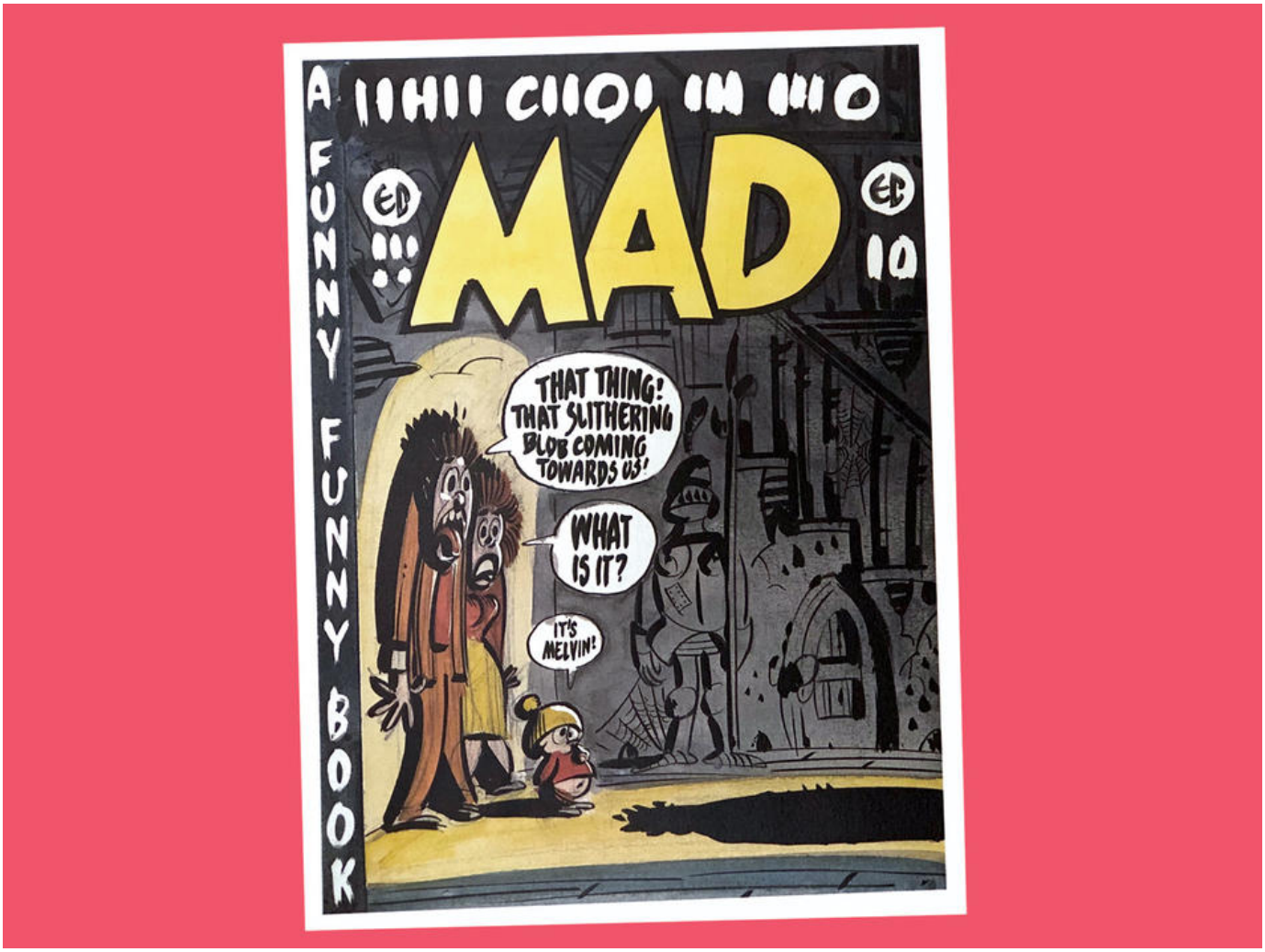
On Campus

Mad Magazine Folded, But Its History Lives on at Columbia

By
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|
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WHAT IS IT? Print of *Mad* #1, cover concept by Harvey Kurtzman

WHERE'S IT FROM? Al Jaffee Papers, 1945–2018

WHERE CAN I FIND IT? Rare Book and Manuscript Library

When news came earlier this year that *Mad* magazine was folding after 550 issues of clever gags, acerbic spoofs, and gorgeous cartooning, the comic-book cognoscenti emitted a collective *GARRARGH!!*

Started by Harvey Kurtzman and William Gaines in 1952, *Mad* became a humor bible for millions of American adolescents. With its sardonic, Yiddish-flavored New York sensibility, the magazine shot spitballs (and darts) at adult hypocrisy. Lampooning celebrities, politicians, and R-rated movies, it seeded the ground for *Saturday Night Live*, *The Simpsons*, *The Colbert Report*, and everything in between. "*Mad* never talked down to its audience," says Karen Green '97GSAS, curator for comics and cartoons at Columbia's Rare Book and Manuscript Library. "It never assumed that a ten-year-old was incapable of understanding life's absurdities."

This print, a study for the very first cover, is part of a collection donated by cartoonist Al Jaffee, creator of the *Mad* Fold-In. It shows that *Mad* was originally a parody of horror comics before it morphed into the authority-questioning bane of parents and teachers everywhere. *Mad* would keep its middle finger raised for six decades, skewering the pieties of the establishment. Perhaps, as Green suggests, *Mad* fell victim to our increasingly cockamamie culture: "When the whole world has crossed over into satire," she says, "how do you stand out?"

This article appears in the Fall 2019 print edition of Columbia Magazine *with the title* "*Gone Mad.*"

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