

AGORA

Volume LI Spring 2018

Agora is the literary publication of Belmont Abbey College, funded by the College.

Belmont Abbey College 100 Belmont-Mt. Holly Road Belmont, North Carolina 28012

Cover Art:



AGORA

...καλέσασθε δε θείον ἀοιδον, Δημόδοκον τῷ γάρ ρα θεὸς περι δῶκεν ἀοιδήν, τέρπειν ὅππη θυμὸς ἐποτρύνησιν ἀείδειν.

...and summon Demodokos, the bard divine, / Whom God gave song: the power to delight / However his own soul urges him to sing.

Homer, Odyssey VIII, 43-5

Translated by Gerald Malsbary, Belmont Abbey College



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2018 AWARDS

Jean S. Moore Literature Awards

Award for Poetry John Paul Hamilton "I wish to dwell in blue"

Award for Short Fiction Katherine Weaver "The Old Man's Piano"

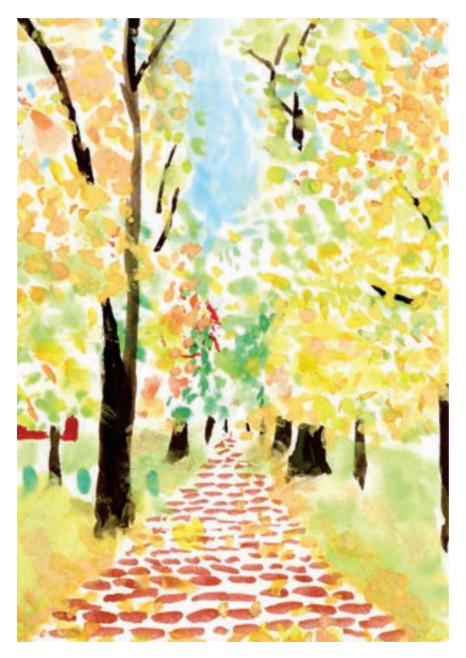
The Jean S. Moore Literary Award was established in 1998 in memory of the late Jean S. Moore, an Abbey English Professor. Each year the recipient or recipients receive publication in Agora and a cash prize. This award is given to top literary submissions in poetry and short fiction as judged by the editorial staff and is based on creativity and originality.

Agora Art & Photography Award

Abigail Houseal "Shipwreck at Placencia"

Each year, the recipient of this award receives publication in Agora and a cash prize. This award represents top submission as judged by the editorial staff and is based on creativity and originality.





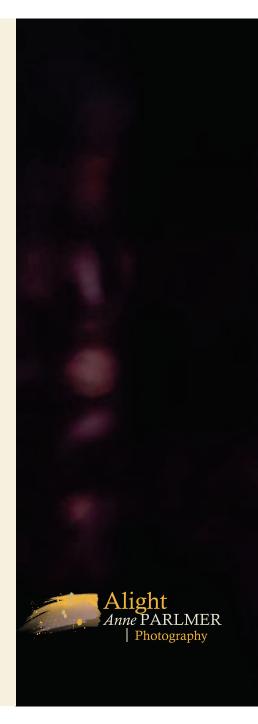


The melting snow like rivers running soaks the ground it bathes with life and leaps ahead. Amidst and over but around the waters walk, then touching, splitting, healing the natural dark. Fearful symmetry, tearfully limited innocence, where is thy hope.



The Butterfly Bethany GAREIS | Poetry

You should not have left your cradle So warm, so snug Should not have grown your wings So brilliant, so smug Should not have briskly, purposefully risky Become a different bug.





Into the Universe Lazaro GUTIERREZ | Poetry

We travelled afar, Cosmos of violet and turquoise, Gleaming crystals—infant stars, Interstellar dust and white noise.

Rays pierced swiftly through our eyes, Patterns of illumination. Sheltered auras—as we rise, To corals, cobalt, and carnations.

Blazing comets flying over, Fields of dreams and striking colors. New beginnings—terra nova, Bursting star, the supernova.

Two souls swaying in pure light, Through the pillars of creation. Soaked in silence—we unite, Dazed by cosmic liberation.

Freedom in celestial bliss,
—subtle sounds soaring.
Your lips on mine—electric kiss,
Stardust haze, meteors pouring.

Then when dreams come to cease, And we've found ethereal peace, In the astral universe, Into the starriness of heaven, Our souls—in specks will disperse.







Ithaca Daniel SHIRLEY | Poetry

Falling carried by winds wonder dreaming Ghostly echoes still whispering stop. As a dance flows, ebbs, with current strong For breaks and bends partners pause Playing tension builds harmonies long. Harmony of step to rhythmed silence Silent sounds seen, blessed ears who hear Melodies stern prow sailing from violence To meeting shores once far now near.

Golden rays of light softly cascading drawing The noon day sun to the sky hung round his rolling. Graceful guide with gilded skin Good will on earth and peace to men.



I slept on the sea, which cast my dreams asunder I petitioned the sky for a warmer moon And picked at thunder with a rusted spoon. I know you cannot see me, and you won't See long hair grazing fingers in the night. I'll pick you apples and planets, I might—But you don't see me, and you won't. I woke up in Kansas and cursed my home Cursed my fingers and every bone...

And how I wished for you to change. How my hopes and questions have rearranged:

Should I stay here wrapped in canvas Brushed in paints all coloured anxious? And where would the stars go if the moon Warmed, melting them in slumbering swoon? But still I am gazing, fingers grazing Your portrait laid in ocean tomb.



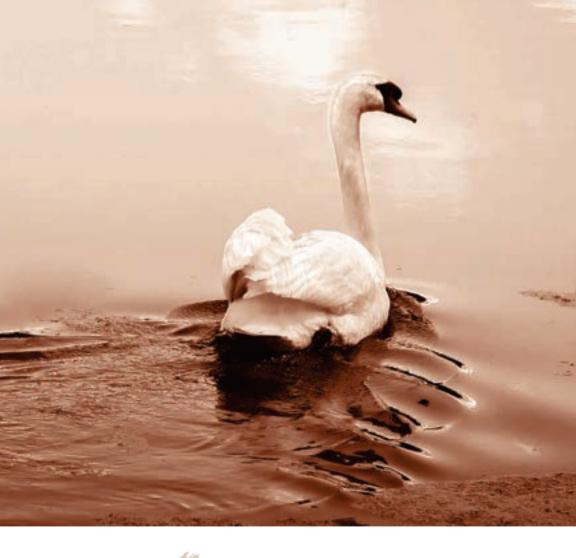




Absent Maximilian MARCK Poetry

At my gate I got some tea. The lady there was sweet to me. I'm on my plane, I sit and sip. I forgot, I meant to give a tip.

It reminded me of when I knew, when I was young, a girl in blue. Now it's cold, a damp November. I forgot, I meant to marry her.





a heavy creature that sits on your chest and shushes your lips without a sound it gurgles without a beat it pulses the walls are bright and people are loud.

But there it is not making a sound.



Blank Verse on All Soul's Day Mary LANG | Poetry

The priest lifts the chalice high in silence; In the empty narthex the door opens, And a half moment lingers where Dust dances still in the sunbeams shining Through the painted saints to the stone-closed room.

The door closes, creaking, the church groaning, The white of the sun slowly withdraws And the world is wrapped again into the small narthex, Colored by silence and stained glass, Warm yellow red green on brown brick.

Whoever creaked the door does not enter But the slow door moan comes to those kneeling, Watching the suspended Divinity Perhaps (like me) searching for Him; A voice, a sight, a thorn of ecstasy.

He's never there, and yet I am faithful. (Or try to be.) Years go by and not a taste of Him comes. I'm like a door that stays still, Waiting to be touched softly into motion.

And yet, that high wood creak echoes gently In the center of this All Soul's Day Mass, That earth may mean being mortal, weak, Like an old still door that moans on its close – But glory too: an entry to heaven.

Yes, from long winters I have been humbled, I have learned, that it is better this way -It is the simple song of loneliness Of a door sighing its mortality I must sing and take the peace that comes.

Doors speak that we are but mortal men: Gentle Jesus bends to our lowly place, Our ordinary world where doors creak And we try (so hard) to be holy.



The Fiendish Friend Daniel LINDHOLM | Poetry

The ghost perched on my shoulder, He gives me grand advice. He makes the air feel colder, But chases off the mice And men begin to wonder From where my wisdom's gleaned

That makes me rare to blunder Prepared for any fiend. My friend of course is Hamlet Who is, just like his dad A ghoul whose joy is forfeit But as a pal, not bad.





A Beginning's End Bethany GAREIS | Short Story

When I came out of my cocoon, everyone noticed the change. It was such a different world; I didn't know how to move. I went so briskly, I flew so high, it was very little wonder I wound up on the dashboard, and that was the end of that.

Auto-Home Abigail HOUSEAL | Poetry

As the purr of the engine begins, I become more comfortable On leather, binded in. We begin our journey. Falling into my seat From my father pressing on the gas. The smell of old french fries Mixed with cheap air fresheners Overtakes me. From the back, I see everything. My father cruising down the highway With one hand on the wheel. My mother, map and pencil in hand, Still managing to pass the fast food dinner to us. My sister preoccupied by her video game, Not noticing the burger being shoved in her face. Days and nights in the tight vehicle, A normality for us. This decade old automotive continues on, Heading to its destination without a complaint. I am home.

A Single Day Lily MULLEN | Poetry

Awake! Awake! Come greet the day. Oh, what will it bring? Laughter, joy, Pain, sorrow, and suffering.

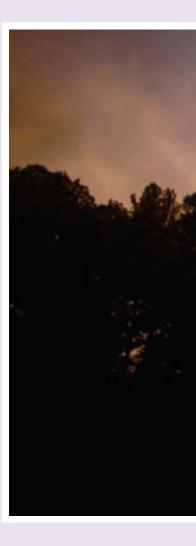
Oh this desolation, this middle state! Fate that we must face. Courage, challenge, and rise up against with grace.

Weary and worn out, oh our world!
Darkness calming
And eyes, heavy to behold,
Close—as night sweeps over the marbled globe.



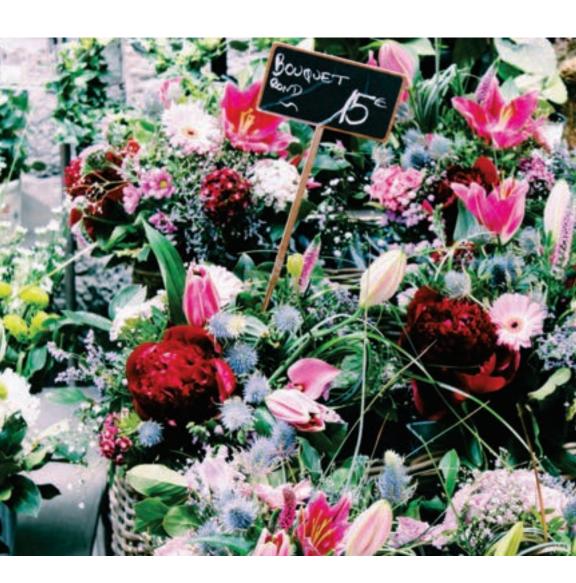
If I could float like a ship to sail where I please, Or swing like a monkey on branches of trees, If I could hover and buzz like the bees, Maybe I'd be happy.

If I could jump from a cliff to swim in the seas, Or maybe just sit, embracing the breeze, Or fall like the penitent man, to my knees, Maybe I'd be happy.













Bartleby's Sister Katherine WEAVER | Poetry

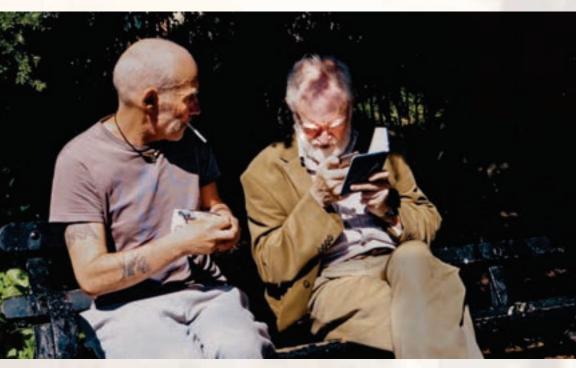
The little nymph sat in the grass as the wind played with her hair The goblins jeered and screamed—Come here! but all she did was stare. She picked at the flowers and wore them around her delicate, golden hair While the goblins gurgled glaring words— How could she just be sitting there? They dug their hands around in the mud plowing, building, piling high creating a staircase to hell. But isn't it heavenly! Oh, they cried as they scrambled atop the hill Come up, you nasty, clean thing you! Dirty those little green hands of yours and show us what you can do! The nymph looked up at the creatures above wondering What can I do? Then she stood and smiled at those creatures up there with her dress all brilliantly blue And she stuck out her tongue like a jittering plum and gave them a raspberry too.

A Treat for These Ordinary Times

Rajive TIWARI | Poetry

Next year let's roll up these drying civilizations into fun-size joints and hand them out for Halloween. Next year let's give our children a world of smokes and ashes and let them imagine other ways.

Next year let's make room for memories, fears, dreams unimaginable.





Personality Maximilian MARCK | Poetry

Shut up. Shut up, but can't avoid, Self-imposed, but self, imposed upon me to be the man, with fractured focus. Arbitrary will of my God? Or chained being, set Among the plans of greater spheres

Bless my chain. Bless my chain, and bless my reason to be
Within the function of unbroken
Links to pow'rs and thrones
But how endowed with self am I?
And how can I be?
When yet your call to die to self
Resounds within me?

What self, O God is let to live
What freedom have I?
My thoughts, my loves, my debts and gifts,
Are these left to me?
Or must I hollow out my heart
Of cracking marble,
To make a home for whom thou would
Me rather to be?

When self is dead, does darkness fall
On identity?
Or does new sacred self spring forth,
From ego's cold tomb?
Once broken, once three days pass by,
Of self in Hell's fire
Will patchwork heart be whole once more,
Returned to me?





Flatland John C. KUNICH | Poetry

Do you have to take them too? You really don't want them, do you? Can't you leave me with a few? Just for old times' sake, just one or two?

This old box is taped and torn, Our hands once made it warm and worn. Now it spills us on the floor, Dusty ghosts of who we were, before...

Look at this one! Remember when? We looked so happy, Way back then...

In Flatland, we smile forever, Glossy fossils, petrified, And mummified before we died, Can we say we really tried, One last time before we turned aside?

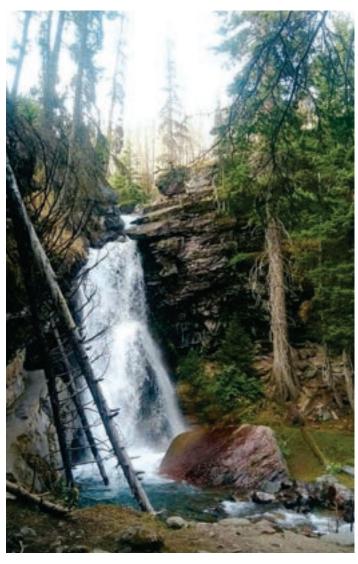
Paper dolls, we still look good, Our sun shines like we dreamed it would. Can't we still love the way we should? Don't you see, these pictures prove we could.





Late Hours Katherine WEAVER | Poetry

Christmas lights hang Onto the end of summer A great symphony Plays a lyrical tune behind them As the minutes dance between the Melodies The stickiness drains its energy Into a new season A season of colder, Drearier days From which comes cider And orange skies. Light-headed and full-stomached We hang with these Christmas lights As they dry the remaining Wet tears that drip from the Sun's eyes.







The Winter time alive will sing with white,
Those Heavy burdens born by trees for life,
and faint the muffled cries do call for light,
for freezing fingers grasp in freezing plight.
The snow as sand in storm blankets the world,
Rending colder earth from strife and sin.
To death of will and might and strength and keen,
Those slowed by frigid flakes, the woven ones,
These slowed things consider time for need.
Lov'd slowed things feel the burden of speed.



Cause and Effect Ashton HARNAGE | Poetry

A smile is a mask A mask that hides the hurt The hurt created by others The others who taunted and teased The taunting and teasing led to wounds Wounds eventually became scars Scars created by self-harm Self-harm inflicted by emotions Emotions built up from countless sufferings Suffering from pain administered by words Words that became true in ones' mind Ones' mind who believed everything Everything became reality Reality then ended Ended with a knife and a smile A smile that masked the pain







Song of Achilles Justin HALLORAN | Poetry

Curse your name, your life, your love. Curse the ground you stand above. Kill the breath inside your lungs. Kill the name you hate and love. Death is beauty fleeting fast. It's why I breathe while it lasts. I yearn to feel you in my grip. To feel the soul, begin to slip. What is love? A lustful thrill. No woman's touch can match my kill. Pierce the heart, curse the soul and die. I'll cheat the gods with one last pretty lie. My glory lives in life, yet deals death. My destiny come, cursed or blest. I AM ACHILLES, greater than any other. Come to me, Hector, for I must avenge my brother.

Song of Hector Justin HALLORAN | Poetry

Down on the wayward border of my own forgotten memory.

I walk the beaches of the past and up the ancestral tree.

I feel the sin, I read the pain, on the faces that used to be.

Then they're gone, I'm all alone, save the voices calling me.

They speak of times past, present, but no future, and mock the epic of my life.

I long to fall asleep, in oceans deep, and leave this useless guilt and strife.

I am not special, not gifted, anointed, appointed, strong, or right.

But I have the love borne by others that gives me strength and eyes of sight.





For Lucia Lazaro GUTIERREZ | Poetry

Behold, my one true beauty, She radiates with life, Her temple is a fountain, That exudes a divine light.

The splendor of our gift, Reflected in her mornings, The minutes of her sickness, The cause of my heart's mourning.

Behold, the giver of life, Who yearns for nothing more, Than peace within the eyes, Of the life within her core.

Behold, the bearer of mortality, And the announcer of life, Who holds within her body, His antidote to survive.

To be forgiving and tender, And hold within her heart, Not a word of pain or tremor, But love much greater than life.

It's you! divine and sacred, The one that makes us whole, And though time may wane your body, It will never dull your soul.

One day your bones will brittle, And your eyes will lose their sight, One day our bird will leave us, To pursue his own first flight.

And in the silence of the night, When we cross to finer sides, Darling, remember the moment, When you turned love into life.



Gasping for Grace Jesse KOOISTRA | Poetry

Lord of light meet us in darkness Prince of peace in raging seas God of love and infinite kindness Hear us humbly on our knees

Make our messes into your masterpiece Lift our burdens by your grace Take our focus and aspiration Turn them holy to your face

Let us learn to trust your goodness Save before we are too far lost When we wander find us in fullness By your grace let us be washed

Great salvation from life's snares Father hear our prayers







Cosmic Chaos Jesse KOOISTRA | Poetry

I am a man of ambition
I live to fly too close to the sun
I will never feel my limits till I fall wax and feathers melted and undone

Mine is a life of confusion But there is order in waves of entropy In chaos there is love hidden by busyness and self-protective levity

I am stubborn against illusion
I am forced towards unwanted conclusions
Am I the sum of mistakes unapologized?
No, simple melodies weave together complicated lives

There Is No Room Josef GAREIS | Poetry

There is no room for our kind in this world They have weeded us out No acceptance, no request They turn to the worst, they leave us behind The devil within they beg to come out Do we resist, or just give in Must we turn our backs on who we were made? To last so long with no proof we were right They say we are wrong, our hearts tell us right The time of Mercy has ended, shall we succumb to the rage? Crush all within, pour forth what is left That which we hate, that which we love Damn the first and damn the last! Destroy ourselves and live for what? We cannot kill, we cannot live How long do we wait, how long do we love? We die in silence, or we die in flames.

Temptress Daniel SHIRLEY | Poetry

Being chased by dreams of baleful eyes, I woke from one and ran into the night, Hoping to find some solace from that hate. And then I stumbled on a dreadful gate: Leave all hope, all who seek to refuge here, She loves ye weariless until ye fear, So if ye do enter this hellish lair, Forget all prayers to God and know despair.

I clasped the cold and rusted iron gate,
Forgetting in my fear, the eyes of hate.
I took a rock to ancient lock and then
The gate swung wide and seemed to call me in.
I stepped inside and found the world so lush,
The colors vibrant, strange shapes, sounds so hushed.
I could not hear my footsteps, and I tried
To scream or make a sound, I loudly cried.

But then I heard a noise, just one, so still, I looked and followed it over a hill, I heard the witch's song, so clear That with enchantment hushed my fear, For now I heard all sound, and every word—Sweeter than anything my ears had heard. The song she sang was beautiful, it's true, She turned around—I saw that she was too.

I wish I'd trusted the sign on that gate. But now, oh now it's simply far too late. For she was beautiful and kind and fair—Unless you try to leave her palace lair. And now I sit—an old man lying here, Hearing just those words inside my ear: So if ye do enter this hellish lair, Forget all prayers to God and know despair.











ink is to morphine Katherine WEAVER

I'm wheeled in they squeak beneath me it shrieks behind me they plug into me Black ooze flows it drips through me A poet's survival cries within me Ink traces my veins
Pumping the numerous voices
Voices
Voices
Into my brain—
My heart beats only
As it sings along to the
Words that are written by
the Ink that traces my veins

I'm wheeled out
they hum beneath me
it hisses behind me
they un plug me
Black water flows
within me through me
A poem's life
escapes out of me

The Old Man's Piano Katherine WEAVER | Short Story

The old man rested his hands on his thighs as the song faded out. He lifted his foot off the pedal and stood, inching his way from the bench to the bar. The room echoed a murmured applause, which shortly flowed into the bustle of indistinct conversation.

The old man's rusty joints clicked as he took his seat at the darkstained table where Joe stood drying some beer glasses.

"Nice tunes today, sir. Gee, do they remind me of my days as a kid," Joe said with a chuckle. He had an almost unhealthily optimistic disposition, and the old man harrumphed at the cheeriness.

"Just the usual mix, Joe," the old man grumbled, irritated that he had to say that every day he went on his break.

"Yes, sir," Joe said brightly. The old man sighed.

"You know, it wouldn't hurt to at least look pleased. What a nice place you got yourself into." The voice came from a few chairs down. It belonged to a thirty-year-old woman with high cheek bones and dark hair. The old man looked away just as her eyes met his.

"What's that got to do with it?" the old man replied. Joe added nothing as he shook the cocktail mixer.

The woman shrugged. "A lot of things, I guess." She swirled her red wine, the light from the window creating a red glow on her chest. "You can appreciate a whole lot more if you get out your own head."

Before the old man could reply, Joe slid a glass across the bar. "Washington Apple, sir," he announced. The old man grunted in thanks and took a sip, savoring the spice of the whiskey. The apple slice whirled in the red liquid as he set the glass back down on the dark wood. His mind wandered into nothing as he repeatedly drank in short sips.

"What's your name?" The woman's voice punctured his quiet like a needle to a balloon, and he winced as he was pulled back into the world.

"Why does it matter?" he said avoiding her eyes. They were dark and unwelcoming, and he shivered as if a chill had come in through the window.

"I guess it doesn't." She gulped the last of her wine and hopped down from the bar stool. "Thanks, Joe," she said as she headed out of the door and into the light. The old man shook his shoulders and relaxed back into his comfortable state of mind where he didn't have to explain himself to anyone or anything. He always liked it that way. It was quieter and less intimidating than the rest of the busy world.

He took the last few sips lavishly until the apple slice lay soaked in liquor at the bottom of the glass. The old man pinched the slice up to his mouth, ignoring the annoyed looks he received as he sucked out the remaining whiskey. Joe didn't flinch.

The creak of the door attracted his attention, and plopping the now dry fruit back in his glass, he went back to his piano. He began to play the usual post-drink song, allowing the familiar melody to whisk him away. The whiskey was warm in his gut.

"Play Sassafras," a loud voice said. The old man looked up from his keys and saw that the voice belonged to the man who'd just walked in.

"Excuse me?" he asked, clearly annoyed by the interruption. The other man's face was juvenile and reeked of disrespect and recklessness. He wore a shallow-brimmed hat, but the light from the window behind him kept his eyes in shadow. His left leg being six inches shorter than his right, he moved closer with a pronounced limp.

"You know, Sassafras? Why ain't nobody heard o' that? Here, lemme." The young man, in spite of his limp, shoved the old man aside.

"Hey!" the old man cried. Several of the others in the bar looked over, but turned away. They didn't want to get involved if they didn't have to. The young man placed his hands on the keys and breathed in deeply, as if drinking the life from them.

"What're you gonna do 'bout it?" the piano thief said with his eyes closed. The old man was shocked and confused. He hated this.

"Listen, you can't just come in here and decide you run the place. This is my piano!" The old man's voice warbled. The younger man didn't seem to hear, and he began to violently bang on the keys, a smile breaching his sour face.

"Gah!" The old man pressed his hands to his ears, the whiskey in his stomach bubbling as the piano's rhythm vibrated through the floor. The light from the window seemed to gather intensity, and out of terror and frustration, the old man shot his hands at the young man to stop the horrid noise.

"Enough! Now get out!" The music had stopped and the bar was quiet. The younger man turned to look at him, the shadows from his brimmed hat now shattered by the light. The old man's eyes squinted, but he could see the younger man's face clearer than anything.

The young man said in a low voice, just enough for the old man to hear, "Go suck on another apple, old man." Then he turned back to the keys and began to play once more. The old man stumbled backward, unable to keep the intruder from playing. No one else seemed bothered by the noise, not even Joe. The old man could feel the liquor in his stomach getting more agitated.

"You alright there, sir?" Joe said, having noticed the old man's stumbling. "Here, come on 'n have a seat."

The old man barely heard him, but he sank into a seat at a table next to the window. Without realizing it, Joe had placed a glass of water in front of him. The old man didn't touch it. He sat rigid, sweat gathering on his forehead. *What's happening?* he thought to himself in a panic. He was desperate for his piano, but it had been taken like a baby blanket from a toddler. The light from the window was hot and thick on his neck.

"That was awful nice of you, sir," Joe said as he handed the old man a cool rag.

"What?" he asked, dabbing the towel across his forehead.

"Letting that young man play your piano. He's got a smooth sound, doesn't he?"

I didn't let him do anything! The desperate thought never escaped his lips. He tried to speak, but couldn't. He didn't like having to explain himself anyway. The piano was muted to his ears, and he turned his head toward the window. The light was so bright and intense he thought he'd go blind. He barely noticed Joe get up to fix a drink for another customer.

Out the window there was a great glow over and across everything. Quiet laughter floated just outside the glass. A small boy stood with his hands up against it, smiling at his own reflection. The old man looked past him and was startled by the clarity of the green grass and crisp air. For a moment, the boy's smiling gaze turned up to the old man, and he heard a faint melody behind him. But, something boiled inside him. He stood suddenly, the liquor sloshing wildly in his gut. He hated this. He averted his eyes from the boy and the light and stood, grinding his feet into the floor. He strode over and took a seat at the other side of bar where it was cooler, and watched, silently loathing the man who stole his piano.

Venom Anne PARLMER | Short Story

She sat exposed to the scrutinizing glare of the bright white kitchen light, twisting her hands tied behind the back of the chair. So much of what he said was white noise, floating around her head like so many nothings. Slap! She was listening now to the screaming of her raw cheek. Water filled her left eye, ran down her face, and soothed the sting. The tears distorted her vision. He looked crooked, twisted. Her eyelids pushed out another drop, and her vision sharpened. He drew right up to her nose. His breath reeked of old meat and hard liquor. His eyes were listless, blank discs; beauty had vacated a long time ago.

"Well?" He demanded.

Her indignation sparked and sputtered.

"It ain't fair! I wasn't even there when it happened!"

But fairness was never in the cards.

He played cards. He always lost, badly—hissing and spitting. Once he flipped a table on its side. The other guys booted him out like they would an angry snake. When she was six, she found a baby snake in the yard: lively and writhing. She hollered inside the trailer,

"Daddy, lookit!"

Out he came clomping in his steel-toed boots and boxers. With such nonchalance he stomped on its head and ripped off the tail end. It made a popping sound: the sort of noise a straw wrapper makes when it's quickly pulled apart.

"Watch yerself, Mag, them babies is more dangerous than the mothers."

Mother hadn't been around for a long while. Her yellow Sunday dress hung faded in the closet. Sometimes he'd shut Margaret in there—for taking ice cubes from the freezer on hot nights, or recording a movie on the DVR. But she liked it in there. It was close and safe, and smelled like Mother's things. Nestled into the back corner, Margaret would take the dress from the hanger and count the buttons running down the front. Twenty of

them. The top three smelled like Mother's perfume, sage and lilac. Mother told Margaret,

"It don't do to be too wise for your own good, says so in the Bible."

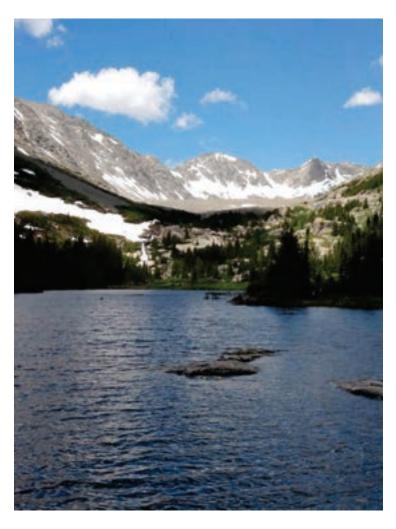
Margaret had only ever seen a Bible at church. It looked heavy. He placed his hands on her shoulders, sloping them down toward the floor.

"You won't be goin' nowhere, never."

"Yessir."

Her dark eyes glittered.

The moon washed the sweet grass with dew. Margaret's percussive heartbeat gave rhythm to the racket of the crickets and bullfrogs. Above it all she thought she could still hear the long exhalations of drunken sleep. Across the pond she saw the dirt road, dappled with moonlight filtered through the firs. Her feet slid silently through the slick grass and, reaching the water, she unbuttoned the twenty buttons and sank into the liquid gloom. Algae clung to her bare skin as she rose out of the reeds on the other side. It cooled her senses. She turned toward the smell drifting to her on the night breeze: lilac. The road—winding and dappled in moonlight—was a kind promise, and it bore her gently into the night.









Sol Sleep Nikole BRAND | Poetry

I see the lightness of the day
Now to the brackish night give way
A golden aura caused by smog
Yielding to the still dark gloom
And yet the wheels go
thrumming on

While with us, the great Ra revealed The waves and ebbings of the land The forests conquered by the hand Of soul-filled beasts of rationality And yet the wheels go thrumming on

Last glimpses! of that heavenly sphere Which lit the splinters of the earth Silent members mark his passing As soldiers rise to mourn their king And yet the wheels go thrumming on

So yields my soul to thoughts of home And sends my family my heart Once day is done and berth is blest 'Neath velvet skies I take my rest And yet the wheels go thrumming on



Dragon Scales Katherine WEAVER | Short Story

A little boy's hand gently wrapped itself around his father's rough fingers. Dozens and dozens of people surrounded the two of them, just the two of them. It had been that way for as long as the child could remember. His deep brown eyes shimmered like glass as he looked up at the showering light. The fireworks boomed as the pair walked through the noisy crowd. A boy and a man.

With a squeeze the man signaled his son to stay close each time the boy was distracted by a dragonfly balloon or the sweet smell of Bernie's candy store. Despite his urge to wander, the boy's soft hand wrapped tighter around his father's, afraid to be left behind in the mass of people. More fireworks shot into the sky and dazzled the sides of the small buildings. Giant, colorful kites flew high above their heads, and images of dragons soared through the boy's mind. He grinned absently as he imagined himself, tall and strong like his father, riding on one of those mighty beasts. The image passed away on the wind, but happiness lingered in the air, wavering brightly at the end of an invisible string.

Drums and bells roared and men cheered. His father tugged once more on his hand, moving closer to the road. The boy tugged on his father's jacket, eager to watch the Dragon march down the street and greet onlookers with a giant, paper smile. His father easily lifted his son onto his shoulders, and the sudden change in height made him giggle. The anticipation of seeing the Dragon steadied him, but his excitement snuck out

in a smile. The more time passed, the more his excitement turned to frustration, and his father felt the boy's shoulders slump. The sharp sound of the fireworks and the yells of the crowd seemed to grow even louder, and the boy suddenly felt so small.

Then, his father tapped his son's knees, and just like that, there it was. The crowd surged, and a dozen firecrackers burst open in pockets of light. The boy couldn't help but mirror the Dragon's fierce smile. The little heart in his chest leapt, and he could feel the rhythmic thump of his father's clapping. The boy closed his eyes and held out his arms. The cool breeze rustled his hair, and he felt himself lifted. His hands could feel the tough skin of the Dragon's scales—scales just like his father's calloused hands. The Dragon's flank dyed his ankles with a crimson light as they sailed over the city far below. A shudder ran through the beast, and the Dragon shook his head, releasing a deafening roar.

The young man bolted upright. The roar faded into a whirl of sirens outside his window. The bed sheets were hot on his legs, and he ran his calloused hands over the mattress. His shining eyes had dulled since those nights filled with fireworks, but the dreams would never leave him. He would never forget the time his hand fit into his father's. He would never forget the time he rode the Dragon into the night sky.



The best I can come up with
Is a one-two-three facade
One of me is good and rightly
Second is a mess
The third would seem I am almighty
God I do confess

WINNER OF THE AGORA ART & PHOTOGRAPHY AWARD



Thomas Merton at the Oriental, 2017

Ellen WEIR | Poetry

having read you stayed there once (to great comment), I wanted to see the Oriental in Bangkok.

so on the terrace, overlooking the oily river, I sipped my Thai beer. just watching. hot day. harsh. no breeze. aluminum river.

then suddenly I see you –four tables over. alone. watching the river, sipping your drink. a bird flights to your table: you are delighted, enthralled. you smile. you speak gently. the bird smiles, speaks gently to you. you both soften to halos. things soften. Bangkok softens. the river becomes water.

all there is becomes, too: just you, the bird, the river, and me, watching you.





People often ask How I do not drown

With all the baggage I have brought on my voyage I don't stay afloat—

I merely have a very long snorkel

Funeral for a Sky Rodent Bethany GAREIS | Short Story

Oh little pigeon,

Are you all alone in the world? Have you every day flown to the same stoop, set your table, and eaten lonely worms and livermush?

That's alright, I once had a very sad sandwich on Main Street. Perhaps you were there too, and we could have eaten together.

But don't worry, little pigeon. If I had found you, I would have wrapped you in tissue paper and brought you to the theater. But now I'll just give you my cigar box, and a handful of soil for your troubles.













I took a walk at the midnight hour, Abraham's descendants lighting the way. No sign of impending dew or shower, And several hours before the new day.

Such peace before now I had not seen; T'was not a stir of ghost or howling beast. And to think that this night was Halloween! They knew the solemnity of tomorrow's feast.

I sought refuge from the costumed hordes Among bosom friends of higher stature; Threatened trespassers with eyes like swords. No mem'ry hence or past could I treasure more,

Than this my night in shining armor!

Far Side of Eternity
Nikole BRAND | Poetry

The far side of eternity
Lies right behind my eyes.
And yet, too far for you to grasp
Too deep for you to rise.

Aviary Rebecca MUNRO Poetry

In her back yard, my grandmother Kept an aviary for small birds, Delicate finches, flickering wrens. We, her three granddaughters, Would unlatch the gate, slip in To flurries of tiny wings, delicate forms Lighting on slender branches, the Tickle of beaks pecking held out hands.

She gazes from an old photograph, Sepia tinted, face antique-doll oval, Gibson-girl style hair piled high, Little tendrils, escaped curls, feather The smooth cheeks, slender neck, Calm steady eyes, mouth a bow, My grandmother when a young girl. In her face, the shadow of my daughter, Of her own daughter, waiting to be born.

We heard she had died as we Drove to California from Chicago. Our mother's self-controlled grief—The mighty holding back of tears—The tense and pregnant silences—Was all, no funeral or obsequies For us to remember her after. Only our grandfather, ill with cancer, Living his last months, cheerfully, Wheelchair bound, at our house.

When we were small, we watched Barrie's Peter Pan on TV at her house. Mary Martin in the part: Never-Never Land, Fairy dust, magical boy who soars and Sings and crows and does not grow old. After, we threw ourselves from chairs, Sofa, arms wide, landing, laughing, Leaping, believing—we, too, could fly.





Miss Heloise Rylee YARRINGTON | Poetry

On any given night, at any time, Miss Heloise is staring at herself, Taking in her withered face past its prime— Unmoving and still like books on a shelf.

She'd think back to those glory days so bright. Her hair was once so red—as kissed by fire. Her skin, unwrinkled skin, was stretched so tight. She had been gorgeous, someone to inspire.

Here slumps Miss Heloise, now old and frail, Her small face now framed by hair white as bone, Her skin greying like bread that has gone stale. A broken queen upon a broken throne.

"Who cares what they think?" says her reflection. "We have us, no need for more affection."

Lilac Rylee YARRINGTON | Poetry

Syringa vulgaris (lilac or common lilac)—symbolizes first love

You have surrounded me in bunches of delicate lilacs, Weaved my tresses with magenta buds, Clasped lightly in my hands the bluest of *Syringa*. You have kissed my lips with botanical delight, Leaving me breathless as my lungs suck in white petals.

Matrimony of my mind, body, and soul with You, With flowers in any shade, any bloom. Wherever my heart may blow, Like a petal on wind, It always seems to wander back to You.









Headlines of Color Anne VICKERS, Stephanie LUGO, Stephanie SCALI | Poetry

A poem written on the top of the Spanish Steps while inspired by stories of Italy.

The World was black and white; Rigid, structured, typed, Until you became my light.

Wandering through the dark, Craving, searching, finding, A maiden in the park.

If only I had known
That captured smile gray,
Would break through the story of the day.

Blue laughs amidst the waters, Yellow zips through the streets, Red leaps back from Truth.

And though you returned to that world, Of white diamonds and black dresses, The memory still remains in every vibrant shade, The love we shared that day







A Mystery Hali GUISEWHITE | Poetry

The subject that destroys Its rejection leaves a void Like silence amidst noise The cause of many joys Absence bringing growth Presence feels like hope Causing time to slow Making beauty known





Sorting through a trove of family photos brings its share of sorrows and of joys, a flood of memories orphaned by the loss of Cathy and more recently her spouse.

From piles of pictures found in the house we cull the ones from David's side of things (send to his cousin), zero in on those of Cathy or our big clan. We see ourselves

so young and handsome—lively, full of days and glories yet to come. We see our elders back from the dead, laughing, telling stellar tales at dinners long gone by.

Digging deep we find our grade-school selves enjoying a picnic or a Christmas gift; or Toddler Jane falling off a log while Mama smiles for the flash.

So many classics Cathy collected, hard to consign to trash. But we have copies somewhere at home of most, or maybe all.

Ruthless Julie would dump the lot while Rick and I, more misty-eyed, incline to salvage now and sort them later. The compromise stacks I carry home

will sit on my shelves for months. awaiting the orderly albums I will absolutely, certainly make one of these days.



I wish to dwell in blue John Paul HAMILTON | Poetry

I wish to dwell in blue:

High canopies adorned with silver fruit, Springs issuing forth to cradled hands, Somber clouds that impart smiles instead.

Cloaked in this mantle, We— With wide quilts strewn on green lawns— Listen to the singing spheres' song.

Here swept streets and windows open-blinded Greet friends to bread and wine.

Under this roof we dwell.





Economy Airline Blues Jane RUSSELL | Poetry

Standing in lengthy line and fuming all the names of furious, eighty people bumped from "degraded equipment."

Next flight twelve hours hence?! A day of vacation lost. You scoundrels glibly degrade this scarcest resource, rationed hours to spend with the ones I love. We leapt at the lure of your bargain fares,

just to be sucker-punched by pinch-penny woes. A plague on your house, Spirit Airlines. Call my account closed!







Gently lofted on an invisible breeze live our softly floating friends of imagination.

White billowing towers in broad blue expanses speckle the horizons. Within each is hidden the secret creativity of our minds:

"a whale, a flower, a dragon!" our innocence exclaims as they dance over us in the sky.

We often childishly curse when they blanket us with compelling grey. We insult heaven by rejoicing only in azure and lifeless clarity.

Yet, out of generosity our friends still rain down life and protect us from summer's beaming fire.

Though we rarely feel their misted coolness, we are often touched by their borderless joys.

Beautiful, confident, and unstoppable, they pass over us and smile.

Forever in motion, clouds are faithful companions to hearts still eager for nature's majesty.

So, look up.



A Rainy Evening Outside Malone's Cafe

Clare RUEDISUELI
| Poetry

Down upon the streets it poured, Drops on the awning adorned, Falling on the silent stones, Never once touching Malone's. Two figures sat together, Listening to the weather. Replacing his hat, stood he, She sipped the last of her tea. His umbrella he retrieved, So he thought she would receive.

She stepped past him, to the door, He picked her coat from the floor. Out into the rain she flew, Not caring she got soaked through. After her, he followed quick, Lifting his shield with a flick. She danced and twirled in the rain, Not bothering to explain. Happiness soaked her smile, Proving to be a trial.

He lifted the protection,
Slipping on wet reflections.
His attempt was washed away,
With her blithe, untroubled way.
Strong rain bathed her gentle form,
Simply dancing in the storm.
Water showed her hidden heart,
Granting her friend a dear start.
He held the umbrella low,
Letting rain over him flow.

Now blessed with such awesome grace, He glowed and laughed in his place. The empty street, now a stage, Two figures on the same page. The rhythm of rain so slight, Mixing with the tune of night. Two sweet souls bearing great joy, Nothing could hardly destroy. She turned to him, still smiling, To see what he was finding.

Their eyes met with greater depths,
Now connecting their vast breadths.
Protection forgotten now,
He gave her a gentle bow.
His hand held out, she took it,
And all the lampposts were lit.
They waltzed down the magic lane,
Sharing this moment of rain.
Raising her hand to the sky,
He twirled her like she would fly.

They were close as the rain slowed, Then thunder shook as it flowed. Quick, they ran as it came down, Holding hands within the town. Away they ran, from this scene Of bright stones and night so clean. Their echoes followed along, Leaving peacefulness so strong. Alone now, the rain still fell, On Malone's café, so swell.

There rested the single object,
That was only to protect.
Forgotten, but not misused,
The sight being that confused.
It lay on its side, so strange,
Seeing not any near change.
With all exquisiteness gone,
There remained a good withdrawn.
This here was a wonderfulness,
That they surely both will miss.





About the Contributors

Students

Cody Agrella Nikole Brand

Madison Caito

Jessica Camano

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Hali Guisewhite

Lazaro Gutierrez

Justin Halloran John Paul Hamilton

Ashton Harnage Abigail Houseal

William Killoran

Jesse Kooistra

Mary Lang

Daniel Lindholm

Stephanie Lugo

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Sophomore, English

Junior, English

Sophomore, Undecided

Freshman, Undecided

Senior, History

Senior, Biology Freshman, English

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Senior, English

Junior, Philosophy

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Senior, English

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Junior, Catholic Education

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Alumni

Liga Pavslovska | 2017 Paul Toscano | 1972

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John Kunich | Professor of Theology Rebecca Munro | Associate Professor of English Jane Russell | Associate Professor of Theology Rajive Tiwari | Professor of Physics and Mathematics Ellen Weir | Associate Professor of English

Other





Agora accepts submissions of fiction; poetry; visual art, including digital art; and photography. Through a blind reading and viewing, student editors select works to be published. Selections are based on originality, artistic quality, and space in the publication. Only student entries are eligible for the literature and art-photography awards. Winners are presented a certificate of artistic achievement during the Academic Awards Banquet at the end of the spring semester and receive a monetary award by mail. Deadlines for submissions are announced every semester in the fall and early spring.

Submission Guidelines

Please edit written works for grammar and mechanics prior to sending. Send each individual work, whether written or art-photography, as an individual digital file, labeled with the title of the work. Send all photographic or artistic works as JPG files of a minimum size of 2-3 mg (300 dpi or 2000-3000 kb). Cell phone photos must be in this range; if enhanced, cell photos lose the original resolution: always send your original high res photo with the enhanced version. Written submissions must be sent as Word files. Send all submissions as email attachments; do not paste them into the body of your email message. In the body of your email message, include title, your name, and the date of your submission. Send all submissions to agora@bac.edu.

Editorial Statement: As is the case with any publisher, the Editorial Elves of Agora reserve the right to make any necessary aesthetic or grammatical changes to submitted works. For photography, photos may at times be cropped to enhance their composition. For poetry, editing may involve taking out a stanza, adding a title, or changing passages and sometimes words. Prose works will be edited for any grammatical errors. Such editorial changes are made only to enhance the excellence of a submission and retain its integrity.

Categories and Number of Submissions Accepted for Consideration

Short stories (1700 word-limit): Two stories Flash-fiction (500 word-limit): Two stories Vignettes (500 word-limit): Two vignettes

Prose poems (250 word-limit): Two prose poems

Poetry: Six poems

Drawings, paintings, mixed media, digital art: Six submissions

Photography: Six photographs

Please send no more than 10 submissions altogether.

All contributors must be members of the Belmont Abbey Community: students, faculty, monks, administrators, staff, and alumni.

