

Agora



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

Agora

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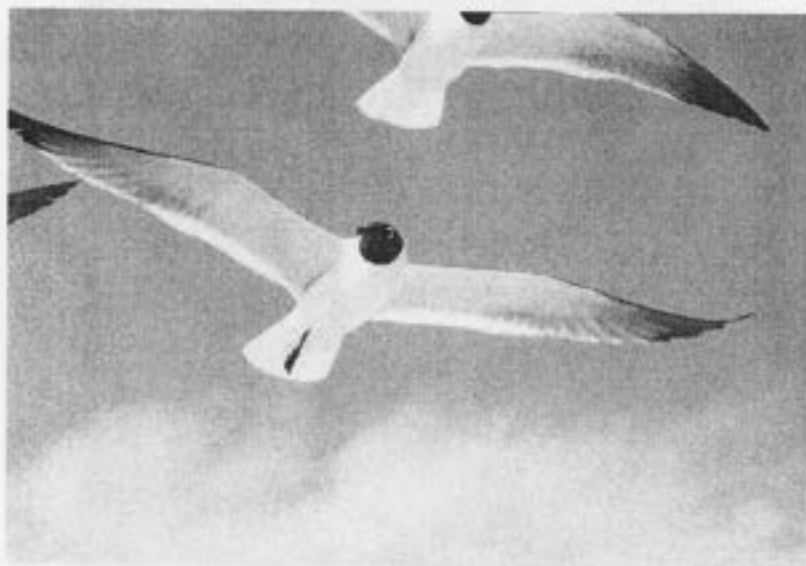
* Winner of the Jean S. Moore Award

** Winner of the Agora Art & Photography Award

Let Us

Lettuce go.
Lettuce leaf.
Lettuce be gone.
Dismiss us.
We don't want to be here.

- Ann Cook



Seagulls at Flight
- Leslie Christiansen

Prayer Circle

The singing-bowls CD
massages me
back to my native shape
as round pillar of perfect sound.

In relation to others, sweet resonant chords,
intersecting circles of Om –
but for Regina coughing,
Janet praying to stave off
the loss of her last good eye...

I invite golden light
to envelope our delicate
bodied spirits, spirited bodies,
pillars of shifting spectrum
and tremulous song.

How do singing strings metamorphose
to lumps and clots of solid stuff
subject to mortal ills,
called to – but rarely reaching –
celestial harmony?

- Sr. Jane Russell



Weeping Willow
- Leslie Christiansen

Song of a Smug Millionaire

I celebrate my money, and sing of my money
And what I assume, you shall assume
For every dollar belonging to me...does not belong to you

I loaf and delight my soul
I invest and digest at my ease drinking daiquiri in frosted glass

My wealth, every penny of my currency, form'd from this Mint, this Treasury,
Stored here in Banks founded here, by Presidents the same, and their Presidents the same
I, now climbing to social prestige, in perfect health begin,
Hoping my shares decrease not till death...

- With Apologies to Walt Whitman

- Emily Roblets



Red tail hawk sitting on the fence
- Peter Lodge

Like the hard-fab dices...

...the hard-fab dices...

...the hard-fab dices...



Bare Beauty
- Stephanie Schwartz

Like the hard-tack desert I rise...

1.

Like the hard-tack desert I rise
to yet another dusty dawn.
I am a ceramic plated giant
crunching the dirt of
the cradle beneath
the tires of my
machine gun masta'don
motorcar while I monitor
the missed hopes of
a hapless haggard people
who know not joy, nor peace,
nor quiet, nor why I am there.
And I cannot explain why...
those words in their words
are not my words... I own:
get down
shut up
stop or
...
and in my own words,
I thunderly murmur,
"Take me home,
deliver me from evil,
so help me, whoever's God."

2.

"I have never seen
a [corpse] feel sorry
for [himself]."
I stand in the dust
with the sand drops
in my eyes and on my face
while aching
with each breath,
each beat of my heart,
and stare solidly at
the once-person laying loosely
before my long solid shadow.
I squeeze my soul
and soldiering tool closer into me.
The day is ending...
The "day" has just begun.
Many steps to go
but I -
I do not feel
sorry for myself.

- Michael Wade



Fishing at Sunrise
- Leslie Christiansen

Home

"This is your new roommate, Maria Fraioli."

Sadie peered around the matron to get a glimpse of who she would be living with. Maria was short...barely five feet tall, yet stocky and strong looking. Her eyes were dark brown; so dark, they could have been mistaken for black. Sadie wasn't sure she liked the spark of defiance that flashed within those eyes. Defiance was frowned upon in this place.

Before she had any more time to study the little woman, Maria had crossed the room and grabbed Sadie's hand with her own two small ones. "I am very, very pleased to meet you," she said with a hint of an accent that Sadie couldn't quite place.

In spite of herself, Sadie smiled back. The woman's high spirits were practically contagious. "I'm Sadie. Sadie Hampton. I'm glad to meet you too."

The matron smiled the bright, pasted-on smile that belongs to all matrons. "I'll just let you two get to know each other. Dinner is at 6:30." And she briskly turned out of the room to some other duty, closing the flimsy wooden door behind her.

An awkward pause sprang up between the two women. Sadie glanced at the clock by her bed. It was 1:56. "Is this your first time in a Home?" she asked.

"Yes..." replied Maria, clearly wanting to say more, but not sure of how to proceed.

"I thought so...you look very young."

More silence.

"Here...let me help you unpack."

As they arranged Maria's few belongings, they tried to make some small talk to fill the silence. It quickly fizzled out, leaving the silence even more awkward than before. Soon, Sadie came across a framed photo of a grinning boy. "What a darling boy! Is he your grandchild?"

"My great-grandchild," Maria answered with no little pride.

At this, Sadie did a double-take. "Good heavens! He must be at least...ten years old!"

Maria smiled. "Yes...I come from an old family. We still marry fairly young. I married my husband when I was sixteen, my daughter was born by the time I was seventeen, and that is her grandchild."

Sadie scrutinized the picture, staring hungrily at the young face beaming out of the frame. "He looks so happy...so loved."

Maria noticed the longing in Sadie's voice. "Do you have grandchildren?"

Sadie shook her head. "No...only one ungrateful son who had a vasectomy the minute he turned eighteen. He hates children, and said he'd be damned if he were to spawn any more," she spat bitterly. Another glance at the clock told her it was now 2:26.

Maria nodded in sympathy. "It's a pity that the old values are dying out. When I was a young girl, children were seen as blessings and having a family was the highest honor an adult could have. Now it's all about personal success, and children are seen as a burden."

Smiling wryly, Sadie said, "He never did try to support me. My husband was lucky enough to die young. Jonathan...that's my son, didn't even wait for me to hit eighty. The day I turned seventy he signed the papers that forced me to retire from teaching and put me in a Home. It wasn't as nice as this one though." She fell silent and glanced around the room...2:27.

Maria shook her head in disbelief. "Oh, it was so different for me. My sons and daughters and even grandchildren took turns letting me live with them. Finally, when I turned eighty and the government came to take me, they all fought to keep me out of a Home. They filed waiver after waiver, but eventually we ran out of options and excuses. Why won't they let me live with my family? They want me...they don't see me as a burden...I hate this new government."

Sadie nodded. "Under the old one, I could have supported myself. When they took away money, they took away my future. Still... I suppose it is for the best. Most people would have been without care or finances under the old government. Maybe I just need to get used to it..."

"Pah! It is a stupid system...an evil system! Keep the people happy by giving them a free high-quality education and a guaranteed job. Take away money, give them as much food, shelter and clothing as they need...lure them into complacency. Then, when they are old and useless and can't fight you, pluck them up and shut them away until they die. My family is only allowed to visit me for an hour a week! How can I live with that?"

I lived with my grandparents until the day they died. I cared for my mother until my sister took over. All my life I have expected to live with my family until I die. And they have robbed me of that!"

As Maria dissolved into tears and streams of foreign curses that she didn't understand, Sadie awkwardly wrapped her arms around her and rocked her back and forth. Sadie found herself murmuring calming sounds and words, as if she were comforting a small child after a bad dream. She felt the old ache in her womb and heard the hated words of the doctors, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Hampton. Delivering your son tore your uterus so badly that more children are just not possible."

Maria was still crying. Sadie gave her a squeeze and guided her to her bed. As she tucked the little old woman in, Sadie felt some tears of her own fall. She remembered tucking Jonathan in like this. Perhaps she shouldn't have doted on him so much. He was an only child, the only child she would ever have. When her husband committed suicide, he had become the only family she had. She had spoiled him, guarded him, loved him to the point of smothering him. He had grown selfish and shallow, and she knew that she was largely to blame for the shell of a man he had become. She still loved him, in spite of all the wrongs he had inflicted upon her. But wasn't that just the story of motherhood?

Lying down on her own bed, she felt a twinge of envy towards Maria. She had many children, and they all loved her and wanted her. She wondered what that would feel like. Would she feel the same pain Maria was feeling now? Sadie thought that she would prefer the pain of separation to the pain of utter loneliness she felt now.

She glanced at her clock. The softly glowing numbers read 3:47. Maria's sobs had reduced themselves to sniffles. Sadie heard her fumble for her box of tissues and the following honks and snorts as she blew her nose. "The first few days are always the hardest. You'll adjust soon, don't worry," she heard herself say.

Another snuffle. "Yes...thank you. I'm so sorry. I don't...I don't know what came over me."

Sadie sat up on her bed. "I...my son...he never comes to visit me. If you would like...I will give you my visiting hour."

Maria lifted her head off her pillow. "You can do that?"

Sadie shrugged. "Well, we could just say that your family is visiting me. You can have anyone present at your visiting hour, and I would just say that I wish for you to be there. I'm sure the matrons will know what we are doing, but they are fairly lenient in that respect. I suspect it's because they know that they will be in a Home one day too."

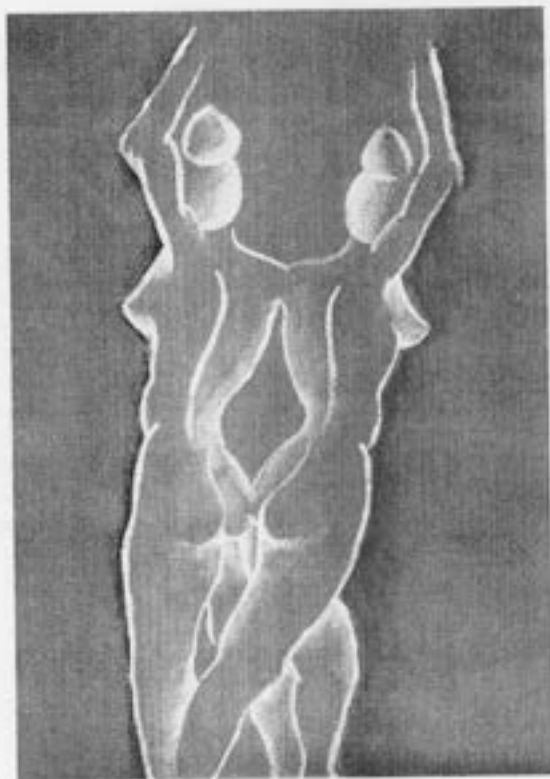
Maria was speechless for a few moments. Then she got up and sat down next to Sadie on her bed, clasping her in a fierce hug. She choked out, "You are a saint! You will be there for both visiting hours. My family will be your family. They will call you 'Aunt Sadie' and love you as one of our own. Thank you...thank you so much..." and she dissolved into sobs again.

Sadie once again found herself comforting Maria, but this time she was sobbing herself. "I...I would be honored. You...you have no idea...what this means to me."

Finally, both women finished crying. Maria left to find the bathroom and wash her face before dinner. Sadie was left alone in the room, contemplating what had just happened. She glanced at her clock again. It was now 4:12. At last, she thought.

She picked up the phone beside her bed and dialed the number she knew by heart. After a few rings, he picked up the phone. "Jonathan? It's me dear...Mom. I know you're busy...I just called to wish you a Happy Birthday. And to tell you that I love you."

- Amanda Coates



The Split
- Anthony Flora

The Miracle of Water

The silence of the ocean separates us from the noise of the city –
like a cloud colliding with a mountain –
or a raindrop absorbed by the orange glow of the sun –

The ocean speaks to us in truth – and –
throughout our lives – we long to know the truth –
The mysteries of daydream
sand and the meditative blue
of our conscience.

The red night sky and the whisper of the wind
echoes beneath the high places of our hearts –
the Palmetto sings to the pelican notes of creation as we
ponder our lonely daydreams and pensive realities of liquid utopia –

The blood of angels cleanses the salted deep –
the souls of purgatory drink moon water
and pray for peace within the chaotic world of a divided sea –

Come to my room and see the mermaids play –
Come to my room and watch the boils of hate separate from my
insensitive body –
Come to my room and observe my barter with death –
and follow the light of my innocence and overpowering joy –
Listen to the waters of contemplation
and ease your appetite with the nourishment of celestial rain –

- Matthew Hamilton

Concerning Emily

Maybe she never wanted to be a recluse,
But one thing led to another –
A failed romance, heartbreak, depression –
And simply took her out for awhile,
Caused her to retreat, stop eating, talking,
Going to church with the rest of them.
They, knowing how sensitive she was,
How already inward and private, may
Have left her alone, not understanding
Their fantastic child, the sister, niece,
The aunt.

Dinner discreetly left outside her room,
And replaced sometime later,
Partly eaten.

A wraith in white standing at a window,
Or slipping out at dawn
By the kitchen door,

Macbeth learned the secret, the murderer knew,
Too far in blood at the end to make
Going back worth the journey,
As hard to go back as go on, no matter
What the doom. And Emily, proud,
Self-possessed, unable to tell them how
She, after being left alone so long,
Wanted one day to ride in the carriage
With them to town, wanted at times,
So very badly, to sit with them at table
For the evening meal.

- Rebecca Munro



Alice
- Liz Dauville



Self Portrait
- Ted Cooke

Let Suffer the Children

I am convinced those smiling clods
That like to say they are happy
Give nothing more than vacant nods
And depend upon their Pappy.

Their Pappy is the TV set.
Their Mommy gives them morphine milk.
The patient Son they've never met
Wears burlap sacks instead of silk.

Why does the Son insist to itch?
Just take three pills and ease your pain.
He's a stubborn Son of a bitch
Using His heart and not His brain.

Who is the Deity of soul
That clouds these children's feeble minds
And leaves them with an empty whole?
Is suffering considered kind?

When you do hurt He gives you wood
And nails you in to feel relief
He pats your back. He calls you good.
Now you have shown Him your belief.

But every John and ever Jane
Would rather die than feel their pain.
They'll take their pills to make them sane
And laugh and play in acid rain.
Just as the Son begins His reign
Their heavy drugs will start to wane
And they'll pray to God for death!

- Andrew Achter

Marian Devotion

Each May one can observe a line of black
figures descend a set of concrete steps –
lush green flora on either side – to
Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto –

Small rocks yield to prayerful souls –
Angels hover over the strong – granite structure – their wings
produce a gentle breeze – detaching magnolia leaves –
the leaves fall quietly to the ground – adding space
for new life – reassuring the faithful of the
Resurrection –

A young raven joins the assembly – He sits upon the Iron Gate –
guarding against the evil green specters that creep along side the holy cave –
attempting to smother the queen of heaven –
The altar weeps –
crimson tide nourishes tainted spirits –

A trail of crushed souls –
Bronze figures of the Christ adorn weathered stones –
Rhododendrons bloom bright – pink and white –
along the Via Crucis –
petals fall tenderly on God's lacerated body –
the sound of the whip – the taste and smell of spit and torn flesh –
salty and wet –
dripping down tense muscles – mixing with divine tears –
Tulips drop from the poplar tree –
Irises bleed purple dye –
royal blood baptizes crumpled earth –
Regina Coeli listens to the prayers of kneeling monks.

- Matthew Hamilton

Curiosity



Curiosity
- Amanda Stanek



Embryonic
- Ted Cooke

Awakening to Shakespeare

Cindy strolled into class like a faithful train,
Steam wafting up from her herbal tea,
Sunglasses askew on the top of her head,
Five minutes into her teacher's discussion.

The excited voice of her young professor
Belting out quotes from some Shakespeare play
Distracted her from her tranquil mood,
So she closed her eyes to catch some z's.

Like the mindless cows that chew their cud,
Her classmates munched on their Carefree gum
Creating a peaceful melody
Inducing her into a heavy sleep.

"He must be God's Scourge and Minister"
Screamed the passionate thespian,
Involuntarily jerking her knee
Cindy's lap began to fill with tea.

"Damn it" she shouted to the heavens.
"Precisely!" reflected Dr. Tate
Not seeing Cindy's scalded lap.
"Why must this be his fate?"

- Andrew Achter



Untamed Spirit
- Stephanie Schwartz

Beach Mist

It is said we are borne from the ocean –
Maybe that is why we are so rapt by it –
Deep within the metallic blue of salty mist and white foam –
can be found clues to the mysteries of life and the divine –
but do we pay close attention to these clues – subtle indications of God's love for us?

Every year we travel to the beach – load up our car or truck with gadgets of every kind –
shovels – buckets – floats – masks – snorkels – and go in search of buried treasure
and skeletons of pirates who roamed the seas long ago in their wooden dragons –

We walk down to the water with our lounge chairs and ice chests full of Coke and wine
coolers – lather ourselves in fruity scents of sun tan lotion
and sit back with a good book and watch our children make drip castles and dig up
periwinkles and sand crabs –

We watch wind socks dance on boardwalks and dream a fisherman's dream of grilled
swordfish and crab dip and boiled shrimp –
We dream of salt water restaurants where the beer never runs dry and the cigarette smoke
fills the bar with Turkish Blend and Camel Lights –
where billiards crack at the sound of a money changer –
where blonde haired girls flirt with old men sipping on gin and tonics –
where the juke box plays classic rock and country music –
where men scuff their boots on the wooden floor and try to impress the ladies with their
rubber leg moves and limber vibrations –

Take heed to the mysteries of the salty deep –
And don't bother yourself with external delights –
Look beyond the horizon and follow the golden road of the sun toward the eternal bliss
of God and the celestial realities of baffling apparitions of saints beneath the cool and
blue abyss –
the secret lives of angels – the rolling thunder of a hurricane –
seagulls circling a group of children carrying bags full of bread crust – sand pipers
pecking at crushed shells and searching for insects – a glimpse of dolphins swimming
close to shore – sail boats two stepping with the wind in a romantic dance of man and
nature searching one another's souls amidst a chaotic spray of foam – salt – and heat –
speak to our hearts of heaven and the love found in the passing moments of the hypnotic
reverie of breaking waves and refreshing rain –

- Matthew Hamilton



Brooding on my heavy ill
- Ted Cooke

About the Contributors

Andrew Achter is a junior at BAC.

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Awards

Jean S. Moore Award

The Jean S. Moore 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 of twenty-five dollars. This year's award was given to Andrew Achter for his poem, "Let Suffer the Children." This award represents top submission 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 the *Agora* and a cash prize of twenty-five dollars. This year's award was given to Caitlin McGinnis for her picture, "Prague." This award represents top submission as judged by the editorial staff and is based on creativity and originality.

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December Sunset
- Ben Safranski

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