’s cards are. Watching is boring unless you can
see everyone’s hole cards. Poker is so popular that
we’re really just tapping into an
audience that already existed.
The other thing that happened
merged with that: starting basic-
ally in the year 2000, you got
these Internet poker sites. And
that definitely made poker much
more accessible because you
could literally just open up your
laptop and you didn’t have to go
to a casino.

B&W: Who plays poker?

AD: Everyone, and I’m not kid-
ding. Twenty-one-year-olds, 71-
year-olds, women, men, every-
body plays poker. I challenge
you to find someone who hasn’t
played poker.

B&W: Are you going to be satis-
fied with this as a career?

AD: Well, I do have something else. I have a pro-
duction company. Look, I was an English lit major
in college and then I went into this very mathemati-
cal endeavor, so now I’m sort of exploring my cre-
ative side as well—and I’m doing both things at the
same time. So I have a horror movie that we just got
a director attached to.

B&W: What’s the horror movie?

AD: It’s like a supernatural thriller that I had the
idea for. I found a writer with my producing part-
er and he basically wrote the story I created. Then
there’s a black comedy that we have in development
that we’ve attached a writer to, and that’s going very
well. And I just sold a game
show called The Session. So
I’ve been sort of creating
some entertainment prop-
erties with some success. The
creative side is extremely
important to me and I’ve
never shunted it aside, but
this is the way for me to re-
ally let that blossom as well.
Poker as a career has obvi-
ously been very satisfying
for me, and I’ve done very
well at it.

B&W: But will you ever just
stop playing?

AD: I don’t think so. There
might be a point when I no
longer do it as much, but
I’ve been doing it for a long
time—I’ve been a profes-
sional for 12 years—and so far I’ve not grown sick of
it. The nice thing about poker is that it doesn’t ever
bore you, because the wonderful thing about the
game is that the more you play it the more the com-
plexities are revealed to you. After 12 years at the
professional level there has never been a time when
I’ve played poker when I haven’t learned something.
It’s hard for that kind of game to get boring.

—Brendan Ballou
The beam is crooked.
It stands proudly in the sky, proudly leaning askew.
I walk towards it—
Actually, I’m just trying to get home—
It’s all the same, though.
I hear Mexican Blues coming from a basement bar—
Oh, it’s actually Contemporary Classical music,
Anyway that’s what it says on the poster clinging to the window.
I descend the three or seven steps down,
There’s a man sitting at the bottom,
I didn’t even see him,
I stepped on his hand so he mutters something;
I feel bad so I tell him to go fuck off.
Inside it smells of lavender and licorice;
Except when I walk by the officious yet unperturbed
Police officer. He smells like moss the morning after rain.
Security stinks, I can’t help but think—I don’t tell him
To fuck off.
The music is overbearing
Though the musicians play quietly.  
I slip past a table of men playing poker;  
They smell of acrid unimportance,  
But I stick around, looking at their hands.  
They’re looking at each others’ faces,  
Searching for a sign.  
We look miserable, though the music is pristine.  
Back outside, the beam is still tittering handsomely.  
Forming a triangle with the sidewalk and a motel’s façade,  
It reminds me of a boat’s sail, gliding away.  
Actually, the clouds in the background are floating away,  
The sailboat is anchored to the cement,  
A front, an illusion;  
Like the poker players’ game of liar-liar-pants on fire,  
And the bar’s lavenderlicorice smell of obsequious apathy.  
The sky is upside-down,  
The entire world is built on tilt.

—Tom Faure
Translate, Muse

Over the past five years, the Iliad has been the heart of two major exegeses, two interpretations, two sets of children’s books, a dramatization, and two volumes of a new six-volume encyclopaedic commentary published by Cambridge University Press. Even Brad Pitt has slipped into the Homeric canon.

Doing justice to Homer for a popular audience isn’t easy, but Alessandro Baricco might have figured it out. As Troy made its way to the big screen in the spring of 2004, Baricco, a journalist and musicologist by training, busted himself planning an ambitious public reading for the Romaeuropa Festival in Rome: that September, 12 actors would dramatize the Homeric epic over three days. His 12-hour Omero, Iliade is godless, lyrical, and both enthralled and disgusted by the violence it presents.

In this show, the actors sit on the stage, reading from the script. They engage the audience, gesturing, hand across throat as they howl, “He hit him here, exactly.” The characters tell their story collectively, as both narrators and as protagonists. In asides they plead and make their demands.

Omero, Iliade, written in Italian, has already been translated into at least seven languages. At the October 26 panel “The Art of Translation” in Havemeyer, B&W staffers John Klopfer and Anna Corke listened to New Yorker editor Ann Goldstein describe her English translation of Baricco’s work, entitled An Iliad. John Klopfer read Omero, Iliade in the original Italian, and Anna Corke read An Iliad. Read on as we rappel into the language gap.

John: Baricco wanted the first word on translation, so he has it: “Now the text of this transformed Iliad is about to be translated into various languages, around the world. I realize that this adds paradox to paradox. A Greek text translated into an Italian text, which is adapted into another Italian text and finally translated into a text, for example, Chinese. Borges would undoubtedly have been ecstatic. The peril of losing the power of the Homeric original is certainly great, I can’t imagine what will happen.”

Anna: I think the fact that Baricco took such an openness to the translation of his book is essential—

J: He says in Omero, Iliade’s forward that he chose to work from the only Italian prose translation of Homer’s Iliad. He wanted to distance himself from the traditional verse and poetic form, and write something more modern.

A: That, and his interpretation is radical. He allows Pandarsus to narrate his own death and Priam to vacillate between “I” and the royal “We.” It’s interesting, though, that all the translators who spoke at Columbia with Ann Goldstein saw a translation of a translation as a serious no-no in the literary world. If a book in Finnish needs to be translated into Swahili and a good translator can’t be found, editors won’t even consider translating through another language. Goldstein said she referenced five or six English translations of the Iliad to ensure that her translation was faithful to Baricco’s appropriation of the Italian Iliad as understood in Italian.

J: So, she would use “swift-footed Achilles,” instead of a literal translation of the Italian, which would be “fast-foot Achilles.”
A: That’s the right idea, but Baricco doesn’t use that epithet. In fact, he took out most of the epithets; he instead prefers Homer’s metaphors: “he fell to the ground like an olive tree, young, beautiful, strong, covered with white blossoms, suddenly shattered by a bolt of lightning in a storm.”

J: But Baricco also modifies Homer’s language. As soon as Antilochus has finished recounting the death of Patroclus, he grudgingly throws in a few details about Achilles’s horses, Xanthus and Balia: “Oh and that thing with the horses...” How does Goldstein deal with asides to the audience like this?

A: She cuts them. She may have wanted her translation to be readable as a novel, though she did say she tried to preserve the theatrical aspects of the text. I have to admit that Baricco’s version of Antilochus’ speech sounds much more colorful.

J: Does Goldstein keep Baricco’s stage direction? In Omero, Iliade, when Patroclus describes Agamemnon beheading Iphidamas and Phoenix recounts Hector spearing Thestor both gesture at their own bodies, saying, he was hit, “right here.” How does that translate?

A: Goldstein’s Patroclus gives emphasis—“struck him right in the neck”—but shows no physicality. Phoenix gives no emphasis and no indication.

J: Let’s skip to things outside Goldstein’s control. In English we can’t discern by the verb alone whether someone is speaking respectfully. Baricco’s narrators address each other in the second person: informally—Odysseus prays to Athena, predator goddess, in the singular second person. Gods and kings are typically addressed in the plural: royal We, royal You, but Omero, Iliade doesn’t conform.

A: In Goldstein’s rendition, there isn’t much emphasis on formality or its absence. The vernacular doesn’t distinguish rank particularly, nor does it emphasize the fact that, in many cases, Baricco uses unusually informal language.

J: When Ideus’s, the herald, addresses Priam, King of Troy, he does it as a peer. Ideus’ order to the king can be either translated as “get up” or “rise.” What does Goldstein use?

A: She uses “rise,” which seems a bit formal.

J: Right. To show Ideus’s informality, she would have to throw out the Homeric lexicon and say “Get up, Priam.”

A: Her translation seems less risky; it’s like she doesn’t want to stray too far from the tone of the Iliad I read in Lit Hum.

J: She can’t be consistent unless she suppresses markers of informality. That’s more the fault of our language. In any case, Baricco uses nothing but informal conjugation; it would be more fun to see a translator work out the subtleties of rank marked by conjugation in a 19th-century French novel.

A: Let’s talk about the most compelling part of Baricco’s work, the bit where Pandarus narrates his own death: “The bronze tip entered near the eye, went through the white teeth, cut the tongue cleanly at the base, and came out the neck. I fell from the chariot—I, a hero—and the bright shining armor thundered down upon me ... Then my strength abandoned me, and with it, life.”

J: A fine moment in narration, but I think the River scores points for actually mocking Achilles: “[Achilles] fled ... and when he stopped, and turned, I surged over him, and again he found the earth beneath his feet and again began to run, until finally I heard him crying, godlike Achilles, ‘Mother! Mother! Will no one save me?’” It must be tough, being a hero.

—Anna Corke & John Klopfer
Phoenix Wright: Justice For All
Capcom
Nintendo DS
$29.99

Phoenix Wright is a franchise on Nintendo’s handheld, touch-sensitive two-screened DS game system. The first game in the series, Ace Attorney (already on its fourth installment in Japan) similarly won the hearts and minds of The American People when it stormed our shores last year. The title character is a defense attorney, his clients are inevitably innocent but facing a mountain of damning evidence, and he not only exonerates them, but outs the real guilty party.

Demand surged when shipments of the game quickly sold out last fall. The $30 game had been selling for triple digit prices on eBay, and its cult standing was secure. Capcom, developer of Phoenix and other cash cows like Mega Man and Resident Evil, has never been a company to shy away from franchising. The sequel, Justice For All, will be released stateside in early 2007—too long for me to wait. When I learned that a Japanese version of the game, complete with English translation, had already been released, I took the opportunity to impress my fellow Phoenix fans and had it shipped across the Pacific.

In Justice For All, Phoenix gathers evidence at the crime scene (moving through different static environments, à la Myst), which he uses to point out the contradictions in the testimonies of witnesses, who are always either confused or blatantly lying. Watching events unfold, you’re prompted to solve the problem with the proper evidence to move the story along. The narrative is linear and unchanging, engaging in a way familiar to anyone who has watched six straight hours of Law & Order.

Part courtroom drama, part soap opera, Justice For All is better, or at least more ridiculous, than anything you’ll see on TV. The action maintains a consistent fever pitch—the witnesses lie, the judge is senile, and spectators heckle Phoenix from the gallery. Characters and events each have their own musical themes. And thanks to a microphone built into the front of the DS, you can even yell “Objection!” or “Hold it!” at the screen instead of tapping a button.

Your rival attorney is Franziska von Karma, a law prodigy who’s been prosecuting in Germany since the age of 13. She left for one reason: to put her perfect win record on the line and crush Phoenix, who, in a mothertrucking epic case from the first game, ruined her father Manfred’s perfect record.

Somehow, each successive case (the game has four) raises the stakes exponentially, adding spirit mediums, split personalities, cop killers, mysterious “suicides,” and a kidnapping to the mix. The cast includes shady characters such as Richard Wellington, a well-coiffed drifter who hasn’t gone to college yet because he’s searching for the “perfect, first-rate university,” and (innocent) clients such as Matt Engarde, the airhead star of a children’s program called “The Nickel Samurai,” and Maximillion Galactica, a flying circus performer whose word of choice is “FABULOSO!”

Justice For All is an excellent sequel that stays true to its roots. Missing that last piece of vital evidence can get frustrating, but when you bluff wildly and find out that metal detector you happened upon at the beginning is the key to acquittal, there’s no better rush. Even if it means spending your first paycheck of 2007 on eBay.

—David Dunbar
CAMPUS GOSSIP

HE’S MORE OF A JESSICA SIMPSON GUY

After explaining Foucault’s notions of genealogy and power/knowledge during his lecture “History, Hermeneutics, and the Human Sciences,” Professor of Philosophy Taylor Carman took questions from the class. An excerpt:

Girl: So I’m walking down the street and I look at a newsstand and I’m always thinking about Britney Spears, but it’s not a conscious thing...so that’s power?
Prof. Carman: Well, that’s not an explanda, because I’m never thinking about Britney Spears.

On the morning of November 19, at about 2 a.m., a B&W staffer witnessed Columbia students taking the Iliad a bit too seriously at Koronets. A littler guy started picking on a taller guy and things escalated until punches were thrown, rendering one guy with a possible broken nose and another bleeding from his mouth. They then went outside and proceeded to try and throw one another into traffic, almost succeeding when a rogue cab came flying down the road and came close to hitting one of them. One group then tried to leave the scene, while the other belligerent group followed them up the sidewalk and every so often engaged in more fisticuffs in front of Duane Reade, Pertutti and other local vendors.

All hail Columbia, School of Champions!

AND WE THOUGHT OUR SHIT DIDN’T STINK

From a notice posted in Butler library: “Odors may linger in the restrooms.”

One sunny autumn day, a B&W staffer witnessed a groundskeeper digging around in the bushes by Low, rake in hand. It seemed he was trying to clear out some of the underbrush, but he was also pulling out pieces of garbage. Suddenly, he mournfully exclaimed, “ONION!” And, lo, a whole, clean onion rolled out from under the bush and onto the bricks. The Onion King has responded by holding three shrubs hostage until Columbia returns his only son.

THE PRICE OF ROCKING LIKE A HURRICANE

Overheard in Hamilton:
Female 1: “So what are you going to talk about?”
Female 2: “What’s there to talk about? The weather? Craigslist prostitution? That’s all that I have on my mind these days.”

STRUCTURE AND STYLE: THE ART OF WAR

Writing Department Professor Scott Snyder, in an e-mail to his S&S II class:

“So we have a reading! We’re going to read w/Owen King’s Structure and Style I class on Thursday of next week… and we’re going to DESTROY them!!!”

POP YOUR COLLAR AND MAKE IT GLOW

A few weeks ago, the Center for Career Education sent around an e-mail with a list of employers who would be sending representatives to campus to discuss career opportunities. On back-to-back days: the US Department of Energy National Nuclear Security and Abercrombie & Fitch.
ARE YOU THERE, JIM? IT’S US, THE BLUE AND WHITE.

After publishing a cover article on the Minute-men in last month’s issue of The Blue and White, we received the following e-mail:

“You wrote quite a thorough story. However, it was too much propaganda and too little truth... Now, if Columbia’s anti-first amendment, book burning clubs (Chicano Caucus, I.S.O., etc.) had the patience just a bit higher than socially maladroit jihadist barbarians, they could have ... made a valid and honest conclusion about what The Minuteman Project really is all about. Hanging the innocent is not a pathway to higher education.

Cheers,
Jim Gilchrist, Founder - The Minuteman Project (BAJ, BSA, MBA, CPA)”

The Blue and White was unable to confirm whether it really was Mr. Gilchrist, and did not try to confirm whether or not he actually had all those certifications. But, Jim, if this really is you, don’t be like this. Let’s talk about it over a couple cervezas.

GOSSIP IN BAD TASTE

When someone asked the website Yahoo! Answers about the caloric content of the “average load of jism,” Barnard’s Well Woman health service helpfully provided the answer: 5-10 calories per tablespoon.

Next question: how many times can you successfully mumble “Yahoo!” without laughing while holding three tablespoons of semen in your mouth?

According to a November 28 article in New York’s Daily Intelligencer, real estate agents are calling the area between Morningside Heights and West Harlem “NoCo,” as in “north of Columbia University.”

Related overheard, backstage at Orchesis: “We can’t have the afterparty in her room. She lives in WestCo.”

YOU MUST BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE IN THE WORLD

When a couple of students tried to unsubscribe to the listserv for Toward Reconciliation, Columbia’s “Undergraduate International Affairs and Conflict Resolution Society,” they made the fatal mistake of e-mailing the entire group to express their desire. This led other members with irreconcilable differences to reveal themselves, peaking when one student kindly asked, “Please, people, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, UNSUBSCRIBE ME from this stupid e-mail serve IMMEDIATELY [sic].”

Countered by: “Look, I know that you all are incredibly upset and shaken up over being on this listserv... You probably immediately call your family attorneys...”

As cyber-intifada raged, one wise soul sagely advised, “I propose that we all meet up and get drunk together to consolidate this!”

But peace was not in sight. “I’m pretty sure that your use of the word ‘consolidate’ makes absolutely no sense,” a cyber-warrior wrote. “Not to say that makes you a retard or anything.”

Toward reconciliation, indeed.

SHATTERED GLASS HOUSE

Since it appears that at least part of Dodge Gym will have to close during the impending construction of the new science center on the northwest end of campus, the University is looking for places to move the gym equipment temporarily. It was initially suggested that the empty space on the sixth floor of Lerner be used, although the plan was soon nixed when a team of “experts” revealed that the building might not be structurally sound enough to support the weight of all those treadmills.

Orange juice...it’s calcium-fortified!