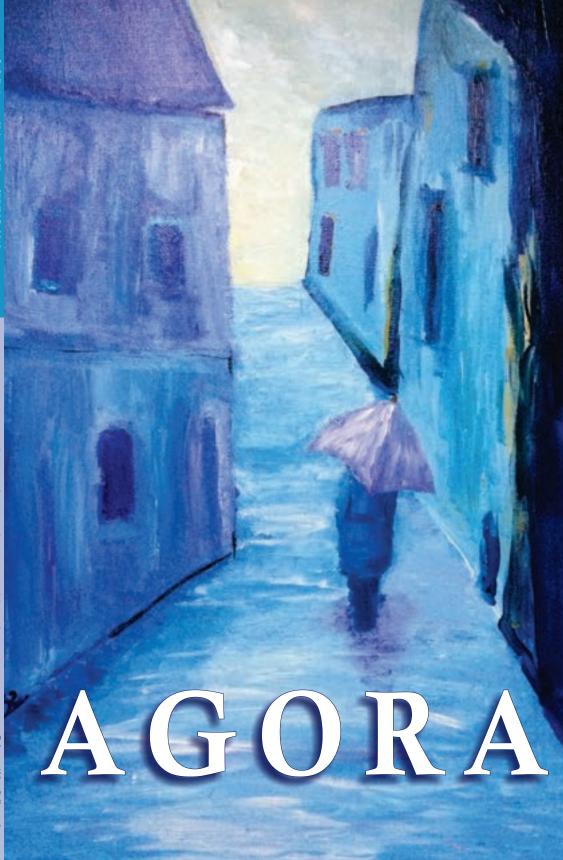


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AGORA

Volume LII Spring 2019

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Cover Art:

The Rainy Walk Through the Village Sarah Kathrin Biser | ART





AGORA

...καλέσασθε δε θεῖον ἀοιδόν, Δημόδοκον·τῷ γάρ ῥα θεὸς περι δῶκεν ἀοιδην, 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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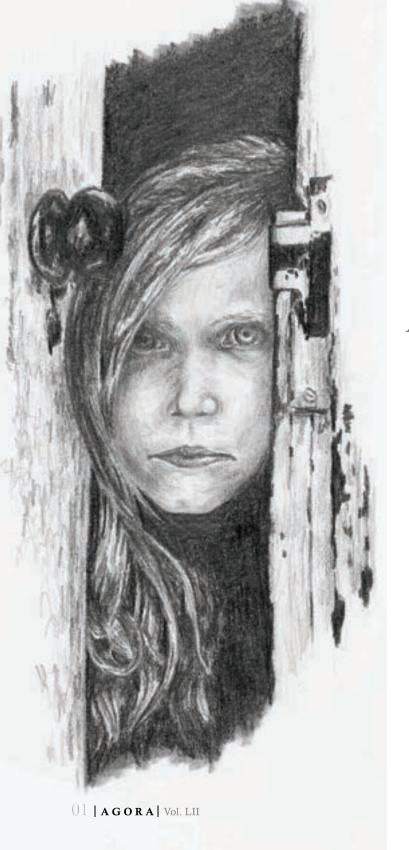
2019 AWARDS

Jean S. Moore Literature Award

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 receives 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

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.



A Glimpse of Truth Rachel Lang

Doorbells

Justin Halloran | SHORT STORY

The doorbell didn't ring that often anymore, at least not since his wife's death. He had often said that she was his better half. He didn't really give a damn that the number of callers had thinned out over the years. He supposed it made sense. When his son had been just a kid, no one even used the doorbell. The door would just be violently tossed open and give way to a pack of neighborhood hooligans, crazed with summer fever.

The ring faded from his ears. He placed his coffee mug down on the wood table to his left. Well, all had passed, and someone must answer the damn door. He braced himself and struggled out of the recliner. "Damn nuisance," he mumbled.

On the porch steps stood two men dressed the full nine yards in military garb, cap and all. He froze, clutching the door-frame. His knuckles turned white.

"Donald Walker?"

"Can I help you?"

"Sir, your son died in combat three nights ago."

The neighborhood children's laughter rang in his ears.

"We're very sorry."

"Do you have his body?"

"I'm sorry sir. There was no body to recover."

He looked down at his feet, silent. Eventually, he met the soldier's eyes.

"Okay. Well, thank you."

He didn't wait for them to say anything else.

That night in his chair, he drank alone. He held his glass of cheap bourbon in one hand haphazardly tilted over his lap, at his feet the near empty bottle. He could hardly remember the last time he'd been this drunk. Had it been when he would stay out all night with his buddies, closing bars in Austin? Or, the night the poor bastard had been conceived? The clock ticked, and the sky grew dark. That night, he fell asleep in his chair.

The funeral came and went. It hadn't rained, but he almost wished it would have, just to complete the picture. In the days following, he kept to his routine. One day, he decided to try Church, but within ten minutes he walked out. "I don't need some dead virgin to save me." He thought of his son, often wondering what had gone wrong.

He decided to leave new experiences to new people. His grave was dug. He had all but bought the casket. The doctors said he was dying, and he knew it too. It was a strange experience; he was relieved. Most days, he sat reading from his chair about a father who had been killed by his son. He felt sorry for the father. More likely than not, he had probably deserved it. "At least you didn't have to be alone."

When night came, he traded his book for bourbon. It helped him sleep. He dreamed he saw new colors. Down through unfamiliar streets he walked, meeting people who spoke a foreign language. As he walked by, each person gave him a warm smile and shook his hand.

Then he heard a familiar voice, "What was it you always told me?"

"Check your six."

"Oh, yeah." He smiled.

"Well, I suppose you didn't?"

"Fucker should've had my back."

"He didn't?"

"Nah, died too soon."

"Like I say, check your six."

"And here I thought I told you not to be an old ass."

The man sat still in his chair. As the sun rose the next morning, he kept on sleeping.



Frank

Bethany Gareis | POETRY

Frank was an elephant-wrinkled man
He didn't want to sleep at night
"The only good dreams are taken already"
He explains his predictions in a sigh.

He didn't want to sleep at night He watched for sunlight and the train Wanted to try someplace else, Frank did Another hill, that's the spot. He smiled

He watched for sunlight and the train His ticket ready, he wrote a farewell Letters delicately arranged in flowers "Forward my mail and think of me, dears"

He didn't want to sleep at night He wanted sunlight and the train His ticket ready, he wrote a farewell And explained his predictions in a sigh.



Write Drunk

Kate Weaver | POETRY

His eyes pierced the past in front of him while he played guitar on my thigh. Fizzling drinks popping in our throats as songs sang from summer fires and late night prayers.

Eyes hung heavily, fighting sleep, fighting time,

holding onto the only thing we have left.

Ink smudges

Music plays

Ghosts pass us by

Tomorrow looming behind yesterday.

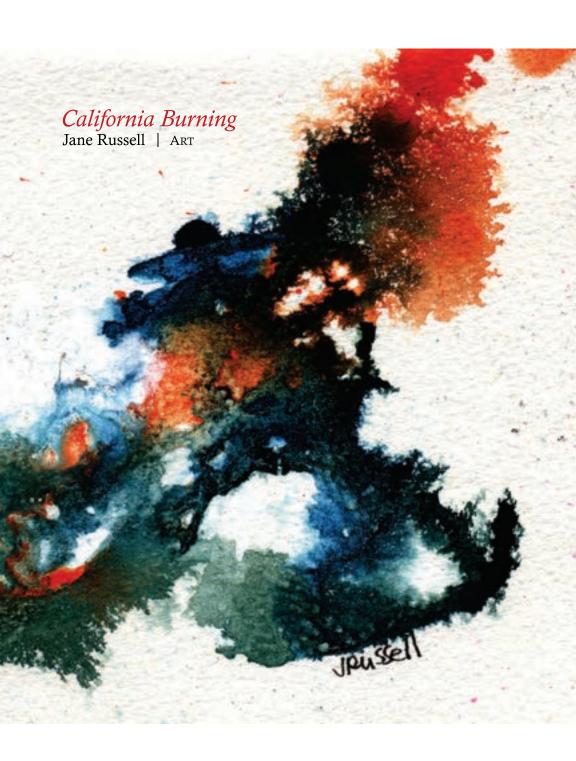
And Surely

Daniel Shirley | POETRY

Marching mantled crystal lines
My deck rail in the morning.
January cold sits like buried coal
Under ash-heaps of snow
Simmering against wood grain,
Cheap wood. Flaked gems melt
And soak, sinking in as the steam
smokes.

Silence. It happens in the Silence.







October

Bethany Gareis | PROSE POETRY

October is a brooding man. He folds his hands and regrets, regrets, regrets.

"I had a friend named Sally. I liked the way she curled her hair behind the left ear."

October draws a picture in the sand as the sea rolls in.

"I knew Sally liked to play. Her music stayed in my head for hours... We took a walk once; she pretended Pittsburgh was Paris and that the gray city streets were good for her music. But it was only Pittsburgh."

October loses a leaf. It flitters to his foot, landing on the cords of his oxfords.

"Sally...liked to play. I would listen. I tapped my foot."

October's wind ruffles. He sputters, coughs, and lets a lung collapse.

"Sally was a good girl."

October takes a step.

"Sally was a kind girl."

October sighs.

"Sally was beautiful, always youthful..."

October forgets, unclasps his hands, and falls asleep.

November

Rajive Tiwari | POETRY

This emotionally cold Sunday morning falls silent on the screened porch.

Leaves huddled on a courtyard bench forgotten like browning words of prose betrayed by the seductive rhymes of spring barely stirred by the choppy line breaks of a dying breeze.



And the whole thing was very bleak

Katie McCarthy | POETRY

Her coffin is biodegradable,
But not like a shoebox or anything.
As if her death could be recyclable;
Her stiff body, next to that trashed box spring.

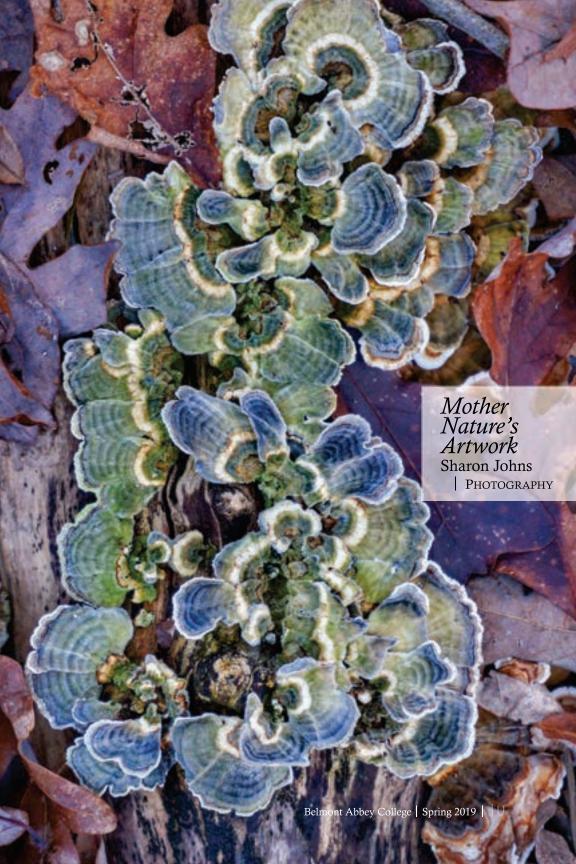
What if a flower grows out of her hips,
Or a worm crawls out of her eye socket?
I can still see her dance without a slip!
Oh! Why, post death, does my love skyrocket?

I see her around every corner.

Never mind, it's just the cat again, but
In that moment life was so much warmer.

For this, I grow to hate that feline's strut!

Why, oh why, did you leave me here alone? My backbone, you, the reason I have grown.



Those Cotton Socks

Andrew Torres | POETRY

A pile of socks completes the laundry heap, One pair the feet adore above the rest; The silk and wool the drawer will gladly keep, But this white cotton pair escapes the chest.

Upon the toes come threads and cuffs of warm, As soles and ankles catch their cushion kiss; The loafers' dream of feet to fill their form Made true with hosts of dove-white cotton bliss.

But wool and silk will sit in dusty dark And loathe their merry counterparts of white; No boots nearby to hear their sorry bark; The tight-shut drawer mutes fruitless cries of spite.

Those cotton favorites always win the praise: Their sockmates writhe in envy all their days.

Indelible Theresa Wilson | POETRY

Imperfect as the humanity
Which called it into being
To leave a lasting mark
To circle a spot as if to say—
"I was here!"
Nebulous as that sign may be
I admire my cup and saucer
For it can accomplish just that
In its small rectangular world.





Art on the Prairie Paul Toscano | Photography

Glitterati Anonymous

Jane Russell | POETRY

My name is Jane, and I stand here to make a strange confession: lately, playing with glitter glue has become my new obsession.

At first, it was fabric paint in red, in glowing green and gold to mark my handkerchiefs and such, let new from old be told.

The problem came when I bought new hues and first applied them to paper.
Bursting the bonds of the functional,
I made bookmarks for student and neighbor.

I learned the joys of "confetti" glue, mixed families of kindred shades. Amazing what glee I took from glints of silver and blue amid jade.

I crossed a last line when I realized I could paste in discarded foils. Recycling gene engaged, I'm now fully caught in the glitter craft's coils.

But I plead for forgiveness halfheartedly, armed with a dawning insight: for a child of the universe, living on light, an ardor for sparkles is birthright.



O Happy Day!

Jane Russell | ART

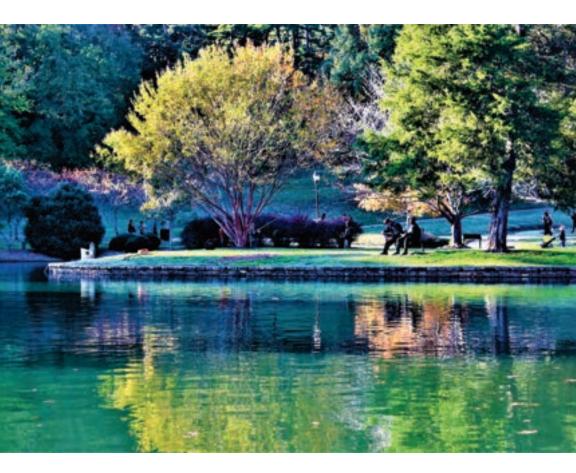
Tennis Court Twilight Catherine Yellico | POETRY

Apollo's chariot descends to Olympus Night monsters stretch their claws and awake Wars are fought in barren deserts Heroes make history with valiant deeds Yet our world is quiet and stars glitter still.

Schemes devised by midnight terrors Young ones cry out in hunger Forbidden lovers meet in the great shade Entangled in a drunken stupor Yet our ears attend and faces lift to the jeweled dome.

Children planning great endeavors Whispering dreams too phantom to achieve Confessing love with impassioned assurance Ghosts of the past arise from the dead Yet our world is silent and a lucid pattern is stitched above.

Children no longer weep Lover's sighs go on unforbidden Moans of the night terrors die away Dry deserts are watered with tears.



Natural Watercolors Kateri Brehany | PHOTOGRAPHY

Synod Marc Chiurco | POETRY

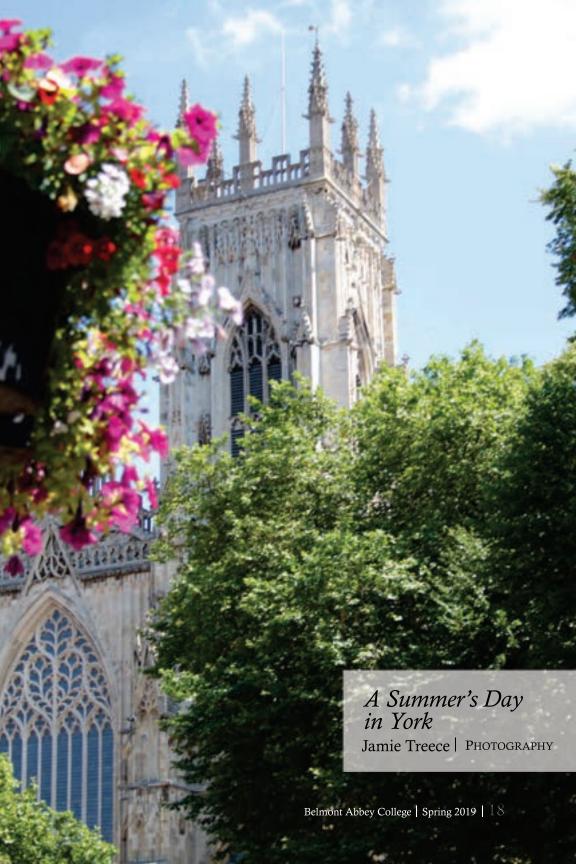
Cardinals flock to the dove
To hear the peaceful morning song
Flight like wings on angels
To carry message far and long
Truth in words
And pardon in peace
One must find joy to release
That sorrow in what was found
Brings the swallow to the ground
In communion and time, we find
The greatest love is out of mind



A Hard Day's Work Justin Halloran | POETRY

Present paid in her work today.

Red nosed Rose bird made her bed merrily.
Eyes closed, she fell asleep resting head.
Morning rose, never did she play or pray.
Yet both were not unknown in heart.
Threading twigs, tweeting tunes never taught.
To work, new work harder every new day,
So I spied seeing her smile in labor.
Her prayer devoutly played,



The Witching Hour Genevieve Grayson | POETRY

Silver wispy moonbeam strands, Radiating brilliance band by band. Ageless stars freckle the open sky, Silent movements oh so high.

The moon is my mother reflecting her sun, Guiding the night when weary days are done. Milky tresses emit forgotten light, Ancient places far out of sight.

A depth so deep it's never ending, Velvet purple and stark white blending. Glassy eyes reveal twilight magic shows, Shadows dance across my nose. Archaic compasses disappearing by day, Help my tethered soul find its way.

Time Tilts on This Tipsy Turvy World Daniel Shirley | POETRY

Time tilts on this tipsy turvy world Set sideways, not straight up or Straight on? Like a top twirling Losing speed, so it slows as New man grows and finds love,

A topsy turvy tilted thing set sideways off
Its rocker.
But we keep spinning,
Dancing in the parking lot,
When I tilt my head to the right,
I see straight.



SALT ST. William Killoran | PHOTOGRAPHY

Roma

Keegan Reeve | POETRY

Long ago great Rome ruled before the fall.

I've never seen it, although I've been told

By those remembering of tall Rome's wall,

But roused up from the North with cruel bronze cold,

In the past guarded by Romans of old,

There now came the Germans and Gauls and all,

With their tyrant nobles and warrior kings.

Whence went the heroes who by nation brawl?

They ravaged Rome and destroyed public things,

Women wailing, wealth away as takings.

Even then the Republic long gone before,

To effeminating games Caesar brings.

For past virtues I wish, for Rome I long.

For the greater ones lost I sing this song.



In the Greek myth, Persephone is carried off by Hades to be his queen in the Underworld.

Persephone
Amelia Shechet | ART

Son of the Morning Joshua Sica | POETRY

anger is pride he Said, and I became a Shiner of blinding light, More strong than lightning or stars, but less strong than The lamb my Light seemed all twisted, dark and Wrong then

anger is love He said, and I fell down
my fists turned quickly into open Hands
Hands tense, and torn into a bloody garden
Light dimmed seemed but sharper, a broken brand

this change I knew to be more true, more good but came without clarity of light came without reproach but a Sigh that said when you love I must say to the dove, Fight

therefore I am a bloody garden bed planted with seeds of rage, flowers to deadhead I raise my fist, I hear the Sigh He said light I made you, but you have become dread





Confession with Fr. Paul
Dominique Du Sablon | PHOTOGRAPHY

They Dance Forward

Anne Parlmer | POETRY

Raw, dusty, and bright With sun and sweat, Sounds and smells stir, Sifting through the sand. Stillness is a stranger.

Stranger still,
The laughter, song, and dance
Of rough-beginning life.
Refined is confounded
By sun-bright,
Dusty sweat,
Raw reality

Coming with Joy In the heels,

On the hips, From the lips Of babes just born.

Having borne much Before, Backs, eyes, Heads, and hearts Are sore.

Seeking salve
Or a chance
Not to be stagnant,
They dance forward.

Secret Elijah McBride | POETRY

The secret of life is to have fun

The secret of life is of no ease to be required

Lest there be no time on our watches

Slowly curling down towards our unclenching hearts

He spews out that all familiar taste of death.

How else will this journey of circles go always and forever spinning

To release, to snap, the many birds chirping, the bees buzzing

For without the many noises, their cry lays

Hope it pleads to take from me what cannot be pried

It will roam free to be what nature has asked for

The pond to remain without ripples

For a time of savings in the season of love.



Homebody Rylee Yarrington | PROSE POETRY

If you could peel back the dozens of layers of epidermis, you would eventually reach scarlet-slathered brick. In those clay stones is a variance of shades, charred brown to ruddy orange.

If you broke through the wall of concrete and clay, you would come across bone-white drywall. The endoskeleton of shape and protection, though not unbreakable. Kick too hard and the whole thing will crack.

If you burrowed a hole through the skeleton of hardened chemical, you would fall into the bloodwarm center. It is pleasant and rhythmic, a place of solitude and peace. The door is tightly shut and liberality remains unthreatened.

Here is the heart of the homebody. The room is not a prison. Here the walls will cradle the heart until all disintegrates into ash and age.





Adaptation
Paul Toscano | Photography

Fall

John Paul Hamilton | POETRY

Dancing down some graveled driveway, Kicking up red leaves like fresh snow. Old leaves like reeking Lazarus Refuse to be raked by plastic, To be burned with old, dried-out wood. Yet, though stamped down on the red clay, Theirs is no sickness unto death.

R.H. The Empress
Bridget Wilkinson | ART



If Our Lives Were Composed of Sunshine and Wine

SarahAnna Spinelli | POETRY

You would look down and flirt with the grass Your eyes bleached with the reflection of sunshine through a thin stemmed glass of wine Days would fade in, Out, like highlights in your hair AM and PM digital clock glow on your skin Crank window, sore arm mementos of your car

Hair caught in mouth, stringy wind-blown in the car Bare feet, purple toes amongst rocks in the grass Woven flower bracelets hanging off skin We would try tying twine around the sunshine With our sepia love for living and sweet wine Your sunglasses would rest in your hair.

Rose tinted *they* told us, against your Hair Coffee cups would collect in your car Rolling back on the floor, hipster's wine Painting the mountains, painting grass With your presence, laughter shines Through, while yellow paint stains caress your Skin

But then cold bitten—inside to out—no longer soft skin. It started to fall out as I watched, your hair On your pillow the color of sunshine Numbness flowed through veins once in the car Pain to be touched, to touch, the grass Turned to razors, no longer could you sip wine

Back of sleeve tries to hide tears spilt like red wine "It will be alright." Patted. As *they* touched your skin headbands, paisley turbans in place of hair I gave you daisies in a coke can, accents of grass "Ignore them." The white petals whispered and shined You sat crisscross on the hood of my car.

Cocktail dress flowing around your knees painting the car Music to dance to, vinyl flavored wine Empty parking garage weather, warm headlights shine looking at your skin grass But our lives really were like kisses on hair.

Driving to the Dunes of Manteo

Donald Beagle | POETRY

My hands have armed the car for weary hours, aiming eyes along seamsplit highways until a spilling ridge of sand like the foot of a Pharoah

rises before me over the trees forever falling in its rising ahead of my arriving, And as I climb from the car ever rising in my falling,

under the glare of its vision of omniscient antiquity, And as I climb, my breath climbs, quickening, to my head. I climb dry brownbush under air

that shifts and quivers, under the aura of hours driven into the dreamtime. The deadened scalps of sanddunes flinch as boots crunch in.

I squeeze the ragged weeds like hair on unskinned skulls, my footsteps heaping yellow sand on heron-bones. Secotan lived here, legends say.

I sense their deer-eyed intimations everywhere, shoving up the last few feet upon the summit's emesis... A sky obscured by light.

Featherheaded, arrowfingered specters permeate the mounds; sandals and gloved hands peripheral, mouths still grinning, grimly proud, despite the foreheads frowned

with scorn for whomever authored history's autopsy. Sliding down a cheek-ridge, I pass the jutting driftwood teeth and jaw dissolution has dissected all.

Sunken hollows shiver dustily amongst themselves, and scar canopies of soft, collapsing necks. On the continental chests wounds and cicatrix of southern storms

have marked the war of years. Sand-pools form, opening like pores, as if a living essence were still easing into air... until deep dusk intrudes,

when specks disperse in sudden coolness. Streams reverse, fleeing from the froth of Nags Head shore. Seeking shelter, I burrow into dunes breathing faintly in the burial-ground.

My blood-filled body quiets to rest beneath the sacred sand. The water from my flaccid mouth slips out, trickling swiftly through the thirsty land.



Two Encounters Mary Lang | POETRY

It's late and chill in Charlotte's night. We walk down blaring streets, Wind whirling us and scrambling thoughts.

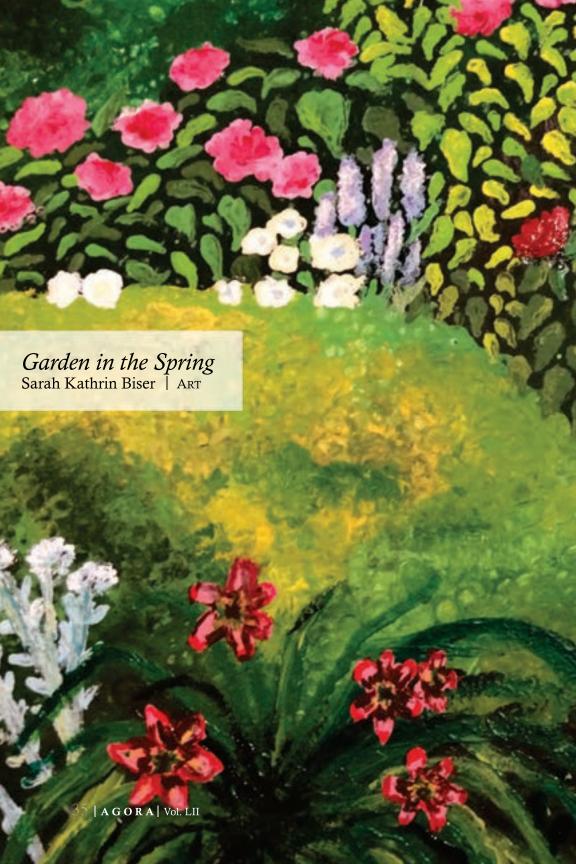
Ahead, a black man shouts to preach: "The King is coming! Je-Sus saves! Jesus is coming soon!"

Cars paused, we hurry to his side. He addresses the girls: "He loves you ladies." We go on,

Stride past him. Dead leaves skitter by. The walk ahead is sloped— Dim, deserted except an Arab.

His white robe rises in full drafts, Red plaid headdress fans out. He's walking opposed, face to us,

And soon he strides past shadow-like, But tosses us these words: "Mohammed listens; Jesus saves."





The Cuckoo Flew Away SarahAnna Spinelli | SHORT STORY

The cuckoo bird was yellow, cats-eye yellow; it popped out and with it came all the changes.

The sunshine was yellow too, tea yellow, and it waltzed through the hallway as the bird called Dave to life. The Home was yellow as well, daisy yellow, which reflected in everyone's smiles. The garden, out to the side, was Dave's favorite yellow, soft halo. It smelled of summer, of homegrown roses and sage. The bench in the garden was embedded with swirls which reflected ocher as often as the cuckoo sang. Dave had to waltz through the shafts of sunshine, past the dayroom to get to the garden—to the bench. To sit alone. To let the corners of his mouth turn upward.

"Helpers" made sure Dave ate and that he went down between the yellow blocks in the hall. Hands helped him lift, push, stabilize as he moved. He was on his way to recovery, so the Helpers told him. A counter stood before the dayroom, a bouquet of fake flowers sprayed with perfume on the white acrylic top next to a phone which had a long curly tail. Dave always watched it when he was given a cup with his medicine. With the evening came the cup and a large Helper with a voice like a mother's or candy at a grandma's house.

Dave shied from the dayroom during each march down the canary hall. The lights were off. The doorway ate the lemon the hall windows let in.





The Cuckoo Flew Away

Once he got beyond—couldn't see the room any longer, he forgot—the breeze, he wanted to eat the breeze, feel it in his ear.

Buzz—the air tingled the hair on Dave's forearm causing it to lift. And he remembered why he didn't like the dayroom.

The bird wasn't yellow.

The lights flickered and a buzzer started eating his ears. A metallic cold grew on his temples, the rods. His arm started jerking, pulling on cuffs, trying to be freed, he couldn't stop them. Then everything went yellow, from inside him to out. It slapped his face; he could see—there were no roses. It wasn't a garden. The walls fell on top of him, a box lid closing, reality like acid burning behind his eyelids. He mentally stopped trying to tell his thrashing limbs to quit, his brain quieted completely. Black.

Dave wasn't breathing saffron air anymore; he had been wrong, wrong; he was suffocating in marmalade orange between dirty white cinderblock walls.

He was carted out, arms clamped to the armrests of the metal wheelchair and parked in the dayroom, in the line Dave had always known was there, but had avoided with his eyes. Now his eyes couldn't move, his mind tried telling them to close, they didn't listen. They stared ahead at the clock.

There was no cuckoo bird. There had never been a cuckoo bird.

Highwayman Reopened Patrick Means | POETRY

A small book tucked in the corner, hiding Opens in the still of a winter's night And the highwayman comes riding, riding, riding

A tale of a man who loved her and lost her Both cruelly undone by a treacherous ostler She died at midnight, and he died at noon But the lovers still meet by the light of the moon

When he rides to the inn yard my heart always flutters When the dead man whistles and taps at the shutters When he waits by the casement and then she is there: Bess with a love knot, dark red, in her hair.

A small book tucked in the corner hiding Closes in the still of a winter's night And the highwayman goes riding, riding, riding



Stopping on RT. 66 (Shamrock, Texas)
Paul Toscano | Photography

Augustine, restless (the madness of seeing)

Ellen Weir | POETRY

He has gone to see the face inside a Face still green and young: there, where light gasps for the water's edge.

He sees: the Whole Sky cradles cities at night.
Air and promise—
white streets, all gathered and alone.

Looking

"when the moon is sprayed against the sky— Know do you think we'll know?" "when the starlight sweets the ringlight's glow— Then? do you think we'll know?"

Restless dear Augustine.

Incredible longing. And She, always, forever Seeing.





Relocation

Anne Vickers | POETRY

Shuffled, hesitated, pushed onto the plane Bound for a family of strangers unseen in years, some unmet in life

Amid bountiful amounts of swarming people, words, faces, places I'm left disoriented "Eu nao falo portugues"

With small respite, comes a wordless smile A kindred spirit *Adoravel*

But even this is torn away, perhaps forever Not a rollercoaster, or hurricane Uncontrollable, no safety in sight This is an earthquake Rattling, disorienting, challenging my very being

Confusion stopped by familiar motions Still, strange words, but comforting occurrences

In a crowd, a rush, with a universal smile: an image, and a saving sign Illuminating each unique face
Raised high above the waves of people, the surge of the ocean

Peace

Throughout my entire being

Forgiveness

Regardless of language

Yet returning to them
Who believe but do not practice
Because others did they now feel they must

Reality and Illusion are interspersed in attempts to follow truth Success and failure
Denying who I am
While always believing in what I could be

But through it all, despite the falls Eu aprendi, I learned Eu entendi, I understood Eu falei, I spoke Eu demonstrei, I demonstrated My faith, my family, myself.

Tortillas Commute Dominique Du Sablon | Photography



Death to Materialism Mary Lang | Short Story

My next-door neighbor was a proud Christian American and liked to show off this fact. Holidays both religious and secular found the facade and yard (I never saw any human hand in this operation) dressed to the nines in all manner of yard decor. Blow-ups, music, plastic figurines, and lights snaked their extension cords onto the driveway cement and into the garage, where undoubtedly lay some twenty power strips. I often wondered what his electric bill read, also how he, or they, slept with the noise and the light that must have come through into the house like ghosts of the florid front yard.

My own house sat on a little hill to the right. I could look out my kitchen window, which, in the manner of ill-planned houses, faced the street, to see a different house directly opposed to mine and my decorated neighbor's. It was a little brown rancher with a blue door. Untrimmed grass that had long since gone to seed brushed the brick facade, and it was apparent by the unevenness of the ground that the bushes that once grew in the yard had been ripped out violently. The mailbox was a faded black and the drive stained. All this was in contrast to my nearer companion. However, the resident of the house across the street was known to me, though not well. He had brought over a blackened loaf of bread when I moved in, and though I threw it all away after the third bite, I had tried to appreciate him.

Time had gone by since the bread was tasted, and it did not improve my feelings toward the old man. He was unusual in his habits—he liked to go for morning runs and on his return to lie on the drive with the hose gushing out above his head—and odd people like him put me on my guard and made me uncomfortable.

The combination of these residents was not enough, however, to make me leave, for I had a job that did not ask too much of me and a cat that had just settled in. I was comfortable most of the year round and took measures to keep myself so. Those times when the old man acted oddly, I turned a blind eye, and when the decorative lights shone into my bedroom with pools of holiday colors, I simply bore the odd dreams I had as a result. I did not mention my reservations or complaints to either neighbor—those speeches were too embarrassing for me to contemplate.

Of all the year, Christmas was the worst, the time when I did indeed wonder why I did not take the five minutes to walk next door and knock on the red wooden door. It was the worst time not because others were joyful, but because my personal space was invaded by a little too much rejoicing. A hundred feet away to my right were a circus of blinking lights and a glow-inthe-dark nativity set. Blowers inflated Santas and reindeer. There were even some flat plastic Santas lying on the roof; one was motorcycling.

The party across the street stood a white silhouette nativity in the weedy front yard. I myself decided that with the blinking to the right of me, my yard would be lit brightly enough to excuse any lack. So I left the brown slope blank and put a Santa hat on the cat statue near the door.

It was warm enough where I lived in the South to ignore the traditional winter fare such as soup if one desired, so I tossed a salad a few nights a week and shortly acquired the habit of looking out my street-facing window as I did so. One Sunday night, pulling together a belated supper, I was washed in multicolored lights as, simultaneously, I sliced carrots and the affair next door was brought to life.

I crunched preemptively on some cucumbers, but was distracted from eating, a rare occurrence, by the sight of a window across the street going up. The old man flung aside the drapes and poked a stick out the window. He squinted across the street.

My brain was too contextual: until the old man squinted *down* the stick and cocked it loudly, I did not realize it was a gun—but only a BB gun, I hoped. I wanted to raise my own window, but did not for the thought that he might shoot towards me.

He aimed across the street, but not in my direction.

My window afforded a sliced view of the yard to my right—not enough. I started to run upstairs for a better look, but then realized my only phone, a landline, would be too far away.

Across the street, the trigger was pulled.

To my right, the proud red belly of one of the blow-up Santas shook. and a hole hissed out air. That, as I supposed, was just spite, for the blower continued unabated; the opposing party cocked the gun for a second time, and he did not miss.

The Santa slowly deflated, falling gently onto its face. The reindeer were next, and they died without protest.

I opened the window and bent down.

The old man was cocking the gun yet again; I called, but too quietly, "Sir!"

He raised the gun and took another shot; this time some of the lights in the tree went out.

"Uh, sir!"

He looked in my direction. "Death to materialism!" was all he said, and then lowered his window.

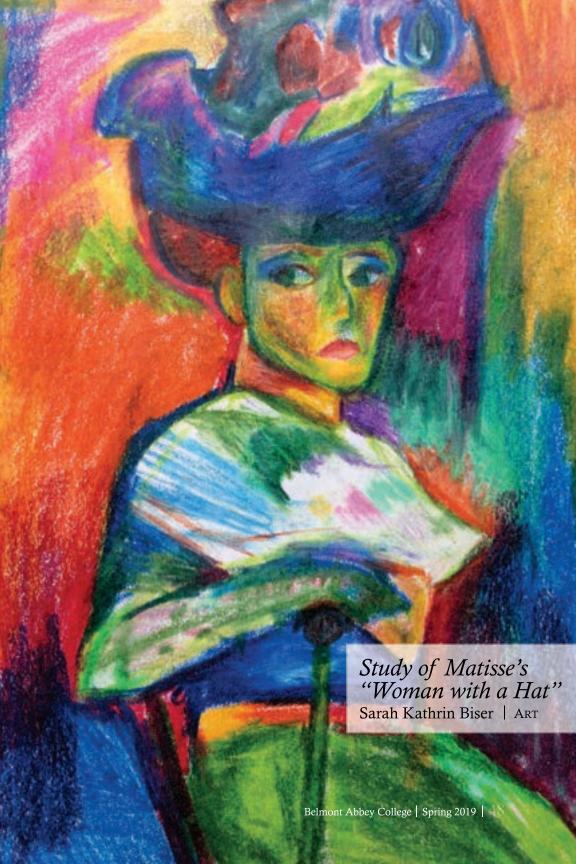
I slept pretty soundly that night, as half the lights were off and the windy forest of blowers had been silenced. The next morning, the dead blowups had been dragged off the lawn and the broken lights ripped off the tree.

I had no doubt that they would be replaced, but, in the meantime, the yellowed grass could try to grow back.

January 1st

Bethany Gareis | PROSE POETRY

January was embittered by an older man who loved and left her, as they do. With child, no less! How Mother laughed. "Just how I got you!" Lips smacking. "But children never listen!" Her friends laughed too. "Those men are dogs!" And "Time goes by!" And every other crude formality. The time did go, and so the child grew. No more was it born and home than January wrapped and left it by Mother's bed without a name or second glance. Then, January distinguished herself. She smoked without smearing her lipstick, she crushed daisies at garden parties with her warm fur coat, and rode in gold-rimmed cadillacs faster, faster! The time did go.



Venezia Keegan Reeve | POETRY

I fell 'twixt elegant canals unwell
I felt all Venice free not firmly fixed
And fluttering furies before me flung
The floors and winding walls below around
On surely steady bases shook and swung

A massive fish with city blocks as scales It swims through softly crashing sea or sails A ship with steep and misty spires the masts

Still ever still vast seas of souls serene

Disaster sprung they even forsake this They whisk themselves away withal And likewise noticed not their fall And so still ever still on silent streets Farewell you final falling lily blooms





Freckles

Justin Halloran | POETRY

Remember now,

Speckled flowers beneath your brow.

Daisies floating summer wind,

Carried snow, white clouds, filled sunlight within.

Remember pathways on living grass,

Long walks, long days, time will last or at last begin.

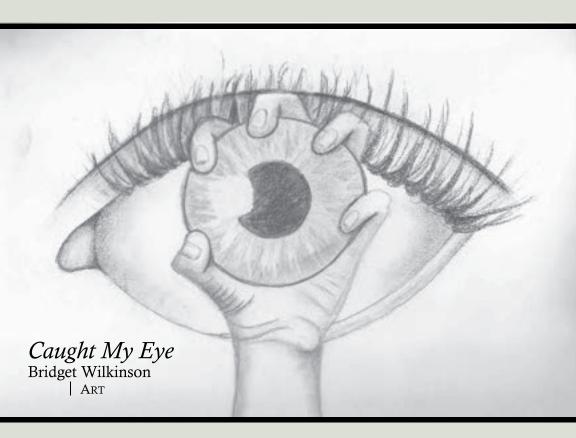
Then it fades, learned random grey shade,

Silver in the night, shadows burned bright.

This unique random display, placed to pray, play, and stay,

Sitting happily scrunched for now,

In that place beneath your brow.



What I Saw

SarahAnna Spinelli | POETRY

Flashes of color and strings of pearls.

A bouquet red and yellow leaned in a corner, a decision made between closing elevator doors.

Dark blue chipped nail polish fingers clutching at backpack straps like they were ideas.

A crumpled face with salt water eyeliner fading into silver between closing elevator doors.

"Ciao" as fingertips brush a coat sleeve, green longing in soft eyes contradicting the goodbye.

A cascade of glances falling like fingers through curly hair between closing elevator doors.

Suede business shoes click while ghost perfume kisses talk of department stores.
Yellow gum-flavored stranger's smiles—shared with the tile—between closing elevator doors.

Highlighted buttons, panel like a teleport's controls, thickly framed mirrors on the wall reflected. Fake greenery pots, plastic disguised as ivory between the closing of elevator doors.

Bent over, keys on the floor—wrinkled bag—stacked cans rim on rim escalating over the top. Backs of heads, unlocking twist, hip to door—the daily routine—between the closing of elevator doors.

Braids, holding a chapter book, brown spine bent fiercely from folding and corners torn. Indian style—on gray grunge carpet, a shadow blinking down on her between closing elevator doors.

Lights, multicolored, and far off through windows—blurred without glasses in a 2:17 AM wash. Cleaning cart wheels wobble, a spray bottle falling, not hitting the floor between closing elevator doors.

White shoes dirtied from life, new laces double knotted, intensely studied mismatched socks scratched with a foot.

Looking, not at people, I saw myself in the space after the closing of elevator doors.

A Valentine Surprise to Daddy's Little Girl

Alexis Rogers | POETRY

Unsettled eyes gravitate to a nameless box and pages determine the proceeding moves.

Safety protocol in place Section X V II Article 3—follow directly or you're responsible. Boxes must be detected, wait for the beep.

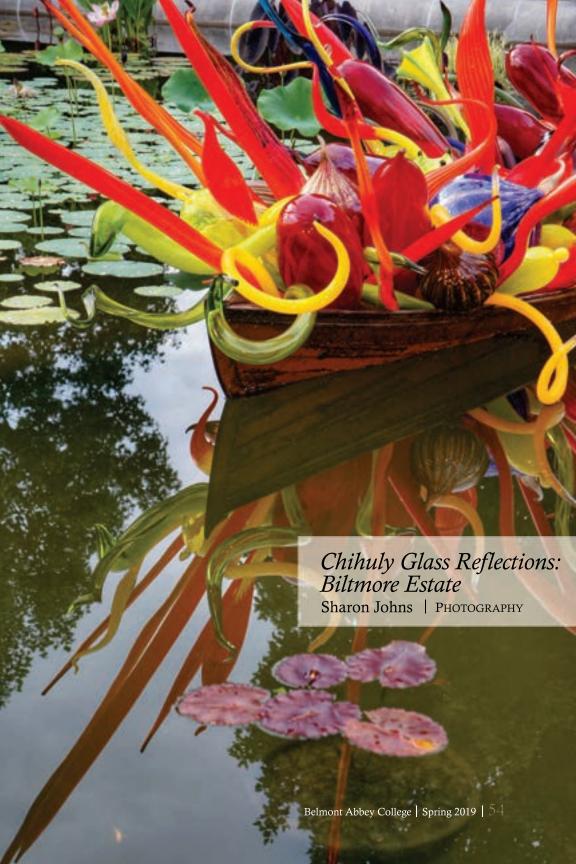
Silence. Continue to Article 4— Remove the children. Now! Running out of room for another row of stones. 10-89! Skip to Article 8—

Dismantle. Slow.

Peeled edges reveal the thorns
that cause the blood puddle of fallen petals.

Paranoia boxes are prone to explode.

Hearts conditioned to turn violent black; no longer safe to learn. Revealing shriveled roses ready to burn.



Insect Wings

Rylee Yarrington | SHORT STORY

Pluck them.

Pluck them from the backs of hornets and bees, butterflies and dragons. Tissue-paper thin chitin like antique glass pinned carefully by steady hands. Maybe the hands are too precise, clean and sterile to the point where the skin is dry from overwashing. There's a buzzing in the ears, but it's not from the bugs below the fingers. Will you please just leave me alone for five minutes, honey?

Adjust the glasses with a ten-year old prescription, scratched but unfogged, the breath coming from those two protruding nostrils. Don't use those hands; scrunch the face to move them up. Wings are too fragile, like people. At least the wings do not talk; they do not cry either. What do you mean I'm not around? I'm right here.

This is a life and a death. A life built on death and a death transformed into life. Don't you understand? I am making something of them, honey. I am turning their short existence into an eternity behind a glass case. I am giving them life.

So you think I'm throwing away my life? No, this is my life, too, my profession. It isn't a hobby! It's an art, dear; I'm making art that will stay preserved for decades. Look at them!

Wings, glistening wet under the light of the desk lamp. Row after row, side by side like the wings of fallen angels. Their number was vast and uncountable; they could call themselves Legion. A thousand glittering pairs of diamond earrings devoid of a lady's ear.

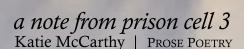
What? It's just the wings? Why not just the wings? It's the most beautiful part of their bodies; the rest of them is nothing but thorax, an exoskeleton devoid of life. The wings though, they have life!

Go ahead. Pluck them.

Take away the very thing that brings them life. Take away those wings which give them freedom because that's the very thing you're jealous of. You want to sprout wings from your spine and get out of this dead end suburbia. Fly away from the nineteen-eighty-something ranch house with too many problems. Get away from your mundane wife and brats. Away from the cubicle and the office.

Because that is all you can do: pluck them and fly away.





There are days when I forget which body is real.

As I realize the same sky that hangs over me has slowly become opaque

And I begin to envy the sapphire palette that I am all too sure you take for granted

There is not a cloud in sight and yet the future has never looked so ominous

I have spent weeks walking this yard

Hours of round and round and round

The realization that I am in a square and I am lost

I have become much too familiar with my own thoughts

And they are much too fond of you

Your anger, your pain, your confusion

And for a second, I allow myself to feel them too

And you despise me for this

For making your pain mine

For thinking

(even just for a second)

that I could possibly feel all that you feel

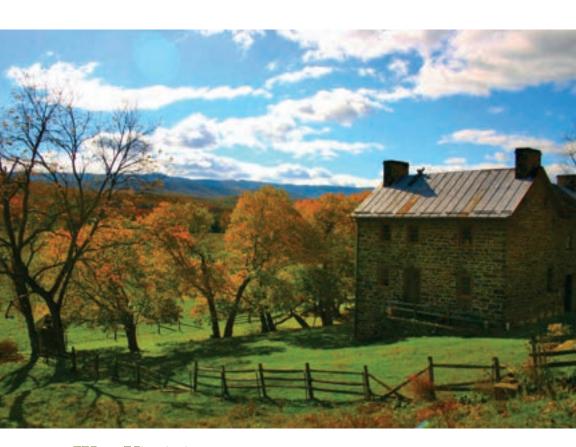
It is not the same.

This I know

But in my head, you come and visit me

I am reminded of the rawness of your voice

And you are reminded that you are much too dignified for the likes of me.



West Virginia
Blake Traylor | PHOTOGRAPHY

The Midnight Sun

Marc Chiurco | POETRY

There upon the cold cliffs of the North Cape

I gazed across the plains of the Barents

Eyes fixed on the sight of the Midnight Sun

As though the day stood still, that bright star fixed above the horizon

Frozen blades of grass stayed motionless

And time did its best to imitate

Swaddled in layers of woven cotton

Hours on end I endured that cold

For it was in this moment, this privation of time

I felt alive. A red warmth had filled my pallid cheeks

Dry tongue and chapped lips moistened

Taste returned. Bathed in the Midnight Sun

Passionate energies danced within me

What was lost had been found

My slow beating heart induced with lifeblood

Visions of the sublime end

Transcending the realm of man

Beauty graced my inner eye, the bonds of human

Rationality released. My reason exalted

Hades, Valhalla, Nirvana, Diyu

And there atop the marble steps of eternity

The Wisdom of the world

Divine is He, Just is He

Low am I

This is what I saw

Swiftly did my mind retreat

As the closing of my eyes to blink

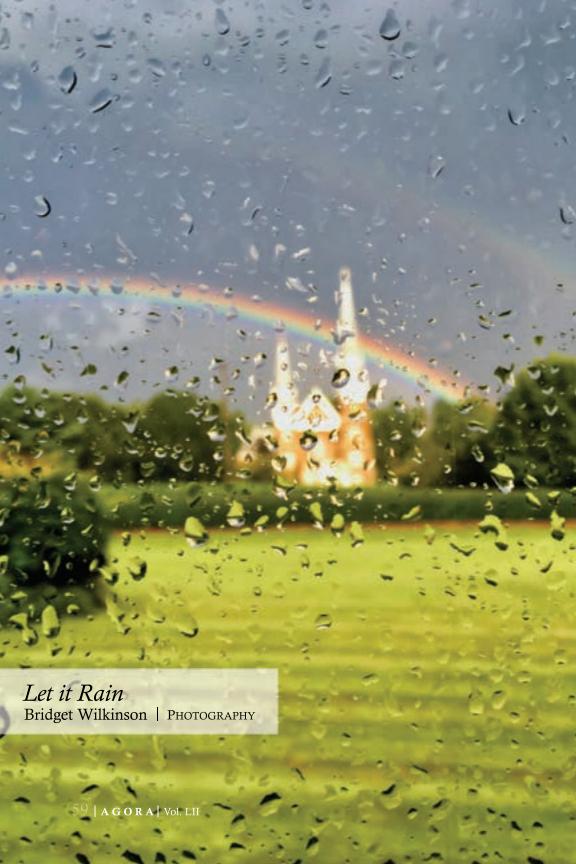
The Midnight Sun was no more

And the stars did show that night

Billions of bright specks

Freckled the blackened sea

Leaving me to this existential solemnity



The Ride Home

Kate Weaver | POETRY

Shadows hang outside windows Screen light shines our own sacred lamps carrying hearts in oil Silhouettes are like halos our own harvested heaven right in the palm of our hands

Shadows hang outside windows Shadows hang inside windows

Dead Sea

Kate Weaver | POETRY

Churning

churning is the tide

Grit gray against beige

Chilled gravel

chilled to the skull

Brings a cry to the

overrun Caribbean drum

Burning

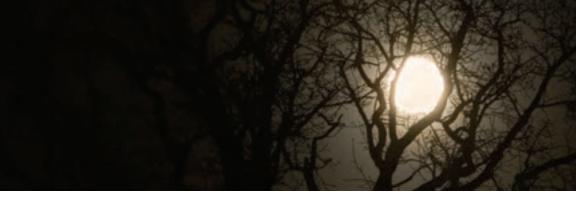
burning is the tide

Dull gray beats against

the rolling autumn sky



On Henge
Jamie Treece | PHOTOGRAPHY



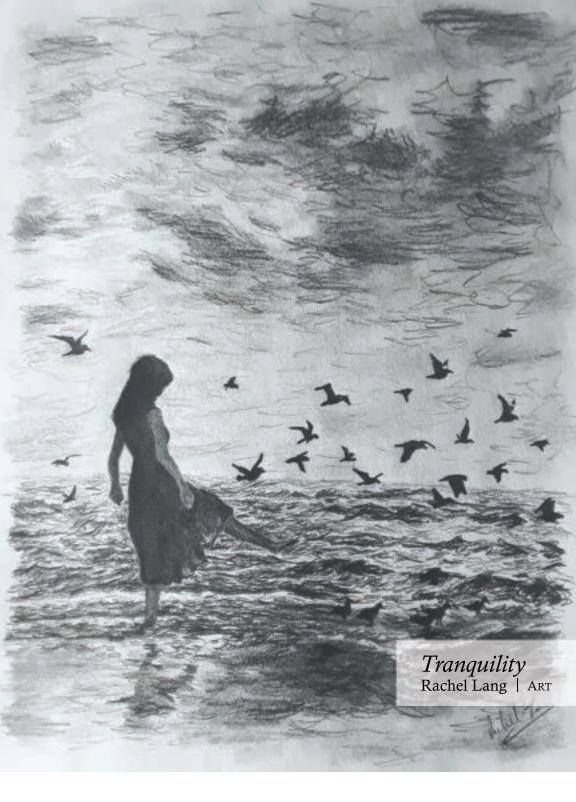
Eclipse at Midnight Rebecca Munro | POETRY

Wolf Moon Blood Moon, Mottled red, pulsing through Atmospheric veils, strings Of cloud, detritus of the day's Industrial exhaust and fume.

Through thin and delicate
Fingers of winter branches
Laced in impossible tangles,
Scratching, rattling, the stirring
Icy wind in leafless trees, bare
Canopy over houses in darkness.

Through green glow of nostalgic Street lamps, the artificial Luminescence of the neighbor's Cell phone pointed toward the Sky from her driveway. And

Through my frozen breath, Another screen veiling the Wonder of this only pendant moon.



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AGORA

Submission Guidelines

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 (1300 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.

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