

THE ALLEGHENY MARGINALIA

Semesterly Newsletter of Allegheny College's English Department



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LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

by Dr. Alexis Hart

Taking on the responsibilities of Chair in my thirteenth year as a member of the English Department at Allegheny seems somehow fitting... But, in all seriousness, I am grateful to my colleagues for trusting me to step into this role. Since the Spring 2025 issue of the newsletter, faculty in the department have brought new life (welcome baby Max!) and new books (welcome *Flight Plan* and *Driving the Beast*) into the world, and students have conducted summer undergraduate research projects (Emily Hildreth '27 "Zombies in Society: Analyzing Cultural Shifts Through Zombie Literature"), attended the Writing Workshops in Greece: Thessaloniki & Thasos, published an article (Milo Watson '26 "Is the Field Guide Sustainable? Rethinking Genre in the Face of Ecological Catastrophe" in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*), and successfully completed another semester of coursework and extracurricular engagement.

Our departmental alumni were featured in College press releases on July 15 (Artie Pitt '01), August 11 (Samantha Cooper '20), September 18 (Tyler Dreiblatt '12), and November 18 (Joe Vickless '03 and Maria Synan '04) and represented a range of industries during the Blue & Gold weekend career fair (Anne Gearan '85, Stacy Corbin '89,

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Letter from the Department Chair Continued

Mike Capsambelis '94, Christie Sutton '97, Stephanie Hathaway '98, Ashley Leonard '20, Jessica Roberts '03, and Bailey Kozalla '22). Such post-Allegheny success is not surprising. For example, an August 2025 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* titled "The Truth About Which College Majors Are Actually Useful at Work" about the return on investment (ROI) of college degrees reports that when higher education researcher Corey Moss-Pech investigated what college graduates "actually did at their jobs and internships, how they felt about it, and how their duties related to what they'd studied in college," he found that English and communications majors "were more likely to call on what they'd learned in college." Whether that is brewer Joe Vickless '03 using the writing skills he acquired as an English major "to describe beer with flair," or former Director of Product Management at Google Mike Capsambelis '94 leading product teams to "create software that helps people in a wide range of domains.... to understand and use their data to make

more informed and timely decisions," or Director of Foundation and Corporate Relations Amber Pouliot '07 using her writing, editing, and critical analysis skills to help Allegheny faculty and staff earn prestigious grants, our alumni are showcasing the ROI of their English majors and minors. Thank you!

I'd also like to thank Dylan Headley '28, the English Department Community Media Coordinator, for designing and editing this newsletter and Jess Sakal, the Oddfellows Building Coordinator, for her patience and support, her creative vision (which, among other accomplishments helped to make our Single Voice showcase a reality), and her genuine care for all who enter our building.

As we head into the winter break and holiday season, I send best wishes for safe travels and well-earned rest, and I welcome you all to reach out to share your stories in future newsletters.



TEACHING ENGLISH IN JEJU ISLAND

featuring Sofia Hassan, '25

Sofia Hassan '25, an English major on the creative writing track with a minor in Middle East and North African Studies, graduated after four years of deep involvement on campus, serving as senior editor for *The Allegheny Review*, prose editor for *Overkill*, working with *The Campus*, serving in ASG Senate, co-leading Food Recovery Network, performing in SET's Rocky Horror shadow cast, and working as an Arabic TA—an experience she says helped prepare her for her current role. Today, she teaches English to children ages 5 to 12 on Jeju Island in South Korea, covering topics such as colors, hobbies, opposites, and the alphabet, and recently helped plan the school's Halloween party, finding joy in watching her students proudly demonstrate their progress to parents. The work has been deeply meaningful to her: "I felt like I had a purpose at Allegheny... but here I see the impact I'm having," she shared. She often uses humor to connect with her students, explaining, "There is a language barrier but laughter is a universal language." When she was sick, they told her they "wanted Miss Sofia back," a moment that moved her to tears.

Her contract runs through June 2026, and she plans to renew for at least a year, with hopes of to continue teaching abroad—possibly in Jordan. We thank Sofia for sharing her story and wish her all the best wherever her journey leads next!

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THE DEPARTMENT PICNIC'S SUCCESS

The English Department started the semester off strong with its departmental picnic, a fantastic way for incoming students to meet our faculty and staff and learn about the many programs we have in place to support them!

It was very exciting to see students from all class years coming together and sharing their experiences to encourage one another in their pursuit of literature, creative writing, and general English studies. Everyone has a place here in the English department! Pictured to the side are students: Aicha Foster '29, Zawadi Wangai '29, Mara Adams '29, and Jay Shank '28, as well as Dr Hart and her daughter Agatha!

We offer a thank you to Parkhurst for supplying us the perfect meal to discuss our department's bright future over, and a very special thanks to Jess Sakal, the main organizer of the event and our wonderful building coordinator.



BLUE & GOLD CAREER FAIR

Several alumni represented their respective industries at the Blue & Gold Career Fair earlier this semester, showcasing the interdisciplinary range of success that can be found with a degree or studies focused in English. Stacy Corbin '89, pictured to the left, shared that the key to success with English studies is to think beyond what's traditional and utilize your skills with creativity:

"It is a harder path than [others] because it's a little unclear, but...you have to think about how to apply your skills. There's a lot that's available with digital media, potentially, and with AI--so you have to think broadly about all those skills that you've gained that are the core to being successful in English and think beyond just the traditional fields."

Thank you to all the alumni who showed up in support!



SINGLE VOICE: SARAH GHAZAL ALI

Sarah Ghazal Ali is a Pakistani-American poet, editor, and educator whose powerful writing resonates across questions of faith, identity, gender, and belonging. She is the author of *Theophanies* (Alice James Books, 2024), a debut collection that has won the GLCA New Writers Award, the California Book Award (Gold Medal in Poetry), and the Julie Suk Award—among other honors—and was a finalist for the Kate Tufts Discovery Award.

Ali earned her MFA in poetry from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she was a Juniper and MFA Fellow. She has received fellowships and residencies from respected programs such as Tin House, the Stadler Center for Poetry and Literary Arts, and the Hambidge Center. Her work has appeared in prestigious journals including *The American Poetry*

Review, *The Kenyon Review*, and the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day series.

In addition to her writing, Ali serves as the poetry editor for *West Branch* and is an Assistant Professor of English at Macalester College, where she teaches courses in creative writing, poetry craft, and the lyric essay.

On Thursday, September 18, 2025, Ali gave a reading of *Theophanies* in the Tippie Alumni Center at Allegheny College, launching the 2025-2026 season of the Single Voice Reading Series. Her poems draw deeply from the intersection of faith, heritage, and womanhood, offering a lyrical and courageous exploration of what it means to carry tradition and identity in one's body and language.

Ali's contemplative voice invites listeners and readers to dwell in complexity. In *Theophanies*, she renders visible manifestations of memory, devotion, and doubt: a testament to what is inherited, reconsidered, and made new through poetry.



credit: Beowulf Sheehan

Sarah Ghazal Ali, MFA,
author of *Theophanies*



SINGLE VOICE: M. SOLEDAD CABALLERO AND CATHARINA COENEN

M. Soledad Caballero is a professor of English and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Allegheny College, where she also contributes to the Latin American and Caribbean Studies program. A celebrated poet and interdisciplinary scholar, Caballero's work navigates migration, memory, identity, and the female body, often at the crossroads of personal and collective histories. Her most recent collection, *Flight Plan* (Red Hen Press, 2025), charts literal and figurative trajectories of bodies and birds through cancer and transformation into lyrical meditations on what it means to survive and belong.

Catharina Coenen is a professor of biology at Allegheny College whose creative writing bridges science and history. A first-generation German immigrant, she came to the United States as a Fulbright Scholar. Her essays have appeared in respected publications such as *The Threepenny Review*, *The American Scholar*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*, and her prose is noted for its clarity, emotional resonance, and scientific insight. In her forthcoming collection, *Unexploded Ordnance: What she felt. What they feared. How they survived. What they saw.* (Restless Books, 2025), Coenen excavates her family's past, exploring generational trauma, silence, identity, and memory through a lens informed by both biological knowledge and narrative inquiry.

On Thursday, November 13, 2025, Caballero and Coenen presented together for the Single Voice Reading Series at the Tippie Alumni Center. Their reading offered a powerful convergence: Caballero's visceral, body-centered poems of exile and renewal alongside Coenen's unflinching essays on memory, heritage, science, and intergenerational reckoning.

Together, Caballero and Coenen embody a deeply human literary dialogue that maneuvers across disciplines and geographies, bridging poetry and prose, science and story, as well as the personal and the collective.



credit: Manuel Ruiz Photography

M. Soledad Caballero, Ph.D,
author of *Flight Plan* and
Allegheny College Professor of
English



credit: Lydia Eckstein

Catharina Coenen, Ph.D,
author of *Unexploded Ordnance*
and Allegheny College
Professor of Biology



Jessie Van Eerden, MFA, author of *Yoke & Feather*

SINGLE VOICE: JESSIE VAN EERDEN

Jessie van Eerden is a West Virginia-born essayist, novelist, and creative writing professor whose work probes faith, longing, identity, and the hidden divinity within the commonplace.

Her newest essay collection, *Yoke & Feather* (Dzanc Books, November 2024), gathers braided essays that wander from a canoe trip down the Rio Grande to the kitchen of the biblical sisters Mary and Martha, from rural mountain childhood memories to midlife wrestlings with desire and loss. In *Yoke & Feather*, Van Eerden reimagines familiar scriptural narratives to transform them into meditations on motherhood, aging, longing, spiritual hunger, and the rough beauty of ordinary life.

Van Eerden holds a BA in English from West Virginia University and an MFA in nonfiction writing from The University of Iowa's Nonfiction Writing Program. Over more than two decades, she has taught in college classrooms and adult-literacy programs, as well as directed the low-residency MFA program at West Virginia Wesleyan College. Today, she is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at Hollins University.

Her previous books span both fiction and nonfiction: three novels—*Glorybound*, *My Radio Radio*, and *Call It Horses* (winner of the 2019 Dzanc Books Prize for Fiction)—and an earlier essay collection, *The Long Weeping*. Her essays and stories have appeared in respected publications such as *Oxford American*, *AGNI*, *Image*, *New England Review*, and anthologies including *Best American Spiritual Writing*.

On Thursday, October 23, 2025, Van Eerden visited Allegheny College as part of the Single Voice Reading Series, delivering a live reading of *Yoke & Feather* and other essays at the college's Tippie Alumni Center.

Van Eerden's voice in *Yoke & Feather* is by turns tender and unflinching, playful and mournful. Her prose presses into longing and grief, faith, and myth, inviting readers to see the divine, or at least the sacred potential, in the everyday.



EXCERPT: “INTRODUCING SARAH GHAZAL ALI”

by *Magnolia Myers*, ‘28

“Many of the poems in *Theophanies* helped me consider what it means to exist in the world as a woman of color. I marveled at the prismatic qualities of Ali’s language and the cleverness, complication, and irony layered through each poem. *Theophanies* is intricate and brilliant—each poem asks a lot of us as readers and yet they are easy to love from first reading on. It seems impossible that this is only her debut.”



EXCERPT: “INTRODUCING JESSIE VAN EERDEN”

by *Milo Watson*, ‘26

“For me, van Eerden’s essays have been a way to better understand the multitude of ways that people relate to religious experience and see it play out in their own lives... I appreciate the way van Eerden draws ancient stories into the present, and at the same time sends us back into the past. She finds ways to pull environmental apocalypse, home, and messy interpersonal relationships together into braids that feel contemporary and personal.”

25 YEARS OF SINGLE VOICE SERIES HISTORY

On the second floor of Oddfellows Hall, the department celebrates nearly three decades of Single Voice Reading Series history through a display of reprinted posters. The installation was organized by English Professor Christopher Bakken, director of the series since 1998. The exhibit documents the breadth of voices that have come to campus and reflects the program’s long-standing role in Allegheny’s literary culture.

The project began with a recovery effort. Materials from past readings—posters, announcements, and records—were collected from campus offices and faculty spaces. These items were scanned, preserved, and properly catalogued, forming the foundation of the display. Many of the posters, previously kept informally or forgotten, are now presented in full view, offering a visual archive of the series’ continuity.



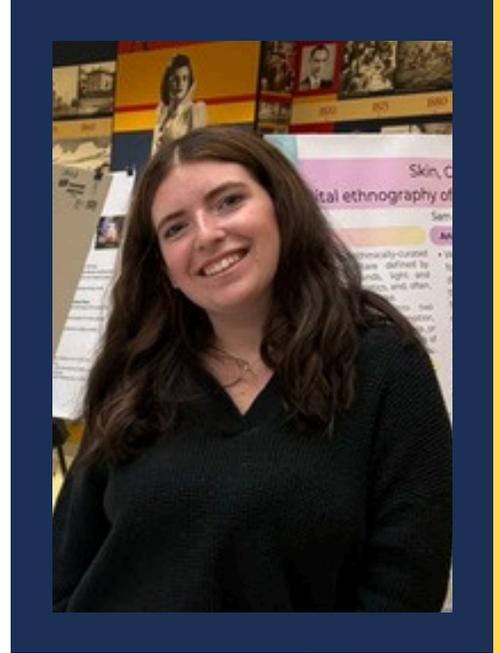
Since its inception in 1989, the program has regularly brought published authors to campus, representing a range of genres and perspectives. The exhibit emphasizes this consistency and illustrates how the readings have evolved from early events into a curated historical record. The department plans to add selections of books by Single Voice authors alongside the posters to underscore the connection between the gallery and the classroom. While concise in scale, the installation functions as a timeline, tracing the movement of writers through campus across more than 25 years.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: EMILY HILDRETH

Emily Hildreth '27 is a junior majoring in English Literature with a minor in Economics.

She is an active member of Kappa Alpha Theta, serving as the outgoing Vice President of External Affairs and incoming Vice President of Administrations. Emily is also a defender on the women's lacrosse team and a member of Sigma Tau Delta.

This summer, she will study poetry and literary criticism at Cambridge University. She plans to apply to graduate programs next year to continue her studies in English Literature, with a focus on the Gothic and Romantic traditions.



SUMMER RESEARCH: ZOMBIE LITERATURE

by Emily Hildreth, '27

This past summer I had the opportunity to complete research with Professor Miller through URSCA. My research this summer was an analysis of zombies in literature and media to understand how these monsters reflect the societal fears of different historical eras. I worked with a total of 17 primary sources and 6 secondary sources; the texts I examined ranged all the way from Mary Shelley's 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* to Charli XCX's 2016 music video, "After the Afterparty (feat. Lil Yachty)." In my research, I found an overarching theme that brought these apparently unrelated works about zombies together: all of them were concerned

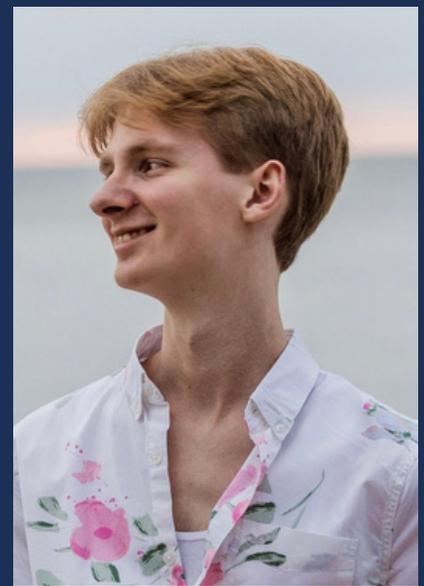
with exploring the relationship between individualism and collectivism, with each text striving to find the right balance between the two. Zombies themselves often exhibit a total loss of individuality and autonomy, so the fear of becoming one is essentially, at heart, a fear of being absorbed into a faceless collective. But many of these stories pit zombies against a shockingly selfish human protagonist, a character whose extreme individualism led them to struggle with insanity and extreme loneliness. These protagonists tend to succeed only after they have found a group where their personal strengths could shine as unique contributions to a larger collective goal. Getting to complete research under Professor Miller was an incredible opportunity that I am forever grateful for. I had an absolute blast this summer and I am thankful for the chance to grow my skills and knowledge in the field of gothic literature.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello everyone, my name is Dylan (or Tien) DeLong-Headley '28 and I am the English Department's Community Media Coordinator and this newsletter's main contributor! Outside of that, I am a Software Engineering and Creative Writing double major and the Lead Teaching Assistant of the CIS department, the Event Manager of International Club, the Treasurer of Upsilon Pi Epsilon (UPE), the Public Relations Chair of Allegheny's student chapter of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), and a Junior Editor for the Allegheny Review.

All this to say...I've witnessed the widespread community that permeates this college's departments, programs, and organizations, and there's something to be said for the English Department's desire to see success in not just its own students, but all students across this campus. From the hard work of Writing Consultants led by Professor Hart to the insistence upon the potential of their students by each and every faculty member, we are lucky to be surrounded by so much support.

To those who have made it this far--thank you so much for reading! It was an absolute pleasure working with so many of the brilliant minds involved with our department to put together this issue--Fall 2025, Issue 4--of the English Department Newsletter, which as of this semester has adopted the name "The Allegheny Marginalia." It was an honor to take over this role, and I couldn't have done it without the help of so many (but especially Joe Klepeis and Professor Hart). I'll see you in the next one!



credit: Matt Mead Photography

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Dylan DeLong-Headley

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Dylan DeLong-Headley



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Note: All individuals featured in photos and named in articles have given their consent.