

Pembroke Center Associates

Newsletter

Playwriting with A Social Conscience



Adam Bock AM'89, Eng-Beng Lim, and Lynn Nottage '86 share a lighthearted moment during the forum.

Recognizing the incredible depth of Brown's alumnae/i who have become successful playwrights, the Pembroke Center Associates organized a commencement forum, "Award Winning Theater: Brown Playwrights and their Work," to explore how some of Brown's alumnae/i are effecting social change through their plays. Adam Bock AM'89 and Lynn Nottage'86 spoke about the craft of playwriting, their process, and how they incorporate issues they care about into their work. Nottage was on campus to accept an honorary degree of Doctor of Fine Arts during the University's commencement ceremony the next day.

Named in honor of Pembroke College and the generations of women who fought to gain access to higher education, the Pembroke Center's research explores the risks and bene-

fits of social change and the ways questions of difference – such as race, sexuality, religion, and class – affect our thinking and our world. The Associates were pleased to present this forum with playwrights who explore in artistic form the issues that the Pembroke Center is researching in scholarly form.

Eng-Beng Lim, assistant professor of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies, moderated. In thanking the Pembroke Center for hosting the forum, Lim observed that it is rare to have a public conversation with a playwright, let alone two prolific and powerful writers who have such a deep sense of social conscience. Lim asked the playwrights to first share some of the ways that Brown has influenced them.

Lynn Nottage said that she came to Brown with a very specific agenda defined by her parents and by Brown, which was to become a doctor. She came to Brown with a scholarship from the Pembroke Class of 1923. Nottage noted that she had three encounters that influenced her while at Brown. She met an "extraordinary spirit in the form of a professor named George Bass, who was my very first playwriting professor, and while I was taking chemistry and biology and calculus, I always found refuge in one other course, which was playwriting. After a time I found that it was the only class that I was looking forward to." The second influence was Paula Vogel, the first person Nottage had met who was a professional playwright. "Paula Vogel let me know that playwriting wasn't just a hobby and something that would end when I left the university." Her third experience was "taking organic chemistry," which convinced her that she was not going to be a doctor, but a theater artist. Nottage credited Brown's open curriculum with giving her the freedom to find and explore playwriting.

Adam Bock explained that a friend told him of Paula Vogel's work, and she is who drew him to Brown. He moved to Providence and sat in on classes before starting graduate school. He observed Vogel's workshop and acted for her playwrights. "In two years I did forty-two projects. I did three major plays, I produced, acted, directed, wrote, I did everything. If you were interested, you could do anything at Brown." He also worked for a time on the Pembroke Center's journal, *differences: A Journal*

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From the Director

As members of the Pembroke Center Associates, we all understand that the Pembroke Center is a special place, brimming with intellectual energy, innovative scholarship, and activities recognizing the history of women at Brown and our namesake, Pembroke College in Brown University. As part of our scholarly mission, faculty, postdoctoral fellows, students, and alumnae/i involved in the Pembroke Center have been engaging in critical thinking that has been transforming research agendas across the Academy. As part of the Center's 30th anniversary in 2011, we are planning a special day-long conference and celebration.

Theory on the Move: Three Decades of Critical Feminist Thinking

Saturday, November 5th, 2011
9 a.m.

Pembroke Hall, 172 Meeting Street
Brown University, Providence, RI

We hope you will save the date to join us for what will be an invigorating discussion of how scholars from the humanities, social sciences, biological sciences, and creative arts have used feminist theory to inform their work. We also will celebrate the hundreds of Brown alumnae/i who support the Pembroke Center and ensure our success.

Our 30th anniversary celebration will include:

- Panels of illustrious scholars who held Pembroke Center postdoctoral fellowships when they were launching their academic careers
- Reflections from former Pembroke Center directors about the Center's history and new directions for feminist and critical theory
- Celebrations of our role at Brown, new directions, and our generous supporters

Thank you for your involvement with the Pembroke Center as we mark this major milestone in our history.

Kay Warren, Director

PEMBROKE CENTER FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH ON WOMEN

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Emily Fishman'11 Awarded the Ruth Simmons Prize in Gender and Women's Studies



Emily Fishman

Established by President Simmons in 2008, this prize at the Pembroke Center annually recognizes an outstanding honors thesis having to do with women or gender. This spring, the Center invited faculty

from all fields to nominate theses for the prize. Emily Fishman, a Modern Culture and Media concentrator, has received the honor this year.

Fishman's thesis, entitled "Fabricating Identity: Fashion and the Role of Personal History in the Construction of the Individual," explores the relationship between personal identity and social construction or social "fashioning," and the relationship between personal history and public history. She appropriated garments that she and her mother had kept throughout their lives to demonstrate how personal meaning is represented as it floats to the surface.

By engaging with Judith Butler's notion of performativity in writing and in practice, Fishman sought to

break down the productions of individuality in the context of dress. As part of her project, Fishman staged a fashion show. Her models wore the clothes she had designed, which repeated and reflected the patterns and designs of these childhood objects. Fishman worked with the design company JF and Son in New York to produce her collection.

Upon learning that she was the recipient of the Ruth Simmons Prize, Fishman said, "Receiving this prize is a great honor. I am excited to move forward with the synthesis of academic and creative practice in fashion." Fishman begins a post-baccalaureate program in fashion design at Parsons School for Design in New York City this fall.

"I want to acknowledge Brown's Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women. Founded over twenty-five years ago, the Pembroke Center has focused on the complexity of difference, which includes gender studies, race and ethnicity, multiculturalism, postcolonial studies, and other forms of difference. The brilliant work of this Center, along with the ardent support of its advocates, has contributed much to the University and to the nation."

— PRESIDENT RUTH J. SIMMONS

Excerpted from her acceptance speech at the National Council for Research on Women's "Making A Difference for Women" Awards Dinner, February 28, 2011.

Stephanie Paris'11 Receives Joan Wallach Scott Prize



Stephanie Paris

Named for Joan Wallach Scott, the founding director of the Pembroke Center and the Harold F. Linder Professor of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study, this prize honors an outstanding honors thesis in Gender and Sexuality Stud-

ies. A faculty prize committee selected Stephanie Paris to receive this prestigious honor. Her honors thesis, "Whoring in America: Sacred Sex, Subjugation, and Stigma in the Land of Liberty" analyzes prostitution in modern America from theoretical and cultural perspectives.

For her analysis of the "social conditions of stigma," Paris employs first-hand accounts written by sex workers; phenomenology (the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view); performativity theory; and feminist scholarship on prostitution. She argues for a politics of prostitution that is neither abolitionist, nor based on labor rights. Instead, she advocates for a politics of livability, which

makes recognition and empathy of primary importance, to counter the stigma, violence, and marginalization that shape the lives of sex workers.

"Upon learning I had received the Joan Wallach Scott prize for my senior thesis, I was stunned and surprised," said Paris. "Having focused so intently on just completing the work, it was both a pleasure and an honor to find I was receiving an award, specifically named for one of the earliest gender theorists I had encountered in classes taken through the Gender and Sexuality Studies program at Brown."

Paris plans to move to San Francisco this summer. She hopes to attend graduate school to pursue a Master of Social Work degree in the future.

of *Feminist Cultural Studies*. In describing his writing and staging of a play for the gay community during the Christmas season that drew ever larger audiences each year, Bock said he realized, "Theater for me is about providing something for my community that it doesn't have."

Lim asked how playwriting was not only about "making it" in the industry but also a kind of social practice and set of commitments, ideas, and politics. "First and foremost, I consider myself to be a storyteller," said Nottage. "Fortunately or unfortunately, the stories that I want to tell are about African American women, and by virtue of telling these stories it becomes a political act." Nottage added that she is always surprised when people come and see her plays and tell her they were not aware of an issue she examined in her plays. "So much of what I write about are things that have happened in my own life, and what they are communicating to me is that my life is unfamiliar to them," explained Nottage. "I wouldn't say it is a responsibility, but I feel it is part of my journey to tell the stories of women from the African diaspora."

"There's an official story of the world, we all know it, and we know who is supposed to be in the center of it, and the roles they are supposed to play," observed Bock. "I think both Lynn and I poke at that story, I don't believe that story. I think the only way the world changes is if the story of the world changes. And so what I try to do is say, 'You forgot to tell this part of the story, this person doesn't even exist.' It always drives me crazy because when I'm watching a movie and there are ten men starring and one woman, I want to know where are the other women?"

"I am very interested in writing about poverty," said Nottage. "I want to know what's really happening in the midst of this crisis we are in, emotionally and philosophically. I feel we are sort of force fed stories by the media to fit a very specific agenda, but I don't know what's really happening in the belly of this beast that we call America."

Two Graduate Students Honored with Marie J. Langlois Dissertation Prize

The Pembroke Center annually awards the Marie J. Langlois Dissertation Prize for an outstanding dissertation in the area of feminist studies. This year, the faculty selection committee made the unusual decision to award the prize to two students whose research is quite different, but very compelling.



Kathy Millar, a graduate student in Anthropology, received one of the prizes for her dissertation "Reclaiming the Discarded" in which she

explores intertwined issues of gender, class, and labor among *catadores*, who retrieve and sell materials on Rio de Janeiro's largest garbage dump. This study reveals that *catadores* integrate work with other dimensions of everyday life in ways that unsettle gendered divisions between workplace and home and that challenge existing theories of the informal economy. The stories of *catadores* show how the dump has become a space in which new gender and class subjectivities are made and alternative livelihoods and life projects fashioned.



Corey McEleney, a graduate student in English, received the prize for his dissertation, "The Pleasure in Error: Early Modern Romance and

Poetic Futility." He explores the errant role that pleasure plays in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English writers' attempts to define the epistemological, ethical, and civic value of poetry. He examines the mode of writing known as romance, which came under attack in the Renaissance for allegedly producing an excess of pleasure over utility. McEleney argues that the threat of poetry's futility, which was pushed to the limits in the case of romance, reveals fundamental contradictions within the project of Renaissance humanism and constitutes a blind spot for contemporary criticism.

What Inspired Some Students to Action Fifty-One Years Ago?

A Reprint of an editorial from the *Pembroke Record*, March 29th, 1960

Brown And Pembroke Picketing

We want to compliment the Pembrokers and Brown men working on the Independent Association of Civil Liberties for taking a stand against segregation. All too often college students, so completely immersed in their life at school, know nothing of national or international news. And for the few "knowing" students to take an active part in national affairs is certainly a rare thing.

However, we question the method used to effect the change the students desire. Do the picketers believe that their picketing northern stores that do not segregate can change the policies of southern stores? Granted, the stores being picketed are in the same chain as those in the North, and their management is centered in the North. Nevertheless, the Providence public has indicated its indifference to the picketers' cause and will not allow the feelings of college students to affect their shopping habits. The managements of the Grant's and Woolworth's chains will, consequently, not readily change the policies of their Southern stores.

We do not agree with the method of protestation being used by the Independent Association of Civil Liberties. However, we do admire the fact that its members are making an active attempt to correct a situation which they feel warrants correction.