

Spring 2023

## Bard Observer, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring 2023)

Bard College  
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### Recommended Citation

Bard College, "Bard Observer, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring 2023)" (2023). *Bard Observer, 2020 - 2029*. 1. [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer\\_20s/1](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer_20s/1)

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# Literature's Near-Death Experience

The uncertain fate of a non-utilitarian major

Yujian Han for the Bard Observer

IN UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, RATES OF GRADUATION IN HUMANITIES DEPARTMENTS HAVE FALLEN RAPIDLY. HERE'S A LOOK AT HOW BARD'S LITERATURE DEPARTMENT HAS BEEN FARING.

Sophie Foley

Moderation is a gateway drug for existential crises, and this semester, as I inched towards the pearly gates of upper college studies in Literature, I had a lovely thought-spiral about the utility of focusing my energy for the next two years on the theoretical discussion of books and words. In my efforts to justify my intended course of study, I stumbled across a recent article in the New Yorker called "The End of the English Major." Who could resist that level of melodrama? I sat at my computer and plodded through grim news about the plummeting humanities enrollment rates in colleges nationwide.

Nathan Heller, author of the February article, makes a pretty compelling argument for his doom-laced headline. In the last

decade, colleges and universities across America have experienced massive decreases in their numbers of graduated humanities majors, with overall enrollment in the subject down by 17%. The trend is such that many schools have seen their English and history programs cut in half, and some have even considered eliminating these departments altogether.

Any reader clued into the cultural zeitgeist can likely intuit some of the causes, as English and other subjects in the humanities are frequently the target of skepticism. *What're you gonna do with a degree in reading and writing?*

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## Untimely Warning

Sexual Assault at Bard

NAYELI SEQUEIRA  
SUNGUROFF,  
SAGE RUDOLF  
BENICIO TAGGART

**SEXUAL ASSAULT AT BARD IS AN ONGOING ISSUE.**

**WE ASK YOU: HOW CAN WE CREATE A SAFER CAMPUS TO LIVE AND LEARN ON?**

According to the National Sexual Assault Resource Center "More than 90% of sexual assault victims on college campuses do not report the assault." However, over the last several years, issues of harassment, assault and violence have come to the fore.

The Bard campus is regarded as relatively safe for students, but recent instances of sexual harassment and assault have placed the danger of walking alone at night in the public eye.

At 10:15PM on March 7th, 2023, Bard students, faculty and staff received an email from the Director of Safety and Security, Peter Verdesi, issuing a "Timely Warning." In his email, Verdesi reported the assault of a student by an unidentified man outside of Kline around 7:10PM that same evening. News of the incident circulated throughout the Bard community via text and email, alerting the campus of a case of "Inappropriate Touching." Two weeks later, on the night of March 27th another assault of a similar nature occurred.

In response, Verdesi and his team implemented extra security procedures, including the installation of 6 additional security cameras around campus. Video footage linked a car belonging to Red Hook resident, Nathan Holmes, to the assault. He was promptly arrested on April 3rd in Albany and charged with three counts of forcible touching.

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-FAITHFUL TO THE TRUTH-

# LITERATURE'S NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

THE UNCERTAIN FATE OF A NON-UTILITARIAN MAJOR

SOPHIE FOLEY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

We are familiar with the death sentence this question points to: there is no money, no hope of employment, no practical use in our preoccupation with language, for all its beauty and mystery. Right?

On the whole, the numbers at Bard show that even students who attend a college in the woods are not exempt from such concerns. Éric Trudel, professor of Literature and director of Bard's French Studies program, told me that when he first came to Bard twenty years ago, the Literature program was moderating around 35-40 students each year. "This year we have about 26 moderating." Though lower, this number is well improved from two years ago, in 2021, when the number of seniors graduating with degrees in Literature was 17. "It seems like we're picking up," Trudel said. "Fingers crossed!"

Matt Mutter, Chair of the Division of Languages and Literature, echoed this hope in an email: "One happier piece of news is that our Lit moderations are up considerably this year... Unclear, of course, whether this is merely an anomalous year, and we are still below our pre-2016 norm, which was 35-40 per year. But at one point we had as few as 12 or 13."

So maybe the nail isn't quite in the coffin.

In fact, there are even some signs of life. Heller, in his piece, briefly mentions that interest in the study of creative writing has increased parallel to the nationwide struggle of English departments, and Bard reflects this trend as well. "We moderated 56 students this year," Dinaw Mengetsu, director of Bard's Written Arts program, told me with some degree of amazement. Given the frequent collaboration between and crossover of the Written Arts and Literature departments, one might be inclined to view this number as an antidote to the (scholarly, but also humanistic) fear that comes in considering the downturn of literary studies.

At Bard, the boundary between Written Arts and Literature is famously indefinite—for a long time, in fact, the two departments were totally indistinguishable. "All courses were tagged Literature courses, even workshop classes. There was a general assumption that the curriculum was nearly identical

from start to finish, but there was a pivot moment where the student, in talking with advisors and professors, decided to emphasize the creative over the critical," Mutter told me, referencing his initial employment at Bard twelve years ago. Today, there remains an understanding of the subjects and their respective skills as greatly intertwined: "You have to read to be able to write," one Written Arts student put it simply. Mengetsu had similar thoughts: "You need a strong foundational literary discourse in order to have a creative one alongside it. And students respond to that because it gives you a clear sense of what the work is doing, rather than making it seem that the work is just there for you to create, in a kind of absence or void."

The good news about Written Arts rates may, or may not, ease concerns about the total annihilation of literary studies that Heller's article seemed to suggest, but the question of utility remains. However, in response to the problem of practical value—or what usable skills this degree will offer a graduate—members of the Bard Literature department seem largely unfazed.

**You need a strong foundational literary discourse in order to have a creative one alongside it.**

"I think the question [of the use of a Literature degree in regards to future careers] is partly misguided," Trudel told me. "The liberal arts education, what Bard provides, is not a professional education. It's not supposed to be something that determines your life—it is supposed to be something that opens up paths for you to imagine your life and awaken interest."

Naturally, questions of class, wealth, race, and privilege are wrapped up in any discussion of career preparedness. The theoretical nature of a liberal arts education can, in many cases, stand for the luxury of not having to worry about getting

a job. However, I would argue that inaccessibility to the opportunity to imagine is not inherent to the literature major itself. The culprit, rather, is the capitalist imperative to pursue an economically viable degree which prioritizes product over everything else.



Aspinwall Illustration by Stella Scanlon

## BEARS! Don't Run for Your Lives

BENICIO TAGGART

**BARD COLLEGE EXPERIENCES BEAR SIGHTINGS ON A REGULAR BASIS, BUT BEAR ATTACKS ARE UNHEARD OF. EVEN SO, THERE ARE REASONS TO BE VIGILANT.**

At 4 AM, May 6th, 2021, Jonah Roth was sitting in the common room of Resnick A when he spotted an adult black bear across Resnick Road. According to Jonah, the bear was "wandering around" and pushing over trash cans in search of food. Afterward, it disappeared around a corner, and from Jonah's night. Then, he went to bed. It was "a surreal experience," Jonah told me. "I didn't take pictures or videos... I just wanted to take in the

moment. I can look up a picture of a black bear any time, but rarely get to see one in real life. But, other people did, and videos of the bear were all over social media the next day."

Bard College is positioned directly across from the Catskill Region, which the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Black Bear Management Plan identified as a region in which bear populations would ideally be reduced, between 2014 and 2024.

The primary policy for population control is the promotion of legal bear hunting as recreation for New York State hunters. Black bears were once understood as "vermin" according to the DEC, which meant that bounties were put out for their pelts to incentivize the removal of their population. Due to conservationist

activism, black bears are now a public resource held in trust by the government. Bears are no longer systematically eradicated, but their population is instead managed for the public good.

Jonah Roth's experience at Bard aside, the average Bardian needn't worry about the presence of these creatures. The surrounding forests of Tivoli Bays are relatively safe. Although, when a bear is sighted one feels the wildness of nature. There aren't many animals we would think of running from in this area, apart from the black bear—and you shouldn't run!

-FAITHFUL TO THE TRUTH-

# What is WXBC?



TAMAR FAAGEN

Last year, WXBC, Bard's student-run radio station, celebrated 75 years since its founding with a birthday party in Ward Manor. Many of the attendees of this momentous occasion might not have known its history. In fact, there are still members of the Bard community who seem not to know that the station exists at all.

The story of WXBC begins in 1947. After returning from their service in World War II, a group of GIs, ready to apply their technical skills to an academic environment, created the Bard Radio Association in the basement of North Hoffman. This became WXBC, the X for experimental, and BC for Bard College. Since its inception, the station has been student-run. From the Sherman Brothers to Adam Conover, the station's alumni/ae have contributed to many culturally significant projects at Bard and beyond.

Today WXBC only broadcasts on the internet, but it was not always this way. For most of its history, WXBC would broadcast using the carrier current method, where the antenna was the electrical

system of a building. The carrier current method was easier to engineer and did not require the expenses or maintenance of an FM or AM license from the FCC. However, the carrier current method only allowed for the station to be received 300 feet from the source of the broadcast. This was one of the factors that led to the decision to switch to broadcasting on the web in 2008. Prior to this WXBC was simulcasting, that is broadcasting on the web and through the carrier current system.

Since the fall of 2021, WXBC has been broadcasting online through Mixlr. The site lets users interact with DJs with a comment feature. By broadcasting on the internet, WXBC can reach an audience outside the walls of Manor and the roads of Annandale-on-Hudson. As a student-run radio station, WXBC operates during the academic year 7 days a week from 6AM to 2AM. The station is proud to have diverse programming brought to you by all members of the Bard community. Those interested in joining WXBC in the fall should visit our website, [wxbc.bard.edu](http://wxbc.bard.edu), or follow us on Instagram @wxbcbard.

# Kennedy in the Streets

A STUDENT'S  
IMPRESSIONS OF  
A 2024 CANDIDATE

MARTIAL JUNCEAU

One of the most fascinating and wild events I've ever witnessed was the Fall 2021 anti-vaccine passport rally in New York City, headlined by a certain Bobby Kennedy Jr., nephew of president JFK. Bobby Kennedy Jr., has just launched an insurgent campaign for the 2024 Democratic Presidential Nomination. Next to Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, Kennedy was perhaps the most internationally significant opponent of vaccine passports, lockdowns, and other pandemic measures. Kennedy went on a world tour of sorts, even to Agamben's Italy, in protest against what he called a "global *coup d'etat*." I caught him at the tail end of his international campaign in nowhere else but Midtown Manhattan.

The truism that all roads meet somewhere near Macy's and Herald Square was a surreal fact on that day. The widely acclaimed environmentalist and "poster child of the anti-vax movement" (as he facetiously described himself) had conjured up a rhizomatic crowd which reflected his travels. Represented were unaffiliated antiglobalists, new agers, trumpists, alternative medicine mothers with those too organically-grown-looking children of theirs, old hippies and even older emigres from east of the Berlin wall, anarchists, skaters, libertarians, and some uniformed black nationalists. Eco-leftists breathed the same air as Alex Jones devotees. And among this wild cast, stood working class and middle class Americans who evade most categorizations of our ever narrower, contemporary political discourse. These last folks weren't republicans or democrats, rather they were anti-system populists of no stable political home. This is the bloc which has been channeling the periphery's Dionysian spirit in an ongoing political realignment which we're all witnessing.

## Eco-leftists breathed the same air as Alex Jones devotees.

Kennedy lamented the devastated small businesses, closed churches, and padlocked basketball courts to an audience both wacky and electrifying in its diversity. He said he believed this powder-keg of utter potentiality had a path to the majority. In the face of what he termed "a controlled-demolition of civil society," I saw in real time a mad harvesting-up of postmodern America's civil rubble, with Kennedy as the reaper.

After he finished, Kennedy stood for some moments to the right side of the podium, speaking with attendees at the fore of the barricades. I had been inching my way up step by step throughout the speech, and now made it there. "Bobby," I said, using the familiar name everyone else had been calling him, "come to Bard College and speak."

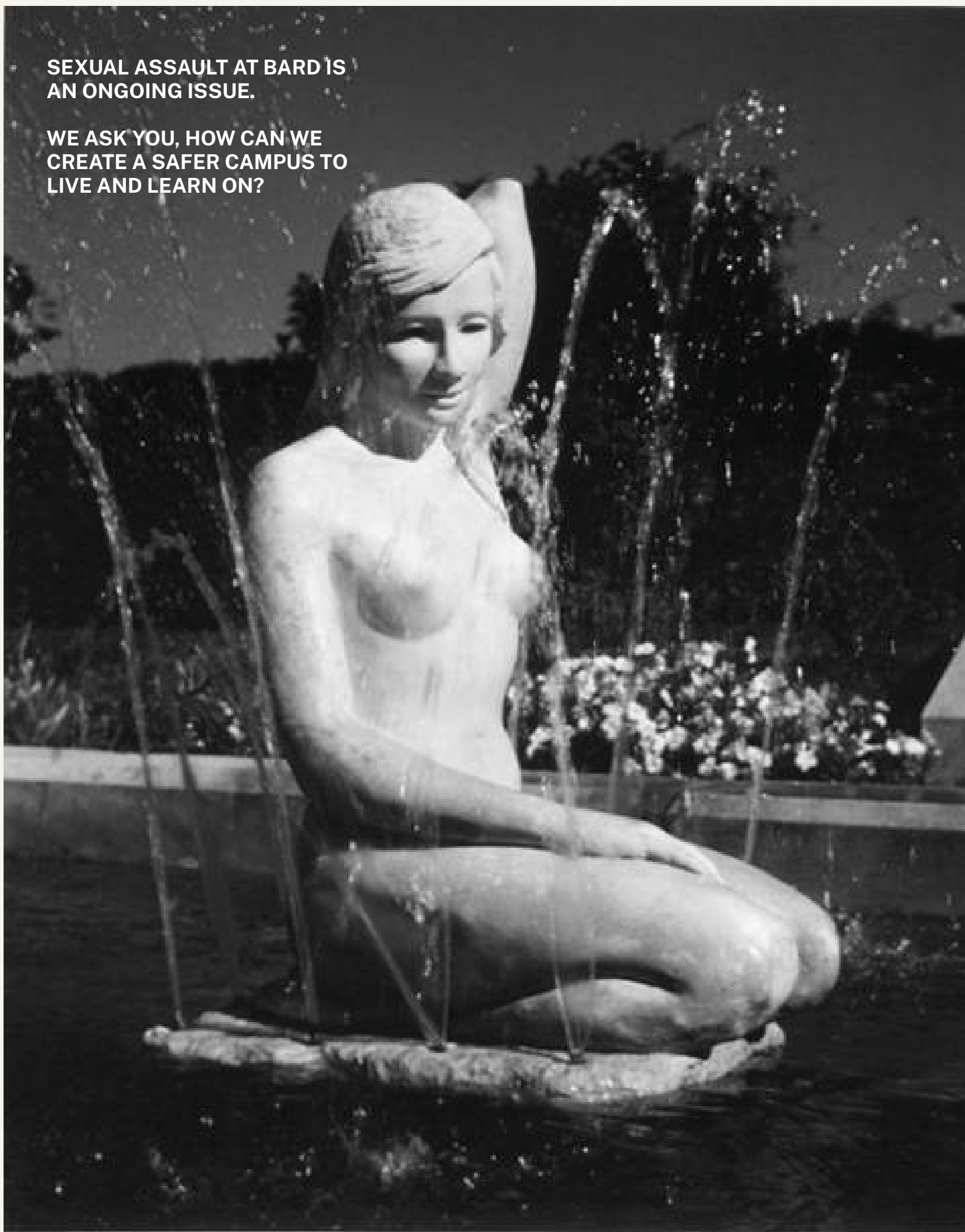
Now that he is officially in the race for the Democratic Nomination with a broad anti-corporate, anti-war, and green justice platform, it's high time that I make a full attempt to bring him here. If he's the same Bobby I met on some Midtown street, I know he would speak to the most existential issues of our time right here on campus.

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-FAITHFUL TO THE TRUTH-

# UNTIMELY WARNING:

## Sexual Assault at Bard



SEXUAL ASSAULT AT BARD IS AN ONGOING ISSUE.

WE ASK YOU, HOW CAN WE CREATE A SAFER CAMPUS TO LIVE AND LEARN ON?

Photograph by Robert Bassler, '57.

NAYELI SEQUEIRA SUNGUROFF, SAGE RUDOLF, BENICIO TAGGART CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE 1

“This campus is exceedingly safe,”

Verdesi assured the Observer in our recent meeting with him to discuss the issue of safety and security on Bard’s campus. Despite this claim, the campus is open, meaning anyone can enter and exit unpatrolled.

In light of these events, students still have concerns about their safety on campus.

Paige Labbe, a student and co-facilitator for BRAVE and the Sexual Assault Support Group, stated, “I feel better that the person has been caught. I feel a little bit safer on the campus, but a part of me is still scared and worried, because of how easy it was for him to do these things

and get away with it. I’m just nervous that this will happen again.”

Bard has had to grapple with sexual assault as a public issue on campus before, albeit in a very different context. On April 20th, 2021, Dumaine Williams, Vice President Dean of the Early College and Bard alum, received notice that a short list titled “Bard Abusers” was being circulated among students on social media.

The list contained the names of accused perpetrators of sexual assault at Bard. Williams claimed that the college’s social media policy at the time prevented the school from intervening, or trying to take down the list. Instead, Williams and his colleagues primarily worked with the students named on the list, as this was the only actionable information available to them. Williams recalled

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**“I FEEL BETTER THAT THE PERSON HAS BEEN CAUGHT. I FEEL A LITTLE BIT SAFER ON THE CAMPUS, BUT A PART OF ME IS STILL SCARED AND WORRIED, BECAUSE OF HOW EASY IT WAS FOR HIM TO DO THESE THINGS AND GET AWAY WITH IT. I’M JUST NERVOUS THAT THIS WILL HAPPEN AGAIN.”**

that “Some of the students wanted advice from us on how they could respond,” but were discouraged from posting any admission of innocence or explanation on social media.

What differed in the case of the list was that the alleged perpetrators sought help from the administration, not the alleged victims, which limited the investigation and subsequent response of the school. When asked how this situation contrasted with the usual operations of Title IX, Dumain recalled, “I think one of the challenges here was not necessarily knowing who were the victims of some of these incidents. So it wasn’t clear, right, this started with a list of the abusers so it was ‘this person did something’ and like usually in Title IX cases we start with the person who has been hurt, the person who has been violated in some way based on our policies and then we work from there. This was very much the opposite.” In other words, the Title IX process doesn’t function in reverse. It would require that the administration seek out and force someone to identify themselves as having been abused.

We interviewed Jacob Testa, the Deputy Coordinator of Title IX and Lauren Gretina, the Title IX Coordinator, at the Title IX office in Sottery Hall. Mr. Testa claimed that Title IX faced intense criticism for their lack of response to the list’s public accusation of sexual misconduct.

Unfortunately, the normal operations of the Title IX office were also impeded by Covid-19 restrictions. They could not run in-person events and workshops to address the issue, something they

would normally have done. “We struggled to make our presence felt on Campus,” recalled Mr. Testa. When news of the list reached their office, their hands were tied because the accusations were unverified. Without first-hand knowledge and thus the consent of the victim to investigate, Title IX could not pursue their usual response protocol.

Determined on a case-by-case basis in cooperation with the federal Title IX statutes, a typical response can include anything between a full investigation to more discrete accommodations to make victims more comfortable pursuing their education. The result could be a dorm switch, an institutional restraining order, or mediation, instead of an investigation resulting in immediate

**THE POINT IS FOR VICTIMS TO CONTROL THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THE PROCESS, AS WELL AS FOR PROPORTIONAL RESPONSE TO BE TAKEN DEPENDING ON THE DEGREE OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT.**

expulsion. The point is for victims to control their experience of the process, as well as for proportional response to be taken depending on the degree of sexual misconduct. Mr. Testa told us, “A cross examination is a deal breaker for some.”

Both the publication of the “Abusers” list and Verdesi’s “Timely Warnings” made accusations of sexual assault public, and raise the same questions: how do we keep each other safe from assault on campus? What does it mean for the community when sexual assault becomes a public affair, and how should we react to that information?

In coming issues of The Observer, we will continue to report on this essential concern, and propose measures to make Bard a safer place to live, work, and learn.

## JEFFREY EPSTEIN AND BARD



### A Suppliant Outsider in the Townhouse

SAGE RUDOLF

### “A guy sent us money,

and we followed up,” President Botstein told the New York Times in an article published on May 5, 2023. “It’s a simple story.” The guy in question was Jeffrey Epstein, the convicted sex offender, and the money, \$75,000, was sent to Bard’s high school programs in New York City in 2011. The Times had first reported on Epstein’s gift in 2019, and a Wall Street Journal article published last month offered more detail, returning the issue to popular attention— and to the attention of the Bard community.

To learn more about Epstein’s connection to Bard, the Observer met with Botstein in his office. He told us that prior to the donations, he had never met or even heard of Epstein. Botstein’s research on the faceless donor revealed Epstein’s status as a convicted sex offender, but the full extent of his crimes was as yet not known. It was only after the donations were given, in two separate payments, that Botstein visited Epstein’s now-infamous New York City townhouse for the first time. As Botstein told us, “I was a suppliant outsider.”

Botstein’s first visit to the townhouse in 2012 was unremarkable. He called the man “odd and arrogant” in a way that Botstein suggested only the truly wealthy, the 1%, can be. While Epstein did not initially agree to more donations, he did not flat out reject the possibility, either. Botstein persisted, traveling to Epstein’s townhouse about two dozen more times over the next four years to solicit more donations in meetings which he told us “didn’t last half an hour.”

As a private school, Bard is only able to function with the patronage of wealthy donors. This need for donors, not unique to Bard, was even more pronounced in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, which left Bard with a \$30 million shortfall to be filled by fundraising each year. Donors usually contribute to schools because the school’s mission resonates with their philanthropic efforts. While Botstein said that Epstein expressed a topical interest in music, the billionaire left ten minutes into two Fisher Center performances after landing his helicopter on Blithewood in 2013 and 2016. According to Botstein, Epstein gave the money because a child of one of his employees was enrolled in a Bard high school. “It ended up that he had no conviction that aligned with our mission,” Botstein said. Efforts to secure Epstein as a sympathetic ongoing patron failed.

Botstein asserted that he would not accept money from Epstein today. He was “a truly evil man”, Botstein told the New York Times. Botstein left us with the impression that this experience with Epstein was a symptom of a larger problem: how the desperation for philanthropic support can leave institutions of higher learning at the mercy of heinous characters.



J . B . P E E L

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-FAITHFUL TO THE TRUTH-

## DORM REVIEWS

EMMA PAXSON

In early March, the Red Hook Catch published the news of Bard's plans to build four new dorms in the field behind Robbins. The residence halls will be three stories high, with a total of 294 new rooms to better accommodate the entirety of Bard's student population. Many students live off-campus in Tivoli or Red Hook, but are now struggling to do so given the recent lack of affordable housing in town. The shortage of rooms has been a problem since the pandemic, and many students were temporarily put up in the Kingston Best Western at the beginning of the Fall semester. The issue is one of image, too: the March article from the Catch reports that the promise of on-campus housing for all four years is something Bard must provide its prospective students in order to remain competitive.

Apparently, the construction on these sparkling new dorms won't be done until 2025, and in the meantime, we thought it'd be fun to review the comedy of errors that is regularly Residence Life at Bard College. Without further ado, here are select portraits of our frequently absurd, frequently horrifying places of residence.

### SPRUCE

A double-wide trailer, not a dorm.

### NEW ROBBINS

Holiday Inn with a daemonic presence. Self-controlled AC is dope, though. 3rd-floor bathroom sink filled with hairs, possibly pubic

### SOUTH HALL

Chic checkerboard kitchen tiling? Check. Your own back porch to chain-smoke on? Check. 2-minute walk to Kline and the library? Check. Air you can cut a knife with? Check.

### RESNICK K

Splennndid, dahhhling! BUT: don't even think about keeping those blinds open if your room faces McCausland (mine does). The freshmen in that dorm seem to have routine soirees that revolve around staring into your room. If you're going to be letting it all hang out in Resnick K, just know you have an audience.

### RESNICK L

After taking a shit next to 5 other people in elementary-school-style stalls for months on end, a suite bathroom is the road to recovery.

## Oracle of Delphi

Is texting a form of courtship or romantic communication?  
Like sending letters was in the heyday of the post office?

Texting is probably the most valid form of chivalric courtship today—that does not mean that it is sexy. While neither shameless, nor titillating, it can still be an intimate form of communication. Though it has not reached the intimacy of the love letter, nor is it destined to, text-exchange has become the modern equivalent of the courtship dance. Demonstrate virility and vigor, but also caution! Make your modus operandi not overindulging in texts—less is always, invariably, more....

### How to avoid overcommunication in relationships?

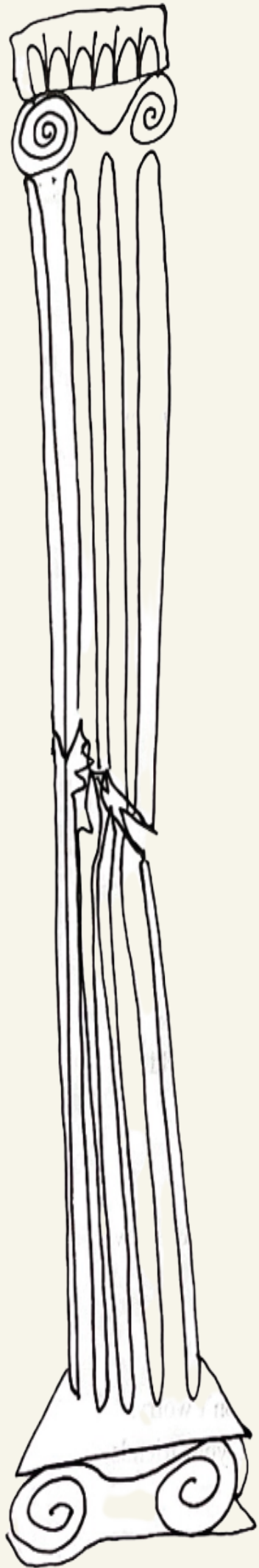
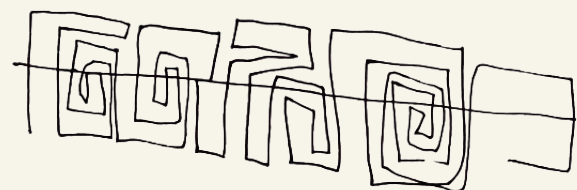
It is necessary and difficult to keep things to yourself. Oversharing is the crutch that keeps the cripple weak. Once the glamor and mystery of the relationship dissolve, you're left with those nagging anxieties, those miniscule details that become the steady thorn in your side—what to do but ask? A fatal mistake. It is exactly because the other person is terrifyingly complicated that love is so miraculous, and the petty anxieties, the little disturbing thoughts that idle around all our brains are laid to waste when we try to share them completely with our lover. The more you and your partner dissect each other's psyches, the worse things will get: The allure of frankness is the source of illness in any relationship.

### Am I an idiot for liking Robert Bly's book *Iron John, A Book About Men*?

This book is the start of a journey. The hurt Robert Bly seeks to heal is only the beginning... But be wary of the mix of German folklore and Freudian psychoanalysis; as you read do not lose your critical capacity. Poets are not always great philosophers....

### I locked eyes with a girl a few days ago, how should I propose?

The temptation to give oneself completely to another is understandable—who cares about the world when you've found the one, right? I assure you, there's not a bigger romantic at Bard than me, but make sure you know the person before you rush into things! Learn how they eat, breathe, smell, scheme and cackle before you propose.



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-FAITHFUL TO THE TRUTH-

# PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE: Lydia Tár

EMMA PAXSON

Lydia Tár, the labyrinthine main character of Todd Fields' new film, does not cede to anyone's will but her own. "You cannot start without me; I start the clock," Tár explains in an interview at the beginning of the movie. With an impressive career in conducting and an unmatched talent, this rigid attitude goes unchecked for most of Tár's life. Although Tár's "clock" is meant to describe her relationship to an orchestra, the viewer comes to understand that this mindset bleeds into everything she does. It ends up not only destroying her career, but, by the end of the film, her entire life.

Tár is nothing without her intelligence, talent, and reputation. The film puts the viewer in a tricky position: you can't help but be impressed with Tár's excellence and expertise, making it difficult to process the disturbing offenses she commits against young women.

I've read four different reviews of Tár, (including ones from the New York Times, and the New Yorker), all of which use popular buzzwords: "cancel culture," "#MeToo," "grooming." While all these could apply, I don't think that any of them could encapsulate the movie.

Do things happen in the film that make Tár an unlikeable and even immoral character? Yes. Are these the most important things about the film? No. We don't have to sympathize with Tár to be interested in her story. Evil or not, Tár is a character so dynamic and unique that we are, like everyone around her in the film, thrilled by her presence. At every turn, Tár does the unexpected.

Tár's previous protégé, Krista, is an example of Tár's messy and destructive compulsiveness. It is never clearly stated or shown what happened between Krista and Tár. Rather, we learn that Tár believes Krista had "wronged" her using various lawyers and publicists who have to deal with the fallout of their affair. Tár viciously rips into the young girl and the outcome is fatal. The lengths that Tár goes to in order to punish Krista is disturbing; the girl, once an aspiring conductor with a bright future, ends up barred from any and all job opportunities in the world of classical music—a world that Tár appears to own and control.

The viewer can't turn away. Tár does evil and incorrigible things. Yet she keeps you hanging on. *Tár* is not so abrasive as it is intoxicating. It will drain the life out of you but keep you wanting more all the same.

A scene that pulls back the curtain on Tár's complex character happens at the very end of the movie. Tár has been sequestered somewhere in South East Asia to begin working on a project very much out of the public eye. A rebranding, some may call it. In Tár fashion, still managing her particular tastes and routines in this far-off corner of the world, she arrives at her hotel and asks the concierge where to get a massage nearby. Upon arriving at the place, she is asked to take a step over to the "fishbowl," a room full of young women kneeling in white kimonos, and take her pick. Tár is flabbergasted, mouth hanging open, a look of confusion and disgust on her face. But isn't this what she wants? Isn't this what she has been doing all along: picking and choosing women like pieces in a chess game? The realization hits Tár like a truck and in the next scene, we see her running away and vomiting in the street.

**Tár is not so abrasive as it is intoxicating. It will drain the life out of you but keep you wanting more all the same.**

Does a guilty conscience compensate for a character's heinousness? This is a question that the film asks us to consider. There is no simple resolution to Tár's turbulent existence. A viewer hoping to see everything tied up at the end will be disappointed. Tár is all too human despite her inhumane tendencies. She is completely frustrating yet brilliant. The film deserves all the praise it gets, regardless of hashtags.



Illustration by Stella Scanlon

## TIVOLI ALIMENTARI

STELLA SCANLON

Tivoli's growing gourmet food scene employs Bard students, but at the sacrifice of a reasonable cost of living. Post-COVID, the rapid gentrification of Tivoli has caused rising rents and the disappearance of affordable restaurants that once catered to the Bard student population. Today, a regular coffee at All That Java and Tivoli General Store does not cost less than \$3, and made-to-order coffees range from \$3.50- \$5.50 at both cafés. Prices vary at The Corner (\$12- \$40 dinner menu, not including market priced meat/sea food dishes); GioBatta (Antipasti \$6-28, Paninis \$14-16, Entrees \$22-32); Tivoli General Store (Sandwiches \$8 -\$15, in-house listed at \$17). But, largely, students are limited to the delicious affordability of Osaka (\$3.50-\$32), and Broadway Pizza (around \$3.50 per slice, \$20 for a large pizza).

A Bard professor cries, "I was shocked that for chips and salsa, guac, and two entrees (and no drinks or dessert) I paid \$70 at Santa Fe last night! I mean, the food was fine, but that's insane for dinner for two that was tacos and chips, right?" One disgruntled student sighs about Tiv. Gen., "I hate it. \$15 for two slices of bread and a sliver of lox."

Ideally, restaurants and cafés in a college town (what Tivoli is in name only) would be the places where the community can come together (break bialy?) convivially. In catering to city-weary vacationers, Tivoli's restaurants and cafés do anything but synthesize the community: they enforce the cultural gentrification of it. Despite the usual vitriol of Bard students, the overall entreaty is a benevolent, and simple one—enter into conversation with the whole community of the area, and lower your prices!



Marginalia by Achi Tsitsishvili

-FAITHFUL TO THE TRUTH-

# TOO MUCH THERAPY

THE ENDURING BLUES OF BOYGENIUS



the record album cover

SOPHIE FOLEY

When boygenius—the supergroup composed of Lucy Dacus, Julien Baker, and Phoebe Bridgers, some of the most notable indie darlings of our current moment—released their debut album, *the record*, on March 31st, all manner of people went wild. The release hit number four on the Billboard 200 within a week, was named a New York Times Critic’s Pick, and received an 8.2 on Pitchfork (its rating adorned with those attractive red “Best New Music” arrows). And while I’ve spent many of my days kneeling at the altars of these women and their music, this time around I had trouble joining the reverent masses.

Luckily, Bard has a high population of contrarians, and I was able to locate some other people who were not so hot on the new album. Though Bardians frequently toe the line between honesty and cruelty, I find a sharp tongue to be integral to thoughtful criticism of the arts, especially when mainstream media is presenting a unified front of positivity. Thus, I bring to you a short negative review of *the record*, semi-crowdsourced from some of my favorite tough-lovers on campus.

The members of boygenius are known in popular culture for their melancholic lyricism and arrangements—Bridgers, especially, is an icon of the colloquially-termed “Sad Girl” music genre. Asking a friend if they’d listened to *the record*, I received a slap in the face: “No! I’m not depressed!” Though I believe that one can listen to slow, soft, downhearted music without being diagnosed as clinically glum, it’s true that these musicians seem to be oddly comfortable in the dumps.

Their collaborative album represents no deviation from this mode: lyrics laden with the same love-lorn I’s and You’s of the band’s debut self-titled EP. There’s ultimately the sense for some that *the record* might be overdoing the emotional weight. “It felt like they’d gone to too much therapy,” a different Bardian told me. We were talking about “Cool About It,” the album’s fifth track, which features an anecdote, narrated by Bridgers, about taking the medication of a friend/partner “to see what it’s like.” “Now I have to act like / I can’t read your mind,” Bridgers sings in her soft alto.

If she believes that’s how empathy works, I’m afraid she’s been misinformed. If not, it seems the line has aimed for edginess but landed in sentimentality.

Then there’s what we’ll call the Big Thief Problem. Big Thief is another current indie rock superpower, led by the lovely, almost monk-like figure of Adrienne Lenker. Another Bard student I spoke with, Marissa, found a lot of similarities in the themes Lenker’s songs revolve around and those of the boygenius members: all are queer, female, and unafraid of getting deep. “But I feel like Adrienne leaves room for hope, for happiness and for reflection that’s well-rounded,” Marissa said, commenting on the monochromatic melancholy of Dacus, Bridgers, and Baker. Indeed, despair abounds in lyrics like: “Wish I wasn’t so tired / But I’m tired,” from the song “Revolution 0.”

I also talked to people who were generally indifferent to *the record*: a WXBC DJ I solicited a review from told me their favorite part of the album was when “Head Alone,” a song by Julia Jacklin, autoplays following the final track—so the best song on the new boygenius record isn’t a song by boygenius. “I was super excited,” said my friend, who had to be cajoled into listening, “it would’ve been a great conclusion, but then I realized it was someone else.” When similarly pestered for a review, Wyatt Mason, notoriously of the New York Times (and less notoriously, the Bard Written Arts department) admitted that his family had listened to the album over the weekend. “Kind of... in the background. It wasn’t a great record.”

And then there was my friend Fari, who ran all the way across Kline to ask me if I’d heard the song “Leonard Cohen,” wondering if I thought it was as bad as she did. The album’s eighth track includes a dig at the titular musician, characterizing him as an “old man having an existential crisis / At a Buddhist monastery, writing horny poetry.” “You just can’t say that!” Fari said to me, smiling incredulously. Indeed, the description had felt out of pocket and almost mean, considering Cohen’s writing is actually lauded in the song. Seems like someone was looking for a cheap thrill and found one which, like *the record*, is too easy, and too pleased with itself.

# Naked, Eating Chicken

THOUGHTS ON WOZZECK

SEBASTIAN KAPLAN

Several weeks ago, Bard Senior of Literature, Benjamin Stroman, staged a loose retelling of the Alan Berg opera, *Wozzeck*, at the Fisher Center.

Stroman’s intelligently sparse production of *Wozzeck* makes for a nasty experience: nudity, handstands, cigarettes. Sterile stage design. Occasional flourishes of Jazz Age music. *Wozzeck* screaming at us, “Why are you looking at me?”

Our first glimpse: a couple opens the door. Diplomatic and pensive, dressed in a white lab coat and with his hair slicked back, Professor Thomas Bartscherer enters in black leather boots, rattling the floor with his pounding footsteps. Preparing us for the horror to come, he says, “Witness the man—Wozzeck, the murderer.”

A sheet is pulled, revealing Stroman as the beat-down Wozzeck in his underwear, contorted in a tall cage. The character and his biography are annihilated within half an hour; shaved, starved, and turned into a prop. What we’re left with is a haunting image: Wozzeck, naked, eating chicken in front of others with no fork or knife.

In one of the show’s most defiant moments, the couple hold each other and dance to swing music, in front of the deflated, defeated Wozzeck—an allusion to Pasolini’s epic meditation on fascism, *Salò*. The dancers refuse to acknowledge what the audience can’t help but stare at, and we wonder if any humanity is left in the caged rag-doll.

Is it about sex; is it about kink—why not ‘fess up? At the end of the show, Wozzeck sits on a table, staring down at its surface. He paws at the wood and we hear the sound of splashing water—Narcissus? The beginnings of art? No. The unfeeling couple brings out a TV and play videos of a baby.

For the audience reflecting, and the actors working, Wozzeck’s personhood is off-stage, unseen and irrelevant. All we have is his physical body, in constant agony: Wozzeck doing a handstand for 6 minutes; Wozzeck being pulled around. Watching this performance, a feat of incredible endurance and pain, we become aware of ourselves as an audience of numb voyeurs, complacent in the objectification of Wozzeck.



Marginalia by Achi Tsitsishvili

-FAITHFUL TO THE TRUTH-

# OBITUARIES



Yujian Han for the Bard Observer

## Fredrick Hammond, Irma Brandeis Scholar and Conductor

Frederick Hammond, 25-year Bard professor of Romantic Culture and History of Music, passed away on March 3rd, 2023. In President Botstein's In Memoriam letter, he wrote about the late Professor Hammond, "Fred was the renowned biographer of composer and virtuoso Girolamo Frescobaldi, and he was knighted by the Italian government for his extraordinary work on behalf of Italian culture." He was a performer, an avid reader of poetry, and a great lover of music.

In an interview Professor Karen Sullivan read praises of Fred as a professor from a former student, "He always knew things about things." He would stand in Olin's cavernous auditorium, lecturing to a class of about twenty. Fred seemed to have little need of notes for his long lectures: his speech punctuated when he would take off his glasses, and rub the lenses slowly, determinedly. At times, he would demonstrate a phrase on the keyboard. He talked with an immense depth of knowledge, and rather shyly.

"Fred welcomed me into the Bard community," Professor James Bagwell of Music History at Bard, close colleague of Professor Hammond's, said on a phone call. Bagwell describes him as a man of uncommon and quiet kindness. "He had a way of doing unadvertised kindnesses, which are really the best kind."

As both a skilled musician and musicologist, Fred was a unique figure at Bard, bringing together the merits of both the academic college, and the conservatory. Fred was a dedicated and loving member of the Bard community, and he will be missed by all.

The memorial service for Frederick Hammond was held at the Chapel of the Holy Innocents on Saturday, April 29 at 2:00 pm. Followed by his burial that afternoon, in the Bard College Cemetery.

## Li-Hua Ying, Senior Faculty of Chinese Language and Literature

Professor Li-Hua Ying joined the Bard community as a Professor of Chinese Language and Literature in 1990, and taught here for 30 years. She sadly passed away after a number of battles with cancer over a long time on January 19, 2023. Li-Hua played a pivotal role in the development of the Asian Studies department, known by her associates and colleagues as the department's "very backbone."

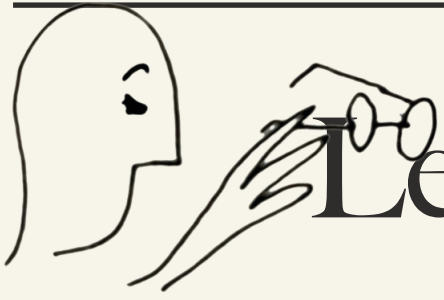
A cherry tree has been planted on the west side of the Olin Language Center in her honor. A circle of white flowers have been laid around the trunk.

## Gretchen Farrell, Former Dean of Campus Safety and Operations

Gretchen Farrell (formally Perry) passed away of natural causes on July 11th, 2022. She served Bard College first as Director of Residence Life, then the Dean of Campus Life, and finally as the Dean of Campus Safety and Operations. She changed careers in 2016 to become the Senior Family Consultant for KidsPeace New York, supporting children, their families, and mentoring colleagues.

Donations can be made in her honor to Kidspace Foster Care & Community Programs (Kingston, NY); St. Jude Children's Research Hospital; or to a local animal rescue organization.

-FAITHFUL TO THE TRUTH-



# Letter from the Editor(s)



It's been 15 years since the last issue of *The Bard Observer* graced Annandale-on-Hudson. Local print newspapers are hard to sustain, and have been dropping like flies nationwide for the last decade. We wanted to try our hands at resurrection. A newspaper is a useful tool: if successful, it can bring a community into focus; clarify and connect the seemingly disparate and vague. This is our attempt at a kind of synthesis, which one can be hard-pressed to find at a school with so many social and academic nooks and crannies. In reinstating *The Observer*, we hope to provide Bard with a forum through which to understand itself and the outside world—a forum for illumination and celebration.

Certainly, this is a complex task to take on. Journalism is a finicky endeavour, inevitably an uphill battle of muckraking. Our predecessor and founder of the original Bard Observer wrote in his first issue, a solitary venture,

"I have tried to get other people to write for this newspaper, in order to cut down the quantity of editorializing, and to get a greater number of opinions. I offer my humblest apologies for having failed to do so—a failure which has forced me to write most of the material myself." (*The Bard Observer*, Vol. 1., No. 1. April 24, 1956.)

We sincerely sympathize with the difficult task of organizing Bard students. Unlike our lone founder, however, we are grateful to have collected a group of dedicated students who have been willing to sacrifice long, sleepless nights to the publication of this issue. As any worthy project does, *The Observer* has consumed us, an idea whose manifestation was inevitable yet against all odds. It has been an honor and a pleasure.

If you, dear reader, find yourself compelled, we encourage you to join, write in, or reach out.

For the purposes of a more democratic, local, and interrogative investigation of current events, at *The Bard Observer*, we hold true to our name. Collectively, we will look—through binoculars and magnifying glass; through windows and walls—with our own eyes in a search for the truth, and report back to you.

SOPHIE FOLEY

EMMA PAXSON

STELLA SCANLON

NAYELI SEQUEIRA SUNGUROFF

ACHI TSITSISHVILI

MAYA KELLY

SAGE RUDOLF

SAMANTHA SCHWARTZ

BENICIO TAGGART

## SUMMER HOROSCOPIES

### ARIES

You've earned it! Rest and relaxation isn't just something you want, it's something that your mind and body need. Drink expensive wine, but steer clear of love this summer.

### TAURUS

You need to buy a bunch of those glow-in-the-dark shoes, 'cause baby, it's time to shine! Look deep within yourself and face the fears that keep you up at night—it's now or never, the world is yours for the taking.

### GEMINI

A test of nerves is upon you: a betrayal in love or friendship—maybe both! It's up to you to show how wise and forgiving you've become while isolated at Bard.

### CANCER

I hear you screaming: Who am I? What am I? Where am I? But don't worry, listen to "I'll Be Your Mirror" by The Velvet Underground—even if you don't believe it, your friends will help you see how amazing you are.

### LEO

Saddle your horses, Leo, of course you're going to be at the center of attention. Risk, romance, forget time and space. Find a new way to tie your shoelaces.

### VIRGO

Hey baby, looking fine as always. Keep that energy going but don't get too uptight! It may be time to start writing again. Go talk to Neil Gaiman.

### LIBRA

Hold on tight, you're in for a lot! Shared resources, taboos, and treasure are all coming your way. So get ready for a summer of big change.

### SCORPIO

After two years of life-changing eclipses, your life is finally out of the spotlight—no more demons dragging you to the underworld. Get comfortable with the new you this summer by listening to the *Meddle* album by Pink Floyd.

### SAGITTARIUS

Paint a fresco. You may find yourself getting unexpected recognition for it. Also, you may find a summer love... or two?

### CAPRICORN

We all miss our moms, so don't think you're too old to give yours a call. Tell her a secret, but don't show her your new tattoo.

### AQUARIUS

Learning to socialize is the theme for your summer. Shadow-puppetry is your new party trick. Nothing lasts forever, nothing stays the same.

### PISCES

Get out of your head, and into your body with extreme exercise. Manifest your soulmate, reject modernity, and keep rocking in the free world.

# Tivoli Bread and Baking

**THURSDAY 7a-noon**

**FRIDAY 7a-noon**

**SATURDAY 7a-3p**

**SUNDAY 7a-3p**



## Announcing our Fall 2023 Conference



# FRIENDSHIP & POLITICS

**OCTOBER 12 & 13**

In politics and in friendships, we weave common ties while establishing our differences. In an increasingly fragmented and lonely world, both are in crisis. How can we nurture the intimate and public friendships that allow us to flourish?

### **Keynote Speakers include:**

**Marissa Franco - Angel Adams Parham**

**Daniel Mendelsohn - Jill Frank**

**Niobe Way - Wyatt Mason**

**Learn more here:**



**Volunteer with us!**

Email Exec. Director Christine Stanton: [cstanton@bard.edu](mailto:cstanton@bard.edu)

**“I have never in my life ‘loved’ any people or collective...I indeed love ‘only’ my friends.”**

**—Hannah Arendt  
to Gershom Scholem, 1963**