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NEWSLETTER

OF THE GRADUATE ENGLISH
DEPARTMENT AT LONG ISLAND

Three Questions for Jessica Hagedorn

"We came to this city for reasons we can no / longer remember, dusting the sand from / the creases in our blouses, accruing new wants / and needs, listening to the phone ring without / answering it ('I think it's for you'), accomplishing / our tasks with a dignity that required an inhuman act of attention..."

- from "Disorderly Conduct," INSEPERABLE poems 1995-2005, by Lewis Warsh, director of the MFA Creative Writing Program

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Jessica Hagedorn, LIU's newly appointed Parsons Family Professor of Creative Writing, was born and raised in the Philippines and came to the U.S. in her early teens. She has received numerous fellowships, awards and honors, including a Guggenheim Fiction Fellowship. Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* was a National Book Award finalist. She is also a masterful poet and playwright, anthologized the world over.

How would you describe your current relationship to place, both physically (Brooklyn, NYC, United States, Philippines) and metaphysically (in writing)?

My current relationship to place is as it's always been: messy, ambivalent, creative (I draw inspiration from where I physically live and work), cathartic, sometimes painful,

sometimes joyful, and often simply practical. I also have relationships to other places -- Vietnam (the war with the U.S.), to Spain (where I have family) and to Mexico, Cuba, etcetera? As a writer I attempt to draw from these connections: to culture, to shared histories, to a way of looking outside and beyond myself. An important, deep and primal place for me is also the landscape of the imagination.

How do you feel identity affects writing, at large and for you personally?

I guess the easy answer is that identity affects everything we do. But what exactly do we mean by that vexed term? Should it transcend the obvious factors of race, class, gender? (Now I'm sounding a bit like Barack Obama, and look where that got him!) I claim a mongrel identity, an expatriate identity, a mother identity, a



cat-lover identity, a flamenco identity, a drag queen identity, a Bay Area meets New York identity, a lapsed Catholic identity, a rock n'roll identity -- PLUS the identity of being a writer who works in many genres, other than fiction and poetry: theatre, film, music, performance! I try to see/hear/smell/feel/imagine and then write the world through these often contradictory multiple perspectives.

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"there are some people I know / whose beauty / is a crime."
 -from *Sorcery*

Cherisse Mayers on being a Teaching Fellow

In 12th grade English, I told my teacher that I was going to Temple University to major in English education in order to become a teacher. Her response was, "are you sure?" with a look of disappointment and dashed expectations as if I had said I was entering a life of

crime. However, at that moment I was undoubtedly confident that teaching at the collegiate level was the one career that I would enjoy doing. Like many young people I did what was expected of me. I hung my hat on a profession without really understanding the

significant amount of work and effort it would entail in order to get there and adequately carry out those duties once there.

Since then I have become a graduate student in the Long

(continued on page 4...)

"where is your embodiment? this small obsession of becoming and collapse. or the desire / to be in the world as Image or as Voice. or a knowing or known clatter, prostration."

-from *The Putterer's Notebook*, by Akilah Oliver
(below: *The Bowery Poetry Club*)



Her most recent work, a book of poetry entitled *A Toast in the House of Friends*, is due out from *Coffee House Press* in 2008.

Three Questions for Jessica Hagedorn (*from cover*)

What is the biggest challenge for you in your work here at the MFA program?

There are several big challenges. The first involves recruiting many more students, so that we can bring in more faculty and offer more courses. We need to let the world know that this new MFA Creative Writing Program at LIU

exists, right here in fabulous downtown Brooklyn. A lot of people who might be interested in a serious writing program don't know LIU. They may have walked right by it on their way to BAM or to Junior's, but that doesn't mean anything. So putting a "face" on this MFA program and making it competitive with the other programs at Columbia, at Brown, at Iowa, at Rutgers or

UC Irvine or wherever – that's going to be one of the interesting and exciting parts of this job. With this comes the challenge of creating more financial aid and scholarships for talented, grad student writers who want to come to LIU but can't afford it. (Or are already here but can't afford to stay here.)

-Jessica Rogers

Focus on Visiting Faculty, Spring 2008: Akilah Oliver

"I don't have a manifesto to hand down to poets about how we should be writing poetry, but I do think we have to consider collapse, fragmentation, the instability of the image-repertoire, that

which is belated and also always in return, cartography in an age of dissolving borders, all of this, when we write..."
-Akilah Oliver, during a talk held at UC-San Diego, entitled *A Poetry of Rapture and Rupture*.

Currently, Akilah curates the Monday Night Reading Series for the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church. She lives and writes in Brooklyn, and joins the faculty of LIU this semester as *The Distinguished Author*.

English Dept Expands Professional Writing Program

LIU's English Department has expanded its graduate-level Professional Writing program by hiring a second professional writing professor and by proposing new courses and a certificate.

Michael Bokor, the Department's newly hired professor, is now completing his Ph.D. at Illinois State University and will be joining the Department in the Fall 2008 semester. Michael researches world Englishes and the cross-cultural issues they raise in professional writing pedagogy and practice. Before undertaking his graduate studies, Michael worked for several

years as a journalist in Ghana.

At LIU, Michael joins John Killoran, a Web researcher who has been with the Department since 2006. Together they will develop the professional writing program to serve graduate students within other English concentrations and from other LIU programs, as well as professionals whose careers involve writing.

Professional writing graduate programs are under-represented in the New York metropolitan area. Currently, LIU's English Department is advancing a proposal to add new graduate courses to the Professional Writing Track in its English MA

and to introduce a 12-credit graduate-level Professional Writing Certificate.

Among the proposed courses is grant writing, which students can study in the Fall 2008 semester. A successful grant proposal sustains much of the work conducted by cultural agencies, businesses, nonprofits, and researchers, and grant writing skills can help sustain graduate students as they transition from college to various kinds of careers. Other courses proposed for future semesters include technical writing and health and science writing.

-John Killoran

Student & Alumni Announcements

Zahra Patterson was promoted to Development Program Manager at Polytechnic University, in the Development and University Relation Office. Her three successful sons continue to make her proud. She and her husband recently celebrated 24 years of marriage.

Sarah Kolbasowski has been offered an adjunct position at Devry University teaching both Comparative Literature and Intro to Poetry. Recent work by Sarah can be found in *The Alchemy Review* and *Juice*, and the Poetry Center in Paterson chose one of her poems for an anthology of works about New Jersey.

Chloe Leyow recently began teaching with the College Now program, in accordance with CUNY Kingsborough, at FDR High School, where she also teaches regularly.

Rochelle Isaacs, an adjunct at LIU and the Borough of Manhattan Community Col-

lege, is completing her final semester of course work in the PhD department at Temple University.

Jamie Anderson lives in Kensington, Maryland, while working for Millin Associates, a company in New York. Currently, she is interviewing for various teaching positions, and working on a piece recording her experiences of being a New Yorker in DC.

In Fall of 2008, **Karen Pitt** begins a tenure-track job as assistant professor of English at Medgar Evers College. She is also applying to PhD programs in English with a focus in composition and rhetoric.

Larry Young does visuals and merchandising for the Gap, and has been working with a stylist, doing the wardrobe for TV shows, photo shoots, and other artistic projects.

Margot Nasti and Charles Thorne, cofounders of Blue Leaf Press, are proud to an-

nounce the eminent publication of the second chapbook in their Quarto series, entitled *Traces*. Their first chapbook, *Buttons and Boots*, is on sale now. Both works feature prominent poets from in and around the LIU community. Contact blueleafpress@gmail.com for inquiry or purchase.

Stephanie Gray's first book of poems and prose poems, *Heart Stoner Bingo*, has recently been published by Straw Gate Books. The book, with cover art by Gary Sullivan, is available through Small Press Distribution and the Straw Gate Books website. Stephanie has been involved in numerous readings in support of the publication, and continues to be an active voice in the downtown Manhattan and Brooklyn poetry scenes.



“There’s the girl with the idea in her head that— stays. / There’s the article that quotes someone important saying, ‘we gotta / fix the maze that passes for downtown.’”
-from “This is the Bike Ride to Work, The Bike Ride Home From Work Loop,” Heart Stoner Bingo by Stephanie Gray (cover above)



From the Research Corner

Patricia Stephens has begun a project examining the unheard testimonies of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Hearings. She hopes to bring these voices to light. **Michelle Solomon** assists Patricia with her work this semester.

Jonathan Haynes carries on his research into Nigerian video films and the culture of “Nollywood,” including field-

work on the distribution and reception of Nigerian and other African video films in New York. He will be taking on an assistant during the Fall 2008 term.

Louis Parascandola is researching the literary and political writings of English-speaking Caribbean immigrants in New York between 1910 and 1935. **Mary Walker** currently aids

with this ongoing project.

Maria McGarrity, with the assistance of **Charles Thorne**, continues a long term project charting the nexus of meaning in Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*, a verse novel written in the Dantean structure of terza rima. The result will be the beginnings of a reference resource for students and scholars.

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Cherisse Mayers on being a Teaching Fellow (*from cover*)

Island University English Literature M.A. program and I have repeatedly asked myself the same question that my English teacher once asked me: Am I sure that this is what I want to do? Is it really worth it? These questions ran through my head as I nervously entered the freshman English class I was assigned to teach a year ago, an opportunity that LIU provided through the Teaching Fellowship program. As a new teacher my fears were many, consisting of my students not respecting my authority, being unprepared, or getting that awkward silence in response to my perceived groundbreaking questions concerning the text. Although some of these worries have occurred within the classes I have taught, the

things I find fulfilling about teaching outweigh the challenges. Granted it is a time consuming profession, one filled with incessant student papers and lesson plans, yet I take pleasure in seeing improvement in my students' writing and believing that I played some role in bringing about that change. I also enjoy the insightful ideas and connections students make in their analysis of the readings. Another feature of teaching that I find encouraging is that it is not a hit or miss profession, in that there are many opportunities to vary one's methods if one realizes a strategy or activity isn't working. Through the experience I have gained teaching freshman English, my goals as a teacher have remained the same, which

consist of getting my students to read and write about the assignments and also to see the readings in relation to their lives in ways that affirm their ideas and values.

As I near the end of my journey at Long Island University, I have come full circle from student to teacher. I know that there will be many more times when I may have doubts about the future I have chosen for myself. However, the advice, strength, and knowledge that I have gained from attending LIU has taught me that come what may, I am sure that teaching and writing is what I foresee myself doing for a long time.

*-Cherisse Mayers, Spring 2008
Graduate, Master of Arts, Literature*

A Note from the Editor:

The editor (who is I) wishes to thank all those who inspired, contributed, and supported this newsletter (who are you). I would like to thank in particular the wonderful writers whose words appear in print on these pages; Marilyn Boutwell, for her endless encouragement; Sealy Gilles, for her support; and Nell del Giudice, for her assistance, contributions, and inspiration in times of need (& all other times, too).

To send story ideas, news or announcements, or to find out how you can write for *Word's Worth*, contact Jessica Rogers, editor, at jessica.rogers@brooklyn.liu.edu

For information about the programs offered in the English department at Long Island University, contact Marilyn Boutwell, Advisor & Coordinator of Graduate Studies in English, at marilyn.boutwell@liu.edu