

# TRI LL UM

2025

Glenville State University's

# Trillium

Issue 46, 2025

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The *Trillium* is the literary and visual arts publication of the Glenville State University Department of Language & Literature. The *Trillium* welcomes submissions and correspondence from Glenville State University students, alumni, faculty, and staff, and our extended creative community.

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Trinity Brown, Literary Staff

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## Editors' Notes

The *Trillium* is the first literary work in which I have been able to contribute, much alone serve as the lead literary editor. The experience as head editor helped me in developing editing, proofreading, and collaboration skills. I am grateful to Dr. Jonathan Minton and Glenville State University for offering me this opportunity to make this journey and have an experience that I will not forget.

I would also like to share some thoughts from the literary staff.

**Jacob Bonds** shared that it was beyond interesting to see the various ways that people constructed their poems. Everyone dug into their very depths of being and retrieved many truths then creatively conveyed what they found. It was a great privilege to edit these poems.

**Trinity Brown** shared that working on this year's *Trillium* has been an honor. To read and learn about everyone's personal experiences and seeing how these experiences are presented so beautifully lights a flame in her heart. She hopes to edit more in the future for the *Trillium* and experience this once more.

**Chyna Nguyen** shared that she enjoyed reading different works from people who submitted prose. It was a learning experience because she learned a lot about working with and editing other people's work. She enjoyed collaborating with the team.

**-Abby Hudson, Literary Editor**

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## Expiring

### *Withholding*

She sat there on her lilac sheets, suppressing the shocking  
Feelings of betrayal that occurred. Almost lobotomized

in the way her brain tried to make excuses. Rejection held onto  
the way she viewed his horrific decision. Like he was pulled

right out of the *After* series. In a bright fantasy  
with her black-haired addict, questioning if it was real.

And it was, at least, for her. The trickery caught  
between two hearts, she would only figure out too late.

As she continued to fool her intelligent, proclaimed self,  
she lies on the overstuffed bed, resisting all her heart's screams.

For the thought of it being real, she waits and yearns  
for the sympathetic eye of love to look for her once more.

### *A Journey*

The baby blue sheets have turned to grey and happiness  
is gone. The deep attachment to his rugged soothing voice

is gone. Overtaken by incomprehensible emotions, her soul  
is like that of a "patient etherised upon a table."

If she sees him, her quaking veins are sure to burst.  
She prays that all of the repressed emotions toward

the frigid man she loved would disappear,  
like the way an echo fades away in the furthering

distance. Her whole self, yet whole less, begs, and wonders  
why such a false commitment was granted to her.

She longs for a change and finds herself drawn  
to the nostalgia of being together.

### *The Worst*

The darkness holds her heart in its hand, like the way a flower dries up from drinking no water.

Her neediness is always there but something is new. Desolation, the sense that feels like an expansive void of space.

A real wound being made. A feeling that drowns her in a pool of water until her last breath is at its

very last brink. That void of space open, waiting just for her to fall into. So, she sits in her gloomy state, letting

the blankness of her stare create false imageries on her ceiling. Her face completely soaked

by the hot tears cascading down her pink tinged cheeks. Never knowing a pain that existed to the human heart.

### *Fulfillment*

The romantics tell her that if she loves something, she must let it go. And she loved him. She loved the idea

of him. The idea of having someone to connect with and hold onto for the rest of her life.

In the end, she knew it was all false, all a game. His better treatment was never an option for her.

Advantage taken of her, as if she would always stick around. His damaging knots are what fulfilled the rage

inside his own. She knew what she had to do, she just had to grasp the courage to go through with it.

And following that decision was the first agonizing element, the second is that she again, has to learn how to be alone.

Abby Hudson

## **Mourn, Atherile**

Aetherile, be gentle.  
Cruel fortune, be kind.  
Let the river of chance flow smooth,  
and please, drink deep our praise.

Aetherile, be cruel.  
You of many names, take only your desire.  
Let the agony of the past serve me now,  
our names forgotten, our longing remains.

Something precious was once taken,  
none have mourned like the mother without child

Kaitlyn Warren

## Contemplation

A long walk subsides gently  
as the glow of the golden crescent  
consumes the radiant sky.

Trees wind and curl, cunningly  
as if to devour the countryside, jealous  
of the ether to which it belongs.

They pause for a moment,  
holding their breath,  
to fathom the untouched marvel.

Something's out there—  
below the grinning moon.

Autumn Moyers

## **Notes for Freshmen, from a Senior**

Never forget yourself.  
Stick to what you know is true.  
Friends come and go;  
Take it as a lesson, not a hardship.  
It's okay to ask questions,  
Even if they seem unimportant.  
Talk to your professors;  
They want to teach their students.  
Never let anyone disrespect you.  
Stick to what you know is true.  
There are days when it gets hard,  
Take it day by day.  
Don't forget to breathe; it helps.  
Challenge yourself, step out of your comfort zone.  
Who knows what waits for you?  
Don't wait; do it now.  
And remember,  
Stick to what you know is true.

Wren Yanak

## **My Dear John Letter to Amer Ica**

Amer

ica

I am  
breaking  
up with you

I know.  
It's like  
the 917<sup>th</sup> time  
and always

you crawl back  
head in your hands  
an act  
to make even  
your gymnasts jealous

it's you,  
all showing off  
always showing off  
your stars  
your stripes  
your marching bands

but no –  
this time it's real  
this time  
it isn't me.  
It's you.

Amer

ica

It is so you  
you have broken  
my heart  
again, and again

you make me angry  
with your climate change  
your leaded water  
your filth.

With you.

You have sent  
your women fleeing  
crying in the streets  
scrambling to save  
their daughters  
from the predators –  
from you.

You have sucked  
your daughters dry  
sold their eggs  
for \$1.67 a dozen  
for the price of eggs  
for the price  
of gas  
already \$3.08  
and dropping

You have sent  
a giant  
fuck you  
to our allies  
to the world  
to the planet  
to the galaxy

so, this –  
this is my  
fuck you  
to you

because  
now, I have  
no more  
to give

Majorie Stewart

## Guadalupe Spring

I

the seeds and sleeping  
                                blooms of prickly pears

like pink parched lips  
                                drip dust and pray for rain

II

that day we left the trail  
and climbed a hill  
to follow two coyotes  
chasing game

Melissa Gish

## **I'm Not 21 Anymore**

**(in response to "I'm Not 21" by Brooke Storm; Trillium 2020, pg 14)**

I finally found my coat.

On my knees in the den, searching for every fiber, every ash  
Wedged between the crevices of my lovers cold, cracked, and ridged lips.

My knees, bruised, bloody, and broken were stained from hitting the blistering  
bottom of that pale bosom  
That once welcomed me, my only warmth, my only solace, a forbidden 'nother.  
I can afford cigarettes but refuse to buy them

"They no longer care; you're no longer an angel- just earth-bound, undesired,  
a forgotten favor."

Is it so? When I took off my wings and turned in my halo, the ash on my knees  
wiped clean, my lungs hallow-

No! I still breathe out fog in the most poetic of springs, smothering myself, but  
refusing to leave.

"I'm still here," I scream; society unappeased.

I had to forge a chained carcinogen coat.

Because my constraints are still welded to the wings I returned, but I'm too  
fragile to be weightless, empty, alone.

Popping the stitches from my gaping chest, pockets made of flesh, I scrape the  
floor for any patches left.

Every cherry flicked burned as I stuffed them in deep, warming my soul as I  
shake.

Suffering winter snows with borrowed smoke; why do I still feel so alone?

Brooke Storm

## **Bourbon, Cigarettes, Van Morrison**

*Lake Anna, Virginia*

The wind's picked up, rattling  
half-dead leaves, snapping  
off acorns that clatter through  
branches and thud to the ground.  
Wasps circle the screened-in porch,  
probe corners, and the sky's  
brief flirtation with blue

has passed behind the gray shade  
drawn over hills beyond the lake's far shore.  
Every now and then, a gust caught  
the ceiling fan's wicker paddles,  
and they turn, slowly. It's nearly too  
obvious: Autumn begins in beauty  
and ends with a cold rainstorm

in late November, too dismal  
to mean anything else but winter.  
I'd forgotten how music can shift  
a body into depression like this, how  
memory clings like cigarette smoke  
to a damp sweater. And rain  
begins drilling at the roof. Van

Morrison's given way to only  
that percussion, whiskey's  
flame in my belly. My mother  
no longer speaks, but she grins  
horribly at the nursing home,  
flicks spit those days when she  
fails to recognize me. The wasps

have given up. Eventually, so does the rain.

John Hoppenthaler

## To the Bone

*Amherst, Virginia, 1/21/2022*

The Blue Ridge Mountains are cobalt  
blue today, almost unnaturally so,  
wrapped around the frozen distance.  
Such a beautiful obstacle,  
hazing the air with isoprene

giving this range its color,  
accounting for one third  
of all hydrocarbons released  
into the atmosphere. It's hard to

argue with the appropriateness  
of such blue in our time. A married  
pair of cardinals offer the only other  
hues against drab gray, posted  
there in bare branches to bear witness,

to whistle our story of mutual doom  
into the wind. Yesterday's slush cracks  
under my shoes, and my mother's ashes  
are stored on a shelf in New York,

waiting. We are waiting together  
for the appropriate blue, convenient  
day—my sisters and I—to slide  
her into a Ferncliff mausoleum  
drawer next to our father, who's

had to wait to lie with his wife once more.  
This is the story as my own body  
begins humming its winter song. How cold it is  
outside, everything at the point of breaking.

John Hoppenthaler

## House on Fire

I grew up in a house on fire  
walls cracking, air choked with smoke,  
flames licking at everything I touched.  
I carried that fire with me,  
hot embers smoldering beneath my skin,  
ready to ignite, to burn it all down again.

Every move was the same story:  
another house consumed,  
ash and soot clinging to my hands.  
I thought destruction was all I could bring,  
that I was born to watch everything crumble  
under the weight of flames, I couldn't control.

But I learned to fight fire with fire,  
to stamp out the sparks before they spread.  
I clawed my way out of the smoke,  
taught myself to breathe,  
to build walls that withstand the blaze.

Now, I have a house unscathed by flames

Kaylie Hunter

## Forgiveness

It's something I'm new at  
for so long, I hated you,  
for all you did to me,  
for everything that fell apart  
because of you.

But now,  
I find myself loosening,  
like scraping rust off a seized gear,  
slowly turning,  
slowly working,  
reshaping my life  
the way I want it to be.  
And somehow,  
in this quiet shift,  
I've found room to say it  
I forgive you.

Kaylie Hunter

## **The Best Teachers Expect the Most**

Come.  
Roll gently  
into your pain.  
Allow it

to embrace  
with its every  
yearning.  
Rest in its

pointed jarring.  
Feel it deep  
inside the fissures  
of neck

and fingers.  
Reach for what  
it asks. Touch  
where it leads.

Inhale what  
it wants  
to breathe.  
See the empty.

It's trying,  
this hard  
thing. It's  
really trying.

Patsy Kisner

## Untitled

the day you  
broke up with  
me a firefly  
flew  
into a glass jar

\*

I'm not sure  
what brought us together.  
One umbrella?

KP Giordano

## **Raccoon**

He makes his way through the forest floor,  
And hears a hunter begin to snore.  
He thinks his chance is pretty great,  
To get a snack he can celebrate.  
As he approaches the man, however,  
It becomes apparent this is a flawed endeavor.  
He is a Raccoon, the other, a hunter.  
What an odd time to see one another!  
“This man makes snacks out of creatures like me!”  
The raccoon thought, as he began to flee.  
“What a funny thing,” the raccoon reasoned  
“To be hungry at once, then the next moment seasoned!”

Tobias Bone

## **Deer**

A prancing poof through the field,  
She trots, nervous, afraid to yield,  
As she comes to a crossing. No time to pray.  
She couldn't help but to feel like prey.  
A final thought, the last pump of red-  
With a loud bang, She, the deer, lay dead,  
While the hunter's family rests happily in bed.

Tobias Bone

## Us

Before we met, my life was a prologue  
To calm nights and crazy hearts  
Ours is special  
Loved is what she is and always will be  
Like it was before  
And the life before that

Elizah Davis

## **Christmas List**

Growing up poor, we never had much  
Christmas was a grim time  
Not due to the lack of gifts under the plastic tree that we could barely afford  
It was seeing the pain on my parents face as they could not afford anything again that  
year

Every year before Christmas, our angel would ask for a list  
Always ready to grant our wishes  
Every year, our angel would arrive with a smile unlike any other with gifts in hand  
The bright red lipstick, the curly white hair

This year she asked for a list of what we needed while in the hospital  
All we could choke out was the wish of her getting better  
The wish fell short as our angel is no longer here to grant them  
This Christmas is going to be different without our angel

Tayla Shahid

## Traveling Far

*In memory of Thelma Dellinger*

Traveling far, you never think you may see an autumn leaf  
Falling from an oak tree  
For the last time.

Traveling far, you think your wife will always be in your passenger seat  
While the radio plays quietly in the background,  
Even though neither of you are listening.

You focus on what lies ahead.  
The winding roads,  
The playground where you used to take your children,  
You used to go there as a child too.

This journey. There was something about this journey.  
Traveling far, traveling to her, you held her hand while she released her final breath.  
You accept the fact that she, too, has a journey to make.  
Her next breath will be with the wind, in the clouds, in the sky.

Stephen Tusing and Madeline Tusing-Knight

## **Porch Sitting**

A gold hue falls over the length of the valley,  
an oasis within the mountains of this wilderness.  
Deer spill out of the thick woods  
stumbling forward,  
as if to say there is no threat here.  
A copy of East of Eden rests in my lap,  
the mother doe watches her fawn race back and forth across the clearing.  
A breeze finds its way down the holler,  
rustling the green leaves of the trees that outline the clearing,  
insects hidden in the cracks sing  
the creek weaves in and out like a strange, twisted snake,  
like a sculptor molds wet clay.

Jordyn Henthorn

## Bacchus

*Caravaggio, c. 1596*



The fruit rots away.  
A softening apple,  
a ripening pomegranate,  
splitting open,  
like a fresh wound.  
Its stench, a putrid fog,  
hangs thick in the air.  
Untouched by divine perfection.  
But the wine is still wine to Bacchus,  
who is young always.

Jordyn Henthorn

## **Ginger, 2025**

Starlight and cigarettes  
Flicking ashes from the eaves  
Bundled in the cold winter's night  
Warm hands and red noses and smokey kisses.  
Orange shadows dusted  
over snow covered leaves.

Emotions as high as ourselves, covering and consuming.  
Thoughtless amongst feeling. Amongst friends  
Drowning in the loss of our minds  
Restless and woeful  
*Hungry-*

Amanita Virosa

## **Secular, 2024**

*God, you cry.*

*Lord, you beg.*

Save me from myself, from what you have created.

Bless me with bliss, curse me with stupidity.

*Almighty, you plead- free me from the weight of my soul.*

Take my tongue so that I may not mar my flesh with the evil of my word

Free me from the shackles of my own hands.

The silence, empty.

Void smothering, knowing, teasing.

A blanket of grief, and yet- protection.

Shadows dance across the cave wall. Intense and meaningless  
shadows fighting, clawing as they move and change. A blob of meaning, no man  
can decipher

God sits, in front of the light to the cave. Frantic. Scared,

Scared of what he created.

Watching helplessly as we hang our bodies, bounding them to the stone walls.

A pain of our own creation, our own design. A trap we built

And beg the Gods to save us from

The hurt we feel, the pain we cause, can only ever be ours, be

Human.

Amanita Virosa

## **A Beauty Beyond**

My momma says I look like You.  
A beauty that goes beyond the eyes.  
Made by the one she calls divine.  
Father, Son, and Spirit, a Holy Trinity.  
We're made from his affinity.  
His image shines brightly through every face,  
so that we may know His grace.  
A love that is beyond this place.  
Agape, an unconditional love.  
One filled with peace and patience.  
With joy that does not depend on oneself.  
For we are weak, but He is strong.  
He did what we cannot.  
He came down from Heaven and humbled Himself.  
Becoming a lowly servant for us.  
To be our teacher and savior.  
Breaking the chains of death and sin,  
so that we may know freedom and favor.  
He showed what grace and faith is.  
He suffered and died, yet asked for us to be forgiven.  
The Son of God.  
A sacrifice given, so we may be made right in His sight.  
What beautiful love.  
Agape, which is shared to all.  
A beauty that comes from beyond.

Todra Hall

## Small Steps

Near the banks of Kanawha where I was born  
in the wee hours of a Wednesday morn,  
the rhyme forecast me “full of woe,”  
a baby boomer with far to go,  
in childhood, I liked nature best,  
with love of literature was I blessed,  
Sherlock Holmes, King Arthur and Robin Hood  
would stress the superiority of good.

As evening engaged my captive brain  
with the lonesome wail of coal-laden trains,  
my brother’s homemade radio played  
the popular music of the day;  
I lulled myself softly off to sleep  
by counting imaginary sheep,  
on a pillow resting my drowsy head,  
safe and snug in my trundle bed.

Small feet walked daily to the first grade,  
beginnings of lifetime learning made,  
the kindly teacher imparted pearls  
of wisdom to all the boys and girls;  
we practiced numbers and A-B-C’s,  
loved stories about animals, plants, and bees,  
“fitting in” became the schoolroom trend  
as we took small steps making friends.

In the back yard was a slide and swing  
where daytime fun-time ruled as king,  
butterknife sword and a towel as cape  
outfitted the lad in Superman shape,  
young “A,” a pal, from across the street  
became the competition to beat,  
Mr. “W,” retired, from the house next door  
offered positive approbation and more.

Saturday morning was the best,  
a bacon, pancakes, and television fest,  
Captain Kangaroo, Lassie, and the Lone Ranger,  
entertaining and thwarting danger,  
Sky King, My Friend Flicka, and Romper Room  
populating the late '50's viewing boom,  
heroes always upheld the rule of right  
as the action flickered in black-and-white.

Those carefree days will never come again,  
only memory can travel to where we've been.

John C. Priestley II

## Eternitea

In the gardens full of life and tranquility  
as I take in all its Beauty  
I see a shadow approach me,  
it does not fill me with anxiety.  
It gives me a sense of familiarity,  
it is my dearest friend who approaches me.  
Whenever he gets the chance to stop for tea,  
We take our time and make no haste  
For we both have eternity.  
We sip our cup of tea  
As we drink and discuss merrily.  
We talk about what we have seen throughout our immortality.  
For I am Life, and I have seen all that I have created,  
naïve happiness as I admire Earth's Divinity.  
But as Death reminisces  
I am reminded that beyond the veil of my naivety  
That has the fragility of snowflakes  
That in the shadows of my light  
Hides Earth's cities of Pandæmonium  
Filled with vile creatures  
War, Greed, Wrath, and Famine.  
They disrupt the beauty of my creation,  
To condemn all of humanity  
But I love them with no hesitation  
Because they too are part of my resignation.  
By the end of my dear friend's visit  
I am reminded that our scale is balanced  
that I cannot exist without him,  
but also, he cannot be without me.  
So that is why we meet for tea.

Allison Boggs

## Ignis Fatuus of Phanuel

*Hark!*

In the pursuit of eleutheromania,  
be wary of the perfidiary.  
Those who condemn Belial doggedly,  
yet regarding their peer as “worthless”.

Refusing to break bread with undesirables,  
yet preach of lofty ideals that overshadow sin.  
Come Cicero, preach me about Abaddon,  
while eloquently masquerading as Lucifer.  
With crepitation about salvation,  
making the current life about damnation.  
Their eyes are nothing but an abyss,  
reminiscent of their heart.

O, Messiah, mercy for them,  
for they know not what they do.  
Relinquishing choice and autonomy,  
out of convenience and desperation.  
Donate their coffers to a desolate temple,  
excluding the downtrodden community at large.  
Save the Jeremiads for the end of prayer,  
make them God’s problems instead.

Michael, Raphael, Gabriel...  
what about Archangel Phanuel?  
Repentance unto hope is foundational,  
yet adorned like a hat for seldom occasions.  
With preference of striking fear in the hearts of man,  
instead of teaching compassion, tolerance, and change.  
Is focus on hell truly necessary for motivating change,  
instead of the gentle guiding hand of Chamuel?

Rogues, with nary a redeemer,  
to honor thy name abandoned child of God.  
Your story matters as much as any other,  
while the blasphemer’s judgmental gaze may deter.  
Be thy own champion,  
redemption is only so far away if you start now.  
Why do only good for the glory of heaven,  
when you could be helping your fellow human?

Jacob Bonds

## Descent into Apeiron

Hesitancy,  
towards lowering Hadrian's walls,  
genuinely believing these feelings should remain a tacenda,  
it is a Gordian Knot.

But the further I look inwards,  
the more compelled I am to express a verisimilitude,  
to finally escape exulansis,  
or at least feel a fragment of solace.

Guilt,  
it is unfortunately my querencia,  
with tristesse as a blanket and dysphoria for the pillow,  
aiding in my perpetual dysania.

It is comfortable,  
having my oh so heavy body sink into alogia,  
as my piffling existence fades into karanoia,  
the harrowing realization I am a slubberdegullion.

Povism,  
my clinomania is an accomplice to aponemia,  
the hypophrenia leading monachopsis by the hand,  
guiding this verklempt poem.

Liberosis would be so wonderful,  
to think and feel for a moment without ellipsism,  
to set aside my pistanthrophobia,  
it would be ataraxia.

Canard,  
To divulge feels like an ignominious gesture,  
considering a veneer enshrouds their feelings behind amity,  
I could never aver their words.

I wish to absquatulate,  
I am an eccedentesiast with a terrible case of ludiosis,  
who wishes to expunge himself from picture albums,  
to evanesce would be a preferable kismat.

Abnegation,  
there is not necessarily an egress,  
this was all foreordained,  
and it is my turn to expatiate my mágoa.

The noumena cannot appertain,  
suffering has a quabalistic amalgam,  
artlessness and melioration,  
making for a veracious contusion.

Nonchalance,  
avoiding cynosure and heed the admonition,  
the gumption is duly noted;  
however, there is only drapetomania to subsist off.

The etterath is nugatory,  
just a miserabilist avoiding opia,  
the purpose was never to ingratiate,  
nor become a raconteur.

Reverie,  
where innocuous saudade can be an ephemeral apricity,  
with reticent eminence,  
a boon with a limina anagapesis.

Those dreams are forlorn,  
as Thanatos is an indelible element,  
striking a stringent covenant,  
of foible and vitriolic temerity.

Corollary,  
forgo slews of inane repartee,  
now inure myself to lachesism,  
with wistful nostomania.

I succumbed to mauerbauertraurigkeit,  
only able to gaze upon that cenotaph,  
while conveying gobbledygook,  
with a fortified latibule.

Vestige,  
expedient dissuasion would only perpetuate,  
I could portend or educe,  
but that will only deface the truth.

The acrimony persists,  
whether cloying poppycock,  
or prudential enmity,  
I retract back to Hadrian's Wall

Jacob Bonds

## Our Promise

When I first met you, I was in a world of change and unfamiliarity.  
However, in our ever-changing lives you seemed to be the only one that remained constant.  
So, I promised that I'd do my best to be the same for you.  
Your big brown eyes and black coat were my comfort in this constantly changing world.  
Many triumphs were celebrated and many failures we survived. Many nights of joy and many  
nights spent to cry, many entered our lives and many more left.  
Yet you stayed and so did I, it was our promise.  
Although your eyes did not change, your black coat started to from the passage of time.  
Your coat of complete and total night started to have white stars shine throughout.  
and through the passage of time, I grew from a child into a lady.  
I left our home for my changing future, but I never stayed away for long.  
Afterall, you stayed and so did I, it was our promise.  
You cared for me and all of those in pain So, I promised to pay you back one day.  
Although I wish that time would never come, I knew it had too someday.  
You were in pain from all the stars on your coat, they started to shine too bright,  
and your eyes started to change, they became unfamiliar  
but I stayed by your side even when you felt so far away.  
Afterall, you stayed and so did I, it was our promise.  
It was time for you to go, no matter how much I pleaded for you to stay,  
but you fulfilled your promise, and it was time for me to repay.  
While everyone else left your side I stayed, and I looked into those brown eyes  
For the first time through the pain, those familiar eyes returned  
and the stars grew dim and disappeared for awhile  
It felt like the first time we met in a world of change and unfamiliarity  
and we promised to stay for each other since no one else will.  
I stayed and put your head into my hands and watched  
while you closed those familiar brown eyes  
and all the stars covered your face again  
I stayed while you laid your head down to sleep for the final time  
and your heartbeat slowed down letting you slip through this life.  
After it was all said and done, and the years passed, I still stayed.  
I'm still here, keeping your memory alive, so I can still have you by my side  
I will stay, so you can too, this is my promise.

Trinity Brown

**Alexander Sampson**

**World Cultures II**

The North American Dark Ages

Dcr. Vetus Spero

Accendi Divitae

12 Mei, 2342

### **History Report**

Referred to as the downfall of the United-States, American Empire, or the North American Dark ages, this time period is noted for the long and dramatic fall of the once world-dominant empire. Starting in the early 21st century, cracks began to show in the empire. The government at the time was defined as a democracy where each citizen had a vote when determining their elected officials. Modern historians debate why this was a common belief when not every citizen could vote, such as those convicted of felonies<sup>1</sup>. However, only some within the United States Empire passed this law, signifying a lack of unity from early on in the empire's development. This lack of unity will later be proven by examples throughout the 21st century and beyond, while addressing the concerns we face in our current government. In this report we will delve into the major socio-political divides, and the impacts it has on the Commonwealth of Solar-Sphere Erde over three hundred years later.

### **Division I**

During the beginning stages of the fall, the nation became heavily divided over the rights and protections of its citizens. These rights, and various others, are now referred to as the 42<sup>444</sup> Laws of Flesh and Mind; they were not defined until 2201. The government hit troubled waters early into the 2020s, not dissimilar to causes of the Revolution of Omicron Perseus XI. Plagued by disease, a turbulent economy, and insurrections, the empire seems bound to fall from our perspective. Citizens, what we would refer to as  $\Theta VWL^2$ , were seemingly unaware of these large-scale issues according to the virtual texts recovered by modern researchers. The first of the battles were not traditionally violent. The division of citizens into subcategories, or "socio-economic classes", caused hatred and resentment to brew until it seeped into the cracks of the already worn foundation.

### **Impact I**

After the Mode of the Stars, the coalition came together to unite the  $Z_X-\Omega!$   
*We're sorry. You've run out of freely translated letters through English Experts Artc. To continue translating, please connect your DobtsDinero plug to the port, or translate it yourself using our free Erde Vernacon-to-English guide (ttml.trxlErde.ppe). (This message has been translated to show our skills. Pay for more.)*

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<sup>1</sup> What defined a felony is still a heavily debated topic due to the lack of legal documents that survived the Fires of 2043-7. It is assumed that the smaller states within the empire defined them differently. According to the historians at the Library of Euno-mia, who have recovered texts from the state of New York (USE), felonies were often incredibly violent, premeditated crimes, or ones that harmed/directly went against the government. (ttml.intspclink.ppe).

<sup>2</sup> English Experts Artc is unable to translate this into English due to these ideas not existing in that language. Thank you

## **she's cheer captain and I'm on the bleachers...**

Megan Evans

These are the only lyrics Taylor Swift ever wrote that did not relate to my life. Every Friday night while my classmates sat in the student section of the bleachers, I was down on the sidelines for every one of the 4 quarters. I was the cheer captain.

Front and center, wearing a uniform that was so tight it made my ribs stick out and it was too cold of a night to be wearing that skirt. With my hair in a bow, I was forced to smile like I actually wanted to be there. Waving to the crowd, trying to engage them, but in return I got nothing. Feels like a metaphor for the rest of my life. I peered out to the familiar faces, all wrapped up enjoying the warmth of their school-colored blankets. Most of them had made the choice to come out and freeze tonight. I had to be there.

You see, everyone always thinks the cheer captain has it the easiest. She is supposed to be the prettiest, most popular, most athletic...whatever. She is supposed to be what everyone wishes they could be. But as pretty and put together as she may seem on the outside, is how bad she is struggling on the inside.

Remember that part I said about getting nothing in return from the crowd? You know, the metaphor for my life? As the cheer captain, that's how your teammates treat you too. They think that you get special treatment and that you get everything you want. Everyone wants to be you, but no one wants to be your friend.

Instead of being that pretty, popular, and put together girl that everyone thinks of when they think of the cheer captain, I eat lunch alone, go to the mall alone, and fall asleep alone. Crying until my eyes run out of tears. I was not invited to the slumber party my teammates are at.

*So yes, Taylor Swift, the cheer captain probably looks good from where you are, but believe me, she would much rather be on the bleachers with you.*

## For Those Who Cannot Fathom

Jacob Bonds

I pulled into the gas station; it was dreadfully empty at the late hours of 2AM. I parked my vehicle near the ice container and the air pump, ensuring that my vehicle was not in view of the camera. With one swift movement, my hand grasped upon the faux leather center console and unveiled tonight's itinerary. The illustrious .38 pistol, packing enough punch to get the job done without potentially harming anyone innocent. My thumb pushed against the cylinder release as the cylinder swings out with a single motion of the wrist. The bullet was already inside, primed and ready to go off at any moment. I snap the cylinder back, falling back into my seat as I closed my eyes and took a deep breath through my nostrils.

The car had a hint of the old pine resin air refresher that I never swapped out since I bought it. Diminished in quality, enduring time's cruelty after being forgotten until it was far too late. Then, there was the lingering smell of decay from the dumpster next to my car...the trash bags split open so that the various misplaced critters could feast on forbidden waste. With the droning hum from the fluorescent lights, continuing to annoy passersby until the end of time. Occasionally, a vehicle would be speeding along going further and further away...yet felt so close. My chest tightened as my lungs screamed for release, to the point numbness throughout my body and fainting. I finally exhaled, gripping onto the pistol as my handshakes uncontrollably. My nerves were getting to me as I rubbed the cold stainless steel against my forehead.

Tonight was THE night. There is no going back home for me anymore, this was the precipice of change that every fiber of my existence demanded since my youth. Goodbye to the future that never wanted me in the first place. They will replace me post-haste at that shitty dead-end job before tomorrow even ends. My hand slams against the steering wheel as the tears start to deluge. I do not want this...but I want it more than life itself. However, I do not want the people that I care about most to sympathize with my decision. I much rather them hate me as much as I hate myself. Loathing my existence and allowing the memory of me to disappear into the past. They do not need me, they never did. I was just there at the right time, just the wrong person. I look into the rear-view mirror to see the tired eyes of a broken man. The bags under my eyes had bags, with a dark desolate purple as my tear-stained cheeks sag with wrinkles. I looked into my own eyes and saw nothing—

just the calling abyss.

I will not let it wait any longer.

I wiped my face, shaking off the tears, before tightening my grip on the pistol just to focus on what I wanted most. It felt different, despite stainless steel material it was lighter than a feather. I needed to look menacing—someone who would pull the trigger without hesitation. My face became purely neutral, indifferent towards the outcome of this. I stepped out of my car, gravel crunching beneath my feet as the cold air kissed my skin. I walked slowly around the building, not even bothering to hide my face to the cameras capturing these moments. The lights were flickering on the perimeter of the building while the inside was consistently lit. As I moved along, I peered to spot a single old man behind the register. There was nobody else inside, ideal for what I what I planned.

My shoulder slams against the glass door, it swings open with a sharp thud as my arm sprawls out while pointing the pistol at the old man. Approaching, with each step methodical and slow, like a predator of the night. The old man's face was drained of color as he held his hands up trembling. His eyes were clouded with age, cataracts without a single doubt blurring his vision—life has been unkind to him. I do not care. I silently pointed the gun at him, my eyes locking onto his unblinking. His stare is returned, confusion overtaking his fear. “Call the police,” I request, my voice low and cold.

“Call the police!” I snap, my voice booming with authority. My feet were planted with my pistol unwavering and dead on him. “Do you value your life?” I asked, with my voice lowly.

The man's hands shake as he slowly lowers them, reaching for his phone. My eyes never leave him for a second. I need him to do this. I need him to hurry.

But his hand stops, his gaze is on my pistol before remarking, “son, are you sure about this?”

“Did I ask you!?” I hissed, my stare turned into a glare.

“I mean no offense son, but you ain't harming nobody like that,” the old man says shortly afterwards, his face tilting to the side.

“And what makes you think that old bastard, I am more than willing to paint the wall behind you!” I yelled, then the man gestured to calm down.

“Son, you got a single bullet in the chamber. Once that hammer cocks, it won’t be in the live chamber no more,” the old man explains. I swallowed hard, my gambit was foiled by a blind fool.

“The safety is on as well, plus that pistol is single action so...you ain’t firing nothing son...”

“Just call the police!” I demanded, but the old man just patiently shook his head no.

I started to burst into tears, the façade breaks as I force out, “please...just call the police...”

“Son, I don’t know whatchu trying to accomplish tonight but I assure you calling the police ain’t gonna help. I reckon you best git out of here before someone else comes along and thinks the worst.”

My arm trembled like the gun that once felt like nothing felt heavier than ever. My entire body was shaking uncontrollably as my arm slowly lowered and I stumbled out the door. Sauntering back to my vehicle defeated. I was close to my vehicle at the last moment I felt my whole body reject this humiliation. I bent over as I regurgitated everything onto the dumpster. Standing up straight, yet unsteady. Wiping my mouth with my sleeve before retreating into my car. The engine roared as the key twisted, the seatbelt light flickering on and off before I set my car into reverse. I tossed the pistol into the passenger seat as I became ready to drive. Exiting the gas station parking lot, I get on the road just trying to think things through. Why did I fail!? I had the gun, I was determined, and yet I still failed!?

It wasn’t long, maybe twenty minutes away from the gas station, that I pulled off to the side of the road. Slowly, I slumped over the wheel in complete silence. This was supposed to be the end, with the credits crawling of everyone who made me feel miserable and the role in it all. Instead, here I am forever a failure and not able to even get myself killed in the most trigger-happy country. What do I do now? I could go back to my dead-end job doing the most fruitless labor that leaves my soul numb to the world. Not having my boss or coworkers even understand that even being there at work is going against every fiber of my being. Later or not—I could be just

gone forever and not have it as my problem. Or maybe visit the graves of people closest to me and apologize that I am just that big of a fuck up. It was so selfish for me to even think about killing myself when they were stripped of that choice to begin with. That just eats away at me, the shame and guilt for feeling the way I do... just makes me hate myself even more. I just want to be with them again talking about those pointless things that never mattered and just having them there. I want to be with them...

That is when I pulled into an open field, leaving my car lights on but the engine turned off. Lethargically, my arm pulled up and pushed the door open as I looked back at the pistol. I knew what I needed to do. I grabbed it and rotated the cylinder, ensuring the bullet was three chambers away from the first. I stepped out of my car, my body loose and my center of gravity jeopardized. My limbs felt like they were made of straw as I moved further into the light. I turned towards the bright lights before kneeling in front of them. The barrel of the gun was now pressed against the bottom of my chin pointing upwards to the heavens. My thumbs worked together to draw back the hammer and cock it... my index fingers squeeze the trigger as the hammer slams down on the chamber.

“One...” I mumbled, I swallowed hard as the air felt so thick that my lungs could not even take it.

“Two...” I repeated, successfully pulling the trigger once again as I did before. I stared at the lights knowing that I was completely alone. There was no changing my mind whatsoever. No one to save me from what I want most. I drew the hammer back...

“Three—” I said with a shaky inflection before I tried to squeeze the trigger, I started to fall back... falling into my own shadow as I stared at the beautiful celestial night sky disappear. back at the pistol.

Everything fell into darkness and there was nothing. I felt like I was floating and falling at the same time. There was only a numbness and a sense of indifference. Am I dead? Or, have I been dead this entire time? Not long after these thoughts emerged, I heard an elated whisper saying, “l’appel du vide...” then there was chanting of that same French phrase. It was happening all around me, three-sixty degrees of my entire body. L’appel du vide... l’appel du vide... l’appel du vide... it is in tandem and in rhythm. Synchronized perfectly to resonate with my very core. Yet, I did not understand it whatsoever... were they mocking me? Relishing in my plight for their

entertainment? I suppose it does not matter, assuming if I am in fact dead. I imagined death being more... significant, like an angel taking me to heaven just to send me to hell. Or, to find out that this was an elaborate will of God for me to end this way. It is nothing.

I cannot tell if, that it is more infuriating that there is nothing at the end of this misery than eternal damnation. It starts with nothing and thus it ends with nothing. No... that cannot be true, these voices are chanting, and they are indeed something.

“He is starting to realize...” one childish voice says with excitement with giggles following suit.

“What am I to realize?” I asked the void, at this point curious as to what all this even meant.

“It’s the secret to life... I am not telling you?” the childish voice said in a defensive manner, as if defending their favorite toy from me.

“The secret? Why would I find the secret of life in death? That makes zero sense...”

“Isn’t that just close minded?”

“Well, I would say I have a very open mind now—”

“Bang! And...you still missed. Mister, why were you even trying to accomplish tonight?”

“I... I don’t know, I just wanted to feel like I had some manner of control...”

“Do you still feel like you have that control?”

“No, I do not know what I feel. I do not know what I even am right now...”

“Now? You never did...”

“I know me better than you know me!”

“Hush mister, I am not done! What are you?”

“A failed human...”

“Human, nonetheless, do you even know the man you were trying to kill tonight?” “I... know who I am...”

“That’s just who you think you are... ad nauseam despair this, despair that, despair to your cow!”

“Are you making fun of me?”

“Oh, now you care about yourself?”

“I know myself more than you know me...”

“Are you trying to convince me? Or yourself?”

“Knock it off!”

“It is very easy to assess something as worthless and then find out the true value too late...”

“I don’t need your fucking lecture!”

“Spite and vitriol are how you got here, granted it was all for yourself. It makes me happy you hate me.”

“...”

“Finally, not even a response. Tell me mister, what am I wrong about you?”

“You want me to say something? I thought you had me figured out?”

“Absolutely, but I need you to say it. I am not your therapist, I cannot be dodged or lied to.”

“Run of the mill for someone who ends up on this side of life. But it doesn’t matter, I am dead.”

“Probably; however, wouldn’t you want to understand and know the man you killed?”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“Am I dead?”

“Possibly.”

“Why aren’t you telling me?”

“Why are you not answering my questions?”

“But you said, and I quote, I know myself.”

“I am just a tired, sickly man. I am just stuck in a life I hate. In a weird period in which I suffer to live and live to suffer. Constantly living on the edge of eviction as I work so hard just to constantly be back at the starting point. Just a little bit still there, just to have that crumb of a dream and the cruelest thing called ‘hope’. People hate me and are the same self-righteous assholes who preach ‘you never know what someone is going through’ then talk behind their back about the things that are discontent. My fault I guess, I suppose I could suffer in a more convenient way that keeps my productivity up. Giving a shit that someone close to me died and my grief lasted longer than allotted two weeks is my fault. I will do better next time. I just do not care anymore to know myself. At the end, I am going to die before really knowing who I am. Even if I didn’t pull the trigger... I died a long time ago, just my body kept going.”

“Go on...”

“I feel like a husk of my former self. It feels like such a long time ago I felt certainty on who I am. I stopped keeping up with my own birthday, I do not even know how old I am. I just remember those death dates... for those I hate, and love died leaving me confused. I love the people I hated and the people I loved. It sickens me. I hate them even after their departure, so I delude myself into sympathy for them. Then, I think about the resentment for those who I loved, and it just gets so muddled. Am I really supposed to witness all this death?”

“Is anyone supposed to see everyone live?”

“What do you mean?”

“Not everyone is supposed to be in your life forever. Not every coworker is supposed to be your friend. Not every boss is someone your scorn with bitterness for the rest of your days. Even with someone you love, if you just ‘loved’ them then you did not understand them or yourself. The problem is ‘supposed’ to be.”

“I guess...”

“You are not even going to be the same person all your life—now begone! Return to that dreadful field and let those of you who were supposed to die remain dead. Grieve his woes but forget who he was and just focus on figuring out who YOU are.”

That is when my eyes sprung open and I took a grasp of fresh air. I was looking up at the morning sky, the various shades of crimson from the east as the light blue sky hangs above me with feathered clouds. I sat up, wondering if any of that even happened... I looked at the pistol and saw an indent of the hammer against the bullet, but it did not fire. I struck a bit of luck I suppose. I put the safety back on and left the pistol on the ground, kicking dirt on top of it as it wasn't my pistol anymore and it was the dead man's last possession. I stumble back to the car and start to drive off towards dawn wanting to start a new life.

## A Walk with God

Sam Edsall

Franktown, West Virginia. Such a beautiful place. It's got Franktown State College ("Home of the Fighters!"). It's got the Franktown Theater, Frank's Pub, Franktown Lake & Dam. In many ways it's the perfect place. But strange things happen there...

Steven was happy. He walked out of Bob's Bagels with the Gourmet Blaster Bagel (blueberry cream cheese, butter, and bagel awesomeness) and a large iced black coffee. Everything was perfect, to the point that the sharp cold breeze hitting him in the face was no bother. Stepping onto the sidewalk, he managed to take one bite out of the bagel. Then a stranger's hand reached out and snatched it from him. The man who took it got a nice big bite out of it, letting out a satisfying "mmm" and not unlocking eyes with him. Steven was furious.

"You don't do that!"

"Oh yeah, I do. My son could live on a few crumbs a day. So can you. Let's go."

"Yeah, let's go!"

Steven punched the man. The man neither flinched nor blinked. There was no sign of reaction. The man punched Steven, sending him all the way across the street. Steven's body ragdolled onto the sidewalk. No one was around to see it, surprisingly. The stranger walked over to Steven.

"Do you want to go to Hell?"

"Who are you?" Steven asked, his voice showing signs of being in pain, quite obviously.

"I am God. Now let's go."

"You're not God... and go where?"

"For a walk. And I am indeed your God. Humble yourself."

“This is ridiculous.”

“You are ridiculous. Get up!”

Steven jumped up and was no longer in pain.

“Today, Steven, we have a little fun. Here’s your bagel.”

It was the perfect day. The sun was shining down on Franktown despite the cold.

God handed Steven the bagel and it was good as new. It was hot and fresh. Steven couldn’t believe it. They started down the sidewalk. God started whistling the theme from Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood. Steven had to question the Stranger’s identity.

“You are not really God, are you? And, by the way, you look and sound remarkably like Gerard Butler.”

“I am God. Gerard Butler is to me what Clark Kent is to Superman. Oh, and by the way, you’re not dreaming. Yeah. I can read your mind.”

“So where are we going?”

“Wherever I want us to go. It’s just you and me today, Steven. Don’t piss me off or you’re going to Hell. Too easy, right?”

“I have class in fifteen minutes.”

“No, you don’t.”

Steven got a text from his girlfriend, Rachel.

“Hey babe. English 204 was canceled today. Professor Wizard himself is sick.”

Steven put his phone back in his pocket.

“Okay why make my professor sick?”

“He’s not actually sick. He’s at home strumming on his guitar and watching birds

mess around from his back porch.”

Steven got the visual in his head and somehow didn’t chuckle at it.

“Why me? Why now?”

“Because, Steven, it’s kind of like winning the lottery. You prayed last night, didn’t you? It was the first time in a long time that you actually got down on your knees and prayed.”

“Yeah this semester is going to be very tough, and I wanted you to come down and give me some help.”

“Well, I’m here now, Steven.”

He lit a cigarette and took a long drag.

“Here, take one. You’re going to need it today if you’re hanging with me.”

Steven took the cigarette and lit it. He hadn’t smoked since he started dating Rachel but figured since God offered that he’d take it. He took another drag and noticed it wasn’t burning down. It was the “everlasting cigarette” he’d wished he’d had as a teenager.

“We’re going for a walk through the neighborhood across the bridge. It’s just a walk, Steven. And don’t worry about Rachel. She’s in her dorm room asleep in her bed. She passed out right after texting you.”

“This is crazy!”

“What’s wrong?”

“I need to go to class right now. One more tardy and I’m fucked!”

“Will you listen to yourself? You don’t need studying right now. You need Me. And don’t cuss at me or I’ll send you to Hell where you’ll burn, burn forever.”

It was a hard pill to swallow. Steven, feeling like he had no choice, trudged along

with this man, claiming to be God, who'd possessed strange superpowers... The neighborhood looked like any normal neighborhood. Houses, fences, trees, bushes. Typical stuff that would have been perfect for a boring doctor's office picture

They walked across the bridge and hooked a right onto Dodger Street. There was a man walking his dog about 35 yards in front of them.

"Here, take this."

It was a .357 magnum.

"No... No! Are you crazy!"

"No. I'm God. Take it or I blow that man's head off myself."

"Why would you do such a thing?"

"Because I'm God and I do what I want."

"This is ridiculous."

"Steven I'm joking."

God fired the weapon, sending a bullet straight into the man's forehead, blowing the head clean off.

"Holy shit!"

"Not quite."

There was a grumbling sound. The body didn't exactly fall. The dog ran off but the seemingly dead man's body remained intact, save for the head. That was kind of gone.

"This is the fun part Steven."

God walked over to the man, reached into the neck area, and pushed his arm all the way down. Then he pulled out a gangly inhuman being with one eye and horns on

either side of its head. It was red all over. God then threw the thing down and blew its head off. Then a giant skeletal hand came up from the ground, grabbed the dead demon, and pulled it down under the ground. God tidied up the surface a little bit.

“All done.”

God then snapped his fingers and Steven sank into the earth, which had given away under his feet as though rock had turned to dust. He fell, the hole on the surface getting smaller until it finally disappeared. Then there were flames all around him. He could hear the screams of billions of people. Then he could hear a deep, booming voice laughing, then taunting him.

“That’s what you get.”

Then he woke up in a cold sweat. He was experiencing déjà vu. He’d already experienced waking up the exact same way... His TV was on, and when he looked over, the movie “Law Abiding Citizen” was on. Gerard Butler looked over and winked at the camera after one of his dramatic, over-the-top lines. A frown formed over Steven’s face. A post-it note was on his nightstand. He picked it up and it read, “Look under your pillow.” Steven looked and there was a .357 magnum. A voice then spoke in his head. “You’ll need it.”

# The Mountain Trail

Allison Boggs

There wasn't a cloud in the sky as the two moved further up the mountain trail; it wouldn't have been fine or even better if the sounds of nature could be heard but unfortunately and quite strangely there was nothing. It was oddly silent for such a beautiful day.

"Buzz...where are we going...we strayed off the main path a couple of miles ago." There was a hint of worry in Tom's voice. Buzz chuckled,

"Hey, no worries...just a bit more and we'll be at the cliffs." Tom nodded as he wrung his hands, speaking up again, his nerves a little more evident than the last,

"Buzz is this about the job last week... I-I didn't mean t-" Buzz stopped in his tracks not saying anything, like he was trying to convince himself to keep going deeper into the woods. Tom didn't finish his thought; he got the message that it would be best to stay quiet as they went deeper into the woods. The once-clear skies were starting to darken as the clouds formed the start of a terrible storm, darkening the woods with their sudden changes.

In the deepening thicket and brush of the woods, it seemed like the two were going out so far that even the animals did not even come out this far which is noted by how their hike went from the main path to the deer path to the lack of any sense of directions since the ground under them has changed to be all the same instead of any clear indication of life besides themselves.

Tom still wringing his hands while scuffling, and tripping over roots. He constantly looked over his shoulder at every sound or twig snap as he spoke up again.

"Buzz... did the boss give us a new job together?" Buzz looked back at Tom, his face twisted in the shadows of the thick forest.

"No new job. Just thought we should hang out like old times... It's been a long time since we got to hang out... away from the busy city," Buzz's voice hushed as he got closer to the end.

After walking a bit further, they made it out of the woods and to the cliffs. Tom noted and shivered at the realization of how the day had shifted from not a cloud in the sky to a blustering storm with darkness that filled the valley below with a sense of uncertainty. Buzz shifted around now standing behind Tom holding out what Tom had feared the whole time.

There was a loud echo that rang out through the valley below and birds flew from out of the trees.

## Princess Pasithea & the Horror from on High

Veronica Rowse

Pasithea sighed as she looked out the windows of the train tube. Still nothing to see but the cold stone darkness that surrounded her car, and the thin layer of water it floated upon.

She turned back to her ‘governess’, a broad-faced lady with dark hair and the hazel cheek-mottling of a northern coastal merfin. Ugh, she thought, disgusted. *Backwater mudfin with a common name like Sanna. Surely I do NOT deserve this humiliation. I only teased the Pacifican princess a little! Her hair was already the color of muck anyway, adding some to her dress only made it match her better!*

“Are you going to move?” Sanna asked. She gestured down to the stone chess board, where her knight and queen were both one move away from capturing Pasithea’s king.

Pasithea shot the woman a glare. “Why should I? We both know you’ve won anyway.” She flipped her hair, a small part of her admiring how her rare blonde tresses caught the light of glowlamps.

Sanna grinned cheekily. “Sore loser, ey, your Majesty?” She said in her unmistakable brogue as she reset the board. “Another game? Or should I leave you to ponder the beautiful view?” She gestured to the window.

“Do what you like,” Pasithea said.

The au pair shrugged and pulled out a tablet, tapping a show and letting out an obnoxious sigh when the refreshment sprinklers turned on again.

*This is what my father sent me with for the summer?* Pasithea shook her head. *I must get away.*

—

When the two arrived at the final station, three train stops later, Pasithea was

parched, her tresses were lank, and she was cold.

Meanwhile, Sanna seemed to have perked up, despite long the separation from surrounding water. As the train entered the waterlock chamber and their car started filling, she splashed in an ungainly fashion around the room, gathering their things.

As was her duty, Pasithea made herself ready for the adoring fans she was sure were just behind the glass of the waterlock chamber. It was just opaque, surely.

When Sanna was ready, Pasithea followed her and the rope-line of trunks, bags and personal effects out the door. Like she had suspected, they were one of few passengers who got off at the stop, and she was the only one who was clearly from the equator.

A man with jet black hair and even worse brown and black mottling upon his cheeks swam up and swept Sanna into his arms.

“Sanna!” He cried.

“Buck,” she replied, and kissed him, dropping the rope that tied their luggage. It started to flow away in the slight current.

Pasithea made a show of admiring her own artfully minimal pearlescent cheek scales in her pocket glass, not even calling out when an errant crab tried to jump upon her snack case. *Surely the local yokels know Royalty has arrived?*

Buck swam and caught the luggage, then turned to grin at her. “Good afternoon, then! You must be young Thea.”

*Nicknames? I think not!* Pasithea whirled around. “My name,” she snipped, “is Pasithea Atlanna Aegersdottir-Nereida. And you will do well to at LEAST remember my title.”

The man’s grin faded, but mirth still danced in his eyes. “Oh, good point, your Majesty. Now, if you’ll follow me ...”

Pasithea followed him out of the station, and into the main part of town, where her hair definitely caught some eyes but no spark of recognition occurred. *Very little*

*patriotism this far north, as to be expected of such barbarians. To not even recognize their third princess? For shame. I will have to tell father about this. When he earns my forgiveness, of course.*

The water was nearly saltless, and the surface laid only 300 feet up. Distantly, she could smell the scent of oil – humans. It was disgusting. How could people, real people like merfins, live like this?

Much to Pasithea's dismay, the location in which she was to stay was a manor retrofitted so that its lower rooms were a government hall. *At least it is the largest building in this village of ... shacks.*

Sanna lead her to her room, a tiny setting with a minuscule bathroom and only one walk-in closet. "I'll let you get settled, your Majesty, then call you down to dinner later. Buck has to finish up the day's tablet-work, but it shan't take too long."

Pasithea did not deign to look at her.

The governess sighed. "If your Majesty decides to go out, tell me, alright? The cliffs bring strange creatures this time of the year, trying to cool off and eat."

Pasithea whirled around. "The cliffs?"

"Oh yes, yonder to the north lie some cliffs above the surface. Now, your father doesn't want you near the surface much without supervision, mind? Humans abound in these waters as well.

Pasithea turned back to face the window once again, this time to hide her grin. "Noted, Sanna."

"Your Majesty," said Sanna, then she shut the door.

From behind it, Pasithea could hear the lady laughing.

She snorted in turn. *No brackish nouveau aristocrate is going to tell ME how to spend my summer.*

Opening the window, she swam out.

—  
Pasithea had never truly been to the surface before. Of course, she had been dry - the trains floated better with less on them, which necessitated dry carriages, with sprinkler systems for the passenger cars - and one simply had not been to a real spa if one has not had a dry treatment. Occasionally, dignitaries from the land or sky would visit, and her father would hold the meeting in a dry cavern.

But she had never been any closer to 100 feet below the surface, and it had been in the open ocean, where proper merfin lived, instead of the outskirts of civilization.

Adults visited the top. She was only 14, so it had yet to happen.

*And today will be the day*, Pasithea thought grandly to herself.

She swam over fields of various kelps and other uninteresting crops, a few bubbles and nets that held livestock.

The floor traced up awards, boulders ruining the smooth slope, and soon the water became muddy and quick. Pasithea had to work harder than usual, to swim the direction she wished.

The sun, which she only knew about in theory, shone and rippled brighter and brighter as she approached the surface - she closed her eyes.

At last, Pasithea breached the surface. She flipped her hair to get it away from her face, and was nearly thrown back underwater by the force of it. Suspicious, she looked around, but thankfully no one saw her mistake.

The land was odd. Jagged, and full of heights that she could not reach, maybe not even if she turned human. Tall, spindly kelp structures swayed with a strong force of air - wind? - that caused little wavelets to scud into her stomach. Everything seemed more vivid, even in comparison to the underwater dry chambers. The sun burned, like when Pasithea had gotten too near boiling water vents but somehow worse.

Distantly, she heard shouts - ducking down until only her eyes sat atop the surface, she peered around.

Two humans, wobbling quickly like eager crabs on their two legs, recognizable to

Pasitheia only by their resemblance to merfins, were escaping from a large ...

*What IS that?*

It was shaggy and brown, with four legs. It was easily the size of a dolphin, but had a relatively small mouth. Upon its head were two structures, not unlike that of feathers - Pasitheia ate gull whenever the gods blessed Atlantis with an overhead hurricane, and the brave surface-hunters snatched delicacies from on high. But unlike the feathers, they looked hard, perhaps even sharp, and did not give with the wind as the animal chased the humans away.

Up the cliff.

And then off the cliff.

Pasitheia yelped as the two humans came hurtling towards her face, ducking down to avoid recognition.

They landed, one after the other, screeching as they splashed.

Pasitheia swam away in a hurry, and hid amongst some reeds and boulders. Inwardly, she curled away from the muck, but covered herself all the same so that she could camouflage. That's what you're supposed to do, right?

Wrong.

A larger, yet more languid and continuous splash sounded behind her.

Alarmed, she turned around.

The creature was approaching her.

Pasitheia froze.

The creature ventured closer, occasionally bobbing up for air or stopping to nibble at some underwater flora.

Her hair, long and loose, floated gently with the current around her boulder.

She dared shriek or not pull it back, in case the creature saw. Whatever it was, it had feet as wide and heavy-looking as her head, and it had scared two humans. Pasithea did not want it to get angry, or come closer.

Unfortunately, it came closer.

Closing her eyes, at first she felt a tug upon her scalp. And then a pull, a yank, until – RIP.

Pasithea shrieked, unable to help herself as her head started to bleed.

The creature, afraid but still willingly chewing her beautiful, murdered hair, turned tail and swam away.

Pasithea started crying, bubbles rising to the surface. “What did I do to deserve this!” She screamed to nobody as she gently cupped the bleeding mess of her scalp.

Sobbing and bleeding, Pasithea eventually found her way back to the manor.

But not before calling upon a pod of orcas and siccing them on the brown creature who had ruined her hair.

—

Sanna tutted as she fussed about Pasithea’s head. “Well, your Majesty, I did warn you! The moose are mighty crazy this time of year, and they’ll eat just about anything.”

Pasithea kept her mouth shut.

“Still, what a shame, what a shame. Of course, I’ll have to tell your father.”

Pasithea whirled around to gaze at the governess, tears bubbling up and out of her eyes. “Oh, Sanna, please don’t! I’ll be good! Just please, help me fix my hair again!”

“Well...”

“Oh Sanna, please.”

“Well, alright. But just this once and you’re done for the season!”

“Yes, madame!”

Sanna brought out a pair of scissors and a razor. “Well, your Majesty, if we’re going to make it look on purpose, we’re going to have to make it symmetrical. I’m thinking, shaven on the sides, but keep the full length on top. That way, you can braid it high – it’ll look very fierce, I’m sure, your Majesty.”

*I want to scream. “Do it.”*

—

There was a lot of crying that day. But less so, in the weeks after.

It was easier to realize that other people were not so stupid once one had been so humbled, and such kindness had been shown.

And the countryside had its own charm. *I hope I can come here again.* Pasithea thought with genuine wonder.

*I think I will miss Sanna.*

—

“I think I’ll miss her,” said Sanna to the king when they arrived back in Atlantis.

The king raised an eyebrow, and then raised the other when he saw his daughter.

Her hair was shaven on the sides, almost scandalously so. Her hands looked almost rough, and she was pulling her own luggage like she was not a royal deep merfin. But her smile was kind and true, with a hidden wisdom and strength. Something over the summer had evaporated the cruelty that had lurked in her grin.

“Father!” She cried, and swam in for a hug.

# The Mystery

William Mullins

“So, what do you think happened,” is the first thing asked of me when I made it there. “That’s what I intend to find out,” as I looked at the body of the man with what appeared to be a bruise on his chest, the shape of a human hand. “The Report said he when camping with his buddies, correct?” “Yes, Sir,” he responded immediately “fiancé said they went out camping for a bachelor party over the weekend and never returned and he is only person we could find.” By this time the sun was getting low, and everyone else had left, we were just waiting on the coroner to get the body. “They seemed to have disappeared without a trace,” I said. “That’s why we called you...” he was saying as I turned, looked at him and saw something that appear human only bigger.

## Staff

### William Mullins

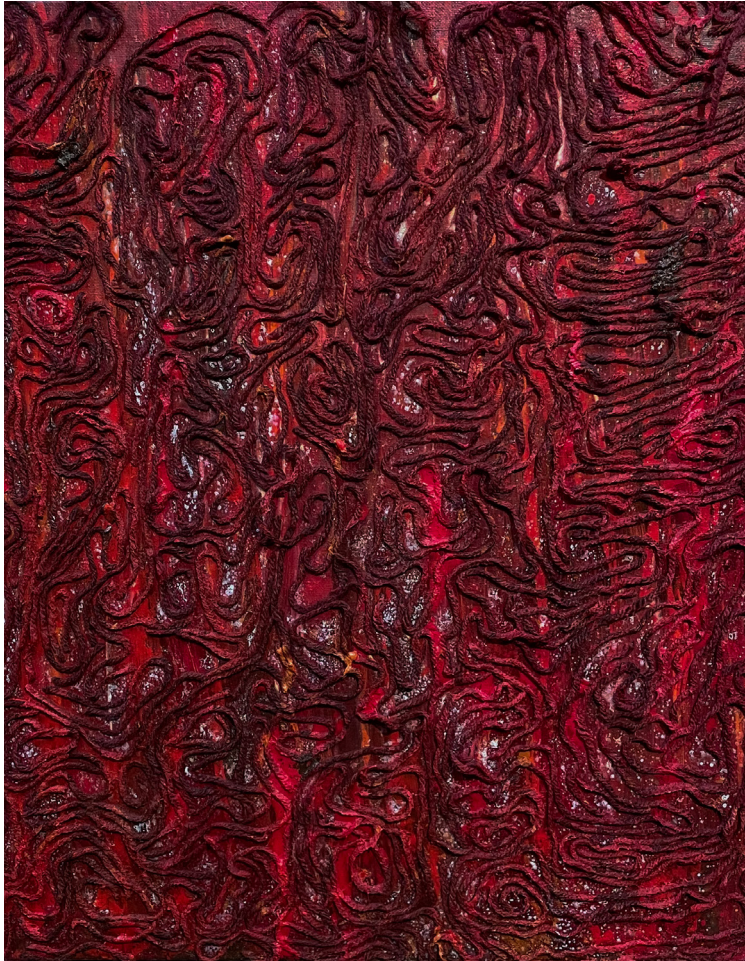
I sit in the corner of the room and observe my master for how many nights I have lost track. It has been long enough for me to collect what he calls dust. My first memory is when I assume my master created me, I am unable to communicate with him so I cannot be certain, but I remember him doing what he usually does when something he had been working on for a while finally succeeds. At first, I could not understand what was being said around but as what he refers to as years passed, I slowly learned new things. I have learned that I am referred to as a staff and I amplify my master's strength. And that my master is considered to be the strongest wizard. I see my master reach out his hand and a familiar feeling fill me as I fly to my master's hand. He begins chanting and I see that familiar look of excitement, and I know his research was a success.



***Master Study, Paul Cézanne: Still Life with Skull 1928***

Oil on Canvas Paper; 16" x 12"

Charlie Bauman



***A Part of Me (213)***

Mixed Media on Canvas; 16" x 20"

Emily Nesselrotte



***Picasso et Max au Sacre Couer et Deux Arches***

Acrylic & Oil on Canvas

Max Stewart



***Sleepy Banana***

Ceramic Sculpture

Emily Rosales



## ***Japanese Doll***

Graphite/Charcoal Drawing; 9" x 12"

Akasha Brown



## ***Geese Pond***

Watercolor Painting; 11" x 15"

Sadie Hill



## ***Sea of Stars***

Acrylic Painting; 16" x 11"

Callie Moyers



***Shay No. 2, Cass Scenic Railroad State Park***

Graphite Drawing; 24" x 18"

Heather Swaggerty



***Gale's Edge***

Watercolor Painting; 9" x 6"

Tregory Blankenship



***Right Study***

Watercolor Painting; 6" x 9"

John Ong



***Interpretation of Rachel Ruysch's "A Nosegay of Roses, Mari-  
golds, Larkspur, and a Bumblebee"***

Oil on Canvas Paper; 25" x 24"

Autumn Moyers



***Dreamscape of an Astronaut***

Digital Painting / Photomontage

Dravin Gibson



## ***Tulipe***

Photograph Print on Handmade Paper; 9" x 12"

Tamara Hough



***Spangled Fritillary Frolicking***

Photograph; 6" x 4"

Kylie Jones



***She Smokes in Bed***

Mixed Media Artwork

Aubrey Buckius



***Untitled***

Watercolor Painting

Emily Garrett



## ***The Swamp***

Charcoal Drawing; 16" x 14"

Micca Blake



***Your Heart, Mine to Devour***

Digital Painting; 9" x 11"

Kaitlyn Warren



***From the Inside***

Digital Painting; 11" x 14.5"

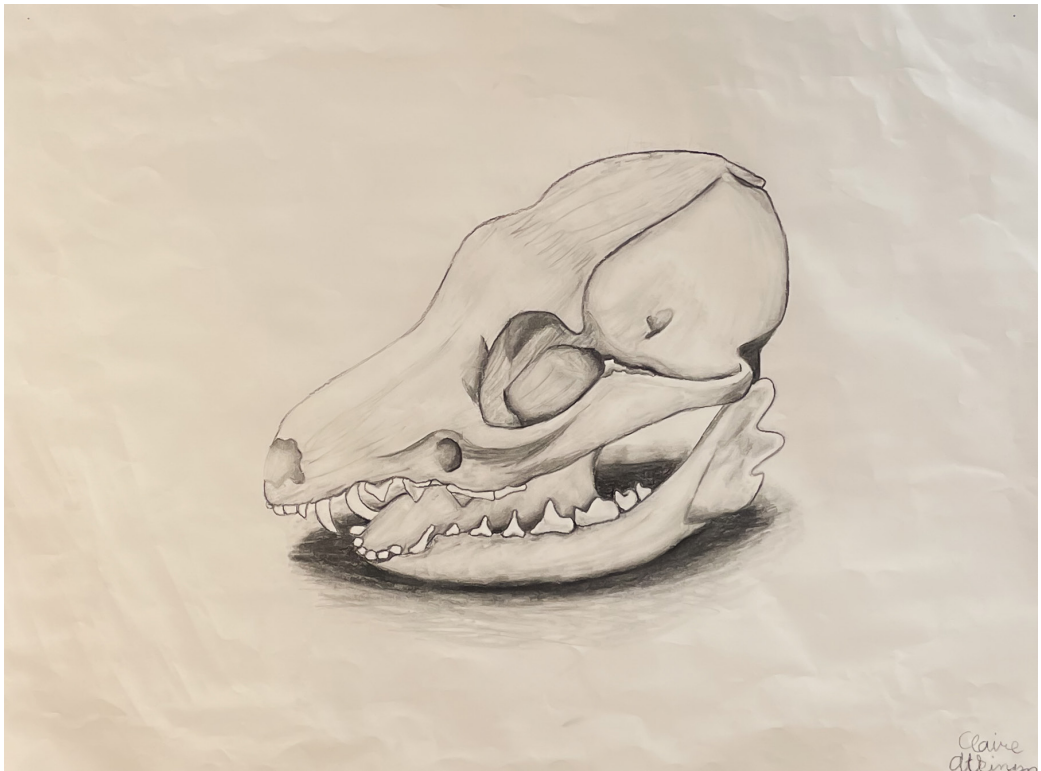
Jesse Kargol



## ***35th Day***

Acrylic on Canvas

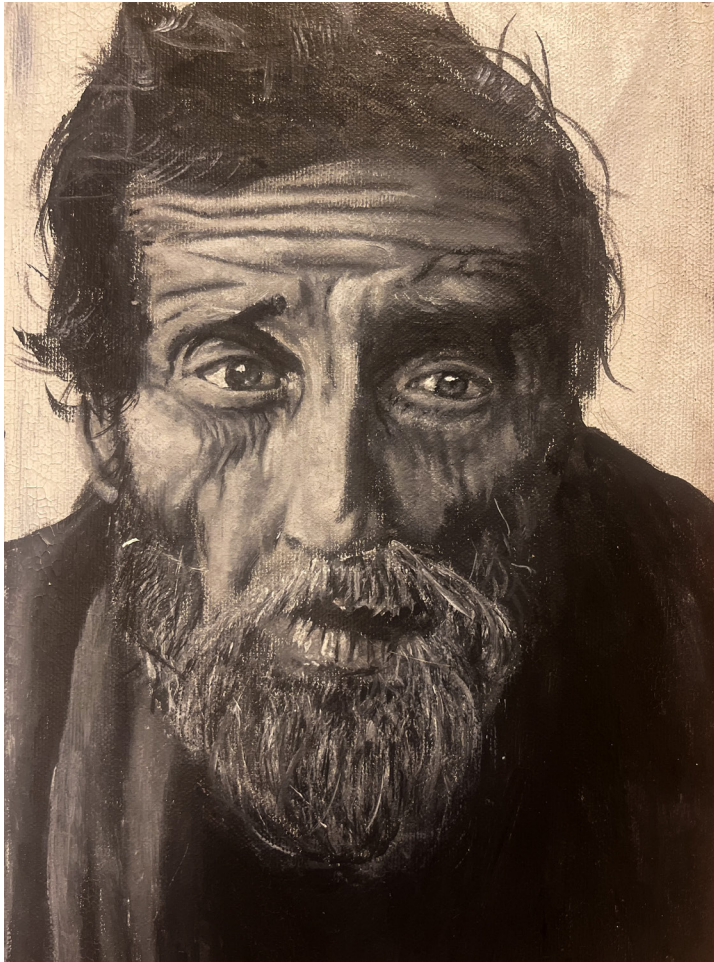
Sydney West



## ***Fox Skull***

Graphite Drawing; 24" x 18"

Claire Atkinson



***Worried***

Acrylic Painting

Daphne Collins



***Birds of Paradise***

Graphite Drawing; 18" x 21"

Michelle McMunn



***Untitled***

Painting

Caitlin Cayton



## ***Sea Turtle / Goldfish***

Graphite Drawing; 12" x 18"

Janae Scott

## Contributor's Notes

**Allison Boggs** is currently a Senior at Glenville State University who plans to get her master's in media studies. Her writing style is diverse as she works on flash fiction, DND/RPG campaigns, and poetry. In her work, she strives to let the audience's interpretation determine the work. She is currently learning screenwriting in her own time, has a YouTube channel, and participates in the podcast known as The Game-masters Guild.

**Jacob Bond**'s submissions last year were more about conveying grief for his late mother Julia Ann Bonds. This year's theme is based around redemption—who deserves it, who needs it, and who shall receive it. He does this through the lens of psychological horror and rather morbid means of conveying circumstances. All of his pieces this time around are mysterious and kind of like puzzles.

**Tobias Bone** is currently enrolled as a freshman with a major in History and Political Science that he plans to switch to Linguistics. He enjoys nature and it is the main theme of his submitted works. He shared that he is more a fan of his raccoon poem “because of its more lighthearted nature.”

**Trinity Brown** is a Junior at GSU with a major in Secondary English Education. She is the Vice President for the Early Education Student Group and the Student Interest Reading Group for the 2024-25 school year as well as the representative for the literature and language department for SGA. She is also on the literary staff for this year's Trillium.

**Vaughn Busch** is a retired quality engineer from Pittsburgh who is living the quiet and peaceful life in Glenville with his three dogs, Jake, Sully, and Clancy. Oh - and his wife, Marjorie Stewart, an English professor at GSU

**Caitlin Cayton** belongs in the woods, picking up whatever is pretty and smells good. Caitlin would walk a waterfall trail and spend hours soaking and swimming. Not being able to be part of nature lately has left Caitlin feeling nostalgic.

**Sam Edsall** does not intend to offend ye who believeth, for he is a Christian himself.

**KP Giordano** has been published previously before in Trillium. His fiction has appeared in The Fanzine. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Florida. He is a part-time professor. He is also a freelance editor at Conde Nast. His journalism has appeared in The New York Times.

**Melissa Gish** is an Associate Professor of English at GSU. She loves three of the four seasons in her native Minnesota. Her natural history books are found in school libraries across the country.

**Todra Hall** is a music education major at GSU. Throughout 2024, she learned more about the Christian faith and her relationship with God grew, which inspired her to write.

**John Hoppenthaler's** books of poetry are *Night Wing Over Metropolitan Area*, *Domestic Garden*, *Anticipate the Coming Reservoir*, and *Lives of Water*, all with Carnegie Mellon UP. With Kazim, Ali, he has co-edited a volume of essays on the poetry of Jean Valentine, *This-World Company* (U of Michigan P). His poetry and essays appear in *Ploughshares*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *New York Magazine*, *TriQuarterly*, *Southern Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Southeast Review*, *Blackbird*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and many other journals, anthologies, and textbooks. He is a Professor of Creative Writing and Literature at East Carolina University.

**Patsy Kisner** is a lifelong West Virginian and a graduate of Glenville State University. Her poems have most recently appeared in *Untelling*, *Still: The Journal*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Appalachian Journal*, and the *Women Speak* anthologies. Her poetry collection *Until the Surface Breaks* was released in 2025 from the *Main Street Rag*. To learn more, visit her website at [www.patsykisner.com](http://www.patsykisner.com).

**John Charles (Chuck) Priestley II** was born and resides in South Charleston, West Virginia. He served honorably for 24 years in the U.S. Navy, during which he discovered a love for reading and writing poetry. His hobbies include cooking, gardening, practicing Tai Chi, and reading literature. He holds a Master of Arts, English degree from Marshall University. He has written over 140 poems in rhymed and free verse. Themes include nature, ecology, human relationships, and social issues.

**Veronica Rowse** is a Math Education major graduating in Spring 2025. She loves to draw, sing, dance, read, and write fiction. When she's not chasing students down for missing homework, you can find her walking her dog, Edie, or hanging with the Science Fiction & Fantasy Guild.

**Alexander Sampson**, History Education major, loves the mountains and the snow. Alexander is also a brother of Alpha Xi Omega.

**Tayla Shahid** is a student studying Criminal Justice at Glenville State University. Her poetry is inspired by personal experience and the emotions navigating loss, love, and memory. The particular poem she submitted is an homage to her late grandmother, reflecting on how much joy her grandmother brought to her and her family.

**Brooke Storm** is a pseudonym. Do they even really exist? Probably.

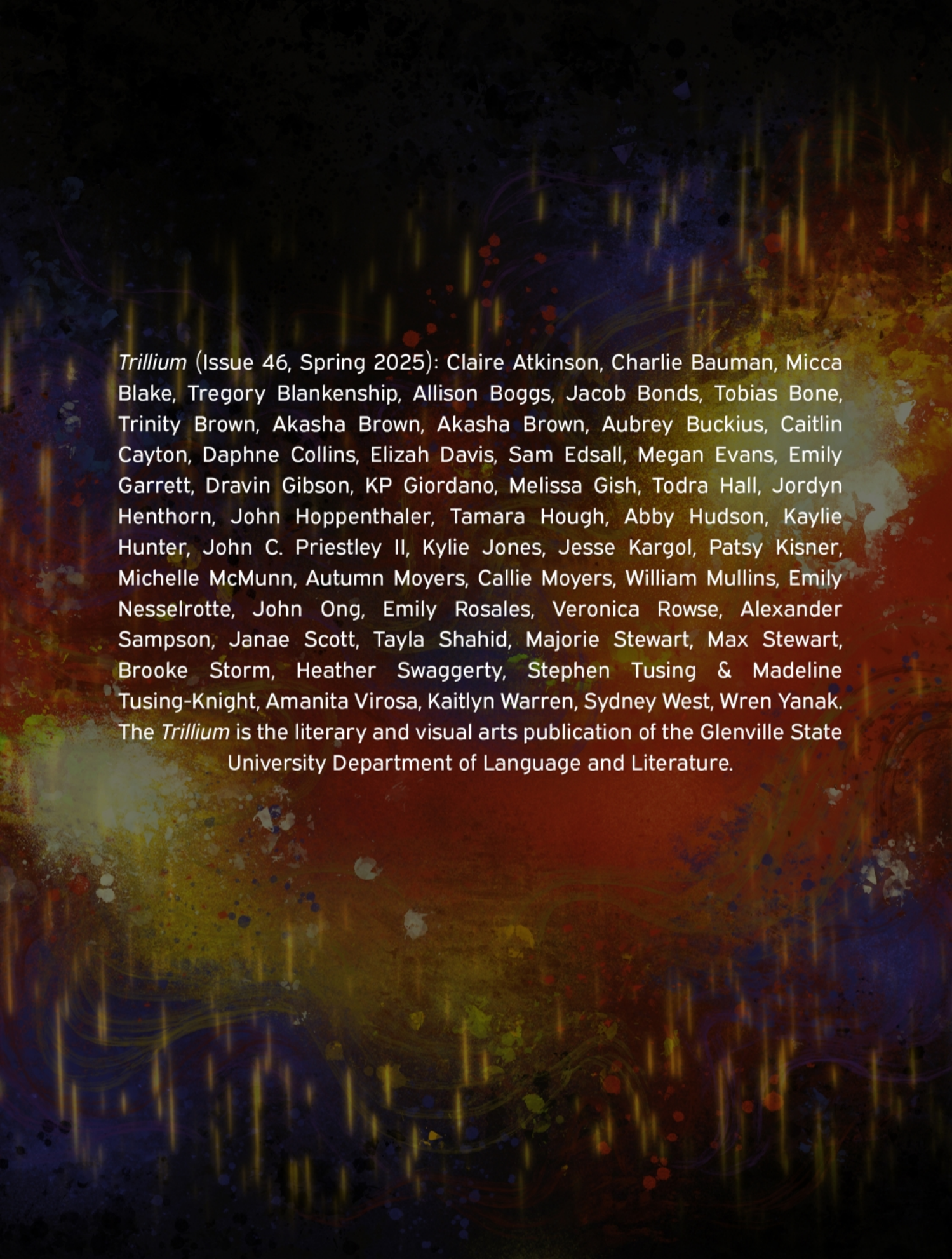
**Stephen Tusing** is a 55-year-old West Virginian native. He lives and breathes contracting; despite that, he still finds a lot of love in the art of writing. This is Stephen's first piece that will be read by the public.

**Madeline Tusing-Knight** is a senior at Glenville State University. Although teaching is her true passion, writing comes second.

**Wren Yanak** is a Senior at Glenville State University who graduates this May with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology along with an Associate's degree in Criminal Justice. They spend most of their time being a tutor at the Pioneer Success Center and juggling the joys of education.

**Kaylie Hunter** is a writer and student based in Glenville, West Virginia. Born in South Charleston and raised in various parts of West Virginia she draws inspiration from their personal experiences and the world around her. Kaylie discovered their love for poetry and writing in elementary school when they stumbled upon Shel Silverstein's works at a thrift store. From crafting stories for English classes to writing haikus, writing quickly became a sanctuary for her.

**William Mullins** is a Senior at GSU who is majoring in business administration, and set to graduate in the fall of 2025. Some of his hobbies include DND, creative writing, reading, and fishing.



*Trillium* (Issue 46, Spring 2025): Claire Atkinson, Charlie Bauman, Micca Blake, Gregory Blankenship, Allison Boggs, Jacob Bonds, Tobias Bone, Trinity Brown, Akasha Brown, Akasha Brown, Aubrey Buckius, Caitlin Cayton, Daphne Collins, Elizah Davis, Sam Edsall, Megan Evans, Emily Garrett, Dravin Gibson, KP Giordano, Melissa Gish, Todra Hall, Jordyn Henthorn, John Hoppenthaler, Tamara Hough, Abby Hudson, Kaylie Hunter, John C. Priestley II, Kylie Jones, Jesse Kargol, Patsy Kisner, Michelle McMunn, Autumn Moyers, Callie Moyers, William Mullins, Emily Nesselrotte, John Ong, Emily Rosales, Veronica Rowse, Alexander Sampson, Janae Scott, Tayla Shahid, Majorie Stewart, Max Stewart, Brooke Storm, Heather Swaggerty, Stephen Tusing & Madeline Tusing-Knight, Amanita Virosa, Kaitlyn Warren, Sydney West, Wren Yanak. The *Trillium* is the literary and visual arts publication of the Glenville State University Department of Language and Literature.