

# SURGAM

fall '09



# SURGAM

*the magazine of the Philolexian Society*

<i>Preamble</i>	<b>Note from the Editor: The Balzac Challenge</b>	2
<i>Quiz</i>	<b>Who Wants to Be a Trillionaire?</b> Frederic Jennings, Fordham Law '12	4
<i>Dispatch</i>	<b>I Don't Know What I'm Doing Here</b> Megan Shannon, Barnard '11	5
<i>Birdwatch</i>	<b>Alarum</b> Jared Rosenfeld, CC '12	7
<i>Rumination</i>	<b>Food for Thought</b> Elaine Baynham, CC '13	8
<i>Elegy</i>	<b>Fuck You Sylvia Plath</b> Rowan Buchanan, CC '12	9
<i>Roadmap</i>	<b>Omphalos</b> Gavin McGown, CC '13	11
<i>Update</i>	<b>On Love in the Internet Age</b> Marley Weiner, Barnard/JTS '10	12
<i>Reminiscence</i>	<b>Busts and a Billiard Stick</b> David Berke, CC '12	14
<i>Ode</i>	<b>On Fame</b> Anonymous, CC '10	23

Cover ("The Old Woman") and back cover ("Georgia Apples") by Hannah Christ, CC '13. Editor-in-Chief: Stephen Blair, CC '11. Editorial Board: Beezly Kiernan, CC '11 and Abbey Warner, Barnard/JTS '11. Philolexian Society Moderator: Jane Friedhoff, CC '10. *Surgam* is sponsored by the Arts Initiative of Columbia University and published with the help of a gift from the Gatsby Foundation.



## Note from the Editor

### *The Balzac Challenge*

I have a friend whose mother is a nurse at San Francisco General Hospital, a position that requires her to work four or five twelve-hour shifts a week. She is a busy woman and has not much time to read for pleasure. So when her daughter recommended a novel by a moderately famous modern author, the mother openly confessed that she had no intention to read it; she had too little time for reading to waste it on anything that wasn't unimpeachably canonical. Time, together with generations of readers and critics, had decided what was most worth reading, and to choose some upstart pretender's works at random in the hopes of finding something equally good was as foolish as plunging into the jungle without a map or guide. Not for her a new novelist's debut, if it happened that she should have an hour in which to idle before the fire; it had better be *Hamlet*, or *Paradise Lost*, or *War and Peace*.

There's truth in that. We need to be selective with the things we read. Thanks to the constraints of mortality, reading is a zero-sum game; for every book you choose to read, there are dozens you choose not to read and never will, since only so much reading can fit into a single human life. And how much reading is that? In Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin*, one character denies that people can ever really educate themselves, since, he estimates, there are billions of classics in print (not including, obviously, anything published since *La Peau de Chagrin*), and a person has only time to read 150,000 books in his or her lifetime.

150,000 is, apparently, a conservative estimate. But is it? Suppose a person's mature reading career lasts seventy years: from age fifteen to age eighty-five. To keep up with Balzac's standard you will need to read 2,142.86 books a year, or roughly six books a day. At that rate you would complete all the assigned reading for my *Modern British Novels* course in two days, you would put away the works of Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Charles Dickens in a little over a week—and even reading at this breakneck pace, by the end of your life you still would not have read a fraction of all the important books that were in print when *La Peau de Chagrin* was published in 1830.

So what do we do with this—with the knowledge that we will never be able to read everything that every educated person needs to have read? That something or other—be it *Middlemarch*, *Ulysses*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Tom Jones*, *Augie March*, or *The Two Noble Kinsmen*—will be bequeathed to our descendants unopened, still waiting to be got to? Either, like my friend's mother, you concentrate all your reading resources on demolishing the number of unread classics as far as you can; or you throw up your hands and give it up. Reading this issue of *Surgam* may prevent you from reading some classic; but why bother with whether something is a classic? After all we read for the pleasure of reading, and not for the

accomplishment of having read, and in the moment of pleasure no one makes comparisons. No vacationer on the beach in Tahiti wonders whether that is the best possible vacation spot, and worries whether leisure time might instead be used to maximum efficiency, say, on the Riviera. The only test of value for literature is whether you enjoy it. And you will.

So put down your Tolstoy and look at what I've collected for you: a little anthology of delightful Columbia writing. No, you won't find it on the Lit Hum syllabus. And thank God for that.

*Stephen Blair, CC '11*



*"No. 4," by Hannah Christ, CC '13*

**Frederic Jennings**  
*Who Wants to Be a Trillionaire?*

The people sit, edge-of-their-seats waiting, in front of glowing LCD, burning plasma and projector screens, as the newest American gameshow premières. More money than the past decade's GDP spent on the intro alone. More viewers than anything else on TV, ever.

The premise is simple: one contestant takes the stage, to become the richest person in history, or to leave in ruins, utterly destroyed.

Sparkling lights pan across the contestant. Shrew-faced, balding, and corpulent, he quivers into his seat. The host smiles his dental-prosthetic teeth.

His plastic-surgery face beams, framed by a thousand-dollar haircut and a million-dollar suit.

All pomade and silk.

Polite smalltalk:

"What's your name?"

"Where are you from?"

"Are you nervous; how could you not be, right?"

"Do you prefer philosophy, or German beer?"

Then the questions begin, simple at first:

"How many beans in this jar?"

*Answer A: 2.*

"What is your favorite color?"

*Answer C: Turquoise.*

"Who won the world cup in 1979?"

*Answer D: Iran; you never said which world cup.*

Another million tune in, as the contestant's winnings quickly triple. "Complete the title of this new hit single: 'Those Who Would Give Up Essential Liberty to Purchase Temporary Safety Deserve —.'"

*Answer D: a Brand New Car.*

"66 61 76 6f 72 69 74 65 20 63 61 6b 65 3f."

*Answer A: Chocolate.*

The crowd strains and cheers, each question an orgasmic ride of vicarious tension and release.

"The writer Oscar Wilde said this is the only thing our civilization can give us."

*Answer D: Comfort.*

"For hundreds of billions of dollars, name the man sitting in row four, three seats from the left."

*Answer B: Gus, my brother.*

The camera turns to zoom in on Gus. He smiles and waves at the camera. Somewhere high above him a servo turns, and a bucket of slugs empties onto his head. The crowd cheers, and ratings soar.

The humiliation leaves Gus in a catatonic state until age seventy-four.

The final question approaches. “Contestant, for the prize of one trillion dollars, and the title of Richest Human Ever—What is the use of life?”

A: Reproduce	B: Consume
C: Work	D: Die

The shrew-faced man startles, shakes, weeps, turns to steel.

“It is none of those!”

The host smiles his caviar-smile. The crowd gasps, then cheers. The contestant is gone, replaced by a fine red mist.

## Megan Shannon

### *I Don’t Know What I’m Doing Here*

#### I. Introductions

“I’m sorry, are we supposed to shake with our left hand?” This is Cathal. In the local vernacular, the TH or Θ sound isn’t pronounced, so his name sounds like “CAHD-all.” This poses an interesting problem for me: do I pronounce it like everyone else, or use my New England accent to say “CATH-al”? Worried about sounding silly, I decide to avoid saying his name entirely.

I had no idea I’d offered my left hand instead of my right. I have to politely explain this away. “Oh, I masturbate right-handed, and we’ve just met, so in this case, yes, we are supposed to shake with our left hand.” Nice cover. Third or fourth glass of whiskey is in my right hand and I’m trying very hard not to drop it, but I guess, when meeting new people, it’s better to talk about masturbation than how intoxicated one is. “How long do I have to know you before you switch back to your right hand?” He surprises me because he’s completely unphased. “Darling, we won’t be shaking hands again.”

#### II. Homesick for up to 10 minutes each week

I miss my mom and dad and brother. But that’s nothing new. I miss them when I’m in New York and they’re in New Hampshire. The three of them, snuggled together in the living room, in front of the fireplace, sipping hot cocoa and watching *60 Minutes* without me. It’s despicable, that’s what it is. I miss them even when we’re in the same room. Wouldn’t it be nice if the four of us could die at the same time? Mom and Dad passing painlessly in their sleep (not until they’re at least 115 years old). Tim... overdosing on cocaine (that’s the closest he’ll ever get to being the coke-addled rock star he always aspired to become). I don’t know how I’ll go. I think I will just die, no cause.

But that would be no good. The chance of two parents and their two children (the four of them fit and healthy) dying of unique causes in different locations, but at the exact same time is so slim that once the press gets wind of it they’ll spin the story to make it seem like we were some sort of cultish family and we planned the whole thing,

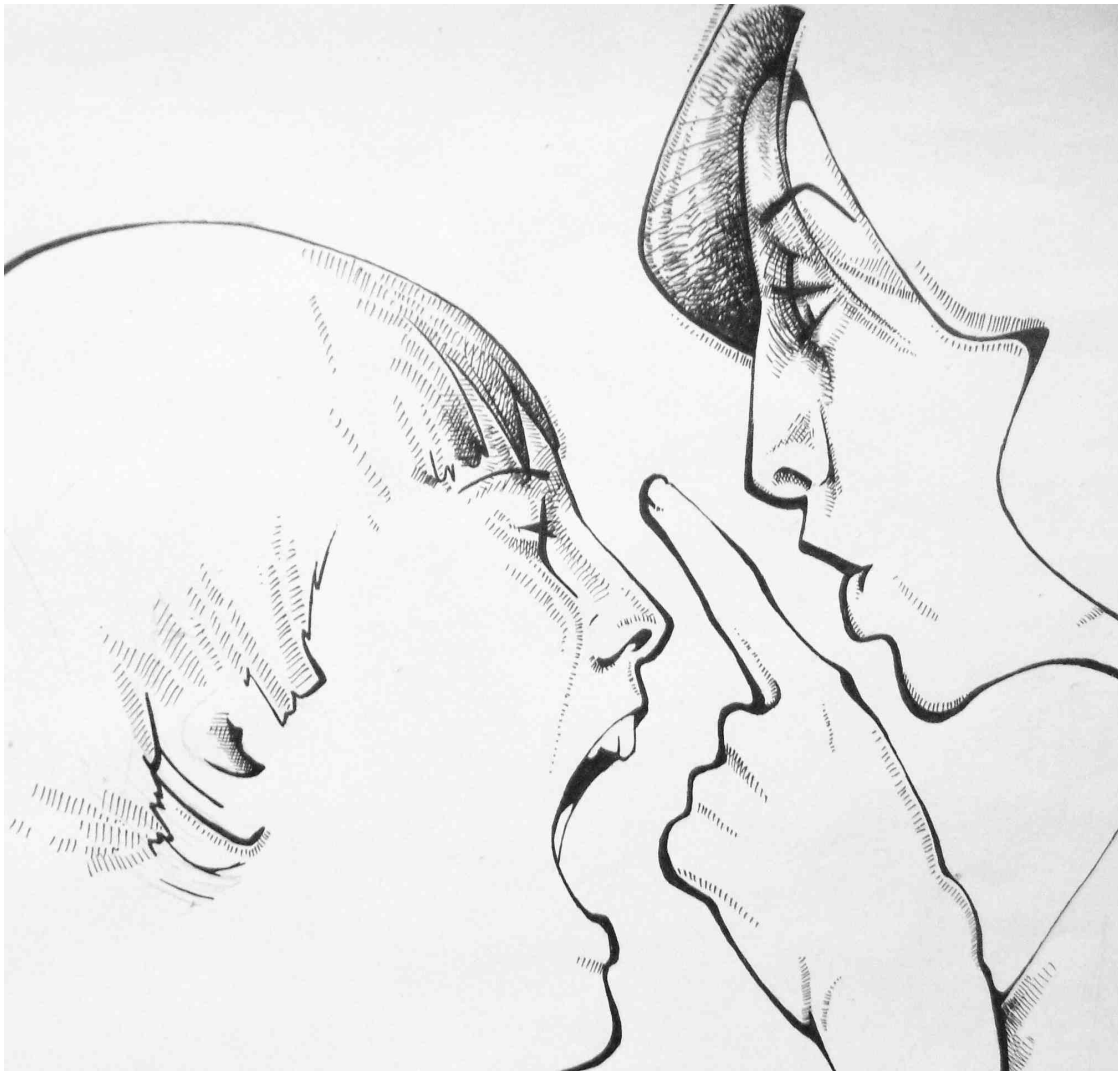
and that's how I'll be remembered when I'm gone. Or at least, it would detract from the tragedy and/or glory of my own untimely demise.

### III. *I swear I'm fine*

Concerned parents. "Yes, Mom, I'm having a great time. Yes, I'm happy. Plenty of sleep, adequate vegetable intake. Last night? I went out with a friend from class. Yes, a boy. How the hell am I supposed to know if he's Catholic? No, we just hung out. His name? Mom, I need to go, can I call you back later?" (There's no way in hell I can tell her how Catholic this boy was, or how much I drank, or what we really did. That much parental approval would just ruin it for me.)

### IV. *An argument*

"Haven't you read the Bible? The whole thing? That's what I thought. If you had taken the time to do your own translation from the original Ancient Hebrew like I did, then you'd know that the Old Testament is basically about how bestiality is the highest



"Mother and Son," by Hannah Christ, CC '13

form of self-expression. No proper, God-fearing Christian, or really, any decent human being would ever soberly consent to having intercourse with another human. Wait, you haven't, have you? Oh, man, you're probably going to Hell. You know how there's a huge list of animals that aren't kosher to eat? Do you know why they're on that list? Those are the animals you're supposed to mate with. The original plan for the Earth was to have everyone and everything breed in all sorts of crazy combinations. It would have been wild if people just did what they were supposed to. And, come on. You can't make sweet love to your wife Susan, an actual pig, and cook her bacon and eggs the next morning. That's so rude. I can't believe you never took the time to learn any of this. Are you illiterate? That's not a valid excuse."

V. *Expensive international phone call*

I'll say, "Try this. Break someone's heart, completely humiliate yourself in front of your peers because you're an inarticulate fuck, then stumble home drunk at 4am. Then tell yourself none of it matters because you're leaving in a month."

Then she'll tell me, "You're drunk." But I'll go on. "It doesn't work. It sucks. You have fun, do whatever you want and never have to deal with it again. But then you have to go home and you realize that someone hurt your feelings and your friends were probably laughing about you behind your back."

Then she'll give me the answer: "Shut up, drink a glass of water, and go to sleep. And when you wake up in the morning, you'll realize that you're not so important that anyone is thinking about you. You're just bored and paranoid. Stop being so fucking dramatic. It's unbecoming."

**Jared Rosenfeld**

*Alarum*

For the sake of one stilted color,  
I threw a stone.  
The broken robin drowned in the ensuing flood  
That poured from the gap the stone had left  
In the wall of the canal.

Oddity, that rare bird,  
Makes a rumor of us all,  
To be carried by the wind  
Past window shutters and sacroiliac  
And finally spat, a seed telluric, into the ground:

At night I keep my mouth shut  
And my words asleep, should an atramental  
Nightingale flutter down my throat,  
And turn me to a magdalene:

A stomach stuffed with feathers,  
Then boiled in milk.

That color, that stilted color,  
Is gray; and when buttery people  
Ask me what I have done, I say,  
“I have done nothing for a long, long time,”  
And I do nothing for a long, long time.

**Elaine Baynham**  
*Food for Thought*

The Refrigerator. An oasis in the kitchen. The anchor of the family. The answer to ninety percent of everyday questions: What’s for dinner? What’s for breakfast? What’s for lunch? Snacks? What can I drink? What can I eat? Am I thirsty? Look to the refrigerator. The answer lies inside.

The refrigerator answers so many of our basic needs that we expect it to answer our other needs. How much time do I have? Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? Go to the fridge. Open the door. Stand still. Concentrate. Look inside. The answer is waiting, or at least a fresh glass of milk can be found to fill the stomach.

The amount of time spent standing in front of and looking into the refrigerator with the door open should be quantified. There is probably enough time to write an entire dissertation on quantum physics or a paper on the evolution of modern English. Or even enough escaped energy to power the school’s lights for a year.

Obviously, we are here for a reason. Even though, many times we walk toward a room with a clear purpose (to pick up shoes, to grab a book, etc.), the reason vanishes as soon as we actually enter. We scratch our heads and return to the kitchen, where we proceed to open the refrigerator. It’s important to observe each and every item with a keen eye and an open mind—like a National Geographic documentary of an exotic species. The light bulb flicks. Aha! A toothbrush! That’s what I want. And maybe this peach, too.

Meaning is a balance of the known and unknown. I know that the ritual of standing in front of the refrigerator inspires an article. Sustenance is the greatest distraction. It’s even entertaining for guests: Hello! Welcome, can I offer you something to eat or drink? I realize I’m usually not hungry until someone else opens the fridge and pulls out some string cheese. I know that the refrigerator stores fundamental food sources for survival. I know that the fridge is a permanent center of activity. It’s our constant soundtrack with its low, electric hum. Yet... the refrigerator still continues to surprise and amaze me. I do not know how the iron ended up behind the carton of eggs. It’s impossible to tell the difference between cherry and raspberry Jell-O. I’ll never know who made the delicious fudge. I’m not sure if I actually like Green Eggs and Ham. I wonder what the future holds.

At least at the present, the refrigerator holds my thoughts.

**Rowan Buchanan**  
*Fuck You Sylvia Plath*

*You have \*no\* new messages in your voicemail inbox. There are \*7\* messages in your voicemail inbox.*

(New York is rain-glossed. A wet rat ran by, silent, but comet bright by lamp light. I'm still waiting here. Can we talk?)

He asked to borrow my notes. It's a writing class; what good would other people's notes do? It should have warned me. He said he'd buy me a cup of coffee, to say thanks. He was kind of cute. Floppy hair, bright like young pine planks. Still, not really my type. He had this way of fondling the tip of his ear. When he talked, he snaked his neck from side to side. As he did this, a mole would shift across his right clavicle. And he had eyes like coffee stains. I guess what really tipped it was that I was broke. I just wanted a fucking latte. I said yes. But it was just a cup of coffee. We didn't really know each other. What caused my thirst, I'll leave up to the chaos theorists and religious studies students. In other words, there was no good reason this fucking happened to me.

(Today, seeing you in class, my tongue fell out and lay on the ground, a half dead thing. It lay quite placid and waiting to be picked up with the rest of the refuse. You walked past. Once you were out of sight, I picked up my tongue. My mother always taught me not to litter. It tastes like dirt. Talk to me.)

On our date, I suppose it was a date, he kept staring at me. His eyes were dark, like gum stuck on the sidewalk that's been trodden into darkness. He stared like he was stripping my clothes off, maybe inflating my breasts a size. That was where every guy I've ever met stopped. Then tearing ligaments, shoving aside my epidermal layer, my hair follicles, my liver, my pancreas, my eyes. Like he was looking to find the thing that was left after clothes and guts were gone. I got back together with my ex a week later. Of course, I told him we couldn't see each other any more. That was the normal thing to do. I didn't owe him anything, anything at all. It was the normal thing to do.

(How to road test anti-depressants:

Step one: Purchase a smooth, steep sided bucket.

Step two: Acquire a rat.

Step three: Fill bucket with water.

Step four: Feed said rat anti-depressants.

Step five: Place rat in bucket.

Step six: Wait.

The rat will drown. But the rat on anti-depressants will keep swimming longer, drown more slowly. The better the pill, the longer it'll take. It's raining today. Want to come swimming?)

Sometimes I sit in the stairwell of my apartment for longer than I need to catch my breath. Who were you? I don't know the most listened-to song on your iTunes

playlist. I don't know if you thought rain felt like lovers' arms or if it just made you wet. I don't remember if your finger nails were rounded like sea-caressed pebbles, or rectangular like computer keys. We were strangers.

(When an earthquake's coming, dogs bark in their kennels. Can you measure the meter of their prayers? When I pray, God is as deaf as a storm. Obdurate Angel, I have seen your ears.)

I think the first thing I really registered was the shoes. Neatly off to the side, your socks folded next to them. You were so bloody verbose but you never explained why you took off your shoes. Then I saw you. My first thought was how much heavier you looked dead than alive. I thought that if I grasped your feet they'd be weigh me down like wet towels. I didn't touch you. I called the police. Jackass. Who hangs themselves in somebody else's stairwell? You didn't have time to be world-wrecked. Fucker. I never wanted to be yours, not then and not now. Sometimes at night, I wake up and I feel the weight of that body on me. My thighs are sore, wet and smell of chicken fat. I wake up slapping and scratching the air.

(Did you know that your mouth turns down at the corners when you smile? Just remembered that. Thought I'd tell you.)

The air of my room is suffused with dust. It falls glittering like the flakes of a child's snow globe. Didn't go out Saturday or Sunday. Looked at light and tried to write about biting clarity. I failed. Took a winter chilled dime between my hands and warmed it. Air fell across my broken lips. Made coffee, stirred it for half an hour. I swallowed each second until I became bloated with time. The ex is an ex again. I spend my days trying to parse out the seconds. The sum of the hours is what?

(Places you cannot hang yourself: light fixtures, ceiling fans. Neither can bear the weight of your sorrow. Wires will tear and fray; plaster will crumble before bones snap or breath stops. Or so I've learned; perhaps I buy too cheap. I found a MADE IN KOREA mold on the top of my ceiling fan.)

You left flowers at my door. I had pollen allergies. You left poems that didn't scan. But there was nothing less lovely you could have left me. I walked out to your bench. It's quiet, no passersby. You were right, you can see my room from here. The cold comes breaking past winter defenses, inevitable as bread mold. Off with the hat, the scarf, the shoes and the socks. I sit on your bench. Facing out, head on knee, feet on bench. It's a good bench curved like a thigh, an eye lid or a womb. Curves reflecting living things. Wind brushes my skin red bright. I stand. Bare red toes. The world is the sort of cold that feels almost wet to the touch. Still it hasn't rained. Pigeon-grey paving slabs. Off with the sweater, off with the shirt, the pants, the rest. Naked.

(I think I love you. Ana. Please, just call me back.)

Belly white-starbright in street light...Air squeezes the blood from my finger tips. It bites my face. I push it out with my breath. It is hot and thick.

Scream.

**Gavin McGown**  
*Omphalos*

A city, we:  
Our years were streets, while we  
Walked, backs straight and pressed  
And clothed in linens ruckus-spun,  
Along the little junctures where crashed  
Milk from aged crockery  
With the tongues that once we grabbed at—

And at splinters of old sentiment  
(The spinster with her fingers light-placed  
On the string of my eyes' blinds)  
I stopped and stared a while.  
You sauntered on.

Our hair rough-hewn,  
Like rocks that guard the sandpits  
Where children crush their empires  
As fast as building lets,  
Formed also the whisper-line of suburbs  
From which we turned our glance.

We struck the city  
With newspat shoes, and heels' careful labour  
Sounding out the new-found turns,  
Corners of ourselves once seen  
And now consigned away to libraries,  
Resolved into the railed air.

And when the path turned only inward  
With the spires of a future ruins  
Palpating overhead our limbic curiosity,  
At you I glanced and smiled:

My smiling is a laying down of arms,  
That barricade of disappointments—  
Doors of buildings ratful and condemned,  
To not again be opened—  
And to weep at being bodies,  
One for each, and each alone.

**Marley Weiner**  
*On Love in the Internet Age*

Let me begin by saying that you are not beautiful;  
I was not bewitched by your eyes, by your hands, by the graceful way that a body can  
    move,  
A white pigeon caught in flight.  
You stayed low to the ground,  
Buried your head in your books  
And let me do the cooing.



*"Black Square with a Face," by Hannah Christ, CC '13*

You are not the lover I dreamed of, all tender words and soulful glances.  
 Instead, you are of a modern age, where love is a commodity. Precious, but still bought  
 and sold.  
 I built my dream of you around train schedules and silent typing late nights,  
 And occasionally, a kiss that would fill me with fire:  
 Your lips on my neck, your hand on my breasts.  
 I loved you for yourself  
 As a simple farmer loves his fields:  
 Taken in pieces, it is miles and miles of shit,  
 But collective, it is like poetry, like endless acres in the sun.  
 I did not tell you this because I knew it would offend your vanity  
 Which you take out and polish a hundred, a thousand times a day,  
 Too often on my too soft words.  
 So why do I repeat them?  
 I do not know, perhaps my sacrifice is my vanity—  
 To see me reflected back in your ego,  
 To know that I have swelled your pride.  
 Did you ever dream that you would love a spoon, a strip of leather, a hollow white  
 bowl?  
 Of course you did, that is art for art's sake,  
 And you always imagined yourself a sort of artist.  
 As for me, I tried to create a still life of our many moments:  
 Your pause, your touch, the beautiful and the sweetly mundane things  
 That you unceremoniously left in my bed before you went back to your life which I  
 will never be a part of.

**David Berke**  
*Busts and a Billiard Stick*

*"Please come back and sit with me. I will not violate you, on my sincerest honor!"*  
*- Sir Dannato, one line after "Hello"*

The pipe is in his moist mouth whilst beside him the hearth fire crackles. A  
 cashmere girdle fastens closed his sangria-red robe with black lingerie trim. His hoary  
 locks are full and well coiffed. He is leaning against the mahogany mantle of his  
 classical fireplace, which is below Caravaggio's portrait of Bacchus as a sanguine child.  
 He nods while perusing a finely bound, gold-foiled tome.

"Ah, yes," Dannato says, staring into the book. "...oh! Did not see you come in,  
 just catching up on the Classics. Enjoying the prose of—well, you do not care about the  
 book, lad, am I right? Why do you not just mosey over...wait, why are you backing off?  
 Do not be hesitant, sit, sit right here in this chair, yes, just sit. It is a fine chair, a fine  
 red satin chair. Picked it up during an interior decorating swing through the  
 Mediterranean. It is the kind of chair one can relax in while another...wait, no, do not

run! Stay! If you do not want me to caress you there, it is fine. I was just enjoying your company. I simply assumed, since you sat down and all...Come, come now, the doors are locked anyway, and I do not have any phones, so it is not as if you can leave, or, for that matter, call for help. Just sit. Stop *cowering* over there in the corner, and my *goodness*, stop clawing at the walls. Those windows are too high to reach and are reinforced from the outside anyway, so desist! It is not as if anyone before you has been able to...but you came here, so you must want to be here, my good man. What is this? *Kidnapped* and brought here, you say? Nonsense! I will not hear any of it. As I said, my friend, I will not hear any of it, so stop throwing my desk ornaments at me. I already have most of them nailed down in any case, but still, I do not want to have to call for Stephanos. Ah, you have already met Stephanos? And he did *what* with a billiard stick, you say? Well, I doubt your veracity on that one, but now you know not to be so inconsiderate. Yes, sitting down, wonderful, each of us sitting calmly in his own chair. Let us have some wine.”

Sir Dannato curls his fingers around a glass of wine that is waiting on a silver tray. Whenever he pauses during his speech, he swirls the wine and inhales through his nostrils.

“Do you not want any for yourself? Rather churlish to refuse good drink from a host. *Smells* funny? My good sir, judge its taste, but not my character! Besides, lad, any elixir I would use on you is far too finely crafted to *smell* funny. No, no, do not run! It was only a joke. Yes, a joke, did you not hear me chuckle? Ha. Ha. Ha. A *scherzo*, my friend, unless, of course, you would be willing to consider that kind of—but it was still a joke, so stop running, for goodness sake. And threatening to stab me with that letter opener is far from polite. Stephanos! Stephanos! Ah yes, now you want to stop? Not interested in playing another round of that...innovative billiard game with my manservant again? Splendid! Incandescent! Yes, just come back to the chair. We can sit and chat like two civilized human beings, no Stephanos involved, if you behave. Wonderful. Yes, let us chat. Let me tell you what I brought you here to hear.

“Where to begin? Well, it was a fine December eve. The silent early winter snow drifted to the virgin ground, visible through the wood-frame window of the warmly glowing mansion

““So this is what it feels like,’ Madison thought as he slid his hand into her moist—well, if I am going to tell that story, then I really should tell another story that happened after that one, if you will oblige me for a moment. It explains the whole situation quite a bit better.

“So I—I mean, not me, his name was...ah, yes Madison Thomas Roosevelt, that was the name of the boy. Madison was going to his prep school reunion, good old *Roosevelt Thomas Madison Preparatory School for Fine Young Gentlemen*. No relation to our Madison. In these more—how does one say it?—*correct* times, the school is now for *Gentlefolk* instead of *Gentlemen*. It had been thirty years since his graduation, and he was eager to see the good old boys again. He had not stayed in touch, but he knew about many of the splendid ventures his former classmates had undertaken.

“The most prominent alumni were a group of boys who made billions when they invented the—oh, how shall I say this politely?—stimulation industry. In fact, I think a

rather large portion of my class went in together on this one business, over a quarter of us, I believe it was. Anyhow, if you are interested, you go to one of their locations—or so I am told—and, after you pay, you can watch women do all kinds of, well, you know...let me just say that the idea for that enterprise came from a night back at *Prep*, and it was a *damn* delightful night. It was one of those frigid evenings when one has nothing to do but ingest illicit substances, which, that night, one of the boys had snuck in. One thing led to another, and before you knew it, we were breaking into the gym supply closet! We took three bowling pins, two rapiers, a traffic cone and a *lot* of hockey sticks and snuck across the lake to our sister school *Rosalina Thomas Madison Preparatory School for Proper Young Females*, our remaining brew in tow, of course. We met our girls in the basement where they were already half—what are you doing? Stop that! Take the letter opener *away* from your throat. Stop this foolishness! Fine, I am getting back to the story, though that tangent was just becoming worth your while.

“Well, as you can see, they were an intelligent bunch who had done a respectable sum of good for society, and they had made out well doing it. So Madison, yes, that was his name, was elated to return. In fact, he was particularly excited to return since, for a while after graduation, Madison himself had stayed involved with the institution, ascending as far as interim dean. Yes, quite a time, but he had become rather embittered after the school was forced to open to both sexes under his watch. He had lost touch since that...unfortunate imposition.

“Anyway, as he expected, the reunion was quite an affair. It was only three in the afternoon, but the boys were already quite...enlivened, shall we say. Some of them had decided that their suits and ties were too much for the occasion and had taken them off. Those lively boys had commandeered the whole of the night’s libations and were forcing the servers to pour the bottles of vintage wine all over them, slathering it on, if you will. Quite a sight, yes, especially given their ages. All at least forty-five, most all balding and hairy, chipmunk cheeked. A bunch of banker types, the kind of chaps you see being needled by Congress about money and shares and such. Rather uproarious if you think of it, imagining all those wrinkly white witnesses *au naturel* at a reunion like that.

“It was quite a capacious hall for the reunion, lined with hardcover-filled bookshelves and two chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, one of which I believe I donated. And then, above the elaborately carved entrance door, was our mantra in gold foil letters: *Un Uomo È Solamente Ciò Che Lui Sa*. A man is but what he knows. It is in Italian because the school was founded by Italian monks in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Tragically underappreciated, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Italian monks of America...they were a devout, disciplined and horribly austere bunch, I am told, the kind of Christians who would have worshipped Christ that much more if the chap were clean shaven, but at night, well, things have not changed at *Prep* over 350 years. Those early schoolmasters went rather batty during the nighttime, using it as cover to—how shall we say it?—take full advantage of their pupils. But that type of evening carousing, I guess we shall call it, was not just their predilection. This is not the kind of thing people like you are taught in history textbooks, but, to be frank, it was downright common among all

those folk who first settled this great nation of ours, the Puritans, as we call them. Anyway, I do not want to stray too far off-track, for I know you do not like that. A man is but what he knows, that adage was our motto. So I told you about the bathing in Merlot, then...ah yes, then there was Gary Weinstein. Gary had been—how shall I say this properly?—an absolute drag in the good old days. He was something rhyming with *fewish*, I suppose, and I guess he thought that times had changed. He was successful, I am told, but we still wanted—how shall I say this?—as *fewish* of him as possible. So when he showed up uninvited, we stripped the poor soul naked and tied his ankles to the chandelier, the one I donated, I believe, and hoisted him up like one of those Latino donkeys. The boys were swinging him around, thwacking Gary with some of those ancient hockey sticks, which had not been replaced since that night we snuck over to the *Girls* prep, might I add. We were all calling him by the old names: Gay-ry, Stein the Schvitzer and—as the teachers used to call him—Whine-n-Stein.” Tingle of nostalgia, thinking about those epithets, to be frank. So that was good fun. Then, of course, we had one of the boys dressed up in a full giraffe outfit, our school mascot being a giraffe. But that lad had, without bothering to doff his outfit, started to take some, actually quite a few, liberties with one of the women we had paid to service the event. It was quite a sight to see that cullion railing away at that woman servant, indeed.



“Teapot,” by Gloria Tsai, CC '10

“Madison was thrilled to be back, I suppose, but he had not always been so eager to join in the revelry. Madison had a rather rough and tumble experience during my first few months at *Roosevelt*, not quite sure if the cavorting was my game, if you understand. I also had quite a personal pleasure problem, on top of it all. Yes, it is all so trifling now, almost comedic, but I did have a rather serial, shall we say, relationship with myself. Could not stop doing it, to be frank. I could not pry myself away from it. So I was rather...put off by the school at the time, though I came to my senses soon after about *Prep*. I was especially hesitant at first about toying with Gary and the girls. For a time, I even felt a certain connection with Gary, both of us being so removed and all, but I gave up that patent tomfoolery once I had adjusted.

But the self-fulfillment, shall we say, remained an issue for a good while. I would try to stop, break away for a week or so, and then be right back at it, six or seven or...quite a few times before the sun went down each day. I was horribly wretched at the time. I loathed most the booming and busting of my...cycle. Stopping cold turkey, my self-control on the rise for a while, and

then hopping right back to it, falling down even lower than before. But I got over it, thank goodness. I am no longer the blasted little deviant I once was. Something rather sour about being stuck in a cycle, though, knowing you will soon go down when you are going up and stuck going down when you are going down. Most pleasant to be rid of it.

“Well, later in the evening, the enlivened chaps who had been enjoying the wine started taking the books—the blasted old boys—and throwing them on the floor, which was drenched in wine. Once they had emptied the shelves, they lined up at the far end of the hall and started running down the length of it, one by one. Once partway, they would launch into the air, land on some of the books and slide down the rest of the hall, zooming on the first edition hardcovers over the floor wet with wine. Naked, mind you, the lot of them. A jolly time they seemed to be having. The old boy who had been wearing the giraffe outfit had done a rather questionable thing with his costume. He had cut off the bottom half and had nothing on below the waist. He was standing on the reference desk of the hall library, yammering at everyone that we should make a trip across the lake to the *Girls* prep, which, while our Alma Mater had started allowing the opposite sex, had remained for girls only. It was their reunion night too, we were told, and we were too old now for Dean Lukina to tell us we could not pay a late night visit, like he did many a time back in the day. It struck me as a capital idea, given that some of the boys were starting to bash the empty wine bottles on the library tables and fight each other with the jagged stumps. It seemed precisely the right moment for my companions and I to step outside for some fresh air.

“Dean Lukina was not all unpleasant, might I add. A rather donnish fellow, but back in our time, he would have open dinners over at the Dean’s mansion, inviting a few students to join him for supper every week. He would ask us our sentiments and such, explain a few of his own. I came for my dinner that first year, when I was still struggling through that personal compulsion I mentioned, but when I arrived, it seemed I was the only student there. Dean Lukina had an unexpected trip, Mrs. Lukina informed me, but she still wanted to personally welcome me back to campus from—well, I do not want to get off course, so we will address that later—and she also wanted me to call her Nina. Nina Lukina, what a name...even now, with everyone named so wildly—all these names like Rainbow, not to mention all the ethnic nonsense like Mufasa and whatnot—Nina Lukina is still a *damn* fine name, I daresay. Sometimes I just say it to myself, softly, in this room, generally. To be frank, that evening with Mrs. Lukina was toward the end of my compulsion—to be doubly frank, it was the *exact* end of my compulsion, for, if I am not being too bold to say, Mrs. Lukina had an ulterior motive for inviting only me to dinner. We certainly had an incandescent meal, some wonderful spaghetti, but that was not all for the evening, if you can comprehend. Which is where the first story I was going to tell started, but I think you do not need it now, am I right?

“It was my first such experience. Straightened me out, might I say, broke my compulsive habit. Well, perhaps it did not break it so much as I ate out quite frequently with Mrs. Lukina from that night on. Made it all work out, she did. Funny

woman, blowing smoke in my face and then engaging in outrageousness when she put out the cigarette in places that...quite a lot for a boy to handle, but it snapped me out of it. Rather like an apprenticeship, so to speak, having an elder partner to show you the ropes, almost like the Greeks did, pairing up young lads with older men to show them the way...so she deserves her due, Mrs. Nina Lukina.

“After she was so kind, I fit in far better with the boys, not hesitant about their adventures like before, enjoying every minute of pouring Manischewitz, that Semitic wine, all over Gary’s bed and in his trunk and then setting it on fire. To tell it all, that night we snuck over to the *Girls Prep* with all the gym equipment was just a week after that first meal. *Damn* pleasurable night, as I said, have never regretted it.

“Was not quite the same sparkle, though, that reunion night. Trekking over there with the boys, most not in a fit state for the outdoors, which were frigid, to say the least. It was that unforgiving late-winter cold, not the splendid early winter kind. What is worse, we had to pass the cathedral cemetery on the way, where I know Mrs. Nina Lukina rests next to her husband, which was a rather unpleasant fact to remember. No, cannot say I felt the old sparkle with the boys. Even when we got there, finding everything we expected, cannot say I was too tickled. Met a few of the old girls, that is true, a splendid joy to relive it with them, I suppose. They, daresay, did not have the same *bounce* as the good old days. It was not the same naturally smooth excursion...I had a certain sense of unease through the whole affair quite like—well, funny, yes, I said earlier that I would expound on this episode—when my parents sent me to Italy during that first term. I had a certain pallor to me then, I am told. My...personal issue was rather readily apparent, sadly. So they sent me on a sojourn to Florence. *Firenze*, as they say. They thought the Renaissance land would purge the nastiness right out of me, but I was rather miserable the whole trip through. The isolation from *Prep* and my family simply offered me more opportunity to, well, please myself. That unease, as I said, was especially acute during my tour of the Medici palace. There was a rainstorm, you see, during my gallivant through the art galleries, and the rain started to *pour* right in through the windows, and the Italians, being Italians, did not do much of anything about it. Such a people of malaise, those Italians. So there was I, a grubby lad of fourteen, watching the puddles on the floor rise closer and closer to that portrait, yes *that* portrait, the one above my fireplace now. The water level swelled higher and higher, creeping closer to the painting. I was rather out of sorts at the sight, could not stand the thought of the rain getting to such lovely art. The rain stopped before it did any damage, thankfully, but I rather cared for the painting, and could not bear to consider that, with any passing storm, it could be consumed like that. Yes, so yes, I bought it a few years ago, once I had the lucre to nab it. Safe and sound in here, the windows too far away to pose a hazard. What? A water stain on it? In the corner...wait, you are pointing there, yes? Yes, I suppose I kind of see it, when I press right up against it, that mark on the right, let me just get a little closer to...so you said it was—wait. Hello?”



UNIVERSITY  
HOUSEWARES

212-882-2798

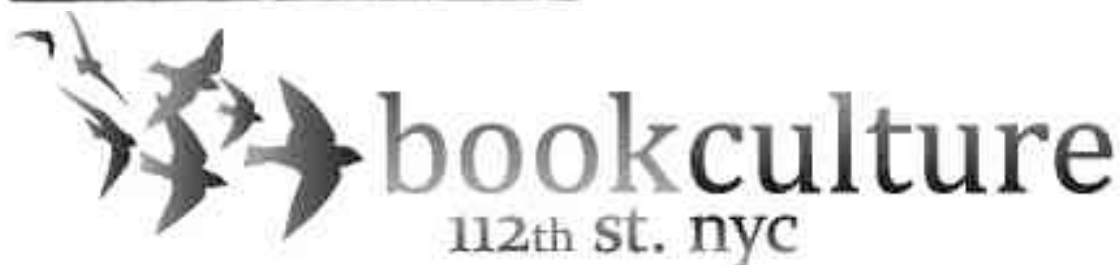
&

UNIVERSITY  
HARDWARE

212-662-2150

2901-2905 Broadway at 113<sup>th</sup> street  
[www.universityhousewares.com](http://www.universityhousewares.com)

*"FOR ALL YOUR HARDWARE AND  
HOUSEWARE NEEDS"*



536 W. 112<sup>th</sup> street, New York, NY 10025

212-865-1588

[www.bookculture.com](http://www.bookculture.com)

M-F 9am-10pm Sat 10-8 Sun 11-7  
Buyback Desk: Mon-Sat 10am-5pm

Now open! Broadway & 114<sup>th</sup> street: an independent  
bookstore has returned. Look for new releases, periodicals,  
bestsellers, mysteries, sale books, and more.

# Crêpes on Columbus

Café \* Crêperie \* Ice Cream

990 Columbus Avenue, between 108<sup>th</sup> and 109<sup>th</sup> streets

Open 8 AM-10 PM seven days

(212) 222-0259 [www.crepesoncolumbus.com](http://www.crepesoncolumbus.com)

109th Street and Columbus Avenue  
Five-Hour Happy Hour, 3PM-8PM Monday-Friday  
Events almost every night!  
212-961-1676

## La Negrita



# THAImarket

---

*"Anyone who has eaten at the simple restaurants opening onto the streets of Bangkok will feel transported upon walking into Thai Market"*

*Marian Burros, the New York Times*

960 Amsterdam Avenue  
Between 107<sup>th</sup> and 108<sup>th</sup>  
212-280-4575



# MILL KOREAN RESTAURANT



2895 Broadway  
at 113<sup>th</sup> Street

(212) 666-7653

밀

Anonymous, CC '10

*On Fame*

Fame, Rumor's  
Vile stepsister  
(Worse than her by far, I deem)

Favors tumors,  
Loves a blister—  
None so foul she won't redeem.

While she humors  
A shortlister  
With the public's lowing scream,

Grim entombers  
Rush to assist her,  
Burying talent's unseen beam.

Belching fumers  
Oft have kissed her:  
Why hold her in high esteem,

Ye illumers  
Who have missed her?  
Write for joy—then burn the ream.

