**The Echoes of Siracusa**

Bruce E. Whitacre

We wait impatiently at the mouth

of the cave, nailed to our places

by the cacophony of a school tour

yelping like seals inside.

Their piercing squeals echo

and amplify against the high stone walls

in a monstrous roar until they re-emerge at last

and the menace of their shrieks

dissolves into the blue Sicilian sky.

Warily we now enter the cavern

carved by Athenian prisoners of the Peloponnese War.

The soaring walls bear the etchings

of pick marks made more than two millennia ago.

The cream of Athens,

students of Socrates and Plato,

audience of Aeschylus,

slaved here

at the command of Tyrant Dionysius

leaving this hollowed void,

with its sonic trick.

For, lounging outside thirty meters above,

the Tyrant could simply tilt his ear to a cleft

and their mysteries and complicities

would filter up from where they lay,

weakened, homesick, and starving.

No one rebelled.

No one escaped.

Hunger, cold and work

relieved him of killing them in

this, their sarcophagus.

Centuries later Caravaggio would giggle

and name it “The Ear of Dionysius.”

He, too, and those children earlier, heard

the deep silence under the echo

of our reverberating footsteps,

the sound of all our captivities.

Like the children before us, like the fugitive painter,

like Athens’ best who still shiver

on this time warp of a damp floor

we open our throats and cry out against oblivion.