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Eastern Kentucky University, The Canterbury Club

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Belles Lettres

*Eastern Kentucky
State College*

1952

Belles Lettres

An annual anthology of student writing sponsored and published by the
Canterbury Club of Eastern Kentucky State College
at Richmond, Kentucky.

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FOREWORD

In the hope of promoting literary efforts and encouraging worthwhile reading, we, the Editors of BELLES LETTRES, take pride in presenting this, our eighteenth volume, second number.

WINDS

JANE MOBERLY

A gentle wind is good; but so polite
he only waves my hair with quiet caress
and never much disturbs my shoulders' set
or even steps. The gentle wind will trickle
across my eyelids, resting only lightly there;
then whispering away.
I often miss a gentle wind when it has gone,
but not for very long.

I love a strong wind—that gives no quarter
as he picks my hair off my neck
and tosses it, and scrapes my legs,
and, chuckling, scorches my face—
all with one breath. The strong wind lifts me high
and whips me around, laughing aloud to think that he has won
and that tomorrow, or some stiller, softer day,
when I look for him—or call to him—
watching, with amusement from his hidden everywhere,
he will pretend he is not there.

You never asked, but still I promise you
It cannot be soon when I forget.
A gentle memory is hard enough to spare
And you are scarcely that.

CRITICISM

GWEN JONES

I do not think to criticize
Will make a poet "good" or "wise."
Your stanzas had much more appeal,
The words to me were far more real
Before your thoughts were his to steal.
The critic makes your poems "fine,"
But nevermore will they be thine.

SONNET

LORAINE McGLONE

Perhaps I'll love you better in a while . . .
But now, please let me rest and try to think.
Do not probe me, for I am on the brink
Of a final abyss and if riled
Will plunge into its depths without a care.
Don't try to understand or long to see.
Simply know that alone, for now I'll fare
Very well; no hope can now be phrased . . .
That I want to hear or that you may sing;
No passion that can be reborn or raised,
For ardour is a past, forgotten thing.
Love—a vignette at the close of your days
With me will fade and be but a happening.

THE PICTURE

WANDA SMYTH

A light touch of white against a background of palest blue; a fairy spray of delicate pink which increases in density until it becomes crimson and then fades again into the blue, this time of a slightly darker shade. Now more white gently woven into the blue. Here a dash of brilliant green contrasting with the dull brown. A pause—during which a long, critical look is passed over the scene.

Then a dash of gold blends into the crimson.

A few more colors find their way into the finishing touches and the fantasy in watercolor is finished. . . . The girl looked up then and found that I had been watching her.

"It's not much of a picture," she smiled, as if in apology.

I was silent for a moment as I looked critically at her creation. If I got several yards away from this mass of watercolors, I had to admit they took form as a colorful sunset blending into sky and sea. Tropical palms wavered in a faint breeze along the shore of this South Sea island.

As I knew practically nothing of art, I certainly couldn't judge the worth of the picture, but I smiled reassuringly and said, "It's very pretty. Are you going to frame it?"

I looked then at the wall opposite where hung a large picture of a destroyer, *U. S. S. Jenkins*, and a bulletin board on which were several pictures of ships and sailors clipped from magazines.

Looking again at the girl, I found her eyes were on an 8 x 10 picture on her desk. The object of her gaze was a boy in uniform, a boy with laughing brown eyes and a big smile. This sailor was on a destroyer near an island very much like the one she had attempted to paint.

I wondered if she knew why she had tried to paint a picture of a tropical island. I thought that I knew. On her face was an expression of wistful longing. Suddenly, I realized what intense loneliness and yearning she had been enduring for months and the culmination of longing was in the fantasy.

The island picture *was* truly a fantasy. It lacked a quality of reality and fairly shouted that its creator had never seen an island such as she had meant to portray.

Her life, as the fantasy, lacked a quality of reality. It needed another touch to mold its colors into shape and give it meaning. But the artist was not she.

My eyes met the happy ones of the sailor in the photograph.

"Please, Jimmy," I pleaded silently to the boy whom I had never met, "please, come home to her soon!"

LIFE—COMPLETE

BEVERLY DAWN WILSON

The trees stand in beautiful, fall-like splendor,
Yielding their all to the earth, leaf by leaf!
Yet, we too our cherished days to time surrender
Each golden joy, last hope, and long gone grief.
As the dewdrops in lovely nights descend,
And glitter like tears upon the tender flowers,
Then by the morning sun to clouds again,
And fall once more in cool, refreshing showers.
Or as the waves, seeking heaven for release,
Clamor upon the sturdy, beaten shore,
Advance, and prove their broad outreach,
Then to the sea are gathered home once more.
Time's rhythm thus progresses and retreats,
And docile death, life's discord, soon completes.

THE LEFTOVER

GWEN JONES

It will not work,
This love affair,
For she's his dearest friend.
She's my friend, too,
And I don't want
His heart to be a "lend."
I guess I'm jealous,
Maybe so,
But still I have the right
To be with him
A little while
When she's not in his sight.
But will I have
To stand in line?
This for him I would do,
And yet, it's hard
To take what's left
Behind, when she is through.

ANAESTHESIA

JANE MOBERLY

And still,
In winter, under a dusky covering of leaves
Held high on swirling oceans of November snow—
We move across the hours, in every way
Sane, sure, and sensible.
Disdainful of a vague and steady fire that smoulders
Far below unruffled surfaces of everyday,
We stoop and rise again to take upon our shoulders
Each common sorrow and success existence has to give,
And say, most proud, with tongue in cheek—"we live."

Until,
One quick, unordinary spring, bursting its parts around us
In a bitter-tasteless-sweet embrace,
Binds heaven, with tenuous iron, to hell.
And uncertain; and half-fearing
To search reason for the truth, and past hearing
Words of judgment as before,
We draw a curtain; cloak our minds;
And blindly beat upon a solid door.
We lift our eyes in clouded questioning above
To skies that tell us nothing, save—we love.

LIMERICK

CHARLES LAMB

There once was a lovely young maid,
Who desired a necklace of jade.
The one that she got,
Proved to be hot,
And now she's in jail, I'm afraid.

TANT MIEUX

LORAINÉ MCGLONE

What then, after all is done, is forever?
A meagre life's span . . . a flash of endeavor?
A golden day; a night fraught
With crystal gems caught
Momentarily in a great black veil?
A precious short reprieve from the gale
That surrounds us as a wall.
No. We are too often in the maw!
To believe this sweetness will last.
Let us cease trying. Beauty will not be held fast.
Soon we will pass and have no more to tell.
You forget we are only flesh and that it's
Just as well.

OLD SONG OF SPRING

H. EDWARD RICHARDSON

During the feather weather of the spring—
When burgeons once again the maple red
And loose like moss; and frigid winds have fled
The brown plain, leaving the new world to sing
And bring an ancient hope to life again—
The lover walks resuscitated ways
Forgetting how he walked there other days
Or laughed in other mirths, or winced in pain;—
Or when a dear remembered friend walked down
The last lane of his life, and cursed the earth
That took his youth, green individual,
And greily gave it to a soundless sound
Low in the soil, cold, cold, deep in earth's girth—
But the lover alive, his passions call.

THE WIDOWED QUEEN

GWEN JONES

Huge crowds protrude into the streets
As the funeral train moves slowly by.
The heavens don a darker garb,
For kings, as well as peasants, die.

Yes, kings are yet as mortal men;
They have no longer lease on life
Than those of lesser means than they—
A widow left—once Queen and wife.

The great procession winds its way
And stately down the street is seen
Through tears shed freely by all there
Save one—a widow, once a Queen.

She follows closely behind the hearse.
A veil half shields her graceful face,
Which bears no mark of grief or pain
Nor longing for a warm embrace.

Her heart requires a thicker veil;
Its shaking sobs are hard to hide;
Her lips kept firm, her head held high,
In misery she is forced to ride.

THE HOUSE OF MATCHES

H. EDWARD RICHARDSON

When you put each tiny match in place
So carefully, so precisely,
And planned it all so joyfully,
You had no thoughts of all that you would face.
When you built it all with life and tears
And calloused hands and sweat and strain,
You just stood back and laughed again
To know that you would laugh in later years.

But that was long ago and you were young,
Searching for the joy you never found;
For, long before your song was sung
And lost, your little house came crashing down.

FATE OF THE UNION

A Play in One Act

SHIRLEY SPIRES

ACT ONE

Obscene One: Senacloakroom in the Capitol. Congress is convening and the Senators have retired for a smoke. As the scene opens, Senator McNasty and Senator Krafty are engaged in a game of jacks in a far corner of the room. Senator Krafty has just kinged his jacks and is trying to pick them up. Senator McNasty looks on bitterly but is eagerly awaiting his turn.

SENATOR KRAFTY: (Accusingly) Thad! You're wearing a red tie!

SENATOR MCNASTY: But it has red and black dots in it.

SENATOR KRAFTY: No matter. We can't be too careful, you know. (Misses, knocking over a kinged pair of jacks.) Damn! This McWrath affair must have got me upset.

SENATOR MCNASTY: (Gleefully) It's my turn now! I'm on my ten's, aren't I?

Obscene Two: In another corner of the room, Senator Bull is practicing a speech he is planning to deliver. McCloy, the janitor, sits as an audience, obviously bored, but condescending. He smokes a pipe placidly.

SENATOR BULL: And so, gentlemen, I must stress the fight against corruption. I personally hate corruption! It's so corrupt! We must fight! Fight—Fight—Fight! (He employs the various antics of a cheerleader.)

McCLOY: Hmmphf.

SENATOR BULL: I personally hate waste. It's so wasteful. We must stress frugality.

McCLOY: Frugality.

SENATOR BULL: I personally hate a coward. They're so cowardly. We must not hesitate! We must—(breaks off) What's French for march, McCloy?

McCLOY: Marchon.

SENATOR BULL: Marchon!!! Marchon—Marchon! (His voice dies to an effective whisper.)

McCLOY: Hmmphf.

Obscene Three: The room has cleared. The senators have gone back to discussing the trying business of deciding the fate of the union. Stale smoke and dog-eared pulp magazines remain. The door opens and McCloy enters. Senator McNasty is in the far corner, sobbing, and McCloy, noticing, goes to him.

McCLOY: There, there, Senator. It's not all that bad.

SENATOR MCNASTY: (Babbling incoherently) But I was on ten's—I was on

...
McCLOY: Come on, Senator, let's go. Everything will be all right. (McCloy leads Senator McNasty out the door, returns alone, breathing a sigh of relief.)

McCLOY: (Thinking aloud.) Well, I guess I can get back to my reading. (McCloy goes to bookshelves, removes a copy of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, finds his place and resumes reading.)

Seven

"MISSISSIPPI MUD"

BETTY MAYO

Everybody knew that Edie loved Hank madly—everybody except Hank, that is. He went about with his sleepy brown eyes oblivious to the nervous convulsions Edie experienced when he was in seeing or hearing distance.

Yes, Hank was her Apollo, Adonis, and Gregory Peck rolled into one, though he had the physique and mental ability of none of them. So while Apollo religiously practiced basketball and stuffed himself with unbelievable numbers of chocolate malts, Edie swayed between nervous convulsions and hyperirritability.

Romantic ballads sent her into a heavenly state which we unfortunates who weren't in love could never hope to experience. Her face would develop a weak, sublimely happy smile, while her eyes became misty and stared blindly through everything and everybody. We were terribly embarrassed when someone who didn't understand her condition witnessed one of these moments.

The spell came over her one day in October while we were quietly watching a basketball scrimmage. Hank Bland's ungainly form unfolded itself from the bench. Edie had her first attack as he hopped down the floor and quietly reached up and placed the ball in the basket. We were mystified. How could anyone in her right state of mind be torn to pieces over six feet and six inches of skin, bone, and a few muscles? Tomorrow she would be normal again, and, meanwhile, we would humor the poor kid.

We were still humoring "the poor kid" six months later, and, to be sure, our personalities were not without their marks of wear and tear. One balmy, warm night in April Edie joined us for a lounging session at the Hideout. How fondly I remember that night! The jukebox responded loudly and beautifully to our many nickels. While we were discussing our plans for the summer, a sudden chill seemed to sweep over the booth. All eyes turned to Edie by force of habit. She was rigid, her eyes terrified and glassy, her face intermittently white, red, and pale green.

For a few moments we just stared. Then a shadow fell over the booth—a shadow which at that moment seemed the very foreboding of evil. Finally I rallied enough to tear my gaze from Edie's horror-stricken face. There, towering over us, was Hank.

"M-m-may I sit down?" he stammered.

Edie made some gasping noise which he took to be an affirmative. We sat there in silence, following brave attempts at conversation. I did all the trying, and Hank replied in his best manner, which was not too intelligent. After a dozen or so nickels were hesitantly dropped into the jukebox to the tune of "Mississippi Mud," Hank screwed up his courage enough to speak again.

"I have M-maybelle out here. Would—would you—you all want to go for a ride?"

Before the proclamation was finished, I was pushing a frantic, stumbling Edie into the jalopy. A battered uke lay in the back seat.

"There," I mumbled to myself, "this should solve the problem. Any idiot can sing."

So, as we chugged along in the soft night air, I strummed the old uke to the best of my ability, and Edie accompanied me with a squeak now and then. In the middle of "Mississippi Mud" I seemed to hear a few stumbling words from the driver's seat.

"Edie," Hank was saying, "would you like—do you think—could you go with me to the . . . ?"

Before the poor boy could finish speaking, Edie uttered a frantic "Yes!" The air seemed warmer, the car didn't jump and rattle so much, and three relieved voices joined in the final chorus of that utterly heavenly song, "Mississippi Mud."

THE DISCOVERY OF A MAN

H. EDWARD RICHARDSON

You must know who I am to ask me this.
Do you? Answer now, for I have no time
To waste—there is little left, little time
To search out what is worth the searching in the mist
Of unbearable, miasmatic, cool-blue smoke that
Chills, and chills, and chills so cold that
Lips of ardent lovers crack and joints freeze
And bluebirds die with severed notes in throats.

But there were some moments not so ugly;
When air was bright frosted air; when piles
Of pure flaked snow lay too dry to roll
Upon the undulation of the dormant earth;
When crystal sabres hung, like melting mirrors,
From caves of mansard roofs, catching prism-glints,
Flecking yellow warmth upon the sheeted earth . . .

But you, what right have you to know these things?

The right of guidance? Let me tell you now,
I have never known a wise man; your hunger
Will not be satiated by my words;
Your appetite will not be filled,
For death is your dessert; you cannot taste
Of it before the sense forgets itself.

All right, if your heart is set there I will
Tell you of a man's discovery, but
First, listen. I will speak of antiquities
Which preceded this great revelation:
A boy rushes from a black-screened door,
Running purposelessly into an ignorant air
Of happiness. In his hand he carries
A model airship; he breathes deeply the smell
Of drying banana oil, laughs a shout—

Older, he sweats in athletic vigor.
In animal tenseness he hovers at
A black line on a wide, brown, polished floor.
Then fast! the break, a slapping pass,
And the strategic crip, bringing hope again.
Within the tight, waning minute, (when a
Forgotten victory meant so much), the noise
Arose and pandemonium prevailed.
Amid the aimless roar's incipience,
A rim was pierced, a net was whisked.
On strange and exultant shoulders he rides
The classic hero's tote, remembering
For a pleasant instant while looking down

Into the arabesque of adulating faces,
The singular glory and surging of
His blood within as the ball arched high—then—
Dropped in casual perfection—

And in the later night, while December blew
Its icy breeze, he listened to the crumpling
Of a skirt while his downy face brushed the new
Smoothness of a sateen blouse, and his rumpling
Fingers fondled at margaric buttons.
Man has no power over age, like death;
He keeps a calendar and counts each breath.

What? No, that is not the discovery.
Wait a while—some more antiquity:

The boy grew, and said he would be wise,
Not knowing such a growth is ineffable;
Still, he tried heroically, taking paths
Of loneliness which searchers for the truth
Must take, and he became acquainted with
The shadow whose dark heart held his friendship.
In the visitations from the depths of
His friend's home, he tried to love the woman,
Finding her fruitfulness like *maremm*,
 But one he found; for her his love
Leaped like a surging spray of orange forever;
No earthly pettiness could touch or hinder it.

But later, later, he began to see
That death was not so small, nor unearthly.

What? No, that was not the discovery,
And don't interrupt me.

 Like I said,
It was gone and over. *Napoo*; he knew
That love was closest to an *arcanum*.

And with it dies the ardour of the act;
Rather than accept the *apyretic* kiss
After that, he would run like a *chaparral* cock,
But soon he quit, and with the rest took his seat,
Knowing that outside the depths was no retreat.

"Hail-fellow-and-well-met," he was welcomed back
To sit alone in dust, in antique rest,
Out off, incased, dark, but true comfort!
And what rascal said that love was best?

But, you grow anxious. I can tell by your
Harassed face. The important thing.

 Would you guess?
No, not honesty; he was honest.
No, not truth; he never learned truth.
No, not virtue; that is a myth.
No, not moderation; he was too hungry.
No, not hope; he always had that.
No, not health; *Sampson* decayed.

No, not modesty, nor humility;
Those and others were his ingrained traits.

You want the answer? Venture once more first—

 Wisdom? No. He had an element of that.

Listen, I will tell you. Here is the scene:

During one dark night with his shadowed friend,
While they passed between them like playing cards
His *seriatim* of sad yesterdays,
He hesitated, as if dropping a card or two.

 "You wait out here, old friend. All right?"

 "Yes, but the restaurant is dirty, don't you think?"

 "Just the same, the coffee is good. Wait?"

 "I don't drink it; it gives me the fevers."

The friend replied, and with the statement melted
Down into the opaque folds of his robe.

Then, while drinking hot black coffee he made
The discovery. Here it is. Listen.

*Strong black coffee in silver spoons
Always looks amber beneath white lights.*

Yes, that is all. That is sufficient.

Come walk with you? Tell you more. You
Are interested?

Well, I would walk farther,
For I am brave enough,
But tired, and far too practical.

SONNET I

LORAINE McGLONE

I have thought there are in dear things long dead
But remote antiquities of perfumes
Purpled long in sweet-scented twilight rooms;
And nothing . . . nothing ever done or said
Is brave enough to recall completely
The sweet true colors of these Yesterdays.
Despairingly knew that its wrath and hate stays
Faster and surer than a remembered discreetly-
Given first embrace. Frail? Yes. But dearer
Than never arriving tomorrow's blooms;
Even though they are more sure and nearer
Than the forgotten roses and their perfumes;
Scentable only when in tin mirrors
Is reflected those musty, proud old rooms.

THE NEXT FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIR

SHIRLEY SPIRES

He awoke with a vague remembrance of having dreamed. The dream was vague and shadowy but he knew it was the same one. The men—the uniformed men—what uniform? The boots on the stair tapping, scraping, or was it thundering?

The same dream—each of the three nights he had been home. Had there only been three? Had he ever been gone, or was that, too, a long, violent dream?

"You're home now, Son. Don't let's talk about over there."

But I want to—I just feel that I have to . . .

She was right, of course. What was there to say?

A heavy hand on his shoulder—the man with the gold filled teeth and flat straw hat. *How does he happen to be here?*

"And how is it over there, young man?" Concern in his voice—only not really waiting or listening for the answer.

"It's about the same, I guess . . ."

Ours is not to reason why

Ours is but to do or die . . .

Was that the way it went? Do or die? Do *and* die?

"All I thought about was how I'd love to taste a piece of Mom's apple pie." No, better say blueberry. More effective.

"Have some more, Son; you look thin."

The most terrifying part of the dream was the resignation. The uniforms surged through the house, their boots clack-clacking, scarring, scraping. But he had not resisted nor was he surprised. They came and went and came back again and all the time he had felt—not indignation, not blind fury, but a hopeless remorse.

But it was a cold war. As cold as the steel of the bayonets. As cold as the bodies that had stiffened and were forgotten. Any bodies—all bodies. Not just the great glorified, personified *OUR*. Bodies were bodies.

Footsteps. Too soft, though. "Can't you sleep, Son? I thought I heard you tossing."

"I'm okay. Just a bad dream, I guess."

Murmurs of solicitude. Receding patter of *her* footsteps.

He fell into a troubled sleep—a watchful, wakeful sleep, and waited for the next footsteps.

A MINISTER'S PRAYER

HOWARD COOP

I do not ask
That people come to hear
A message wrought with eloquence,
But as I speak His word
Christ may be near.

I do not ask
A church with music sweet,
But one with love and fellowship
Where people come to kneel
At Jesus' feet.

I do not ask
For shouting praise of men
But that the host who come to hear
Will show the world that they
With Christ have been.

"IF"

BEVERLY DAWN WILSON

If all life flowed as the warmth of wine
And all life ran as the rivers twine,
If there were no sorrows to war our souls,
No desolate hearts to pay the toll,
Would our caravan of time be eternal?

If the ocean of life held nothing but beauty
And the pathway thereof was free from all duty,
If those who are strong were not trampled by fate
And courage not killed by temptations in wait,
Would our ideals today be a dream?

We could know no joy if we knew no sorrow:
There would be no longing to conquer tomorrow.
Not one beat is missed in a heart that is true,
Because pain is our baptism, love is our virtue.
Build a destiny for our intangible souls!

From each yesterday and today build for tomorrow;
Lay a foundation of faith, because evil brings sorrow.
On many roads will our wild fancies play,
But memories are one gift death does not steal away.
Our best is constructed by will!