

# The LODESTAR

2021

FALL

Valparaiso University English Department Newsletter



# Welcome From the Chair

*From Dr. Richard Sévère, Chair of  
the English Department*

It is with great pleasure that I bring you greetings from the Valparaiso English Department.

My name is Richard Sévère, an associate professor who teaches medieval literature and professional writing. I started in the role of department chair in July 2020. I recently came across what may have been the last print version of a department newsletter, and let's just say it has been a long while. And though I'd love to catch you up on all the time lost, I am most excited to speak of the great things to come. We are safely back in person, which means our hallways are occupied, lively and filled with the voices of our students, faculty, and staff. In-person department meetings and chatty office-door conversations are back in full swing. It is clear that we missed each other's company.

Like for most others, it has been a tumultuous year and half, during which time a pandemic and social justice inequities tested our resilience, patience, understanding, and compassion. In true Valpo fashion, we emerged more knowledgeable, adaptable, graceful, and grateful. From these times came new opportunities for English studies at Valpo, such as a social justice reading group, pedagogical groups,

a departmental video, an endowed speaker fund, and many other great accomplishments and milestones that you will read about in this newest iteration of the department newsletter.

As you may know, we are Beacons. In keeping with the university's new mascot and emphasis on light, we thought it appropriate to resurrect the department newsletter and name it the Lodestar, which is defined as a star that guides a ship or an individual who inspires. We envision this newsletter being a symbol of light that will continue to shine for past, present, and future participants in this department and the University. Under the direction of the department faculty, we identified two of our very own students to write and edit the department newsletter. Cori is a Public and Professional Writing major and Business minor and Emily is a Political Science major and Public and Professional Writing minor. Both have been working since this summer to identify a format and design that will best capture the often-untold stories of our department. Their hard work and innovation have allowed us to make this venture a student-led initiative that will give undergraduates yet another experience and further connection to

the department. I invite you to read further and learn more about all of the latest departmental accomplishments, achievements, milestones, celebrations, and future endeavors. We look forward to updating you more frequently.

In the meantime, well wishes and light.

Richard Sévère



*Photo from [valpo.edu](http://valpo.edu) English  
Faculty Page*

# Classroom Spotlight

## The Role of Narrative in Gaming



One aspect of post-secondary education that stands out from other levels of education is students' ability to choose classes that interest them. Our professors work hard to offer elective courses that they are passionate and knowledgeable about that will also generate student interest. One of these classes new to the English department is Professor Martin Buinicki's English 200: Video Games, Playing with Stories.

The main objective of this course is to explore narrative through the lens of video games. For this course, Buinicki chose critically-acclaimed games like *Bioshock*, *Walden*, and *What Remains of Edith Finch* that students will examine, along with other literary works, to identify different forms of storytelling and expression. "One of the big overarching ideas of the course," Buinicki elaborates, "is 'what difference does play make in storytelling?' So you can watch a movie, you can read a book; narrative functions in all of those things. But video games are unique in that you can take part in [the narrative]." This aspect of having personal responsibility in the outcome of the game brings up a

certain ethical obligation in terms of mature themes, and Buinicki does not overlook that. "Literature deals with difficult and graphic themes, but you don't see it on the screen and you're not participating in it," Buinicki points out. He is sensitive to the fact that, "what seems like play can actually become something very personal for some students."

The idea for this course came from Buinicki's own interest in video games, particularly in the game *Bioshock*. In 2016, he published an article called "Nostalgia and the Dystopia of History in 2K's *Bioshock Infinite*" on what the game had to say about American life. As far as the success of the course thus far, Buinicki reports large class sizes, consistent attendance, and out-of-class engagement. He notes that while these games are highly revered, many of the students have never played them before. Yet, it is clear that this course is more than playing video games. Student Annie Liemohn says, "The class taught me to look at plot lines critically and analyze story structure in a way I hadn't ever been exposed to before, and... how visual storytelling combined with

written storytelling offers copious room for analysis and subjective interpretation." Buinicki is intriguing students through a medium that they interact with every day. He hopes that through this course, students will learn how to take a critical literary lens into their day-to-day lives and notice the nuances of narrative within modern entertainment.

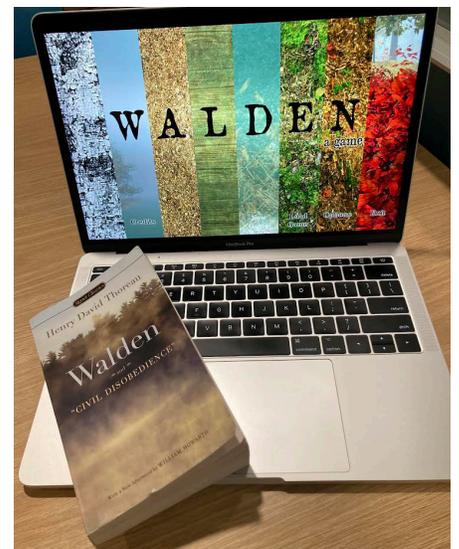


Photo by Annie Liemohn, English 200: Video Games, Playing with Stories student

# Spotlights

## First-Year Spotlights

**Bella Brunner**

Goshen, Indiana: English

Aurora, Illinois: Creative Writing

**Peyton D’Orazio**

**Ben Fields**

Chesterton, Indiana: Language and Literature

Hammond, Indiana: Creative Writing

**Jonathan Hurtado**

**Madeleine Koetke**

Oak Park, Illinois: Creative Writing

La Porte, Indiana: Creative Writing and Journalism

**Alex Krings**

**Annie Liemohn**

Saline, Michigan: Public and Professional Writing

Valparaiso, Indiana: Creative Writing

**Evette Maglish**

**Alexis Mathisen**

Valparaiso, Indiana: English

Michigan City, Indiana: English

**Fatima Mota**

**Katelyn Oehmke**

Hobart, Indiana: Language and Literature

Michigan City, Indiana: Language and Literature

**Mia Pool**

**Courtney Slavens**

Indiana: Public and Professional Writing

Welcome to  
the English  
Department!

To all the new English students, welcome! We hope your transition to college has been a smooth one and that you are finding your home in the department. As you continue to grow during your time at Valpo, we implore you to seek connections, go outside of your comfort zone, and ask for help. You have an incredible opportunity ahead of you, so make the most of it and never stop asking

questions. It was once said that “If you are not willing to learn, no one can help you. If you are determined to learn, no one can stop you” (Zig Ziglar). Take these words to heart and do not be afraid to seek support when you need it. The department is here to support you, and we want to see you succeed! Keep your heads held high and enjoy everything that VU has to offer. We hope you find your place at Valpo by joining various clubs, getting involved with extracurriculars, and making new friendships.

# Event Spotlight

## Books and Coffee

**B**ooks and Coffee is a Valpo English Department tradition started by John Feaster and Gus Sponberg. Each event features a different book and is hosted by various faculty, students, and staff. It's an excellent opportunity for both English and non-English majors to get involved on campus. Books and Coffee will be starting this spring, both in person and on Zoom! Grab some coffee and join us in listening to students' and professors' reflections and summaries of books you should add to your reading list! Books and Coffee is a great opportunity to meet new people in the department and learn about new books.

Want more info? Contact [John.Ruff@valpo.edu](mailto:John.Ruff@valpo.edu).



Photo by Edward Byrne

Above: Students Jesse Hershberger, Emily Neuharth, Anna Bedalov, and Isabel Coffey on a 2020 Books & Coffee panel

## Spring 2022 Titles and Speakers

*Presented by  
the English Department*

### Books and Coffee



Free and open to the public  
Live and in person and available through Zoom

#### JANUARY 13

*Klara and the Sun: A Novel*  
by Kazuo Ishiguro

Reviewed by: Carter Hanson, Ph.D., Professor of English, and Sean Kamperman, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of English

Location: Harre Union, Ballroom C  
Time: 4 p.m.

#### JANUARY 20

*All In: An Autobiography*  
by Billy Jean King

Reviewed by: Bob Modesto, Head Valparaiso University Women's Tennis Coach, Patrick McAuley, Assistant Coach, and Claire and Olivia Czerwonka, Valpo's doubles team, of College of Nursing and Health Professions

Location: Harre Union, Ballroom A  
Time: 4 p.m.

#### JANUARY 27

*Matrix: A Novel*  
by Lauren Groff

Reviewed by: Amanda Brobst-Renaud, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Theology

Location: Harre Union, Ballroom C  
Time: 4 p.m.

#### FEBRUARY 3

*Cloud Cuckoo Land: A Novel*  
by Anthony Doerr

Reviewed by: Jonathan Bull MLS, Associate Professor of Library Science

Location: Harre Union, Ballroom C  
Time: 4 p.m.

#### FEBRUARY 17

*No One is Talking About This*  
by Patricia Lockwood

Reviewed by: English majors Ashlyn Houser, Nichole Mitchell, Jacquelyn Delgado, Skye Sherwood, Noah Marshall, and Kyle Boisvert

Location: Harre Union, Ballroom C  
Time: 4 p.m.

#### FEBRUARY 24

*O William! A Novel*  
by Elizabeth Strout

Reviewed by: Edward Uehling, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus

Location: Harre Union, Ballroom C  
Time: 4 p.m.

#### MARCH 3

*Covered with Night: A Story of Murder and Indigenous Justice in Early America*

by Nicole Eustace

Reviewed by: Lucas Kelly, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of History

Location: Harre Union, Ballroom C  
Time: 4 p.m.



# Faculty Spotlight

## Professor Juneja reflects on her time with the English Department



*Photo from the Beacon, 1983*

Professor Renu Juneja has been a part of Valparaiso University since 1978. Throughout her time at the university, she has served as both a professor and an administrator in the Provost office. After ten years in administration, she took a year sabbatical and returned to her faculty position in 2013, which she has been serving in ever since. Throughout her career, Juneja has faced many challenges. She came into the department as a woman during a time where there were not many other women teaching. Because of this, she did not have many role models or teachers to look up to. She had to pave her own path. Although everyone was very collegial, and she never felt ostracized, she did not have the same leaders as her male peers. Juneja also had to work for everything she had. She recounts, “On the individual level, people can be kind and they are...but when it comes to opportunities, I learned to fight for them.” She never let this stop her, and throughout her personal challenges, she put her students first.

One way Juneja supported the university, was through her care for international



*Photo from the Beacon, 1979*

students. She did everything she could to make students feel welcome, including by teaching English as a second language. She related to international students because she had been through similar experiences.

When asked if she had any advice for current students, Juneja said, “Everyone will tell you to explore your passions...Yes, explore things you like and have fun, but keep your foothold. Keep yourself realistic and keep your options open. Have classes that will allow you to get work. Keep your passions but be pragmatic also.” She wants students to know that they can explore their passions and do what they love, but they should also be marketable.

One of her fondest memories during her time here includes teaching a Christ College class called Politics of Literature in West Africa with her husband, Jim Kingsland, a professor of Political Science.

She fondly remembers arguing and challenging each other in class. It was entertaining for students, but it also taught them to question things.

Although she is no longer teaching, Juneja will still be at Valpo. She is currently serving as the senior research professor and plans to continue to call Valpo home! To her fellow colleagues and staff members she says, “The English department has been my home and the people in the department are my family. [Valpo is] a great place to work and the colleagues are wonderful.”

The English department would like to thank Professor Juneja for her continuous support for the department. She has been an incredible professor and friend during her time here, and has truly been a beacon of light for her students. Her work as a professor will be missed.



*Photo from ValpoCore Facebook page*

# Donor Spotlight

## Sponberg Endowed Scholarship Fund

The Arvid “Gus” Sponberg Endowed Scholarship Fund was established in memory of late Professor Gus Sponberg who taught in the English and theatre departments from 1972 to 2013. He attended Augustana, a small Lutheran college, for his bachelor’s degree and attended the University of Chicago for his masters. He then went on to the University of Michigan and completed his doctorate. As a prolific writer and speaker, Sponberg accomplished many things over the course of his career, including publishing two books: *Broadway Talks* (1990) and *A.R. Gurney: A Casebook* (2004). Before he passed in 2013, he was also working on a comparative drama relating English and American theatre.

Throughout his years at Valpo, Sponberg loved to spend time in London researching and writing about the theatre there. His passion was academics and he surrounded himself with it. His wife, Bonnie Sponberg, recounts, “He was a compulsive reader. Anytime anyone brought up a topic, he could discuss it. He would read the cereal boxes at breakfast every morning and the menus at every

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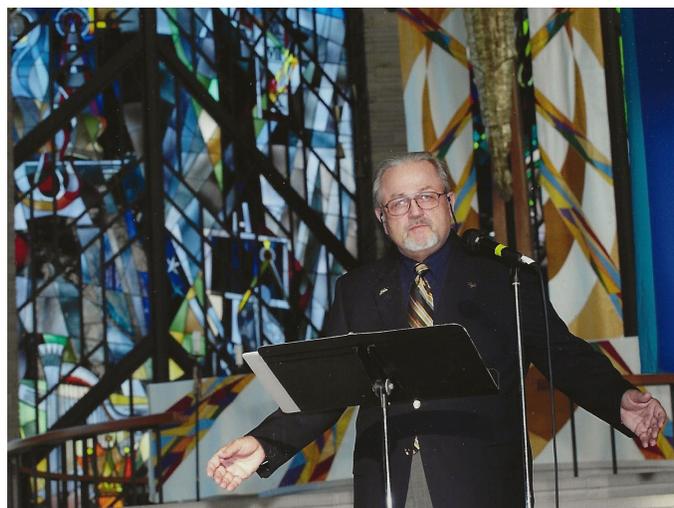
**If you are interested in supporting Sponberg’s endowed fund, please contact Jason Petrovich in the Advancement office at [jason.petrovich@valpo.edu](mailto:jason.petrovich@valpo.edu)**

restaurant and point out all of the grammatical and spelling errors. He absolutely paid attention to everything.”

Bonnie set up this scholarship fund not only because of her husband’s love for the English department, but also because of his love for people. “If there’s one word that describes my husband,” she said, “it was love. He loved everything and everybody.” In her role as a guidance counselor, love for students “was one thing that tied us together.” She goes on to say that she chose a scholarship because Gus would have wanted to invest in students. In both of their careers, the Sponbergs worked for the betterment of people, and Bonnie wants to continue that legacy.

The English department faculty will always remember Sponberg as a positive light in the department. Professor Sara Danger remembers him as, “A renaissance man who loved the theatre and was immersed in that world, but was also deeply interested in his colleagues and students and what they loved.” She continues by saying, “Gus left a huge hole in the department when he passed away and this scholarship may in some way fill that hole and carry on good work through future generations of students.”

Professor Sponberg definitely left his mark on Valpo through his various involvements in the English department, specifically with the creation of Books and Coffee, and also through his service in the community via theatre.



*Photo from Bonnie Sponberg*

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Left: Professor Gus Sponberg speaking at the memorial service for John Steven Paul, the late theatre professor. His wife recounts, “This is so Gus. He spoke with his hands and his whole body.”

# Meet the Editors



**Emily Bakri**  
*Political Science Major*

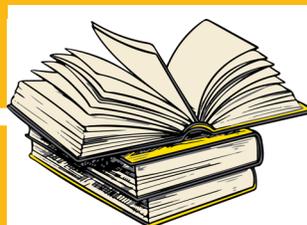
Emily was born and raised in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. She is a sophomore Political Science major and a Public and Professional Writing minor. On campus, Emily serves as the Alpha Gamma Delta sorority president. She is also involved in student senate as a College of Arts and Sciences senator and as the screening committee chair within senate. She is involved in Dance Marathon as the director of entertainment and is an ambassador in admission. In her free time, Emily loves doing theater or hanging out with her friends. Emily can be found giving tours on campus or spending time wherever there are other people. She has loved working on this project and hopes you enjoy reading it! For news about future articles or to get in contact with Emily, reach out to her via [emily.bakri@valpo.edu](mailto:emily.bakri@valpo.edu).



**Cori Laatsch**  
*Public & Professional Writing*

Cori was born and raised in Green Bay, Wisconsin. She is in her second year at Valpo as a Public and Professional Writing major, with a minor in Business. Cori is a Christ College scholar and serves as a resident assistant. On campus, Cori is an assistant editor of *The Lighter*, a literary magazine to highlight Valpo student art and written works. She is also an editor for the *Valparaiso Fiction Review*, which publishes short fiction stories from authors all over the world. After graduating, Cori hopes to enter the field of publishing as a copyeditor. A natural introvert, Cori spends her free time watching the latest Netflix shows or working out at the campus gym. She is very proud to be a part of the newsletter and hopes to continue publication in the future. You can reach her via email for any questions or comments about the current or upcoming issues at [cori.laatsch@valpo.edu](mailto:cori.laatsch@valpo.edu).

We would like to offer special thanks to Matt Ross, Junior CVA student, for designing the Lodestar logo!



**ValpoEnglish**