

Surgam

selections from
The Twenty-Second Annual
Joyce Kilmer Memorial
Bad Poetry Contest

A Note from the Editors

Each year, Philo asks writers to get everything wrong, to recall all the lessons of all their english classes just to invert them. All the admonitions against pretension, clichés, bad meter, silliness, offensive jokes, cognitive dissonance, and lethally bad puns fall aside in the pursuit of the worst possible poetry. Humor, like poetry, is hard to get right, but many audacious poets have dared to try. Eager to parody either their own mistakes or those of others, they have created that sublimely agonizing kind of wrong. So, take guiltless pleasure in best of the baddest poetry, while also enjoying, unironically and seriously, the second installment of Amitai Schlair's serialized short story.

Neil Flanagan, on behalf of the editors of *Surgam*

Surgam and the Philolexian Society

Surgam is published by the Philolexian Society, Columbia's oldest literary organization, founded in 1802 by associates of Alexander Hamilton.

Philo holds weekly debates, the infamous Annual Joyce Kilmer Memorial Bad Poetry Contest, a celebration of Columbia's legacy of beat poetry, a croquet tea, a Greek-style symposium, and other events open only to full members.

Surgam accepts poetry, brief prose, and other original works. *Surgam* also welcomes silly or bad poetry, but we wonder, why waste your virulent verses and horrific haikus on a magazine when you can read them at the *Twenty-Third* Annual Joyce Kilmer Memorial Bad Poetry Contest next November?

Please send all submissions to:
surgam@philo.org.

Surgam: Fools like me

Selections from the Twenty-Second Annual
Joyce Kilmer Memorial Bad Poetry Contest

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Yonah Lemonik:

A Psalm of David

- 1: O LORD, the firmament sheweth thine handiwork, and the heavens thine wisdom.
- 2: Your might exceeds the depth of the seas, O LORD, yea, your righteousness the vaults of the skies.
- 3: O LORD, have you ever considered the advantages of owning a really fine set of encyclopedias?
- 4: I mean this is a truly gorgeous set of twenty-four volumes here, am I right?
- 5: For verily, O LORD, the wallpaper showeth thine good taste, and the bookcase thine worldiness.
- 6: And should the chicks see a really handsome leather-bound set like this one they shall surely dwell in the house of the LORD for the length of days... or at least the nights!
- 7: Eh? Eh? Eh?
- 8: No, no wait don't close the door, O Awesome LORD, do not cast me aside in this my hour of need.
- 8a: For Thou art a merciful LORD, and loving.
- 9: Yea thou art a support to orphans and thou lifteth up the weak.
- 10: O LORD, thou giveth comfort and sustenance to the poor.
- 11: Please, O LORD, be merciful, as you ride this subway to a warm home and loving family; remember there are those out on the streets less fortunate than you.
- 12: We can feed a family of four for only 79 cents, but tonight we're going to have to turn people away. So please give generously, O Just LORD, do not turn thine countenance from us.
- 13: Well? What, nothing? You can't give even a penny, O Tremendous G-d?
- 14: Oh that's great, O LORD, you're just great. Thou art super fucking awesome.
- 15: O Mighty And Awesome LORD, thine voice convulseth the deserts and blabbity blah blah.
- 16: Even thine oh so holy angels tremble in thine August and Awesome presence, the pussies.
- 17: O Master of the Universe, I am sooooo scared of you.
- 18: Oooooh....
- 19: No wait, O LORD, I didn't mean to be nasty; you're a great guy.
- 20: And I like you, I just don't like you like you, y'know.
- 21: No, you're really a great guy, O Lord Of Jacob; thou judgeth the righteous with goodness and hateth the wicked.
- 22: Until a man's dying day thou waiteth for him to return.

23: And you're a really funny guy! Yes, yes, you are G-d.

24: You created flamingos
brilliant touch with the pink there;
and the Black Death
greatest practical joke ever;
Menstruation?

hilarious;

The human condition is
pure comic genius.

25: C'mon, how bad can you be, O LORD? You do have complete dominion
over the heavens and earth.

26: Yea, thou art ruler of the seas and king of the mountains.

27: Thou causeth the wind to blow and the sun to shine.

28: O LORD thou openeth the gates of dawn and ordereth the stars in their
places.

29: Verily O LORD thou art powerful - you have thousands of workers re-
porting to you, CEO of a multibillion dollar multinational corporation, yes sir!

30: Yes sir, Yes sir, O LORD you're the most powerful man in America, yes
sir.

30.5: Why that's a brilliant idea it is yes sir, yes sir!

31: No sir, O LORD, I'm not just being a yes man, yes sir!

32: Genius sir! If we sack the entire company we'll have no costs. Our profits
will go through the roof yes sir! Genius, O LORD, yes sir!

33: Yes sir, Thou art truly a wondrous LORD!

34: Thou splitteth the sea before thine children, and feedeth them in the wil-
derness.

35: O LORD, Thou bringeth up beautiful flowers from the firmament and
showeth the rainbow as a sign for the generations.

36: Yes, O Mighty and Awesome LORD, your hair is truly beautiful. And
your eyes are like two stars shining out on a moonless night.

37: Your movements, O LORD, are like grace encapsulated, your voice is like
a pure clarion call.

38: Thou hast a great rack, and voluptuous thighs.

39: And my ears are cold.

40: So why don't you head back to my place, O LORD. I have a fine set of
encyclopedias to sell you. Rawr.

And let us say, "Amen."

**Phillip Hutchinson and Phyllis Ma:
Leftovers**

I like leftovers
Like my soul
which is the leftovers of your love

It could have been the pullover of your love
Soft, and cuddly
But instead you had to wear the button of hate and misery.

My heart is dribbling down my face
Like anchovies
That you reheat and reheat

Shall I compare thee – to the best minds of my generation?
Do I dare-to contradict myself?
To eat or not to eat now but maybe to take it home and stick it in the fridge
– of history next to the gasket of time by the magnet of monogamy, under the
freezer – of infinity.

Leftovers.
eftovers.
ftovers.
tovers.
overs.
vers.
ers.
rs.
s.

[high-pitched noises]

broccoli

[high-pitched noises and snapping]

coleslaw

[high-pitched noises and snapping]

fried pus!

of destiny.

Robert Frawley, III:

Put Your Pudding where Your Mouth Is

Have you ever eaten pudding
I mean really Eaten it.
Not a nibble, not a munch, not a chew or a crunch.
Have you ever let it envelope your mouth in cold gooey delight.
Have you ever moaned for your pudding.
Has your pudding ever moaned for you.
I dare you – eat your pudding
Become your pudding
Let the pudding flow from your every orifice and scream “I AM PUDDING”
And then, gently recede into your puddingness,
And let the pudding be.

Maggie Lane and Sasha Stewart:

Meditations from the Bottom of a Well

i. From the Well a Voice Cometh
Perhaps this well is my spiral
To a kinder hell
Except wells are cylinders
Dante was wrong.

Time trickles on like raindrops falling... into a well.

In this well
I will dwell
My heart doth swell
My thoughts, pell mell
My voice, a treble
My sense, of smell
My boyish form, so sup-pel
Around my neck, a lapel
Untold stories, I yearn to tell
I slipped on a banana pe-el
And into this abyss, I fell

This world of mine, a prison cell
Like a prisoner of war, named Marcel
Or Irish savior, lost Parnell
My soul I would sell
Or beg or plead or ped-del
Nails scratch and break and bleed and swell
Lessons are hard to learn
In the bottom of a well

ii. By the Well a Man Cometh

Is this my body?
No it's a well.
Is this my metaphor?
No it's a well.
Is this God?
No, it's my voice from a well.
Is this the Media Age?
I wish Lassie were here.
Timmy? Timmy?
Too bad my name's Tom.
Should I throw pennies?
Food would be better.
Will you grant my wishes?
Only if your wish is to hear a voice from the well.
My wish! Granted! The well is magic! I must tell the others!
Oh go to hell.

iii. From the Well the Well Cometh

Stone, mortar, water, moles
Chipped nails, chipped souls
Of little forgotten boyos
Trapped in arroyos
Trapped in the chasm
Of my bosom
Forever singing their tales of woe
But do I listen? No
For I am a well
Powerful to beheld.
... Oh, Well.

Eric LeSueur:

When the Economist met the New Yorker

When the Economist met the New Yorker, love was in the air.
They brushed shoulders by the Grand Central news stand
And after a few perfectly timed witticisms, the Economist took an unusually
bold move and asked her to drinks at the St. Regis, because that is what a
gentleman does.

When they met again, the Economist could not help but smile as the New
Yorker looked down at her glass of Chardonnay, nervously rubbing the stem
between her fingers, and told him of her love of short fiction and her hobby of
drawing single panel cartoons, which her friends nevertheless thought profound.

When she asked him about his own pursuits, he remarked that in his present
career he performed forensic economic analysis, but that his true passion lay
in the implementation of monetary policy. And he knew he had found someone
special when the New Yorker thought that was interesting and amidst the
candlelight placed her hand atop his, and asked him to tell her more.

Soon they could be seen holding hands as they walked down the Guggenheim,
and kissing as the autumn leaves fell upon them in Central Park. And when
they finally did spend the night together, the Economist saw the New Yorker
as she laid in her languid prose, and smiled at the adorable way she marked
repeating vowels and failed to italicize book titles.

One day, as they were watching *Terms of Endearment*, the New Yorker began to
cry. Not because of Debra Winger's performance, but because at long last, she
was happy. "Things were never so good when I was dating the Popular Mechanic,"
she said. And the Economist is not afraid to admit that even he shed a few
tears, also not because of the film...

Indeed, it was the first time he had wept since Thatcher left office.

Sadly, my friends, the relationship, much like this poem, ran out of steam. This
prospective merger, which had begun with such promise, concluded slowly
and ignobly, as the Economist reached a conclusion that the marginal benefits
were no longer meeting marginal costs. It was only afterward that the Economist
finally realized, too late in fact, that some things in life, particularly love,
could not be so coldly calculated. Though he is with Harper now, and she with
some New Republican, the Economist often thinks fondly of the days of his
youth, and the promise they held when he brushed shoulders with the New
Yorker.

L'Orfeo y Selfone – the Lost Monteverdi Opera, 1602**Translated by: Edward A. Rueda****Musically Reconstructed By: Everett Patterson****with Cellist, Harpsichordist, and Turner of Pages***Text, in the original Spanitalian:**Translation, in English***ORFEO:**

Selfone, ¿puedes oirme ahora?

Il'fierno es tant'oscuro

Siento tu dolore.

Espería que nos

'contraremos

Pero l'entrada de la tierra muerta

Tiene un señale

Qu'explica sencillamente que tengo

Que 'bandonar mi 'speranza.

ORFEO:

Selfone, can you hear me now?

Hell is so dark

I feel your pain.

I would hope that we will

find each other

But the entrance of the Dead Land

Has a sign

That says clearly that I

Have to abandon my hope.

VERIZONE:

Ay, mortal con tu Selfone,

yakking!

¿Porque necesitas hablar constante?

Est'es il'fierno, yo soy Verizone

Opero un red pa' los damnados.

Tú, quien huele com'los vivos

Piensas que'stas tan importante

Que to'los muertos tienen q'oírte

Y tu conversazion'arrogante

¡Como te odio!

VERIZONE:

Oh, mortal with your Selfone,

yakking!

Why do you need to talk constantly?

This is Hell, I am Verizone

I run a network for the damned.

You, who smells like the living

Think you're so important

That all the dead have to hear you

And your arrogant conversation

How I hate you!

Potente servicio
Cuyas palabras vienen desde l'India
Todos necesitan tu red
incredible
Para comunicar con alguien.
Quiero extender la mano
Y tocar a mi querida Selfone.

Powerful Service,
Whose words come from India
Everyone needs your incredible
network
To communicate with anyone.
I want to reach out
And touch my dear Selfone.

Tu voz es muy bello,
pero tengo
Q'ablar con mi supervisor
Il reino del'fierno, Plutone
¿Tu nombre completo?

Your voice is very beautiful, but
I have to
Speak with my supervisor
The King of Hell, Plutone
What's your full name?

Orfeo me llaman
Lo voy a deletrear.
Oh-Erre-Efe-Eh-Oh

They call me Orfeo
I'm gonna spell that
O-R-F-E-O

Ay dio'sta 'jueputa no
dej'ablarme.
Me siento más cansado cad' minuto
Yo debería ser'l aburridoso
Y zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz

Oh, God, this sonofabitch
won't stop talking
I feel more tired with every minute
I ought to be the boring one
And zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz

¡Ay me! Él duerme.
¡Selfone, ya vengo!

Oh my! He's asleep.
Selfone, I'm coming!

Amitai Schlair:
Hooke's Law

Mrs. Dombrowski had resolved to tell the police that she had been assaulted. It was a truth. Every time such a thud emanated from her wall, she thought: this is the time it comes for me. So she had fear often. And in one's own home, isn't this an assault? Yes it is, it truly is. She was comfortable with the idea of speaking these words if it would keep the police from hanging up. To this they would have to listen. It was a truth.

Telephone in hand, eyeglasses freshly perched, she squinted in search of 9. Then she paused. She had never been able to forget the tone with which they'd told her to stop calling. The phone went back in its cradle. The kettle grew hot again. She found herself knocking, for the first time, on her neighbor's door.

It was late, and it felt like weeks since she had watched any Dan Rather, and the noise that slid under the door would have sent her right back down the hall, had she not been prepared for it.

What the fuck. "Leave me alone," bellowed Jim from his couch. He hadn't been trying to fall asleep, exactly, but he'd been succeeding. His head throbbed anew and he lurched forward to lower it into his hands. His hand still hurt, too. Worse. Dammit. The knocker rapped insistently. "What the fuck." The noise needed to fucking stop. He placed another cold can in his injured hand and wobbled to the door.

"Listen, lady," said Jim, "Now is a bad time."

It occurred to him that she was standing firm. A little too firm. What was that in her hand, a teakettle? He flinched slightly, enough that if his bar buddies had been around they'd never have let him hear the end of it -- and enough that Mrs. Dombrowski, set on edge, ready for the worst, began her windup. Jim flinched again just as she was catching herself.

"Young man," said Mrs. Dombrowski with nerves audibly electrified, and stopped because she had meant to sound firm. The teakettle still swinging back and forth, she swallowed and started again. "Mister, I live next door. You are making an awful racket."

"I said this is a bad time." Jim shut the door.

Indignant but taken aback by this unexpected turn, Mrs. Dombrowski gathered herself and walked back down the hall, started double-locking the door, remembered to set down the teakettle, finished locking the door, poured herself some tea, inserted a tape of the early news, sat on the sofa, and tried to watch. Her mind was elsewhere, more so than usual. She was going to have to try talking to this brute again and she wasn't sure how she'd manage. Her husband would have known how to handle him, that's for sure.

Jim had always been tall and a little thick. He looked like a decathlete, or at least a power forward, until you saw him run. But you don't have to run much to pitch, and by junior year of high school he was the ace of a rotation that took the team deep in the state playoffs. When Stanford came knocking with a full ride, he decided he might as well go to college and to California. His parents were skeptical of both, but when he told them going pro would mean scraping by in the minors and just as likely never getting called up, they grudgingly agreed.

It quickly started looking like a smart move. Classes were real tough, but he got help, and he knew he needed time to develop physically and work on his mechanics. They barely played Jim at all his first year, just a few innings of mop-up duty here and there. The next year, when they moved him to middle relief, he saw a bit more action. By his junior year he was every bit the specimen they'd hoped for and he finally took a starting spot. Now all he had to do was pitch like he knew how. At a program like Stanford, the scouts would find him.

It ended just as quickly. In the top of the third against Oregon State, he made a routine pick-off throw to first and fell to the ground. His knee was a shambles. Without meaning to, he took rehab more seriously than he took classes. His grades dropped; his velocity never returned. Stanford offered to keep him on for another year if he got his grades up. This time, he turned them down. Rehab had been a goddamn waste. He wasn't going to make the same mistake twice.

His parents welcomed him home, happy to see more of him and half-happy to be able to do once more what they knew best. Problem was, he wasn't even disconsolate. He was going to be a pitcher and now he wasn't going to be anything. He didn't want sympathy and he certainly didn't want to hear about how at least he'd given it the old college try. Not everyone makes it to the bigs. I'm just someone that didn't make it. Just gotta get used to that. It didn't work out, that's all.

Within a few years he'd found his way to a job as a pitching coach at his high school. It pained him every day, but maybe he could help some kid make it. Long shot, but still. What else could he do? That's all he knew and he knew it.

Mrs. Dombrowski resolved to try again the following evening. Should she bring the kettle again or no? Now that he knew about it, it might work against her, but she couldn't very well go over there defenseless. It could be a matter of life and death. She would watch Mr. Rather in the morning and he would help her decide.

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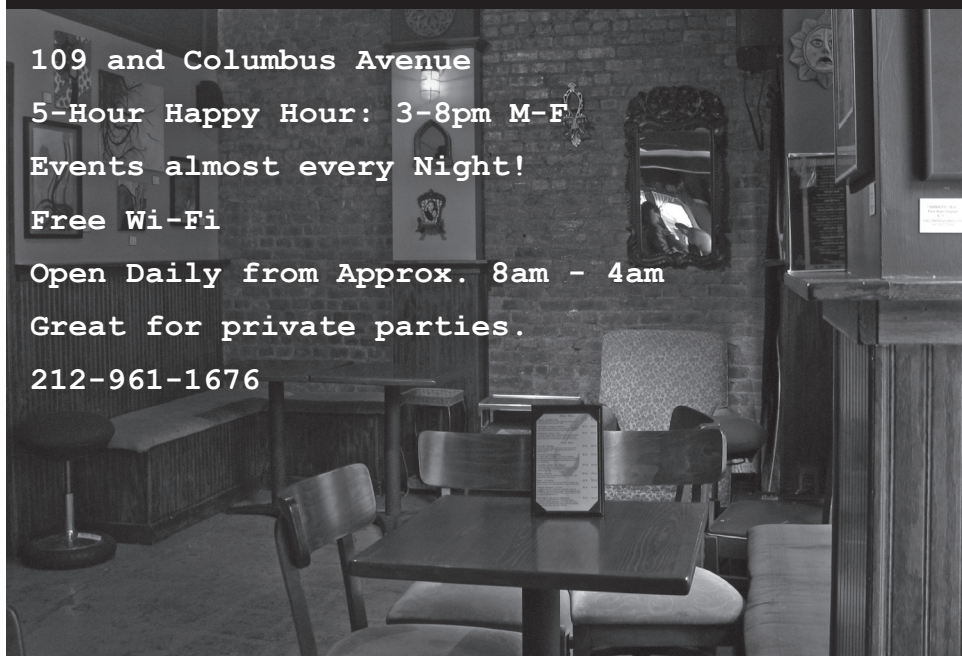
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Year 205, Issue 2

"Trees," Joyce Kilmer, 1913/1914

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.