



Agora

AGORA

*"Birthplace of Democracy,
the Agora dozes at the foot of the Acropolis.
Athenians thronged here to discuss,
harangue, litigate, philosophize."*

Volume XXXI
Spring 1997

Agora is the literary publication of
Belmont Abbey College,
funded by the college and organized with the
help of the Abbey Writing Center.

Editor

Tucker Hearn

Production

Matt Memrick
Debbie Heath

Coffeehouse Coordinator

Maria Ferguson

Editorial Board Coordinator

Chris Sabatini

Moderator

Dr. Mary Ellen Weir

Editorial Board

Amy DeCastro
Steven DeLong
Angela Murphy
Gerry Gibson
Erin LaRocco
Matt Memrick
Chris Sabatini

Cover

Photograph by Chris Sabatini, taken in 1997
at Belmont Abbey College which he entitles, "Spring sprang sprung."

Contributors

Amy DeCastro (5-8) is a junior English major who works in the Writing Center as an intern. This is her first effort in submitting poetry.

Jessica Etheridge (16) is in her freshman year here at the Abbey. She is coeditor of the *Abbey Voice* and will be editing it next year. She enjoys drinking cappuccino and listening to Duran Duran.

Russell Fowler (12, 13) teaches English at the Abbey and is the chairperson of the English Department. He is a frequent contributor to the *Agora* and has been published in other journals.

Ben Hamrick (17, 18) is a semi-retired intellectual with bad luck in relationships, not on his part, but on those with whom he is having a relationship. He maintains his main purpose at BAC is to annoy as many people as possible, but at least you are thinking.

Fr. Matthew McSorley (9) taught American Literature here at the Abbey for 34 years. This is his first effort and he "thought he'd give it a try."

Matt Memrick (15) is a freshman English major from Durham. He is involved with many things here at the Abbey like the *Abbey Players*, *Voice*, and lecturing. He has been enjoying literary magazine work for the last five years.

Angie Murphy (14) is a freshman English/Secondary double major from Florence, SC. She has a passion for writing poetry, fiction, and playing volleyball. She has plans to write professionally and coach volleyball.

Linda Pellerin (4) is a 1996 graduate of the Abbey and is a frequent contributor to the *Agora*. She has also had published poems with The National Library of Poetry as well as feature articles in *Inside Gaston* and the Abbey alumni newsletter, *Crossroads*. She works in the Development Office as an associate director of development and prospect research.

Carson Poe (21, 22) is a freshman at Appalachian State University in Boone. He frequently performs his work at coffeehouses.

Dr. Robert Preston (19, 20) is Belmont Abbey College's thirteenth president. He teaches philosophy here at BAC and frequently publishes a column for the *Gaston Gazette*.

Christopher Sabatini (9, 10) is a junior English/Philosophy double major here at the Abbey. He writes songs primarily to poems and short stories; the latter come about only when they can no longer be avoided. In addition, he enjoys photography and driving.

Mary Ellen Weir (23), a Sister of Mercy of North Carolina, teaches English at the Abbey. She is a frequent contributor to the *Agora* and her poetry has been published in numerous other works.

Lynn Varn (11) teaches English at the Abbey and directs the Writing Center.

My poetry
begins in the solar plexus.

My soul is saturated.
And like the radiance of the sun
the words,
thoughts,
images
permeate my entire being
until it all eventually is thrust from my fingertips
onto paper
from the sheer lack of space
within me.

The overwhelming desire
to expel the words filling my soul
brings satisfaction
when it is all done.

But even after the codification
there remains fluidity
ever-changing from one reading to the next
flowing to and fro
from side to side
near and far
and up and down.

To harness it would
betray
the creativity that is me.

To understand it
would negate its purpose.
The **point**
is not as important
as the
saying of it.

Amy DeCastro

Bar Room Window

A glass artist works,
filling an iron maze,
with pieces of glass:

smooth ones
sharp ones
big ones
small ones

He toils tirelessly,
designing a story
with pieces of glass:

blue ones
red ones
green ones
clear ones

A lifetime later,
The Work is complete.
And the artist steps back,
To see Beauty replete.

The Belt

Once firm and taut,
Almost unyielding;
Now warm and soft,
Though still brass wielding.
A placid visage
It did hold;
Now dressed in lines of
Stories told.
Its supple strength,
Still fast and free;
Now is the love
Supporting me.

Amy DeCastro

Sticks

Of grand design and weighty purpose,
To uphold life and support us,
Pillars of strength and solid make
Suspend us in an upright state.
Of ancient origin and historical use,
Still subject to civil abuse.
An instrument in battles great
Is immune to Man's love and hate.
At the head of courts and corporations,
Carrying the weight of many nations.
The potential power is innate,
To grant life and death; determine fate.
Despite a noble, lofty air,
The seat of learning is just a chair.

I saw this man with a hole in his head. I tried to tell Mama about it but she was wailin' and screamin' at the nurse. She's always yellin' at the nurses. Like it was their fault or somethin'. Last time it was Frankie. Frankie done gone out and got all cut up. He told Mama he and his friends were playin' ball in the locked up court and he hurt himself climbing ' over the fence when old man Hanks yelled at 'em to get out. I knowed he was lyin'. I seen him talkin' to two of his friends just before he gone out. I was in the yard making' a fort out of all them old boxes and trash out there. That fort was so strong none of those big guys could get in. I wanted to go get Mama and make her live out there with me where it was safe, where it was just me an' her.

But then I heard Frankie. He didn't see me. He laughed and telled Mookie that that powder was cut and only a little bit of the original stuff was left so them clowns comin' down from Jersey were gonna' give them a lot of money and then they could go pull the same job with the South Side guys. He said them guys would never know the diff'rence. I bet one of those guys did know the diff'rence. I bet one of those Jersey boys brought one of those big silver knives, like the kind Frankie's got in his coat. I bet that's how Frankie got cut up that night. But I didn't tell Mama. The guy with the hole was pushed into a room with a lot of beeps and machine sounds by them people in the green clothes that are always runnin'.

Those people are movin' so fast they never see me. I was gettin' cold sittin' next to the door so I got up and found a seat next to the table with the lamp. Some lady asked where was my mother so I pointed at the desk. People at the hospital was all the time askin' where was my Mama. She's always in the same place, tellin' the doctors: "Be careful, that's my baby!" or "Don't you let him die! If he dies it's your fault!" Mama yells those things about Daddy too, only he ain't around to hear 'em so she yells 'em at me. She tells me how my Daddy ain't never done any good and she wishes she never laid eyes on him and how he oughta' try livin' with his wild boys for a change and then maybe they wouldn't all the time be in trouble.

Mama's done finished yellin' at the doctors and nurses so now she's walkin' back and forth in a line, fast like the people in green clothes, holdin' that cross Grandma' give her that she carries in that big, old black purse of hers. She's mumblin' low to God sayin' how if He'll let her baby live this time, she knows she can make him a good Christian boy and that all her boys is good, they just need some guidance. She's all the time sayin' that stuff that when we're at the hospital. I don't know what needin' guidance means but I don't think none of us is ever gonna' get any. I'm gonna' try real hard to find some, though, so Mama'll never

have to bring me here hurtin'.

This time it's Joe that's hurt. I don't know as much about his business as I do about Frankie's. He was always doin' business though. I'd ask him, 'Joe, you gonna show me how to toss that football as good as you today? I wanna be good as you when I get to high school.' Joe always says, 'Little brother, you know I gots to take care of business tonight. We'll try to hook up this weekend, OK? I promise man. I'll even take you to Mickey D's for lunch, OK? See you later little brother. Peace' Then Joe would make those bunny ears with his fingers. He was always doin' that. I don't know why.

Some woman run in an' took Mama's place yellin' at the doctors. She was really makin' some noise about her little kid. Some man was runnin' behind her with the kid in his arms. The kid was bleeding a lot and he had his eyes closed and his mouth was hangin' open like he was sleepin'. There was a cop askin' the man some questions. I heard the pig, that's what Frankie always calls the cops, say 'So, you and your wife were walking out of the ice cream store with your son and then you heard the shots?' The man's cryin' now and he shakes his head yeah. The pig asks, 'Did you attempt to take cover?' The woman turns around, still yellin' but now at the cop and says, 'Of course we tried to take cover. Some bastard yells that he'll get some other bastard named Joe for taking out his girl and then my son is shot in the stomach!'

I don't like lookin' at that kid asleep like that. It's spooky 'cause he's about my age. Mama sees the kid too and she looks scared and then looks at me. I smile to her bye she looks so sad, I stop. She goes back to walkin' and prayin' so I get up and go over to where they took the man with the hole in his head. A man in green comes out and goes over to Mama. Nobody was lookin' at me, so I look in the room to try and see the face of the man with the hold in his head. I'm kinda surprised 'cause for the first time ever the people in green clothes are still. They are movin' real slow now movin' around doing doctor stuff. I hear somebody screamin' real loud and I know it's my Mama. The green people are movin' slow now, but they still don't see me. I get all the way in and sit down in the corner. All of the people go out 'cept for one lady. The man with the hole in his head is lookin' at me. His eyes are open. Them's Joe's eyes. The lady in the green clothes walks over to Joe and then she sorta' jumps when she sees me in the corner. 'He's going to sleep now,' she says to me. 'He's going to sleep for a long time,' She makes bunny ears with her fingers. She puts them on Joe and makes his eyes closed. 'Maybe he'll find,' she says, 'peace.'

Fr. Matthew McSorley

Red, Yellow, and White

Tying those golden strings
Round the stems,
With gentle fingers,
You enwrap our coleus
In your tender caring.

“Thrive,”

you whisper,
and

The gay leaves
laugh and romp
in the sunlight.

Pity that such

Beauty

soon

will

fade,

die.

Chris Sabatini

Independence Day

Today every fiber-optic strand of my soul is screaming
out in complacent silence “I don’t need you!”
I fought this battle to win my solitude and the
tearing down of all around me left me alone.

I’m drinking coffee out of a mug that has
printed on the side of it
a prayer for serenity
But if you turn the mug over and look at
the bottom you can clearly read the words
‘made in china’.

I can’t think of a place farther from serenity
and I think to myself,
“This is exactly where I’m at.”

5/19/96

1.

Lying in bed listless and lazy
My face pressed against the pillow
I feel the weight and the world
Pressing me down.
But when I walk I can walk for miles
And I feel the earth rotating beneath my feet
And I have thoughts of moving on.
I'm thinking now of now.

2.

The dog rises excitedly to greet me
Moments later to collapse again on
The cold tiles,
To await once again the excitement
Of an entrance.

3.

I live on Byron avenue and that's
Not completely inappropriate
It is very dark. The two
Streetlights do not seem very serious
Or very sure of themselves and
Are nearly crushed by the darkness.
I forgot that it was this dark and
Imagined it lighter
(But I'm glad to know).

The Bear

is angry today, tearing down
my house, halving whole trees
with one swipe, my only safety
knowledge of his unknowing ways.
Later he will amble, sniffing curiously,
through the wreckage, the mood,
for now, past. I have lived
with him all my life, though
he'd driven off family, friends, a wife,
who, though first impressed,
grew anxious in his proximity,
moved to a town or someplace
else where they say the bear's
been tamed. There, it is said,
is happiness beyond this looming
shadow, his great shouts,
his foolish rolling about
in springlighted meadows,
a daisy stuck to his snout,
the strange winter moons
that reveal the delicate plume
of his breath just holding out
beneath the cold, pure, furrowed white.
There, they say, one can make plans,
rest assured, look confidently to the future.
Of course I have no affection
for him, of the scars he's taught
my body to make. The only
certainty is that he will some day
kill me. But if I ever awake
without knowing he's near,
only then can the fear come and take me.

Russell Fowler

Art

The night rain catches
the early sun and glistens
in the trees. It is the picture
they all wish they had painted.
How lovely death goes riding.

The shadows slide from
West to East, slowly shifting
the look of things. The
picture's never quite the same,
the place unrecognizable.
How lovely death goes riding.

May the brush fall short
in final stroke, all perfect
scenes brought forth at last,
before the artist turns his back,
and lovely death goes riding.

In that small quantity of the day
Between the unseen change of guard
We carried your pint of ashes,
Mother,
Up the unknown hill at arlington,

We could hear your clarion lilies
From your neat training borders far away by sunrise,
And we knew your stitches, like optical fiber--
Your papers== in the furrows of Untold uniforms
Would go on transmitting your papers,

Pulsing from arlington your memorial myth:
It is reported that

**A full thousand diplomacies
Had wiped their feet on the treaty of
This remarkable woman's front mat, yet
All traces disappeared in the laundry.
Without an eye's witness,
Unmarked by ceremony.**

And we knew that your greatness had wafted from
All your teakettled regiments of winter afternoons,
Where you always held,
Encamped outside urban zones,

And your address of rallies had flashed your words
In the rhetoric of refrigerator doors;
We knew then you would go to immaculate arlington where
Shots pierce the air and heal it up again.

At that appointed 0-hundred hour, a generation of commissioned
ushers
Stood, without a charge when they were to carry you
Through open-hinged doors in a single hand,
But you swept through on your own
Still persisting, presiding over an emptying parking lot
in full colorless dress.

So in that brass-buttoned box of an hour we
Lost your ashes-- on some hill--
No trouble, Mother, at
arlington where it-- and you-- grow wild.

Streets now eerily silent
 A remembrance of cries and moans
 Heard tangled in the breeze
 Haunting memories are dancing in nightmares
 Lives blown apart. Frag-
 ments of fam lies wander aimlessly
 in a daze. Father and son sit a-
 lone at a break fast table. Once
 a swing set
 was occupied
 by two sis ters. Now one is
 left standing still. A
 grandmother
 prays on a park bench near her
 granddaughter's grave. A
 breathless baby lies limp
 in the arms of a rescue worker.
 Digging through debris.
 Searching for answers.

human heinous, heartless a by numbed City Oklahoma

Intangible Inkling

I dip my pen into the well of dreams and the letters
 d
 r
 i
 p onto the barren paper letting it drink every word
 Ideas surging within me
 My hand cannot write fast enough
 Then before my fingers can grasp the thought
 It dissipates in the breeze
 With a careless laugh, gone forever.

Matt Memrick

"These walls are paper-thin?"

If I say this again, they will hear.
It's such a vague statement here, though.
I don't know if they care or understand,
But they will hear.

They keep up with my daily activities and the ideas I want to express
They want to do what is best for me here.
They try to keep me out of places where I want to learn.
They hide in shadows, to keep track of my shadow.

There are times when I hear their steps. And
There are times when I can't do anything but hear their steps.

I cannot help fearing their plot to kill my thoughts and spirit in the next
room.

Maybe, I can save my thoughts, my spirit...
I cannot move or breathe for fear that I will miss their conversations...
If they choose to speak.

Then I will cling to every word.
"These walls are paper-thin."

The Cleansing

As I sat quietly reading a book
A frigid wind knocked on my window pane
I lifted the sash and saw from my nook
Ominous clouds approach calling my name
Outside, the rolling hills covered with grass
Whipped to and fro like a turbulent sea
The sky suddenly darkened, lightning flashed
The rain felt like small pebbles thrown at me
I ran farther in the violent storm
The rain came harder, my soul felt revived
True feelings rushed out of my heart, I mourned
Finally for a death, now I feel alive
Remembrance of a very long life
Is in the end worth all including strife.

"What the World's About"

The blind night was moonless,
No evil spirits were out.
Therefore, the asylum was loonless
And that is what the world is about.

Ben Hamrick

For Melissa

You took the toaster when you went
You never paid your half of the rent
You took the spices from the rack
But you don't have to put them back
'Cause in your haste on Halloween
You left your camera on the bed
Where we played roles in black and white
You left a roll of black-and-white
I set the time and thought of you
And put the lens up to my head
I took a photograph for you
What comes out grey is really red

So are you happy now?

I smashed your pumpkin on the porch
The candle flickered at my feet
As goblins flew across the moon
The children peered into the room
A cowboy shivered on the porch
And Cinderella checked her watch
A hobo waited in the street
An angel whispered trick-or-treat
But what was I supposed to do
But sit there in the dark
I was amazed to think that you
Could take the candy with you too

So are you happy now?

I've sat all night, and now it's dawn

And I cannot believe my eyes
There's garbage strewn across the lawn
Where we once stared up at the sky
And streams of paper fill the tree
That hovered over you and me
And shaving cream covers the car
That we picked up from David's store
And though I know it's hard to tell
I hope that what's-his-name treats you well
I still maintain that he's a bum
But it's your money have some fun

And are you happy now?

And you always asked why I had not
Written you a line or two
Since that's the one thing I regret
I dedicate this one to you

So are you happy now?
Are you?

Dr. Robert A. Preston

Three times a week for 25 years I played racquetball. Therefore, I never had to jog, ride a bicycle, lift weights, climb mountains, swim, or take long walks.

For reasons too painful to explain, after coming here I stopped playing racquetball. Six months and too many pounds later I realized that I had to get back to regular exercise, so I joined the East Gaston YMCA in Belmont.

Now the Y in Belmont, a temporary facility, is a rather spartan place. No showers, sauna, swimming pool, racquetball court, or much else. But there is a room full of exercise equipment, all of which was new and strange to me.

First, you must understand that racquetball is a game played in a small, enclosed room. In other words, it is done in private. Just you and your opponent. No onlookers.

Now I had to walk into a brightly lighted room, full of other people, and with mirrors all over the place. Why all the mirrors? I had no idea, but they seem essential to the ambience of exercise rooms. Given the way we all were dressed, it would seem that mirrors would be the last thing wanted. In fact, if it was up to me, I would board up the windows as well.

Then there is the electronic exercise equipment. State of the art, I am sure. Had the members of the Spanish Inquisition had some of this stuff, heretics would have recanted in short order.

My first encounter was with a treadmill. There on the front of the thing was a digital device on which you could set speed and it would keep time for you, report calories burned and record distance.

Twenty minutes seemed to be a reasonable length of time. Never before in my life had I discovered how long twenty minutes really was. After three minutes I was beginning to wonder just how reasonable twenty minutes was. Then I figured that if I walked faster the clock would also move faster. No way. In fact, the opposite. The faster I walked, the slower time moved. Each minute on the digital readout now seemed several minutes in length.

After I had walked for what seemed to be an hour, the clock had recorded ten minutes. But I was determined to persevere, buoyed by the knowledge that twenty minutes on this machine would surely burn off at least ten thousand calories. You can imagine the suicidal urge that swept over me when, at the end of my twenty minutes, I pressed the dial that

over me when, at the end of twenty minutes, I pressed the dial that recorded calories burned. It showed eighty-two. That is equivalent to two french-fries.

I next challenged the stepmaster, which is the same as the treadmill except you are climbing stairs. I knew this would be a piece of cake because there was a petite young lady on one who had been there when I came in and was still treading away. In fact, she had not yet worked up sweat and was even reading a magazine. I set the dial for 20 minutes and after two, the pains, began moving up my calves to my thighs. I glanced over at the young lady's digital recorder and, if my calculations were correct, she was climbing past the 93rd floor of the empire statebuilding and was not breathing hard yet.

By this time a ring of pain circled my hips and my breath was coming in short gasps. She glanced up from her magazine, smiled sweetly and said: "Getting a good workout, aren't you?" I would have given some witty answer, had I been able to speak at all.

After five minutes I knew that cardiac arrest was not far away and that prudence dictated some alternative device of torture to this one.

The next machine that I chose has to be the most diabolical of them all. It is the Nordictrak. I've seen it advertised on TV with a slim, trim model effortlessly trudging away, all the while smiling into the camera and pulling a rope connected to a pulley in rhythm with her trudging.

Walking on this machine is roughly equivalent to wearing snowshoes while walking in six inches of mud. It is said that twenty minutes a day on this machine is all the exercise you need. That is correct. If you can do twenty minutes on the Nordictrak you are a perfect specimen of the healthy human being.

My estimate is that after six months of practice, I should be able to spend ten minutes walking through the mud. In six more months, I will be able to walk through the mud and perhaps not rhythmically, pull the rope through the pulley at the same time. And if I do not cripple myself first, maybe in a year I will make it the full twenty minutes.

I think twenty minutes on that contraption burns up about 100 calories or three french fries.

Printed originally in the **Gaston Gazette**.

64 Shades

her harrowing head despondantly drifts
alone
in a soda shop shake cool smooth,
as a quarter slips in and feeds the
greedy needs of the creedfilled jukebox.
desperately randomly
she punches Life in(to) the numbers on
the hollow-dreamed healing machine's
stolid face/crust/guard/Bible.

and a skatman from that skatland
of careless chords and jazzy overlords
slurs subtle slinking rhymes that
flow like the wind-bent keen reeds which
bleed peace and ultimately hide our
minds for their goals,
from parole,
from our own grassy knoll,
or any other thought of Ken and Barbie.

But the girl doesn't know this hide and seek-
she only plays hopscotch - a game where she/all
dares to leap Life from square to square,
dime to dime crime to crime,
trash to trash ash to ash
with the nonchalance of a child
scribbleing crayon Crosses

Carson Poe
In the Nose of Belfast

tiny hairs,
tickling
terrorist
trigger-
fingers,
target their touch at the
tense torso of time bombs,
trusting this trite, yet
tasty tryst of tender turmoil
to take on
the tedious
task of
tainting
trained
troops
and
tenaciously
teaching
that it
takes
too much
to tame
tears.

amalgram?

ardent sleep
awakes with
arms numb
apparently
no circulation or
arousal
among limbs
arched and open-
almost armor
around imaginary
and often empty
adversaries in love,
of love- the aquamarine
and azurite that
always advances into
an amorous array of
assumed aspirations.

Mary Ellen Weir

Justine Shine Dies at the Shelter

they say poetry is the unseen life
of jumping off
of twirling plumes abandoned thinking

of comets' blasting flashes. and delight
that dims so firmly
we swear it was never here

never been here, never never
the way clouds forget our eyes
or mists hide a barnfull meadow.

but there is always,
always as strong as the nevers
some hidden moment that can lightning a noon--
and how we startle then:
snap our necks
jump
and feel some glorious wordsong trek our gut

I knew a poet, once.
she spent her life, like Barrett Browning's
Marian Erle,
seeing "sunsets full of grace/ from pothouse windows"
she never wrote a poem
but in dying, her body dissolved to nothing--
think of our amazement--
when from such decay

a flash ignited

splattering, gathering
to immense blast
her last utterance,
a poem that sang

straight up the crazy stars

The *Agora* is published by students every spring at Belmont Abbey College. For next year, submissions of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, plays, and pen-and-ink will be accepted between September and January. Selections will be made in February with notification of acceptance in April.

Works must be submitted in typed duplicate. A cover sheet containing name, address, telephone number, and a brief biographical profile along with the names of your submissions (or, if untitled, the opening line of the work or a brief description of the subject) must be included. The limitations of the submissions are at a maximum of five poems, two short stories, plays, etc. up to five pages each, and five pen and-ink drawings. Submissions not meeting these requirements **will not be accepted.**

Beginning next year, the Jean S. Moore Award will be awarded by the editorial board to the top submission. The winning entry will receive a cash prize of fifty dollars and be recognized in *Agora*. Notification of the award will be in March.

To submit work or to ask for more details, write to:

Agora Editor
The Abbey Writing Center
Belmont Abbey College
Belmont, NC 28012-2795

Special Thanks To:
The Abbey English Department
The Abbey Writing Center
Debbie Estes
Melodie Land
Meghan Etkorn
Ms. Elaine Varn
Dr. Lynn Varn
Tim Yetsina