Word's Worth

Newsletter of the Graduate English Department



bigger than pigeons geese, as it wereheaded west toward prospect park in sharp v formation they pass in the upper wind just above the roofline

from East Window Illuminations by Jamey Jones

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An Interview with Visiting Poet Anne Waldman

by Alicia Berbenick

It is not enough to merely say that Anne Waldman is a poet; no, her writing transcends the page, even the classification "spoken word artist" does not sum up the art she creates. She is a teacher, a philosopher, an activist, a prophet. I was lucky enough to have a conversation with this inspiring artist, in hopes that I might find what makes Anne Waldman Anne Waldman.

AB: In researching your poetic upbringing, I came across the concept of the poetry caravan that you helped bring to life in the 1960's. I found it so interesting and tried to look at today's movements for that intimate replica.

AW: It's a wonderful model for a community of writers who enjoy each other's work and company, and also collaborate together. I was on the Pull My Daisy (Pullman) bus tour that went all through Italy about a decade ago. Participants included Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Ed Sanders of "The Fugs" rock group fame. And Jack Hirschman who has recently been the poet laureate of San Francisco was on board as well. Lawrence did a reading blindfolded, Ed sang, I did poems in both Italian and English. At one point Judith Malina of the Living Theatre joined up. And there were musicians accompanying as well. We performed in so many interesting venues- from outdoor stadiums to small cafes. I had also traveled on Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Review tour in the mid-seventies, which allowed for this kind of serendipity - or surprise. There isn't much advance warning. The caravan shows up and performs, like the motley traveling players in Shakespeare's plays.

AB: Do you think the poetry caravan could be resurrected for this generation of artists? How



would you see that taking shape?

AW: There have been some contemporary examples. But its nice to keep it keyed to public spaces outside the usual institutions. The MFA students here at LIU could organize something like this, I'm sure. In the Sixties there was flatbed truck with microphone on board organized by poet Sam Abrams and others with poets out reading poems against the Viet Nam War, traveling from Cont'd on Page 4

Summer Fiction Immersion Coming to LIU by Jessica Wedge

will direct the launch of The Summer Writers Lab at LIU's Brooklyn Campus, a conference comprised of intensive writing workshops, panels, readings, and performances by prominent writers, on June 16, 17, and 18, 2011.

Professor Jessica Hagedorn Thursday's opening night reading will feature the lab's master class leaders: Gabriel Cohen (The Ninth Step), Jennifer Egan (A Visit from the Goon Squad), and Marlon James (The Book of Night Women), and will be hosted by Jessica Hagedorn. Book signings and a reception will follow.

Friday night will feature a conversation and performance by Rick Moody and Wesley Stace (aka John Wesley Harding) followed by Q&A, a book signing, and a reception.

A Saturday lunchtime panel, Cont'd on page 3

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Brooklyn Book Festival Draws LIU Students by Aimee Herman

The rain was not strong enough to wash away all the words present at the annual Brooklyn Book Festival spanning historic Brooklyn Borough Hall on Sunday, September 12th, 2010. Umbrellas covered heads and rain boots walked toward the many booths housing small presses such as Soft Skull Press, Coffee House Press, South End Press, and Literal Latte, among many others. Readers and writers were able to browse the tables and purchase featured titles, sign their names to mailing lists, and learn about upcoming readings and submission deadlines.

The festival had officially begun on

Friday, when Brooklyn locations such as Greenlight Bookstores and BAM hosted literary readings and book signings.

On Sunday, highlights included the reading and lecture entitled Youth is a Foreign Country, featuring novelists Myla Goldberg, Farai Chideya, and Reif Larsen. Each writer spoke about the challenges of translating adolescence. Larsen characterized their work when he said, "Without childhood trauma, there would be no writers."

LIU professor, Jessica Hagedorn, moderated Food, Metaphor, and

Memory, a panel featuring Amy Besa, Lara Vapnyer, and Monique Troung. The sensations of food permeated through the packed room as each writer spoke about the memories cooked inside their favorite dishes.

The day may have been wet; however, lines still grew long as eager book enthusiasts picked up free tickets to see their favorite writers. On the subway ride home, it was easy to spot attendees by their bulging tote bags. On one bag, a quote by Barbara Kingsolver spoke to the excitement of the day: "The most important part of the story is the piece you don't know."

Graduate Assistantships Bring Focus on Reading to LIU

by Jessica Wedge and Rachel Jackson

LIU provides the opportunity for graduate students to partner with faculty on research and writing projects, and this semester, some of that work is aimed at ensuring that our undergraduates are reading at a college level and succeeding in their studies.

A summer assistantship partnering Professors Patricia Stephens and Deborah Mutnick with graduate student Jessica Wedge is taking shape this semester by increasing faculty participation in boosting reading skills in the college classroom.

Approximately 20 faculty members are taking part in a yearlong seminar designed through the assistantship in which readings, discussions, and guest speakers will help them to understand their students' strengths and weaknesses. They will use the information and practice from the seminar to remediate and en-

"When a student sees that he or she has difficulty, there is then an opportunity to transform these weaknesses into strengths."

hance work in their own courses.

A fall assistantship partnering Professor John Killoran with graduate student Rachel Jackson aims to gather data that will assess LIU students' reading skills compared to students at other institutions.

The Nelson-Denny Reading Test, a forty minute exam administered to over 150 students who are taking

English 14 and Core Literature courses, also assesses how well professors are teaching reading skills to their students . The test is divided into two multiple choice sections: a 15 minute vocabulary section and a 20 minute reading comprehension section. The students are tested in the beginning and at end of the semester in order to determine if they improved, remained at the same level, or dropped in their scores. This research study does not affect the students' grades in the English class or their standing in their academic programs. Jackson finds this test to be very beneficial, because vocabulary and reading comprehension strengths and weaknesses do not disappear once a student enters college. When a student sees that he or she has difficulty, there is then an opportunity to transform these weaknesses into strengths. Additionally, this study enables professors to create lessons around these weaknesses, which promotes improvement in these areas, encouraging success.

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Student and Alumni News

Giuseppe Infante, Kyle De Ocera, Gulay Isik, and Micah Savaglio have launched a journal of writing and art entitled By The Overpass. Issue #1 will release in the first quarter of 2011. Email bytheoverpass@gmail.com by Feb 1 to submit poetry, fiction, nonfiction, photos, and illustrations.

Uche Nduka has published a new book of poetry entitled *Tracers*. The book can be found at http://www.wheelhousemagazine.com/chapbook/nduka.pdf.

Tony lantosca, along with Professor Lewis Warsh, will

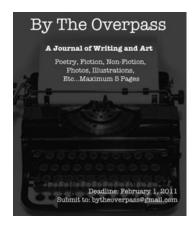
be representing LIU at the Associated Writing Program conference in Washington, D.C. this February.

Jon L. Peacock ('10) is currently teaching courses at St. John's, LaGuardia, and LIU's Bushwick extension campus.

Stephanie Gray ('10) recently published poems in The Brooklyn Rail and 2nd Avenue Poetry. She also spoke and sat on a panel as part of CUNY's Tendencies series on queer writers. She presented her film-poetry project based on E.B White, which she

developed while at LIU at a performance event called MONO NO AWARE. Her work was also included in The Red Room, an anthology published by Straw Gate Books.

Liliana Almendarez ('09) recently participated in NYFA's Entrepreneur Boot Camp where she developed an artist business plan. She was invited to participate in the organization's Boot Camp Arts Festival in November. She also participated in the Best American Short Play reading at Nuyorican Poet's Café in November as well.



Zahra Patterson ('10) was recently appointed as an adjunct professor of English at the College of New Rochelle (Brooklyn Campus) teaching Modes of Analysis, an advanced English course focusing on literary theory.



Summer Fiction Immersion Coming to LIU

Cont'd

The Literary Marketplace in the 21st Century, will be moderated by Harold Augenbraum and will feature Rakesh Satyal (editor at HarperCollins and author of *Blue Boy*), Johnny Temple (Publisher and Editorin-Chief, Akashic Books and Chair of the Brooklyn Book Festival), and veteran literary agent Faith Childs, who represents some of today's leading writers of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry

Morning and afternoon workshops in fiction and genre fiction will round out the conference.

Those interested in The Summer Writers Lab can apply by submitting an application along with a writing sample of no more than twenty pages. LIU English graduate students wishing to take part and/or earn credit through the conference should contact

Marilyn Boutwell at Marilyn.Boutwell@liu.edu.

More information about the conference, including tuition and workshop information, as well as opportunities for graduate students to volunteer as TAs or to assist with special events can be found at http://www.liu.edu/swl or by contacting summerwriterslab@brooklyn.liu.edu.

Literary Magazines Highlight LIU Creative Work

by Jessica Wedge

Since 1992, Downtown Brooklyn: A Journal of Writing has given the LIU community a space to share creative work. In addition to campus-wide distribution, the magazine is sent to over 300 creative writing programs around the country, sharing our work with other writers. A new departmental magazine, Brooklyn Paramount, will feature work from our MFA students and alumni as well as faculty associated with the program. The

first issue will be edited by Program Director Lewis Warsh, then subsequent issues will give students interested in editing and publishing hands-on experience. *Brooklyn Paramount* will release its first issue this spring, and will continue to release two to three times per year.

Those interested in submitting to Downtown

Brooklyn: A Journal of Writing can submit annually between September 1 and February 1 by sending work to Wayne Berninger at Wayne.Berninger@liu.edu or by placing hard copies in his mailbox in the English Department. MFA affiliates interested in submitting to Brooklyn Paramount should watch for department announcements later this spring.

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A note from the editor:

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition of Word's Worth. To send story ideas, news or announcements, to find out how you can write for Word's Worth, or for information about the programs offered in the English department at Long Island University, contact Marilyn Boutwell, Advisor and Coordinator of Graduate Studies in English, at Marilyn.Boutwell@liu.edu. Jessica Wedge

An Interview with Visiting Poet Anne Waldman

Cont'd

Harlem to the Lower east Side. It's an excellent skillful means for *agit prop* work.

AB: As an activist in many forms, what has your soul been propelling you toward most recently? How is this affecting your writing?

AW: Manatee/Humanity (Penguin 2009), a long Buddhist ecology project, and The Iovis Trilogy; Colors In The Mechanism of Concealment (coming out in 2011 from Coffee House Press) a epic that takes on war and patriarchy, were huge projects. And then I started something quieter, using the inspiration of a Japanese woman's diary from the Heian period, but that wasn't enough - so an opera with composer Steven Taylor has been cooking more recently. It's entitled "Cyborg on the Zattere" and I wrote some of it in Venice, where Pound lived at the end of his life, and died. We have a modest production with singers and musicians and ourselves, scheduled for the end of April at the Douglas Dunn Salon. It takes on the "knot" of Ezra Pound a bit- his brilliance as a poet, and his crazy and vile anti-Semitism. His incarcerations in Pisa and

in D. C. at St Elizabeth's (for treason) come into play. It opens in a casino and includes a Goldman Sachs chorus of devils. My son Ambrose and I are also working on a new CD, which has a new piece entitled "Remember Qana", a reference to the Biblical loves and fishes story, and the massacres in Beirut.

AB: After watching your latest film creation with your husband, Ed Bowes, entitled *Entanglement*, I was wondering (1) how you view the art of filmmaking and (2) how you believe poetry will/does influence filmmaking?

AW: In this instance I was writing quite a bit of the script and suggesting other poems to include - those of William Carlos Williams and Eileen Myles. I am in awe of so many filmmakers, and the commitment it takes. That's a huge subject. But I grew up with a lot of avant-garde film happening around me. Stan Brakhage for one, whose work is close to poetry. Montage is a literary device as well. Nathaniel Dorsky whose work I admire tremendously (wordless and soundless) is like poetry.

AB: During one of our class workshop sessions, you stated that you believe writers can never have writer's block. For those who weren't there, would you be able to share your advice in avoiding that mental block?

AW: I was saying they shouldn't have writer's block. And I am speaking to myself here as well. I create experiments and strategies to keep the "block" at bay. I think you stay in shape by reading other writers, by writing things down in notebooks including your dreams, by listening to your world as well as your own imagination. And by doing research, engaging in collaboration. You can't just wait for the "Muse" to descend, all shimmery and poetical. It's a two-way street. And the difficulties - the tragedies as well as the beauties of this world call to you to note them, and wake the world up to itself. To be a mirror and transformer.

AB: Wow. That's such an exciting, intoxicating idea. I only have one last question to wrap up with: do you have any additional advice for the students of the MFA program?

AW: Keep reading other writers

through all times and cultures, and keep a daily practice going. Create ambitious projects for your selves. And stay in touch with one another down the line. Start little magazines, online stuff, create venues for readings. Some of the students here are doing this already. If you know another language (even just a little bit) get involved with translation work. The program here at LIU here is nurturing generations to come. Keep attentive to what your mentors have accomplished- Jessica Hagedorn and Lewis Warsh and John High. They've been part of the counter culture, the outrider culture. They struggled.

And don't be obnoxiously careerist. No one asks you to do this amazing work- it's hard to "commodify" what we do in this world- we don't have the usual "products" but we are needed, as you can see. Just turn on the TV, they really need us to refresh the language and the imagination. "Keep the world safe for poetry" is the Kerouac School motto, which means if it's safe for poetry, it could be safe for a lot of other things.