Adrienne Rich Visits Northwestern

by Öykü Potuoglu-Cook

Adrienne Rich, the legendary poet, essayist, feminist, and activist, delivered a vibrant poetry reading to a standing-room-only hall and met with students for a critical discussion during her visit to Northwestern on October 25. Co-sponsored by Northwestern’s programs in American Studies and Gender Studies, these campus events helped chart Rich’s aesthetic and political transformation over the last half-century, with a particular focus on the continuing implications of her feminist poetics, pedagogy, and public engagement.


Professors John Keene and Robyn Schiff, faculty members in the English Department, led the morning discussion with 25 highly-engaged undergraduates and graduate students from across the college and university. Both Keene and Schiff detailed Rich’s impact on their own artistic growth as poets. Schiff cited “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision” (1972) to contextualize Rich’s provocative re-visualization of both literary and political challenges to formalist and sexist literary canons and to posit Rich’s trajectory as a history of the U.S. women’s movement. Similarly, Keene elaborated on the moral courage of Rich’s art and the conscious pursuit of communal transformation across Twenty-One Love Poems (1977) and An Atlas of the Difficult World (1991).

In the wide-ranging questions and answers with students, Rich addressed formal shifts in her work, particularly how she came of age with her third book, Snapshots of Daughter-in-Law (1963), eschewing the tight, restrained verse and syntax of A Change of World (1951). Defining intertextuality as not only a dialogue with fellow poets and writers (Audre Lorde, Denise Levertov, and James Baldwin), but also with political/institutional climates, she expressed “skepticism about movements that win), but also with political/institutional climates, she expressed “skepticism about movements that...

2006 AWARD WINNERS

Abby Rogosheske ’06, winner of the Dobbs Thesis Prize, with advisor Joan Sherman and honors coordinator Amy Partridge

At the annual spring awards banquet in June, Gender Studies recognized its graduating seniors and presented three undergraduate prizes. Please join us in applauding the accomplishments of these new alumni of the Gender Studies Program:

Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs Prize for the best senior honors thesis written in the Gender Studies Program: Abigail Rogosheske ’06 for her thesis entitled “Pineapples and Politics: Ugandan Women and the Road to Empowerment.” The award committee cited “the intellectual rigor with which Abby approached her topic, from the initial data collection to her appendices on ethnographic method.”

George C. Casey Prize, for the best undergraduate essay on any topic relating to the situation of gender and society: Corey Robinson ’06, for his essay, “Where Have All the Queer Boys Gone?: Representation, Respectability, and the Political Potential of Bodies.”

Rae Arlene Moses Leadership Award, presented to a graduating senior who has fostered initiatives and demonstrated leadership, both within the classroom and in co-curricular activities sponsored by the Program: Corey Robinson ’06. The award committee cited Corey’s leadership as co-chair of the Undergraduate Board, his devotion to the new Gender Studies Undergraduate Scholars’ Group, and his work organizing the hugely successful Hoffmann Colloquia events: “Radical Chicago,” assimilartist Nikki S. Lee, and Professor David Eng.
From the director’s desk

We hope gender/dynamic also conveys the energy and growth of the Gender Studies Program itself: as an interdisciplinary collaboration with faculty and students in many departments across the university, and as an ongoing project that includes women’s studies and feminist theory, but that has also dynamically expanded in recent years to include sexuality studies, the study of masculinities, and queer theory. With this new title and new look, this newsletter issue sends word of a Fall Quarter talk by Jules Rosskam, filmmaker and creator of “Cinema,” a version of “Voices and Visions of Woman Born” (the core-curriculum course for majors and minors); and Visiting Assistant Professor Amy Partridge’s new seminar for incoming first-year students, “Making History in the 60s,” which focuses on the Gay Liberation Movement, Women’s Liberation, and Black Power movements. Gender Studies Associate Director Jilliana Enten will launch another new 200-level course in the Spring Quarter, on transnational sexualities. We are also now in the process of launching an expanded graduate program, as part of the new interdisciplinary “cluster” initiative in The Graduate School.

These developments follow on an extraordinary year in 2005-06. Our previous newsletter detailed an unprecedented cohort of six senior honors theses in the program; in this newsletter, we congratulate Gender Studies prize winners for best thesis, best essay, and senior leadership, announced at the annual awards banquet held at the end of last academic year (see page 1).

Alongside the new “look” and name of this publication, we are also launching a freely web-sited website for the program, in first in several years, where you can learn about events, courses, programs, and faculty in Gender Studies: https://www.nwcs.northwestern.edu/gendestudies. Building on our past successes and ongoing collaborations with faculty and students, I’m pleased to welcome you to our new dynamic.

—Jeffrey Matz

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To consider the university as both an institutional enabler and pre-emp of arts and progressive politics, Rich drew upon her disparate teaching experiences at Stanford University and at CCNY’s open-admission SEEK program, designed to educate black, poor, and immigrant students underserved by the public system. She also discussed her public refusal of the National Medal For the Arts (1997), calling it “a visceral response” because “she could not imagine herself going to the White House” after “President Clinton had just signed the Welfare Reform Bill.”

Rich’s comments about the radical efficacy of the women’s and LGBT movements exemplified her attention to historical particularities and the intersection of power structures. She contextualized her seminal essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality” (1980) as a response to the heterosexist leanings of feminist journal Signs in the early-1980s rather than as a timeless “manifesto.” In explaining her hesitancy to reprint this work, she identified the proliferation of interpersonal feminist and queer frameworks from the last decades, and as suggested by a student, their challenges to the unified category of “Woman.” Embedding gay and lesbian movements within American radicalism, Rich underlined first, partial attainment of rights with the continued invisibility of gay people; second, the possibility of co- opting by the status-quo; and third, the need to situate gender and sexual oppression within political and economic inequalities. Such points spoke to Rich’s earlier, process-oriented analysis of lesbian existence and continuum (“Compulsory Heterosexuality”) and the coercive social structuring of motherhood (“Of Woman Born,” 1977).

Focus on “Introducing Queer Cinema” by Jessi Reber ’09

In this newsletter, Gender Studies asks a student to introduce a course to our readers. Jessi Reber ’09 contributed this description of Professor Nick Davis’s new version of “Voices and Visions: Introducing Queer Cinema.”

Gender Studies 231: “Voices and Visions” serves as an introductory course to the Gender Studies Program and focuses on representations of gender in literature and art. In the Fall 2006 quarter, Professor Nick Davis specifically explored the field of queer theory in relation to queer cinema. In the broadest sense, the course allowed students the opportunity to examine the relationships between queer films and queer theory and provided students a solid foundation in both areas. For example, we related the movie Boys Don’t Cry to several examinations regarding the inclusion of transgender persons in queer theory.

Films required for the course varied widely in subject matter as well as technical. The course included documentaries (Paris Is Burning), mainstream narratives (High Art), and films often considered independent or alternative (Velvet Goldmine). Through the various themes of the diverse films, we learned to expand the common definition of “queer” beyond sexual orientation by exploring topics such as gender identity, drag, and the intersections of race and sexuality.

Professor Davis selected movies to modify the way we viewed and analyzed film. I developed the ability to recognize the formal choices filmmakers use and to probe the possible intentions for those choices. I now consider the more subtle aspects of film, such as camera angle, duration of scenes, and location and saturation of lighting. The added scrutiny with which I view movies, both academic and leisure, has provided me with a better understanding and appreciation of films. “Introducing Queer Cinema” cultivated my growing interest in queer theory and motivated me to explore more courses in the Gender Studies Program.

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T he main event, a public poetry reading by Rich at Harris Hall, was a large, enthusiastic crowd of more than 250 faculty, students, alumni, and members of the greater Evanston-Chicago community. English Professor and Gender Studies affiliate Christine Frueha affirmingly introduced Rich as an indelible figure in the American “difficult world,” a cultural and political figure who maps both “the world of actualities” and the “lyric of imaginations.” In her reading, the poet provided witty and sharp commentary on recent poems along with the ones from the 1960s and the 1990s.

Interwoven threads of historical accountability, visibility, and personal intimacies were taken through the selected pieces. Rich offered disquieting meditations on war as she pondered “The victory carried like a corpse from town to town.” “Begin to crawl in the casket” from “Letters: March 1969” (1971). Referencing the Vietnam-era, “Newwork” (1976) provided images of folki-“heavier” than “the war we fought in.” Rich continued, “Somewhere my body goes untamed, some weight rubs behind the lines washing my body in the water of that war.” Her haunting description of a military hospital filled with mutilated soldiers drove “Calibrations” to its ironic conclusion on the Iraq War. “You come back from war with the body you have.” Rich cited the famous public response to Defense Secretary Rumsfeld’s famous public statement: “You go to war and the army returns, you return.”

To honor National Coming Out Day, which she learned from a student coincided with her visit, Rich read two recent erotic pieces replete with the subversive intimacy of Twenty-One Love Poems (1977). “Memento Mori” (2004) amplified mundane sensualities: “take a strand of your hair / on my fingers / let it fall / across the pillow / lift my mouth / inhale your body entire.” Throughout her reading, Rich commented on the process of writing. She confessed “some poems take decades to write.” “Rauschenberg’s Bells” (2000), she said, crystallized 30 years after she first saw Rauschenberg’s memorable painting of the “inevitable site of anxiety.” This reading ended with a standing ovation, a palpable reminder that Rich’s poetic and political vision continue to inspire, illuminate, unsettle, and move her audience.
Faculty News, Honors, and Achievements

Micaela di Leonardo (Anthropology) returned from leave as a National Endowment for the Humanities Senior Fellow at the School of American Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2006. There she worked on The View From Cavallaro’s Window: A Historical Ethnography of New Haven, Connecticut, to be published by University of California Press and hosted a School of American Research Distinguished Achievement in the Conduct of Research in North America from the Society for Anthropology of North America in December 2005.

Allen E. Pryor (Psychology) has co-authored two essays: “Gendering gaps in sociocultural attributions: the right brain and left brain paucity in Psychology & Psychiatry” and “Envisioning oneself as a leader: Comparisons of women and men in Soviet and the United States,” in Psychology of Women Quarterly. She has recently presented at the Society for the Study of Sport, Physical and Social Psychology and the International Congress of Applied Psychology, and she gave the Carolyn W. Boyd Award Winner Invited Address for the American Psychological Association.

Diana Fauntleroy (Gender Studies and English) recently published a chapter on Todd Haynes’s Velvet Goldmine in the anthology The Cinema of Todd Haynes: The Man Who Sowed Seeds and Launched a new 2006-2007 season of the Voices and Values course entitled “Introducing Queer Cinema and Theory.”

Cecilia Pagliaro (Performance Studies) is the recipient of the 2006-2007 Artist In Residence at the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture at the University of Chicago and was honored with a 2006-2007 McCormick Award for Excellence in Teaching Lecture at Northwestern University. She is currently working on a book about Latina women: Quita Mitos - Transgender Communities. Her theater company, the 2006-2007 Artist-In-Residence at the Center for Digital Media and Learning. She has published a chapter on Todd Haynes’s film M violations of URLs: An anti-anecdote. In my family, this may have been inevitable. My grandmother, with teaching honor, my mother as an active community college; my mother as an active public school teacher; and my grandmother has taught me to think like one, sometimes even if I didn’t want to be a scientist—and that’s why I became an anthropologist.

Jeffrey Masten (Gender Studies and English) was named Gender Studies Director Jeffrey Masten at a Centeraring McCormick Professor of Teaching Excellence. The university’s highest teaching honor, the McCormick Award for Excellence, recognizes faculty who consistently model excellence in teaching. Professor Masten was awarded the following remarks at the award event.

At an award ceremony May 30, 2006, Northwestern University professor Jeffrey Masten, a University Professor of Teaching Excellence, a national 2006-2007 McCormick Award for Excellence in Teaching, was named a vice chairman of the board of the Northeastern Society for the Study of Women in the Arts.

Jeffrey Masten (Gender Studies and Sociology) is known for his work with a fellowship from the Russell Sage Foundation in New York City. Ann Shola Orloff (Gender Studies and Sociology) was named Gender Studies Director Jeffrey Masten at a Centeraring McCormick Professor of Teaching Excellence. The university’s highest teaching honor, the McCormick Award for Excellence, recognizes faculty who consistently model excellence in teaching. Professor Masten was awarded the following remarks at the award event.

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New research on Gender, Sexuality, and the pre-WWII Kindertransport

Phyllis Lassner

A n important part of my Holocaust courses is to show how our understanding of the Holocaust requires culturally gendered analysis. To continue to develop my course, “Gender, Race, and the Holocaust,” I received a Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences Hewlett Fund Grant that supported research in England on the Kindertransport.

The Kindertransport rescue effort saved 10,000 mostly Jewish children from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia in 1938–39. The rescue operation was organized by the British government and had multiple organizations and stopped only when war was declared and Germany locked all exit routes. Ninety per cent of the rescued children’s families were left behind and murdered by the Nazis.

As I learned from interviews and their writing in various genres, these Kinder who remained in Britain faced severely gendered social and cultural restrictions. For example, regardless of their prior educational levels, family expectations, professions, and personal goals, girls and boys were discouraged from seeking university educations. At the age of fourteen, girls were required to accept work as domestic servants or caregivers, while boys who arrived at sixteen or older could work only as gardeners, chauffeurs, and mechanics. Whereas Britain’s liberal humanitarian program contrasted sharply with the U.S.-S. and Canada’s policies of refugee refusal, its conservative social policies constrained the refugees’ ability to integrate into British society.

As Kindertransport writing also shows, despite these constraints, the refugees were expected to show their gratitude by adapting to British culture, and so, in addition to accepting strict gendered roles, they were encouraged to forget or subdue their Jewish identities and customs in favor of the dominant model of British Christian restraint. For the Kinder, such a double bind often produced overwhelming feelings of guilt about their differences, as well as for abandoning not only their families but also their heritage. These experiences produced a hyphenated identity—Anglo-Jewish—the social and psychological complications of which are expressed vividly in extraordinary memoirs, novels, and poetry.

One of the most outstanding writers I have discovered is Karen Gershon, who, before her death in 1993, published a volume of memoirs, three novels, and several volumes of poetry. This summer, with the help of Gershon’s daughter and a British colleague, I found five unpublished manuscripts that I am currently studying and that we are hoping to publish.

One of Gershon’s major achievements is to dramatize in her characters’ developing sexuality the gendered challenges faced by these children. Among these the Kindertransport writers I have studied, Gershon explores the Kindertransport’s hyphenated cultural identities through characterizations of homosexuality and bisexuality. Perhaps most startlingly, Gershon also depicts an urgent desire for lost family intimacy and reconciliation through consensual, mutual incestuous desire. Gershon’s writing succeeds not only by upstaging the norms of nineteenth-century British society, but also by provoking thought among scholars, teachers, and students of gender studies.

Teaching, Learning, and Identification

I teach and write about much of the time: Renaissance English literature. But, again, students in my “Introduction to Shakespeare” course know that one of my tactics in that class is to try to find ways to get them to think across their standard categories historically. As a young appren-
tice weaver, or a young unmarried woman accompanied by her father—having made the trip across the Thames in the year 1600, to a region near but different from outside the city of London, having stood watching in the pit of a theatre without a picture-frame proscenium—how might we think ourselves back into a play about a story as it registers in or is practiced through the mechanics. Whereas Britain’s servants or caregivers, while working, were constrained by the British government and had limited freedom to move or act. The Kindertransport rescue effort saved 10,000 mostly Jewish children from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia in 1938–39. The rescue operation was organized by the British government and had multiple organizations and stopped only when war was declared and Germany locked all exit routes. Ninety per cent of the rescued children’s families were left behind and murdered by the Nazis.

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Undergraduate Student Updates


Katherine Macfarlane (2007) was awarded the first Holocaust Education Foundation Undergraduates Grant in recognition of her final paper from Phyllis Lassner’s course, “Gender, Race, and the Holocaust.”

Jesse Mathiason (2007) received a scholarship to attend the Out for Work Conference in Washington, D.C., in October. The conference addressed LGBT issues in the workplace.

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Alumnae/i Updates


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Gender: dynamic is published twice annually by the Gender Studies Program at Northwestern University. Copies may be obtained at the Program Office, Kresge Hall 2-360; 1880 Campus Drive, Evanston, IL 60208-2211.

Gender Studies at Northwestern is an interdisciplinary program, with faculty affiliates drawn from more than twenty-five departments across four of the University’s schools.

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