

BRENDA COULTAS

Visiting Poet Teaching "The City Below" this Fall at Long Island University by Stephanie Gray

LIU's visiting professor this fall, NYC poet Brenda Coultas, is the author of several books, including *The Handmade Museum* (2003), which includes her Bowery Project, a series of poems and documentation of the Bowery, one block from where she lives. I asked Brenda some questions on poetry, the city, drawing inspiration from her book, and looking towards her "The City Below" poetry workshop.

Gray: "locked myself in Bowery mindset.." I can't get that phrase out of my head. For your Bowery Project poetry series you sat down with a sign that said Tell me a Bowery Story – how did that work with your poetic process? What does that quote mean to you?

Coultas: Setting up a table and chair and posting a sign

was a way of bringing the residents and passersby into the poem by letting them speak. I did not want to assume to know their stories. What if my assumptions were wrong? So I listened. I worked with a friend, Rembert Block who filmed while I listened to the stories. They were all men but one. Still, there was a range, some with long roots having been raised on the Bowery, and some workers, some just passing through, and others from the missions with time on their hands and a generosity towards sharing their stories.

In your "City Below" class, students will "take our cue from the streets by writing about what is under our feet and surrounding us"... and they'll "go deep rather than wide in their excavation of the city" – what do you envi-

sion by this?

By finding a focus, perhaps a physical or abstract point to gather materials for, one can deepen and discover new ground. By covering less surface, one is forced to find new ways to mine. This is essential in dealing with a huge rough diamond as NYC. I visualize this class as a starting point for a longer project, like Olsen's 50-year project. It's not just about the street, but anything that has been or is still lost or hidden. This could mean local legends, landmarks, crimes, even sounds or sights.

Cont'd on page 3



Flash Focus: Five Questions on the Fine Art of Reading and Writing with Lewis Warsh by Charles Thorne

Charles: What role has reading played in your development as a writer?

Lewis: I feel happiest when I'm reading--my mind is most active. Early on, I realized that my writing got better the more I read--that

the two were intertwined. Reading is an experience; it's like anything else you do, like going to the movies or listening to music or falling in love, and all these things interact and impact what you're writing. Also, reading

gives me ideas about writing. It's important to know what's already been done in your field and the way to do that is to read everything that's been written before you.

Cont'd on pg 4

Inside this issue:

*The Writing Program
by Tamara Lebron pg 2*

*A New Campus Group...
by Danielle Moskowitz pg 2*

*The Kluge Fellowship
by Srividhya Swaminathan pg 2*

*A Visit to the Morgan Library & Museum
by Elspeth Macdonald pg 3*

"I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman." - Virginia Woolf

"I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best." - Frida Kahlo

"A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song." - Maya Angelou

"I believed, when I entered this convent, I was escaping from myself, but alas, poor me, I brought myself with me!" - Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

Think wrongly, if you please, but in all cases think for yourself. - Doris Lessing

Deborah Mutnick Talks About What's New in The Writing Program

by Tamara Lebron

The Writing Program at the Brooklyn Campus of Long Island University has undergone various transformations as LIU continues to look for ways to serve its students better. LIU's mission is to provide "access and excellence" to its very diverse, historically first-generation student body. According to Writing Program Director Deborah Mutnick, "This semester in the Writing Program, we are implementing new curriculum guidelines that will hopefully help improve student writing and reading and student retention."

In 1991, English 13 and 14 were developed in order to facilitate a new wave of academically underprepared students' needs. The goal was to teach basic reading and writing in an intellectually challenging program.

At the same time, English 16, first-year composition, and what was then known as English 17, the research paper course, remained more or less the same except for the introduction of portfolio grading in the former and occasional, innovative experiments in the latter. In the spring of 2000, the Brooklyn campus faculty approved a major revision of the core curriculum that included the elimination of English 17 and the creation of Core Seminar (COS 50), writing intensive requirements in the major, and a Writing Across the Curriculum program.

Along with many positive aspects of the new core, faculty in the English Department and across the campus noticed that many students were not learning research skills. Meanwhile, Writing Program faculty observed that over the years the basic writing

sequence and English 16 had lost cohesiveness. To address the need for comparability across classes, the Writing faculty began its own review of the program, eventually integrating research skills into instruction, especially in English 16, developing new curriculum guidelines, and creating rubrics for each course.

Starting this fall, students in English 16 are required to write a research paper. Similar to Core Seminar's curriculum, students will have two library visits in order to introduce them to the basics of research. Although English 14 instructors will be encouraged to take students to the library, it is not mandatory this semester. It is hoped that students who pass English 16 will now move on to Core Seminar and their majors with a basic understanding of research.

Patricia Stephens and Claire Goodman Co-Sponsor a New Campus Group: The International Women's Caucus! By Danielle Moskowitz

In my search to find women's activists groups in NYC, I sought guidance from Gender Studies professors Claire Goodman (Media Arts) and Patricia Stephens (English). Then, I learned that about 70% of LIU Brooklyn's students are women. Of this large female population, I also learned that many are from various countries and backgrounds. It seemed like a no-brainer—I needed a women's group and LIU needed a women's group! The International

Women's Caucus was born, and Claire Goodman and Patricia Stephens agreed to co-sponsor the IWC.

The IWC not only provides a place for students, alumni and faculty to meet other LIU-er's who care about issues that affect women, it has also become a forum for planning ways to take action. In between meetings, our Google Group is flowing with ideas and articles that generate thought-

provoking discourse and empowerment. From right-out-of-high-school freshman to those retired and going back to school, hailing from many corners of the globe, the International Women's Caucus is as strong as it is diverse and is looking for new members. For more information contact Danielle Moskowitz at Danielle.Moskowitz@my.liu.edu

"The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own. There is no other way."
— Betty Friedan

The Kluge Fellowship by Srividhay Swaminithan

For the 2008-2009 academic year, I had the good fortune of being awarded a Kluge fellowship through the Library of Congress in Washington DC. This fellowship is specifically designed to assist junior scholars in the humanities, who have completed a Ph.D., to research substantive projects that can range from an article to a book. My work involved a book-length study of early portrayals of slavery in Britain from the

Restoration to the mid-eighteenth century. The central research question asks, how did slavery, in particular transatlantic slavery, become part of the British national narrative in the era before the first abolitionist movement?

In the nine months of project funding, I was able to make use of the Library of Congress resources, including an impressive rare

books collections and a host of digitized material, and I still have many texts left to consult after my time there. While the work on my project is still ongoing, I delivered a lecture on the questions I discuss in my first chapter. The lecture, titled "Defining Enslavement: Literary Depictions of Slavery in Early Eighteenth Century Britain," is available by webcast on the Library of Congress website.



Student, Alumni, and Professor News

We would like to congratulate the following students, alumni, and professors on their wonderful achievements:

Our very own **Mary Walker** competed in the 2009 National Taekwondo Championships in Florida during the 4th of July holiday; she placed second in sparring in her division (Silver Medalist), second in the nation. She also brought home a bronze medal for poomse (forms). She would also like to share with us that her eldest son, Akil Walker, brought home the Gold for sparring. It's good news for this very athletic family all around!

Jessica Rogers, who graduated last May, has accepted a teaching position at Queensborough Community College – Congratulations Jessica!

Jamie Jones is now the new graduate assistant to the MFA Director, Lewis Warsh.

Congratulation Jamie, we know you'll do a phenomenal job!

Stephanie Gray has two poems in the new EOAGH issue; the release reading was at Unnamable Books in October. She also read in September with Jack Collom at LIU's C.W. Post campus.

Ashley Carter Sinclair is teaching at the High School for Telecommunications in Staten Island.

Anthony Williams is a new adjunct at St. Frances College.

A documentary film that **Zahra Patterson** worked on with a film crew interviewing writers about their experiences at Princeton University had its first screening on October 23 at the Third Annual Alumni Conference. The name of the film is "Looking Forward: Reflections of Black Princeton Alumni." Many of the writers Zahra interviews were featured in the film.

Lily Almendarez's play, "Glass Knives," will be published in the anthology *Best Short American Play 2006-2007* from Applause Books this coming spring, 2010. Finally, congratulations to Professor **Maria McGarrity** for the publication of her new book, *Washed by the Gulf Stream: the Historic and Geographic Relation of Irish and Caribbean Literature* and Professor **Srividhya Swaminathan** for the publication of her new book *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759–1815*. There will be a book party in honor of both professors on November 16 from 4:30 to 6:00 pm on the 4th floor lounge in the Humanities building.

Congratulations to everyone!



Visiting Poet Teaching "The City Below" this Fall at Long Island University cont'd

"Maybe we want poetry to make us popular, bring us love, money, or to affect political change.."

How can we "enter" the city for an investigative poetics, especially if we see it so closely every day?

There's the obvious, which is to use models, to write off of other poets or what one sees out the window. Write about a lost sound, one that existed before your birth. Imagine the sounds that existed in Brooklyn before the Europeans. We have to learn to see the city new again, by finding ways to

invigorate/inspire/invoke/provoke our gaze.

"Poetry changes the world constantly, only not in the ways in which we expect or recognize." What can this mean for emerging poets?

We expect poetry to operate in a capitalist sense. Maybe we want poetry to make us popular, bring us love, money, or to affect political change. We wave a poem over a

cage and expect a rabbit to be turned into a stack of cash, and when we find ourselves stuck with the rabbit, we think it's the fault of the art, not our expectations. Yet it does work. Imagine the world without it. The best poetry elevates us, our discourse, our relationships and understanding of what it is to be human. I take comfort in Allen Ginsberg's belief that the purpose of poetry is "to ease the pain of living."

A Visit to the Morgan Library & Museum by Elspeth Macdonald

What is it about the Morgan? It's not the NY Public Library nor a museum. This was my first visit to the Morgan, although I have lived in NYC for 50 years. The new addition, designed by architect Renzo Piano, is alone a reason to make a visit. The original building houses a Renaissance library and study.



What a gold mine! Galileo's autograph notes on the satellites of Jupiter; Johann Sebastian

Bach's signature on a little note; Beethoven's sketch for the 7th Symphony; the Genealogical and Chronicle roll "which traces the ancestry of Louis XI to Clovis and less directly to Adam and Eve;" Toni Morrison, *The Art of Fiction*, typed manuscript with corrections; *L'Histoire de Babar*; a permanent collection of medieval manuscripts; a daguerreotype of Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Brontë, note from Oscar Wilde to Lord Douglas.

My bait was the traveling exhibition of medieval manuscripts that was there until September 13. This included the work of a forger, exposed because of his use of "Paris green," only invented after 1814.

J. Pierpont Morgan made millions by founding General Electric and two other companies. It was his strong interest in the arts that made it possible for him to attract cultural works from Europe.

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**NEWSLETTER OF THE GRADUATE ENGLISH
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A Note from the Editor:

I'd like to thank everyone who contributed to this edition of Word's Worth. To send story ideas, news or announcements, or to find out how you can write for Word's Worth, contact Tamara Lebron, editor, at Tamara.Lebron@my.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

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Flash Focus: Five Questions on the Fine Art of Reading and Writing with Lewis Warsh *cont'd*

What do you see as the role that reading should play in the MFA program?

I think literature courses are an important part of an MFA program. Writers who are working in the idioms of the present must be discussed--like the seminar in the writings of Roberto Bolaño that's being offered this semester.

What would you say to someone who thinks that reading should not be a part of the MFA program, that the MFA is a place for someone to work on his or her own craft rather than studying the craft of someone else?

Working on your own craft involves studying the craft of others. The two are inter-related. We're not writing in a vacuum. That's why classes in lineages and traditions are important. Every generation leads out or

breaks from the generation of writers that came before.

What should an MFA student be required to do in a lit class and why?

Explore connections between texts is one thing. There are infinite possibilities. In grad school, curiosity must be assumed. You need to know what's going on inside the texts--it's a necessity. If for some reason you're bored--then check out the professor and see what he or she is doing right or wrong. That's what I did in grad school--I studied the teachers. You might be that person some day.

What are you reading right now?

I'm reading the *Selected Writings of Henri Michaux*, a 20th-century French poet who also did these beautiful ink drawings when he took mescaline. And then I just finished a bio of Edward Hopper, of all people,



which was really a bio of his wife, Jo, who was also a painter--completely ignored by the art world, and by her husband as well, who discouraged her from painting and was physically abusive--but then she stays with him for 30 or so years, so that's something to wonder about. Reading books like this is a totally cautionary experience, but gives much insight into the generation of writers and painters preceding mine. And then *The Plague of Fantasies* by Slavoj Zizek for the great mix of references from psychology, literature, film. I like books that make me want to know more about anything and what it means to look closely at something. And how everything changes the deeper you go.