

Department of English E-newsletter, Fall 2024

Subject: Fall 2024 News: Department of English

Sender: On Behalf of Benedict S. Robinson, Professor and Chair, Department of English

Reply to: casdeansbu

Dear Alumni and Friends,

I hope the Fall semester finds you well! I'm writing, first, to introduce myself as the new chair of the Department of English. I'm looking forward to working with our students, faculty, and staff in charting the path forward for our Department. I of course see both challenges and opportunities. The essential thing is that the Department remains a vital community of scholars, creators, teachers, and students. So, the foundation is strong.

A LOT has happened in the Department recently, and more will be happening as the semester progresses. I'll offer just the highlights – and spotlight some exciting upcoming events.

If you wish to support innovation and tradition in English education as a public good, as we see it, then please consider giving to our [Fund for Excellence](#). We're humbled and grateful for your generosity; it helps us offer our students and faculty the support that's critical to learning, research, and community. If you are interested in learning more, please feel free to contact Michael D'Ambrosio, director of development for the College, at michael.dambrosio@stonybrook.edu or (631) 632-4061

Thank you for reading, and as always, we would be delighted to hear from you!

With best wishes,

Benedict S. Robinson
Professor and Chair

Welcoming New Faculty

We're really delighted to welcome three new faculty to the Department!

Ileana Jiménez

Professor Jiménez joins us as a PRODiG+ Fellow, and as part of the English Teacher Education Program. Her research focuses on Black and Latina feminisms, feminist and queer pedagogies, and digital feminist activism in the high school English classroom. As an English teacher-activist, she taught women of color feminisms and queer



literature classes at the high school level for over 25 years. In 2011, she received a Fulbright to interview queer and trans high school students in Mexico City on their relationships and friendships, as well as their experiences with bullying and harassment. She received her BA in English Literature at Smith College; an MA in English Literature at Middlebury College; and a PhD in English Education from Teachers College, Columbia University. She is @feministteacher on social media platforms.

Name one work you love to teach, and why it's meaningful to you:

I can't really name one, but as a set, I really love teaching the Combahee River Collective's "Black Feminist Statement" (1977); Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984); and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). Each text has been a part of my teaching for the last 27 years and each informs my stance on transformative justice. I truly believe that each one needs to be read by every high school student in the US.

What's next, in terms of your research and/or writing?

I'm currently working on a series of articles that are coming out of my dissertation, including one that just came out in *English Journal* on teaching women of color feminisms in the high school classroom and another one that I'm revising focusing on Black girls and #MeToo digital activism. In the future, I'd like to write a memoir about my journey as a feminist teacher.

Fun fact:

During the pandemic, I ran a lot, including three half-marathons: one in Brooklyn; one in Providence; one in London. Finishing my dissertation over the last year took me out of training and I'm slowly trying to get back to a more regular running routine. I've never considered myself an athlete, but running reminds me to get back in my body as well as outside beyond desks and screens.

David Heska Wanbli Weiden

(Photo credit: Aslan Chalom)

Professor Weiden joins us as one of the inaugural faculty of the Native American and Indigenous Studies initiative. An enrolled citizen of the Sicangu Lakota



Nation, he is author of the novel *Winter Counts* (Ecco/HarperCollins), winner of numerous literary awards and named by *Time* magazine as one of the best mystery novels of all time. His short fiction appears in the anthologies *The Best American Mystery and Suspense Stories*, *Never Whistle at Night*, *Denver Noir*, *Midnight Hour*, *This Time for Sure*, and other anthologies. In 2024, he was Indigenous Artist in Residence at Brown University and has received fellowships from PEN America, MacDowell, Ucross, Ragdale, Sewanee, and Tin House. He's the editor of *Native Edge*, a new series of the University of New Mexico Press.

Name one work you love to teach, and why it's meaningful to you:

The novel *Winter in the Blood* by James Welch has deep meaning for me, as it was the first book I'd ever read written by an Indigenous author. Although I didn't completely understand it as a teenager, it literally changed my life as I realized that Native people could write about ourselves and our communities. The novel is truly a classic, and I'm looking forward to sharing it with my students here!

What's next, in terms of your research and/or writing?

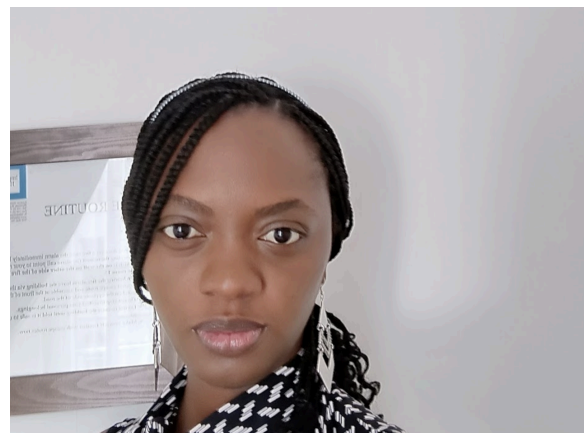
I'm finishing my next novel, *Wisdom Corner* for HarperCollins. I'm also in the final stages of editing an anthology of Native-authored short stories titled *Native Noir* for Akashic Books. Finally, I have a scholarly article that I've just completed, "Leonard Peltier's Sun Dance," that will be published next year in *The Cambridge Companion to American Prison Literature*.

Fun fact:

I'm a big music fan, and I'm really excited for the opportunity to see great live music here! I tend to listen to alternative rock most frequently (Radiohead, X, Television, etc.) although I also love classic jazz and am hoping to catch a set at the Village Vanguard soon.

Neisha Terry Young

Professor Young joins us as part of the English Teacher Education Program. She has been an educator for 19 years and has taught middle and high school English in Jamaica and the United States. She also has experience as an instructor in teacher-preparation programs at Drexel University and Temple University. She earned her teaching diploma from Shortwood Teachers' College in Jamaica (with honors), her BA in English from Georgia State



University (Summa Cum Laude), her MA from Southern New Hampshire University, and her PhD in Education Policy and Leadership from Drexel University.

Professor Young's research explores the affordances of multiliteracies in supporting the intersectional identities of Black immigrant youth. She has received various recognitions and awards for her work, including the Drexel University School of Education Ann Marie Weil Award (2022), the English Language Arts Teacher Education (ELATE) graduate student research award (2022), the Robert Blake Memorial Scholarship from the International Congress for Critical Pedagogy and Transformative Leadership, and a 2024 MAXQDA Research for Change: Black History Month grant. She is the Director of the VOICE Lab, a new research lab in the Department of English, which aims to be a collaborative hub that provides platforms for the crafting and amplifying of immigrant narratives.

Name one work you love to teach, and why it's meaningful to you:

I love teaching the poetry of Langston Hughes, whose works offer a profound critique of racism in the United States while celebrating the resilience, strength, and vitality of the Black diaspora. His poetry embodies a spirit of defiance and endurance that never fails to inspire both my students and me, leaving us feeling deeply empowered and transformed.

What's next, in terms of your research and/or writing?

My current research explores the immigration narratives of Black immigrants in the United States. Part of this research will be included as a composite video in an exhibit on Caribbean immigrant experiences at the Penn Museum later this year.

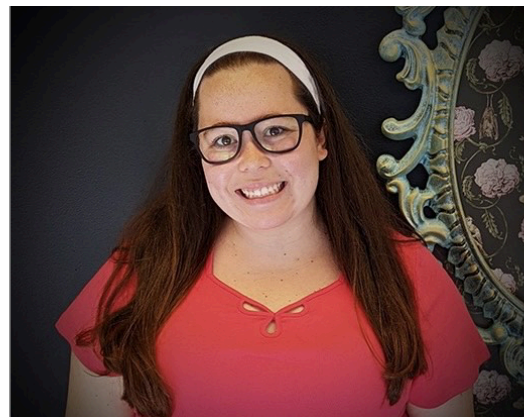
Fun fact:

As an immigrant from Jamaica, I have always loved spending time at the beach. I am excited to explore the beautiful shores of Long Island and discover all they have to offer.

Welcoming New Staff

Alyssa Bergman

We're also being joined by a new staff person, Alyssa Bergman, who recently joined our Department in a position tasked with communications, outreach, programming, and recruitment.



Alyssa holds an undergraduate degree in Creative Arts with a focus on Theatre from Siena College and a Master's in Higher Education Administration from Stony Brook University. Since joining SBU in 2021, she has been dedicated to fostering a vibrant learning environment, and is thrilled to embark on a new journey in our department. In her spare time, Alyssa enjoys exploring new plays and engaging with the local arts community.

Fun fact: Alyssa has a twin brother named Alex who works for Enterprise Risk Management on East Campus!

Chair's Student Advisory Council

This year we are piloting a new initiative, the Chair's Student Advisory Council. This is something I'm really excited about, because I'm convinced that it will be a way of facilitating direct communication from students to the chair; that it will give me important insights into student experience in our programs, and therefore information about what we're doing well and what we could be doing better. Most importantly, this council will give our students a platform to share ideas for how to improve student experience; for events or initiatives that we should be doing; and for anything else that we, as faculty, may not think of. And we had a huge outpouring of interest! That was itself really delightful to see.

We have 11 members on the inaugural Chair's Student Advisory Council, and I'm looking forward to working with them and to seeing what they bring to the Department!

Undergraduate Research

Several English undergraduates were integral in creating the first Humanities Research Day last year, to put the focus on humanities research for undergraduates. So I want to spotlight the research and creative projects being done by our students, in their own words. Both Laci Burton '25, and Aman Rahman received URECA grants to do work toward their Honors theses this past summer. Here's what they have to report!

Laci Burton

This summer I was awarded a URECA research grant, which allowed me to conduct archival research at the Library of Congress, where over seven thousand of Shirley Jackson's primary documents are housed. In preparation for my honors thesis, I spent the entirety of the spring semester reading through as much information as I could find on the life and works of Jackson. Through this process, I was made aware of several documents housed at the Library of Congress, but none of which were openly publicized, and my desire to access these documents inspired my URECA proposal.



The archives are comprised of a range of materials, including Jackson's original manuscripts, hand written notes, and personal correspondences, but I went into the experience hoping to find a handful of specific letters and notes referencing either the queer subtext in Jackson's work, or Jackson's relationship with psychoanalysis.

What got you interested in this topic?

I have always been interested in the queer Gothic genre, and I knew that I wanted to dedicate my thesis to a queer Gothic text, even prior to reading Jackson's novel. I spent the last two years reading as many potential works as possible, and I found *The Haunting of Hill House* along the way.

I was drawn to *Hill House* because of the sapphic subtext that seemingly drives the plot of the novel, and I originally planned to center my discussion of the text on how the central character is haunted by her own compulsory heterosexuality. While that initial concept is still present in my thesis, I have since shifted to focus more heavily on Jackson's pointed use of Freudian concepts. I was hesitant to even incorporate psychoanalysis at first, but my findings at the Library of Congress made it impossible for me to overlook the blatant connections.

What's the coolest thing you found while researching at the Library of Congress?

While I read through thousands of largely unpublicized documents, one of my most notable findings was a letter connecting Jackson to Dr. Nandor Fodor. Fodor was an

associate to Sigmund Freud, and in his work he theorized about the potential psychoanalytic explanations behind real supernatural occurrences.

Upon further investigation, I realized that the events of *Hill House* closely mirror a case study published by Fodor in 1951, a parallel that I have not yet seen addressed in scholarship on Jackson's work. But despite the analogous situations presented in both texts, Jackson authors an alternatively tragic ending, which I argue reveals her disapproval of Freudian tactics. This letter, in tandem with various notes made during Jackson's drafting process referencing Freud, has shaped the entire trajectory of my project.

Aman Rahman

This year I received a URECA Summer Award to work on a poetry manuscript under the mentorship of Dr. Christine Kitano from the Department of Creative Writing and Literature. I met with Dr. Kitano several times over the summer to talk about what I've been reading and revised about 10 new poems, which brought my total manuscript to around 35 pages. Mostly, I read a lot. I was especially influenced by Louise Glück, Fady Joudah, Mary Oliver, Leila Chatti, Mahmoud Darwish, and Zeina Hashem Beck.



It's difficult—and can feel limiting—to describe what I've been writing about. That said, I've been interested in using two forms, the ghazal and the elegy, to examine how grief intersects with cultural and religious inheritance. The ghazal is a poetic form consisting of a tight metrical pattern with a repeating last word and rhyming refrain which originated in 7th century Arabia but was popularized by Persian poets and Urdu and Bengali singers.

My poems invert the rigid structure, break established rules, and deviate from traditional themes to put me in conversation with the histories that have shaped my life. I became interested in this form in particular because I wanted to engage with my poetic lineage as a Muslim and child of Bangladeshi immigrants.

The most interesting thing I've learned is that I can't control how quickly the work comes together. Despite proposing to write a book, my summer was spent crafting and revising poems one by one. While I had a bigger picture in mind, Dr. Kitano encouraged me to let my imagination and reading take me to new, strange places.

The biggest change I made to my writing practice was investing my time in running, rock climbing, and walking in nature. This might seem counterintuitive, but taking care of myself and being patient with the work is what brought me closer to completing and publishing my project.

Upcoming Events!

We have a packed calendar this semester, but I want to highlight three events in particular, all celebrating important, recently-published books by our faculty.

Elyse Graham, Professor

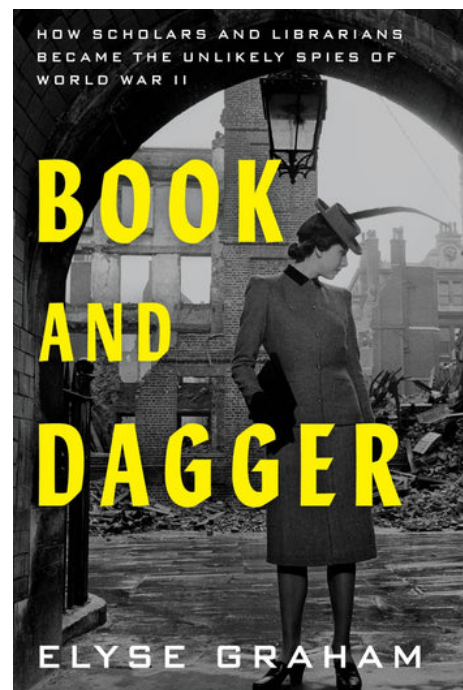
Book and Dagger: How Scholars and Librarians Became the Unlikely Spies of World War II (HarperCollins)

October 30, 4:00 pm

Humanities Building, Poetry Center

At the start of WWII, the U.S. found itself in desperate need of an intelligence agency. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a precursor to today's CIA, was quickly formed—and, in an effort to fill its ranks with experts, the OSS turned to academia for recruits. Suddenly, literature professors, librarians, and historians were training to perform undercover operations and investigative work—and these surprising spies would go on to profoundly shape both the course of the war and our cultural institutions with their efforts.

In *Book and Dagger*, Elyse Graham draws on personal histories, letters, and declassified OSS files to tell the story of a small but connected group of



humanities scholars turned spies. Among them are Joseph Curtiss, a literature professor who hunted down German spies and turned them into double agents; Sherman Kent, a smart-mouthed history professor who rose to become the head of analysis for all of Europe and Africa; and Adele Kibre, an archivist who was sent to Stockholm to secretly acquire documents for the OSS. These unforgettable characters would ultimately help lay the foundations of modern intelligence and transform American higher education when they returned after the war.

Thrillingly paced and rigorously researched, *Book and Dagger* is an inspiring and gripping true story about a group of academics who helped beat the Nazis—a tale that reveals the indelible power of the humanities to change the world.

“An engaging study of wartime American intelligence. . . . Graham makes a good case for studying the humanities as both an instrument of learning and a weapon of war. Bibliophiles with a taste for cloak-and-dagger work will enjoy this lively book.” — *Kirkus Reviews*

“Entertainingly conveyed, with great respect and deep appreciation for their ingenuity and drive, Graham's history is a powerful symphony for these unsung heroes whose professional skills and personal courage brought down the Nazi state. The modern intelligence community owes its existence to their rigor and resourcefulness. Readers fascinated by espionage will be eager to checkout Graham's fresh telling of the surprising story of the OSS.” — *Booklist* (starred review)

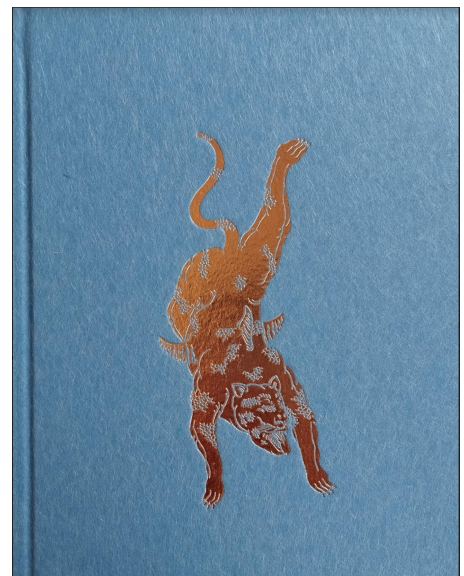
“*Book and Dagger* brings to light a spellbinding, untold aspect of World War II history..Graham takes readers all over the world to show that as the Nazis burned books, book lovers were defending the freedom of ideas, with relish.” — *BookPage*, 14 Most Anticipated Books of Fall

Simone Brioni, Professor ***Crazy Fish Sing* (Yogurt Editions)**

November 7, 5:00 pm

Humanities Building, Poetry Center

With the participation of contributor Loredana Polezzi, D'Amato Chair in Italian and Italian American Studies, Department of Languages and Cultures, and editorial assistant Peter Bruno, doctoral candidate, Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.



Crazy Fish Sing is a visual art book inspired by Suranga Katugampala's forthcoming film, *Still Here*. Situated in an experimental territory on the border between noir and documentary, the film is shot in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and Milan, Italy. Transporting the reader through its real, imagined, and affective geographies, *Crazy Fish Sing* offers a unique behind-the-scenes perspective on the making of *Still Here* and the questions this film raises about cultural hybridity, urbanization, and realism.

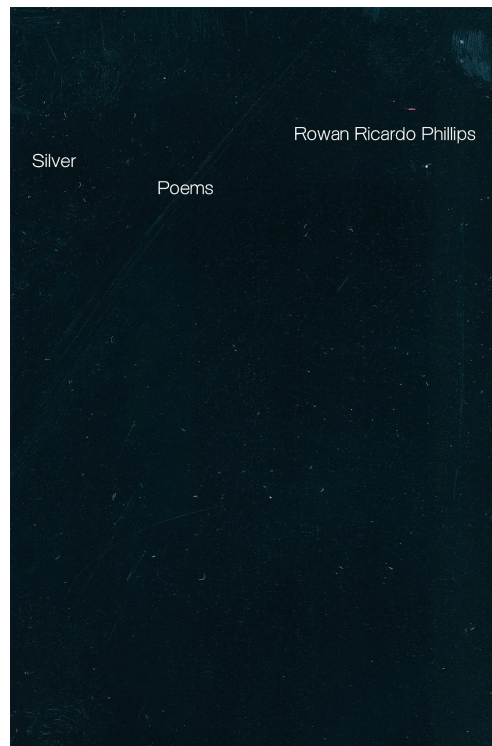
The book is made possible thanks to the support of the General Directorate for Contemporary Creativity of the Ministry of Culture, within the framework of the Italian Council (12th edition, 2023), a program for the international promotion of Italian contemporary art.

Rowan Ricardo Phillips, Distinguished Professor *Silver* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux)

**November 14, 5:00 pm
Humanities Building, Poetry Center**

[Click here](#) to read more about Professor Phillips' recent recognition.

This beautiful, slender collection—small and weighted like a coin—is Rowan Ricardo Phillips at his very best. These luminous, unsparing, dreamlike poems are as lyrical as they are virtuosic. “Not the meaning,” Phillips writes, “but the meaningfulness of this mystery we call life” powers these poems as they conjure their prismatic array of characters, textures, and moods. As it reverberates through several styles (blank verse, elegy, terza rima, rhyme royal, translation, rap), *Silver* reimagines them with such extraordinary vision and alluring strangeness that they sound irrepressibly fresh and vibrant. From beginning to end, *Silver* is a



collection that reflects Phillips's guiding principle—"part physics, part faith, part void"—that all is reflected in poetry and poetry is reflected in all.

This is work that brings into acute focus the singular and glorious power of poetry in our complex world.

"To meet an increasingly isolating and terrifying era, Phillips retrenches in poetry, which, he claims, can be found everywhere. "The imagination hides in plain sight."**Poetry stands by us, ready, Phillips seems to say, to console us with the truth,** whether or not we want to hear it." —Craig Morgan Teicher, *NPR*

"A collection to ponder in wonder." —Michael Ruzicka, *Booklist*

"Musical and erudite, the latest from Phillips offers an extended ars poetica in which poetry is 'a ritual that the sun organizes/ and arranges' . . . **Readers will take pleasure in this poetical flowering."** —*Publishers Weekly*

"Phillips refines and reworks his own poetics against the backdrop of tradition. . . This tension between what "has never been done before" and the knowledge that "every poem has already been written" is central to Phillips; tradition is what he coaxes music from. He uses echo, reprisal, repetition and recurrence as strategies for invention." —Lorna Knowles Blake, *The Hudson Review*