Fall 1977

Valparaiso University

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A few words to our readers:

This issue of The Lighter reflects an editorial philosophy which gives prominence to the written word in its poetic and prosaic forms. As a literary/variety magazine, The Lighter seeks to provide creative authors an opportunity to share their works with the University community, and also encourages the artist and photographer to embellish and complement the written word. The Lighter is the students' publication and, consequently, we present here the creations of students for the enjoyment of students. Material is selected on the basis of creativity, expressiveness, and quality by student critics with editorial approval. The editors welcome original contributions as well as constructive criticism from its readers. Special words of thanks are in order to the staff for their zeal, to our printer, Larry Klemz, for his assistance, and of course, to our contributing authors and artists. My personal gratitude is extended to Mrs. V. J. Berg, who first sparked my interest in literary pursuits. Finally, thanks to THE LIGHTER – in luce tua videmus luce.

John F. Messerschmidt
"Bells" by Susan Holman

Ring,
song.
Sing long.
Fling the cord
that chains this?
Wish you to lose awareness
of the single-minded clanging
of its faithful watchman’s cry?
Must I loose my chains before the
world hears of my bondage? Wait.
Listen to the cradle rocking silently,
more quietly. And on the hill the sunset
traps the air within its gravity, and we
can breathe the evening mists. As cows
come home, their gentle gait and muted
low allow the hollow clanging of their
brass voice to warn others there will
soon be heavy footprints in the soft clay
of the soil. A Light! And from the Sound,
a long and mournful moan that seems more
eerie than the fog and much more beautiful
to sailors in the tumbling, rocky storm than
belles, who too, give rings to men that keep
them from their slumbers. But a new awakening
it is, and we see bling who know more light
and walk more wisdom in their lameness than
do we in our blind sight. For now the Sun is
rising. And from slow, arthritic peddlers’
carts we hear a ring awakening us to know the
wares there being sold. For bells of Liberty
are often frail and crack, as in his hero-death
the Unknown Soldier tolled out from his slavery
the price of freedom to the world. Now in the
afternoon of earth, when elixirs from alchemists
are still not freeing us from death, a slave I’d rather
be to Truth than any liberated from the heart of life, so mortal
that a sunset takes its toll so soon they hardly see the morning
when the full moon wanes and rises in the night. Listen!
to the bells
Tall Cat's Tail
— a rag —

I.

I'd been swimming
for what seemed a lifetime
in a no-end river of muddy water—
the boat over-turned
halfway from the bank
upstream, downstream—too dizzy to think,
but anybody knows
cats don't like water
but they'll swim like hell for fame.

Felicity, felicity
finicky feline
rammin' around the river bank—
my ear's been clipped
and my tail's been dipped
but I have crossed blue eyes.

II.

There's one good thing
to being a river cat—
obody needs to keep you.
Your tongue grows rough
to clean the mud
you learn to swim
and bag a fish.
Now anybody knows
cats don't like dirt
and cats don't like water
but they'll swim like hell for pride.
III.

Some of us cats
think we know it all—
by the ninth time around, we know we don't.
There's always something
brand-new curious
around all well-traversed river banks—
and river bottoms
but something lets the cat out of the bag,
'cause cats don't like dirt
and cats don't like water
but they'll swim like hell for life.

Felicity, felicity
finicky feline
living forever on the bank—
my ear's been clipped
and my tail's been dipped
but I have wide blue eyes.

T.L. Wolfe
and it came to pass, in those days, that many of them were sitting about in a room, carousing and drinking beer and making merry; and many of them began to cry out in a loud voice, laughing and saying, “Give forth with more brew, so that we may become more inebriated and do shameful things that no man would own up to when sober.” And their host complied, and also gave them more beer, so that he would not be thought of as a blivit, but rather as one who is a good guy.

And behold, with time their eyes grew glazed, and they knew not where they were; indeed, they knew not who they were, so much had they consumed; and lo, they began to play Pink Floyd at very high volume.

Now there was one among them, named Andrysiak, who was thought of by all to be a purveyor of all things unpleasant and foul; for every time he opened up his mouth, there came forth loud braying and foolishness in great amounts. And he spake unto them, saying, “My stomach is full, and I shall drink no more; yea, I will not lift another can to my lips, but will cease to consume this drink, for verily, my stomach churns, and my liver is greatly troubled.” And they derided him and laughed much at him, saying that he was an abomination and engaged in perverted activity; but he did not listen, and turned the other way.

And behold, the music grew louder, and the drunkards made great noise; for they knew not what they were doing, and cared less.

And there came a knock upon the door, and all who heard it shouted, “Enter!” without thinking, for they had drunk much beer, and were not given much to thinking. And behold, he who entered was the RA, and he was smiling not, neither was he happy nor telling jokes; for he was confronted with smiling idiotic faces and the smell of alcohol on many breaths, and beer cans plainly in sight. And when the music had been turned down, and all had turned to look at him, he spake unto them, saying:

“Woe unto you, O men of little minds! You have been foolish and sinned greatly, and been loud beyond the laws of men, and have sunk into the depths of drunkenness; and because of your hardness of heart and unrepentance, I shall pour out all of this brew, and pink you all, every one; and in this way shall your sins be visited upon your heads.”

There came then a great silence over the room; and then they began to weep and gnash their teeth, and beg for mercy, and to grovel like dogs before their master.

And lo, Andrysiak arose, and stood before them, and had pity on them; for he had not drunk much beer, and so was clear of mind. And he
drew near the RA and said, “Wilt thou indeed pink the righteous with the wicked? Suppose half of us were not drinking; wouldst thou pink us all and not spare us for the sake of the half that were not drinking? Far be it from thee, righteous Assistant of the wing, to pink the innocent with the guilty!”

And the RA pondered the situation; and he said unto him, “For the sake of half I will not pink you all.”

Andrysiak answered, “Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the RA, I who am but a student. Suppose five of us were not drinking. Would you then pink us all, and not spare us for the sake of the five?”

And the RA answered him, “I will not pink you all for the sake of five, if there be five.”

And lo, some of those who were not without reason began surreptitiously to conceal those beer cans that were full, seeing what Andrysiak was doing.

And Andrysiak spoke again, saying, “Suppose two of us were not drinking.” And he said, “For the sake of two I will not do it.”

And again Andrysiak said, “Oh let not my RA be angry, and I will speak this once: suppose only one of us were not drinking, wouldst thou not spare us for the sake of the one?”

And the RA said, “Oh, for crying out loud,” and left the place; and they were amazed, saying to themselves, “Who is this man, that the RAs themselves cannot handle him?”

by John Bales
Cornflakes

It's raining cornflakes brown and red,
So crisp they crunch beneath my feet.
Perhaps they're waiting to be fed
To winter's hungry, milk-white street.

They crackle in the frosty air
And trickle down, one under one,
While rain strips sugar-frosted's bare
And Krispie Krunchies are undone.

S.H.
re: leaves

Scratch and slide
    and slip on streets
Whirl and curl
    with tempests' beats
Crunch and crinkle
    beneath my feet
Ride alone
    or sail in fleet.

J.F. Messerschmidt
SOUVENIRS

If God
gives me
experiences
to make me
see things
I never saw before,
to see even
things I
didn't
wanna see,
then
you
must
be
experience
with
a
capital
E.

Kim Melton
Snowflakes and Fingerprints

When you try
to change
a fingerprint,
It might
resume its
original shape
or
It might
leave permanent
unnatural scars
but
When you try
to change
a snowflake,
it melts.

I
in my uniqueness
fear.
I am
a snowflake.

Terry Clarbour
GOOD MORNING, CHICAGO

Good morning, Chicago—thanks for the hospitality—
You've greeted me with your porno magazines at corner newsstands,
your gay men (with their lovers on Long Island),
your glazy-eyed children who fill their lives
with nothing but emptiness,
and your dingy "el" stations which digest your people
and spit them out again.

I've seen your broken screen doors and crumbling stairways,
your tattered campaign posters which promise your salvation,
yes, and your cemeteries which tell me where your people are.

I hope you've put your best foot forward,
'cause it's time to leave you now—

No one waves good-bye.
Yet your cigarette billboard asks,
"ARE YOU READY FOR MORE?"

John F. Messerschmidt
A PLEASANT NIGHT

A pleasant night, as yet, has passed. The light
Upon my fertile page falls soft and warm.
I write by candle's flame to make me one
With those long dead whose art glows yet so bright
It's sure their poems did their souls inform,
For men through all of time to look upon.

And then, a howling from beyond the wall
Of creature never seen upon this earth
Or, if upon this earth, not in our time.
Empty of feeling, message, not a call,
To brother beasts, but as the cry at birth,
To say, "I breathe, and I claim life as mine."

And now, a rumbling just beneath my feet,
As if, below a shallow shelf of ground,
Collapsed some huge and vacant cave of ice—
The walls give way, then floor and ceiling meet
To make this terrifying, final sound.
If man survives, what will remain of life?

The question, though it chills my heart, yet seems
A fitting subject for the written word.
I take my pen. But now upon the page
The light falls weak and cold and sputtering dim.
The sounds this thin-walled, thin-floored room has heard
Are their own heralds of a coming age.

Carol Breimeier
James Clifton Hale (From the journal of a landed English lord. Early 1840's.)

SEPT. 1

All aspects of life here at the Manor are quite pleasant. The grounds are more than ample (many times has my father pridefully stated that they "approach 500 acres"), and the house where our family resides is, at least according to the name given it by our tenantry, a "castle."

I can see at work the tenant farmers, all of whom live in a group of thatch-roofed cottages which lies half a mile or so from the main house. In the distance, their scythes flash against the cobalt sky, and are framed by the window in whose square of afternoon light I now sit. When the wind cooperates, I can smell the perfume of the grain and clover through which they cut their swaths.

I write now not to fill the empty day of a leisurely landed gent, but from desperation. I have little recourse but to seek some bit of accidental wisdom which might fall from my pen.

I have searched this great house from uppermost gable to cellar. This was no mean task, let me assure you, for as tangled with ivy is its exterior, the interior of this house is wound with sinuous and narrow corridors. Further, a dim stairway leads to each of the many gables. My search, however, has been for naught. My family, my parents and sister, is nowhere to be found. Of course, I went calling their names among the dense oaks, fields, and formal gardens that are my father's acres, and I naturally inquired among the tenants about them, but I received information from neither endeavor.

When I was younger, at harvest time my father would sometimes disappear, "gone to town for a few days," presumably to negotiate the sale of our crop, but never has the entire family quit the Manor for so long. It's been four days.

SEPT. 2

Hoping to find my family there, I rode the several miles to the town today. I rode quite desperately; my worrying has become nearly frenzied.

I entered the town along a dusty road, which was sectioned by ribs of slanted sunlight streaming between the village's antique structures. My horse's sides were well lathered, for over the entire journey, I had kept him always at a run or better.

I raced into the town square, and immediately leapt from my saddle. I fell as I did so, and swore wildly, drawing the eyes of all in the square. Rising, I began to scramble among the crowd shopping there, accosting each person for information as I passed.

I gripped and shook shoulders. I cursed ignorants for no reason but their lack of news. The townspeople stood mute before me, in something akin to fear, with wide eyes and gaping mouths. They must have thought me mad, or perhaps disordered in some more loathsome way, for one beshawled beldame made an odd and complicated gesture toward me, then fled.

Making no progress in the square, I next ripped frantically into the various shops around it. I upset shelves, broke bottles. My hoarsely shouted questions echoed throughout the hamlet in tones which, I'm sure, must have rung with an air of deranged malevolence in the townsmen's ears. You must remember, however, that I was tortured by grief, or, more properly, by a growing suspicion that something had occurred which might engender that emotion. Great fear had invaded my soul, and was rapidly winnowing any reason from my mind.

(Thankfully, though, as I write now I have calmed somewhat, but even yet my faculties of mind and spirit are eroding beneath the wild surf of an ever more debilitating sea of events.)

Despite my raving interrogatives, I gained no information from my trip this morning.

SEPT. 3

Again today, I continued my search. I went below into the cellar, intending to reconnoiter it somewhat more thoroughly than I previously had. I armed myself with a kerosene lantern against the darkness inherent in such a windowless, subterranean enclosure.

The light of my lamp flickered, its undulations reflected most disconcertingly by the damp walls of the cellar. The condensation upon the walls trickled onto the flagstones of the floor, so that areas wholly without puddles were quite scarce, if not non-existent.

As might be expected in such a dank, light-
less place, from the murky wetness of the floor grew disgusting molds and foul gray mush-
rooms. This being the case, I could not re-
strain my mind from conjuring horrifying pic-
tures of things creeping underfoot in menacing
aspects of centipedal terror.
Because even the large lantern I carried
do something to dispel the blackness of our
large cellar, an unplumbable depth of utter
night stretched away before and behind me.
Again, my worry-fevered brain created images.
How could foul, avaian vipers be not awing on
the currents of darkness all around?
Despite my fright, I knew that I could not
turn back. I needed to be certain that the
ceiling was not the place of my family's conceal-
ment, and I knew that I would descend there
and again, searching until certainty fi-
nally came.
At this point I was driven no more by cour-
age or love than by a very strong desire not to
return.
During my stumblings in the cellar, I had
not thought it possible that my situation could
be made even one iota more fearful, but such
an abominable thing did occur, for as I sought
my kin among the mushrooms and wet walls,
I soon perceived the growing of a chittering.
No other word could describe the sound, be-
cause it reverberated in my head like nothing
other than the insane noises of an infinity of
rodents.
"Surely," I thought, "the plague victims of
so long ago heard this sound above that of
their labored breathing as they sank into the
grasp of Black Death."

The sound increased until I was positively
crazed with dread. At last, I screamed, and
hurled the lantern at the sound's source, which
was many running steps before I caromed
in the new blackness into a wetly beslimed
wall. I scrabbled, gibbering quite animalistic-
ally by this time, against the wall, seeking in
its unbroken facade some means of escape,
though I knew that none would be found.

Since the cellar is of rather large dimensions,
it was many running steps before I caromed
in the new blackness into a wetly beslimed
wall. I scrambled, gibbering quite animalistic-
ally by this time, against the wall, seeking in
its unbroken facade some means of escape,
even though I knew that none would be found.
I continued until my hand encountered a
raised surface.

In my terror, I mindlessly pummeled the
projection with an open hand, as a sickly child
might slap his bedsheets during an epileptic
fit. I could sense both the bulging of my eyes
and the thrashing of an icy eel deep and low
within my abdomen.

Suddenly, I suppose in result of my pound-
ing, a door set flush with the wall sprang open
before me on silent hinges. The protrusion
upon which I had pounded must have been
some sort of spring-loaded catch or lever.
I had not many times before been in the
ceiling, having since my earliest recollection
been rather unnerved by the place. I had,
though, ventured often enough below to know
that no door should have hung ajar in that
quarter of the underground chamber. Despite
this, which I recognized even as I gibbered, I
ducked within, seeking a hiding place, a haven
from my chittering tormentors.

After a few moments behind the door, which
had, subsequent to my passage through it,
closed of its own accord, I came somewhat to
my senses. Immediately, my mind reeled in
the darkness, and I felt that if one more sec-
ond should pass without the advent of illum-
ination, I would perish.
I felt in my pockets, and, luckily, discovered
that I had matches with me. As I struck one,
I became suddenly aware that the chittering
had diminished greatly in volume, and realized
that it had done so upon my entry through the
unexpected door.
It seemed then that the door offered a bar-
rier that the source of the chittering could not
easily pass. I was, however, sure that this set-
back was a merely temporary one, and that
the chitterers, the many who blasphemed with
their hellish din, would soon plague me once
more.

For this reason, I wished nothing so badly
as to put an eternity of miles between myself
and the hidden door.

Striding as rapidly as possible without ex-
tinguishing the matches I lit to show my way,
I hurried away from the portal. Even though I
felt my eyes drawn to turn back, I refused to
look behind me.

As I walked, I surveyed my surroundings by
the thin light of my matches. Much to my sur-
prise, though no memory of this occluded
place was mine, I felt it strangely familiar.
I traversed what seemed to be a seldom-
used corridor. The many-yard expanse before
me was shrouded under a pall of dust. The
ceiling a few feet above my head was clad in a
thick, tangled cloak of cobwebs: among them
dry husks of insects hung like black buttons.
The passage ended with a ninety-degree turn
to the left, but this was yet far away.
Oddly, the air here was not damp. It seemed
in fact the exact opposite—as dry as the air is said to be within the pyramids of Gizeh. The walls about me, rather than being points of condensation, as were those of the cellar without, were absolutely covered with carven letters of seemingly Roman origin.

I studied the inscriptions as I paced the narrow space between the walls upon which they lay. I had hoped to commit some of them to memory for later translation. (I do read Latin.)

Despite my knowledge of the ancient tongue of the Romans, I could make no sense of the inscribed syllables. This inability is not caused by a faulty memory of the carvings (as though I could forget them!), for those I saw are burned into my brain, repeating themselves again and again, but in no language I recognize.

In my skull, the inscriptions are the ever-chanted supplications of some forgotten and barbarous cult, intoned in a dead, forgotten tongue. Wild flutes screech in my head, accompanying insane voices. The voices wail crazily, without pause, their mindless invocations echoing impiously among the bloody stars that float behind my eyelids. Eternally: “Ce-haiie ep-ngh fl’hurr ghi Fhii’lle! Ican-icani-irus! Fhtagn! Fhtagn! Fhtagn!”

I formerly had dismissed the notion that our house sat upon Roman foundations. I have* no doubt now that it does. I merely wonder if Jupiter or Apollo, or any of the others were included in the heavenly pantheon of the Romans who made the inscriptions I now know so well.

As I finished my travel of the distance to the corridor’s bend, the match then lighting another, struck it against the sole of my boot, and rounded the corner.

In the sputtering and sulphurous light the new match gave, I saw that which had been concealed by the corner. My family lay in a pool of congealed blood, the remains of their bodies torn nearly beyond recognition, as if by some rabid animal. A week’s decay had transformed my loved ones into a fetid mass of rotten carrion.

I recall screaming, but how I came safely into the light of the ground floor, I doubt I shall ever know. I am sure, however, that until I was delivered into the day, the chittering followed the entire distance outside the hidden threshold.

SEPT. 7

I have been unable to write for the past days, for the terror that remained with me in that time had left me good for nothing but lying blankly in bed, my eyes astare, and my jaw slack. But, as is obvious, I am today somewhat recovered. Even the horrid chanting in my head has softened.

I wish, however, that I lay yet in my former amnesiac state, for my memories are more than I can bear, especially at night.

SEPT. 16

I own the Manor now, but it means nothing. The various inquests and will-readings have passed, their outcomes quite predictable. My father’s will left all to his descendants, and since wolves do roam in these parts, they were pronounced my family’s killers. It was obvious, the magistrate said, that “there was a nest of them down there.”

Ha.

SEPT. 17

Since the Manor has become mine, it has been my wont, indeed nearly my only activity, to sit at this desk and stare out the window at the tenants as they labor in the distance. This day, however, though I watched, the tenants did not appear in the fields. Whether or not they were absent because they had finished the harvest, I do not know, for, I’m afraid, though master of the Manor now, I have done little to fulfill the duties of that station.

I ventured down to the tenant’s cottages to discover the reason for their absence. They were nowhere to be found.

SEPT. 26

Nine days have passed since I visited the tenants’ cottages. Since then, I have neither left this house, nor even this study, for the terror that remained with me in that time had left me good for nothing but lying blankly in bed, my eyes astare, and my jaw slack. But, as is obvious, I am today somewhat recovered. Even the horrid chanting in my head has softened.

I wish, however, that I lay yet in my former amnesiac state, for my memories are more than I can bear, especially at night.

16
It Must Have Been
— a rag —

T.L. Wolfe

I.

Nature, mother, tried
but I don't think she succeeded
in the sense of being
the unimpeded
progress of growing
such, like, a malformation;
I mean, one couldn't help seeing
it's all a result
of time, out of whack
throwing
it all back
revealing the primitive's
expression of all the black
rich, dark, bad, bad sublime.

II.

Ham
in the oven
smells
oh—so good
the beans in the pot
are calculatin' worth
prizes more than I could give.

I see the money running fast
away from my fingers
and the food in the pot
boils over 'til
it's all gone
evaporated

* * *

It must have been,
Once upon a time
It must have been
a real, real good life.
Oh, Trixie, tell my soul
that it's all gonna be
alright again.

Someday
we're gonna run down that hill
searching for wild flowers
because the berries aren't there
but we won't care
we'll take what we are given
and all the rains
and all the snows
all the times so bad won't hurt
anymore, ever again.
Trixie, how long can you hang on?
There's so much work to do.
The harvest's begun
the winter's coming,
please try to work a little more.

The sun is pretty
pulling all the light it can
and throwing it back to earth
Oh, the wind's so cold
and we feel so old
please, we don't want you to make fun.

It could have been
something else once upon
a time, long time
but oh, I wish
it never had been at all.

III.

Sh-h-h:
how sad the cemetery sits
upon the broad hill
and the stones aligned
and scattered, both.

My, how decorous!
Black cars in a row
they'll bury me in real fine style.
Please, no roses, please—
I was allergic to them.

IV.

Watch the pot—
there, I think it's done, too.
How tired everyone is
but the worst is over,
I suppose.

Tomorrow we must go back,
labor's labor for the greens
we'll never get to eat
but trade in for a certified bill.

Baby! Stop her crying!
we don't shed tears in this house—
and watch the pot, the other one!
spare, don't burn a thing.
* 

When inquisitive and relentless butterfly hunters pursue and capture you, imprison you in their labelled jars, and impale you on tasteless display and when they classify, characterize, and categorize you in relationship to their other specimens rendering you immobile helpless and lifeless.

Look to Him who was pinned to two roughly-hewn beams and exhibited as a cosmic spectacle, enduring the prejudices of an ignorant world, And remember that the story did not end there.

For He was the first to shed his earth-bound cocoon so that we may follow His example.

Arise, then, soar high in the freedom of your untried resurrection wings.

J.F. Messerschmidt