

SPRING 2026 | ISSUE 5

THE ALLEGHENY MARGINALIA

Semesterly Newsletter of Allegheny College's English Department



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

by Dr. Alexis Hart

The end of an academic year is always bittersweet for me. The sweetness and joy of celebrating our graduating seniors “chomping” their comps, receiving their diplomas, donning their regalia, and sharing their next steps—whether they are off to graduate school, employment, or something else—is offset by the sadness of knowing how much I will miss seeing their faces and hearing their voices in the classrooms, hallways, and stairwells of Oddfellows. And then I remind myself that Commencement is not a full stop, but more of a comma, a semicolon, or (dare I say this in the age of AI?!) an em dash. That is, while we have equipped our graduates to succeed independently, they are still connected to us and to each other. And we are always eager to welcome them back, as we did this spring when Lirona Wainer-Yaffe '24, Julia Weeks '16, and Amber Pouliot '07 shared their experiences with students in the ENGL207: Editing & Publishing class and Anne Rumsey Gearan '85 and Christina Bryson '16 facilitated a conversation about the transferable skills they gained as Allegheny English majors and staff writers for *The Campus* newspaper. We were also thrilled to welcome back to campus on a more permanent basis Victoria Smith '23, Admissions Counselor and Coordinator of Arts Recruitment, and Roman Hladio '23, Associate Director for Communications & Media. Thus I remind myself that just as the ups and downs of Meadville spring weather shift my mood from gray gloominess to sunny sanguinity, my dismay at the thought of seeing the members of the Class of 2026 less frequently will soon give way to my delight at hearing of their post-Allegheny successes. Please share yours with us! Thanks, as always, to Dylan Headley and Jess Sakal. Happy Reading!

A SNEAK PEEK INSIDE THE ISSUE:

*Evelyn Griffith '24:
Then & Now - 2*

*Allegheny Professor
Single Voice - 4*

*2026 Issue: The
Allegheny Review - 6*

*Senior Spotlights:
Renee LaGrosse - 7
Gretchen Hummel - 8*



Evelyn Griffith, '24
M.F.A. Candidate at Old Dominion University

THEN & NOW: WILDACRES RESIDENCY

by Evelyn Griffith, '24

I suppose this all started with Professor Matthew Ferrence of the Allegheny College English Department and the sophomore required course for English majors called “Books and Literary Community.” But when I walked into class on that first day, I learned that we wouldn’t be studying Professor Ferrence’s favorite literature. We’d be studying *mine*. *Ours*. Those books that my classmates and I grew up reading and felt shaped us in some way or another.

That’s another story. Today, I’m here to tell you about how my life came full circle since my time at Allegheny, and it’s all because of that class, and its introducing me to a writing residency called Wildacres.

In that very same class where I learned about my classmates’ favorite books—everything from *Call Me By Your Name* to *Ready Player One*—I also got to sit in on several lectures from visiting publishing professionals. One such professional was a representative of the Wildacres Writing Residency in North Carolina. At the end of her talk she encouraged each of us to apply saying, “maybe we’ll welcome you here one day.” *Maybe*, I thought.

I hoped and dreamed that to be the case not because of that specific residency, but because I wanted my writing to be good enough that residencies, in general, might want it. It wasn’t until two years into my MFA program (where I now reside) that I actually started applying.

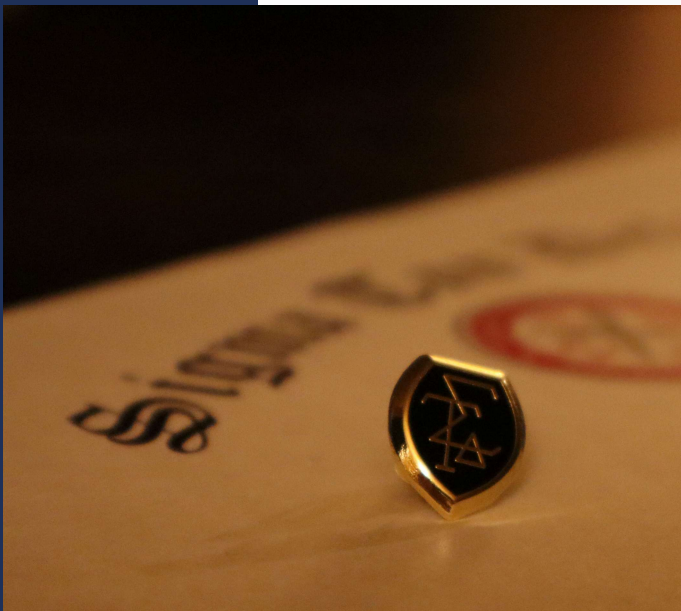
Wildacres, as I’m sure you can imagine, was at the top of my mind. I knew it. I knew the people, or at least one person, and I figured my chances were as good as anyone else’s. I applied with the first

chapter of my children’s novel in progress *The Singing String* (tentatively titled), and it wasn’t until months later that I received this email:

“Congratulations! You have been selected for a one-week residency at Wildacres Retreat for the upcoming season.

“Our selection committee carefully reviewed more than 200 applications this year and is pleased to offer you a residency. We are very excited about your project and the prospect of having you with us.”

In that moment I felt a sort of stretching between my existence now, and my time sitting in (strangely enough) the Environmental Science building. I felt my past self meeting my future self, recognizing all the struggles and trials we went through to get here and I felt this sort of whispering across time: *well done*.



THE RETURN OF SIGMA TAU DELTA

by Dylan DeLong-Headley

The Allegheny College chapter of Sigma Tau Delta has returned, and with it a strong desire to engage the Meadville community with the skills we've gleaned from our studies! Congratulations to the incoming board: President Emily Hildreth and Vice President Mia Anderson, Treasurer Callan Patterson, Secretary Addison Schaad, PR Chair Lily Lehnhardt, Outreach Director Molly Suppo, Internal Affairs Director Dylan DeLong-Headley, and Historian Gracie Miller. The future of Sigma Tau Delta looks bright!

CCPD ENGLISH LUNCH: READING YOUR FUTURE

by Dylan DeLong-Headley & Joseph Klepeis

The Allegheny College Center for Career and Professional Development hosted its very first of a series of academic department luncheons on Thursday, April 16th to assist students in creating a career plan revolving around their majors and minors! We were honored to learn that the first department involved in this initiative was the English Department, and we were proud of the impressive turnout. There are endless ways to engage yourself in the professional world using an English degree. Best of luck to everyone!



ENGLISH DEPT. BOOK SWAP A SUCCESS

by Dylan DeLong-Headley

It was my pleasure this semester to work with Oddfellows Hall Building Coordinator Jess Sakal on organizing our departmental Book Swap! By all metrics, it was a raging success—we were able to meet several students, faculty, and other community members as they left a book they'd previously loved, and took something new to try out! (I personally made out like a bandit—I highly recommend attending next year.) Thank you to everyone who attended, purchased a copy of *Overkill*, or enjoyed a snack with a peer. See you next time!

SINGLE VOICE: CHRISTOPHER BAKKEN

Excerpt by Dr. Matthew Ferrence

I've known Christopher for quite a long time now, and it's been a true pleasure to wander along my own writerly path while he's blazing his. I often feel like I see him up ahead, turning a curve, then finding a particularly excellent mushroom, or an animal skull, or a poem. So I'm thinking, quite a bit, about the glory of forest scrounging, and reality, and how the alchemy of *Driving the Beast* begins with the real and transforms that substance into verse.

By that, I mean Christopher's newest collection reads as simultaneously the most familiar—maybe intimate is a better word—and the most gloriously bent of his work. Reality, but not quite, the essence of this poetry.

"One way to try to see more clearly is to search for what's distorted within us," Christopher recently told Antastasio Mihalpoulous, one of our wonderful graduates. "We might not like what we find, however, and we also might be harder to pin down than we first thought. But running from our reflection, or fleeing from the beast that lives within, also encourages us to look without: into the lives and plights of others, both human and non-human. Empathy requires a dimming of the self and offers the possibility of a different kind of clarity."

Christopher further explains the temporal stamp of these poems, written during a period of considerable dis-clarity. The throes of the pandemic. The aggressively rupturing politics of our country. The continued decline and disdain for the value of artistry in the educational economy. An age that demands poetry, truly.

We cannot live without, even though many people try, usually by citing economy and practicality, revealing themselves to be less interested in living than they are in earning.

Christopher Bakken is the author of four books of poetry, including this excellent new one *Driving the Beast*. Plus a terrific memoir of food and Greece, *Honey, Olives, Octopus*. He is also the co-translator of *The Lion's Gate: Selected Poems of Titos Patrikios*, the Director of the Writing Workshops in Greece, and poetry editor of *Ergon: Greek/American Arts and Letters*. His poems have been everywhere including *Southwest Review*, *Paris Review*, and *Best American Poetry*. He's been a Fulbright Scholar in both Romania and Greece. He bakes lots of bread and organizes vegetables for people to pick up, runs a magic kitchen, and has been a member of the faculty here at Allegheny for a quarter century.



Christopher Bakken, Ph.D.
author of *Driving the Beast* and
Allegheny College Professor
of English





Jessica Elisheva Emerson
author of *Olive Days*

SINGLE VOICE: JESSICA ELISHEVA EMERSON

Excerpt by Isabelle Caramenico

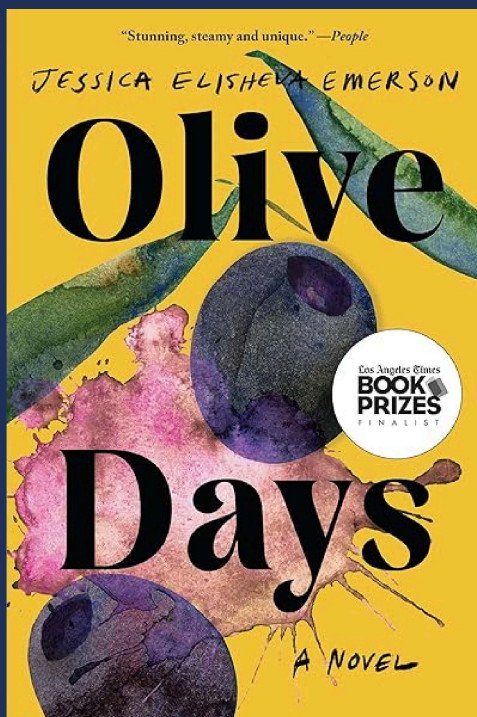
I am excited to introduce to you author, poet, and playwright, Jessica Elisheva Emerson, and her new novel *Olive Days*, which has won numerous awards, including the GLCA New Writers' Award in Fiction for 2025.

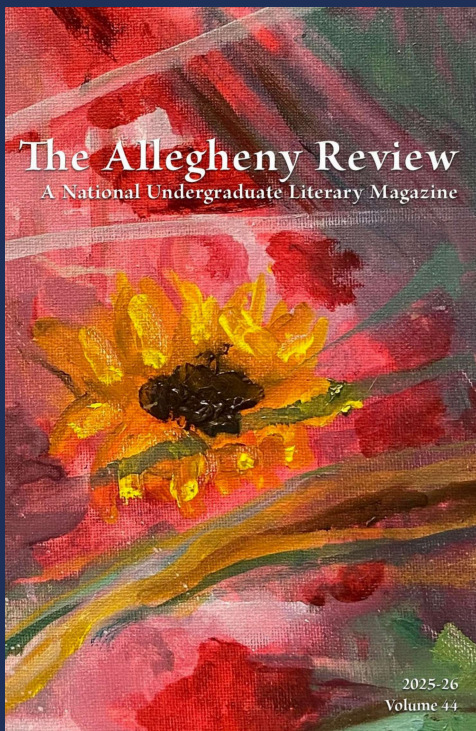
The novel follows Rina Kirsch, an Orthodox Jewish wife and mom of two living in L.A. On the first page, we learn Rina's husband David wants to participate in a wife swap—an evening of switching partners organized by David's best friend. Rina isn't particularly excited about the swap, but also doesn't refuse, and her experience at the swap begins her journey of questioning her marriage, her faith, her place in Jewish tradition, and her life's purpose. This leads her down the road of self-discovery through two affairs—with a rabbi at a volunteer job, and with the teacher of the painting class her husband makes her sign up for. Ultimately, through this journey she is able to unearth the version of herself that had been buried under religious and familial duty. Emerson writes, "[Rina] resolved to stop living as she had been; she resolved to figure out who she was again."

Emerson brings to the page an authentic and subtle story about self discovery as we trace Rina's affair with her art teacher, Will Ochoa. For Rina, freedom and self-certainty are most easily channeled

when painting. However, having let her passion for art be stifled by motherhood and her devotion to her faith, whenever classmates or strangers ask Rina about her art, she has more questions than answers to offer. Emerson writes: "The caged birds weren't parrots, but Rina felt mimicry in their endless cries. *Are you an artist? Are you an artist? Are you an artist?*"

I have heard this caged bird's song and asked myself the same question. Moments such as this are why I admire Emerson's approach to the craft. Emerson's attention to the development and authentic beauty of her characters demonstrates her dedication to and appreciation of the craft. Rina frequently reflects on the ways her community and husband have inhibited her growth as a person and artist. As she puts it, "Women earned a holiness men could never possess. So instead the men possessed the women themselves, kept them. Let them, like lumps, smolder into ash." By fulfilling her religious duty of marrying her husband and having two children with him, Rina leaves behind her passion for art. But, like the Milcham in Jewish scripture, or the Phoenix in Greek Mythology, Rina rises from the embers in an attempt to sculpt a new self from her ashes. And in doing so, she finally learns what her greatest life-long desire has always been: to be known.





THE ALLEGHENY REVIEW'S 2026 ISSUE IS HERE!

by *Dylan DeLong-Headley*

The Allegheny Review, in print since 1983, is the oldest national undergraduate literary magazine in the United States dedicated exclusively to undergraduate works of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. Published annually, the periodical showcases some of the best literature the nation's undergraduates have to offer. The magazine is and always has been edited and produced by students at Allegheny College. This past year, our

editors read over 700 submissions from across the country, choosing pieces based on rigorous standards of quality and creativity.

We are happy to announce that after a long, careful selection and editing process, the new issue is officially in print! This would not have been possible without the amazing editorial staff, nor Professor Bakken, the magazine's advisor. Thanks for your hard work!



OUTGOING EDITOR: PEYTON BENDER

by *Dylan DeLong-Headley*

Peyton Bender is a graduating Creative Writing major and Behavioral Neuroscience minor, and this year's recipient of the Mary A. Flower Prize for most outstanding senior English major. She joined *The Allegheny Review* her first semester, continuing the editorial work she had loved since high school. One of her favorite memories was attending AWP in Los Angeles with Joe, where they promoted the *Review*, attended panels and readings, and explored Hollywood. Her time with *TAR* shaped her editorial eye and writing as she enters Emerson College's Publishing and Writing MA program.

OUTGOING EDITOR: JOSEPH KLEPEIS

by *Dylan DeLong-Headley*

Joseph G. Klepeis III is a graduating English major, Political Science minor, and first-place winner in the ongoing news coverage category at the Student Keystone Media Awards. He first joined *The Allegheny Review* after discovering it at the involvement fair during his first semester, where a past issue drew him in. Since then, he has become a dedicated editor, spending time each week reading submissions, learning logistics, and helping with the work behind the journal. His time with *TAR* has taught him the ropes of literary publishing and strengthened his goal of pursuing an MFA.





SENIOR SPOTLIGHT: RENEE LAGROSSE

by Renee LaGrosse

I am an English and Environmental Science & Sustainability double major. At Allegheny, I work as a Writing Consultant and serve as Education Chair for Honor Committee, the VP and Social Media Manager of AC Bird Club, a member of Kappa Alpha Theta, and a volunteer at Grounds For Change.

My project explores how literary fiction can serve as a tool for stream ecosystem education aimed towards young adult readers. Set along the Lower Youghiogheny River in Western Pennsylvania, the novella follows Terra Williams, a sixteen-year-old girl tested as she faces a white water rafting trip she knows she can't control.

After graduation, I will be working with The Student Conservation Association as a Crew Lead for the Tree Pittsburgh Crew. I will also continue to work on future writing projects with hopes to publish children's literature books!

GO WITH THE FLOW: A LITERARY FICTION STREAM EDUCATION STORY

Excerpt by Renee LaGrosse

The water doesn't just feel like liquid; instead, it feels like your whole body is stuck in quicksand. It is disguised with beauty and swallows you as if you are nothing. There is a specific kind of cognitive dissonance that happens when you're struggling to swim in white water rapids. Your brain becomes a cluttered room with too many thoughts. Soon you feel as if there is too little oxygen, and then you are stuck, and buried in your head. I always thought drowning would be quiet, even ethereal. A slow slip into the water where you fade into the stream's ecosystem. I was wrong. It's overwhelming. But I was not truly drowning; I'm just panicking. The worst part was that I knew how to swim. I have been on the swim team since fifth grade. I have learned how to float. I have learned how to tread water, to race, to win, to survive this situation. I knew what a rip current is and how you were supposed to find the white water and swim sideways out. I knew how you were supposed to put your feet downstream and

let the water pull you through the rapid and into the pool. I knew all of this, the way you would know what to do if a fire alarm was pulled at school. But what if there is a fire? What if there is a rapid and you are drowning in it?

The Youghiogheny River does not care how much I know. In fact, it really is just doing what it is supposed to do: flow.

The rapids burned my nose, and my mouth tastes faintly metallic. The class III white water treated me a bit like I treated my Ken dolls as a kid: thrown around with disrespect. The river was louder than I expected but the sound was muffled with the water in my ears. Sound was something they don't talk about a lot. Rivers do not whisper. They scream and shout roaring as they announce to the world that they are strong and important too. They are as important, if not more, than me and you.

My red life jacket pulled me up to the surface of the water. I can feel it straining and tugging at my body like a boa constrictor. The current was deciding my path for me. No point in trying to swim or fight against it. I gasped in the air as I came up. And in the one half second of clarity I got, I am thinking only one thing: Why did anyone think this was a good idea?

The river was just doing what a river does: it flows.



SENIOR SPOTLIGHT: GRETCHEN W. HUMMEL

by Gretchen W. Hummel

I am a graduating senior majoring in English Literature with a minor in Communications and Cultural Studies. My comp is a series of personal essays interrogating the character of Dr. Julian Bashir from *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. In my project, I embrace the work of projection as valuable scholarly inquiry, using a character that I heavily projected onto at a difficult point in my life. I use creative nonfiction as both a method of analysis and a vehicle to bring my own personal story into conversation with my academic subject.

This fall, I'll be moving to Denver, Colorado and beginning my Master's in Library Science. I've worked in libraries all four years at Allegheny, and I'm thrilled to use all of the skills I've learned in my work and in my English career to pursue a career in librarianship!

I AM JULIAN BASHIR: ESSAYS ON DEEP SPACE NINE AND EMBODIMENT

Excerpt by Gretchen W. Hummel

28. It can be difficult for me to remember concrete details of what things, places, people actually look like. I have almost no memory of these things, especially from difficult times in my life. My internal world distracts from the physical. But it is very easy for me to imagine what DS9 looks like. It is very easy for me to place things there, to imagine what different areas of the Promenade, or the Medbay, or Ops, or Security, or Quark's, look like.

29. The final stage of an EMDR session is the reprocessing part. Once you've been desensitized from the memory, now the goal is to reprogram those negative beliefs into neutral ones. Your therapist reads you the core belief that you started with and asks you what your level of distress is with this belief. Usually it's quite low, after the desensitization stage. You and your therapist come up with a neutral belief, something that you would like to believe, how you would like to feel related to this memory. She asks you what your level of distress is with the neutral belief. Here is where I always have an issue – my level

of distress with the neutral belief is always sky-high. She asks me what stops me from believing that about myself. I tell her I don't know, that I just feel that it isn't true. Sometimes we have to go back to stage one, but that's okay. We will repeat this process as long as it takes to neutralize.

30. This project is an act of reading. In close reading *Star Trek*, my own writing, and my own self, I hope to come to some sort of understanding of what Julian goes through in regards to his body and what I have gone through in regards to my body. I have always used literature and story as a tool to try to understand the real world. When I was a kid, I used to read any dialogue in books out loud, changing my voice and tone and inflection, reading over and over until I said it perfectly normal, like a person should. During my sophomore year of college, I started to read dialogue out loud again. But only when I was reading fanfiction about Julian Bashir. Only when it was Julian's dialogue. His words were mine.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

by *Dylan DeLong-Headley*

If you've made it this far, thank you so much for reading! I took on *The Allegheny Marginalia* in its fourth issue last semester and decided to pour my passion into it. I love our community inside and outside the English Department at Allegheny College, and this newsletter is my way of showing it off!

My name is Dylan (or Tien) DeLong-Headley '28, and I'm a double major in Software Engineering and Creative Writing, as well as the English Department's Community Media Coordinator. Within the realm of English, I also serve as a rising Senior Editor for *The Allegheny Review*, Editor-in-Chief of *The Allegheny Marginalia*, and Director of Internal Affairs for Sigma Tau Delta. Outside the department, I am the Lead Teaching Assistant for the CIS Department, President of Allegheny's student chapter of the Association for Computing Machinery, and Web Designer for Upsilon Pi Epsilon.

This summer, I will be studying and workshopping poetry in Paris, France to work toward my goal of receiving an M.F.A. in Poetry! Share your plans and successes this summer with me at headley01@allegheny.edu for a chance to be featured in Fall 2026 | Issue 6 of *The Allegheny Marginalia*. I look forward to hearing from you! Have a wonderful summer break.



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Dr. Matthew Ferrence
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Gretchen W. Hummel
Renee LaGrosse



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