A Letter to Friends

Dear Friends,

My term as president of the Friends of Fondren board got off to a rough start as Hurricane Ike barreled down on Houston. Although our first meeting was canceled, as so many other things in the city, the Rice campus suffered minimal damage. When we resumed our schedule in October, the first order of business was to meet and congratulate our nine new members of the board—Susan Perry Alexander, Patricia Brice, David Bybee, Debby Crabtree, Katherine Dobelman, Bryan Domning, Tom McKittrick, Susannah Webb, and Jim Wyckoff. This is a very enthusiastic group full of new ideas. We very much look forward to working with them. Also, thanks went to Iris Ballew, Pamela Giraud, Dorothy Knox Houghton, Margaret Jordan and Troy Williams, who rotated off the board. We will miss them.

The board is taking a long look at the mission of the Friends of Fondren. This mission, as set out in the bylaws is “to secure gifts and bequests and provide funds, whenever possible for the purchase of rare books, manuscripts and other materials which could not otherwise be acquired by the library and to make better known and encourage use of library resources and otherwise engage in activities which promote and benefit the library.” We should all be pleased with how well the Friends is fulfilling this mission. Since the founding of the Friends in 1950 our two endowments have together grown to well over $5,000,000. Fondren Library has been greatly enriched from purchases with these monies. Sara Lowman, our librarian, will continue to guide us as to the greatest use of our resources.

As Rice looks ahead to celebrating its Centennial, our outstanding board officers and event chairs are working hard to make this a special year for the Friends. Our Homecoming Brunch honored Dorothy Knox Houghton and was quite a success. The Distinguished Guest Lecture will be January 21, 2009. We are delighted that Larry McMurtry will be our speaker. The Gala, honoring Elizabeth and Albert Kidd will be held March 28th in Fondren Library. The Kidds commissioned a wonderful installation by glass artist Lino Tagliapietra, made especially for the library. It is displayed from the ceiling as one enters from the east making quite a statement. Thank you, Elizabeth and Albert. These are just a few of the things available for members of the Friends. Put these dates on your calendar.

It is a privilege to serve as the president of the Friends of Fondren Library board. Rice University and Fondren Library have been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I thank all of you who do so much.

Sincerely,

Peggy Barnett

Peggy Barnett
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The Brochstein Pavilion
by Karen Hess Rogers

On April 24, 2008, the Raymond and Susan Brochstein Pavilion, located outside the west entrance to Fondren Library, was dedicated. This opening was the culmination of many months, perhaps years, of planning, both schematically and programmatically. Originally conceived as a simple cyber café serving the library, the project ultimately encompassed the entire Central Quadrangle of the Rice campus, enlivening an outdoor space that was frequently overlooked and undervalued. The Pavilion itself, as Lisa Gray remarked in a Houston Chronicle article on July 2, is “a really great coffee shop: a building so seductive that it redefines the center of campus.”

Named in honor of Rice alumnus Raymond Brochstein, former member of the Board of Trustees and current member of the Buildings and Grounds Committee and chairman of the Rice University Art Committee, and his wife Susan, the structure dominates the quadrangle bordered by the library, Herring Hall, the Rice Memorial Center, and Ley Student Center. “The Pavilion is located at the crossroads of our campus and I have no doubt that it will be a magnet for students, faculty, staff and visitors,” notes Rice President David Leebron.

History professor John Boles said of the Pavilion, “It is, in my view, a lovely building, handsomely landscaped, that is airy and bright and lively inside; the view of the trees from the inside makes one appreciate the live oaks more than ever. In both daytime and night the graceful building serves as a beacon to attract one’s attention and lure one to it. The outside tables near the shimmering fountains almost transport one to Paris. The ensemble of pavilion, landscaping, fountains and tables clearly attracts people who, in addition to partaking of liquid refreshment, use the space to read, to use their laptops, to conduct meetings – it is the most people-friendly spot on campus. Altogether it has transformed what had been an inert space into the liveliest, most engaging place on the entire campus. I really enjoy having coffee there early in the morning, looking west. That view will become an iconic Rice vista.”

Designed by Thomas Phifer + Partners of New York, the open structure draws visitors to partake of beverages, food and conversation. It is interesting to take the design of the newest Rice building in the context of the architects’ philosophy expressed on their web site:
The best architecture strives for design excellence. ... It is reflected in the deeper attributes of appropriateness, proportion, attention to detail and celebration of craft.” They went on to note, “Buildings marked by design excellence are connected to their surroundings and embody the culture of the places they inhabit. ... In the twentieth century architecture has used the vastly expanded possibilities of advanced technology to erect barriers: buildings that close out the natural world. Such ‘progress’ has come at a high cost: financial, ecological, physical and spiritual. There is another way...architecture that is enriched by an awareness of location and landscape, the movement of the sun, and the changes in the weather.”

The Brochstein Pavilion clearly takes advantage of its environment which is enhanced by the extraordinary design of landscape architect James Burnett. Rice University Architect David Rodd notes, “James Burnett’s genteel design scheme for the Central Quadrangle landscape is closely coordinated with the concept for the Pavilion itself. It’s all about openness, filtered light and delicate shelter. The landscape is evident from every aspect of the Pavilion’s transparent walls to the broad perimeter patio, which with its integral planting, dissolves the boundary between interior and landscape. Most of the Central Quad is dedicated to an activity lawn punctuated with a mature canopy of live oaks. The landscape on the east side of the Quad, immediately adjacent to the patio, is a more formal bosque of Drake elms that segregate intimate seating clusters. Dappled sunlight through the elms and the sound of gently moving water invite pedestrians to stop and relax.”

Architectural historian Stephen Fox clearly admires both the building and the landscape as evidenced in his remarks. “The Susan and Raymond Brochstein Pavilion is an architectural masterpiece. It is a masterpiece even though it is ‘only’ a coffeehouse and, in terms of its architecture, “beinahe nichts:” “almost nothing,” as the great, 20th century, German-American architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe described his modern skin-and-bones buildings.

What makes this simple, one-story building so extraor-
The Flyleaf 6

building's frame and the choice of the aggregate for sidewalks and terraces — enhance the sensations of lightness and effervescence. The result is magical: the pavilion feels both vivid and serene, alert and relaxed.

What cannot be overlooked is the landscape architecture. At the Brochstein Pavilion, the design of the building’s setting is as important as the building. Elevating the pavilion on an artificial rise, so that one walks up to it from the north, views to the west, the outdoor room beneath the ranks of elm trees between the pavilion and the back of Fondren Library? Transparency and spatial intimacy — the contrasting sensations of sweeping openness and protection — contribute. The deft, unpretentious character of the architecture — which calls so little attention to itself yet is so meticulous — is another factor. Even normally prosaic details — the way that exterior lights are suspended from the building's frame and the choice of the aggregate for sidewalks and terraces — enhance the sensations of lightness and effervescence. The result is magical: the pavilion feels both vivid and serene, alert and relaxed.

What cannot be overlooked is the landscape architecture. At the Brochstein Pavilion, the design of the building’s setting is as important as the building. Elevating the pavilion on an artificial rise, so that one walks up to it from the north,
south and west, overcomes the depressing flatness that previously tyrannized this section of the campus. The decomposed granite surfaces, black concrete fountains, and rows of slender trees construct strongly formed, room-like spaces that finally make sense of the back wall of the Fondren Library, which has waited for 40 years for this, its spatial complement, to be built. The big beds of mulch that replaced lawn beneath existing tree canopies provide spatial counterpoints in what Lars Lerup, dean of architecture, calls the "flat planet" of Houston, re-proportioning the ground plane at the scale of the landscape. Here, too, details are critical. The spiky rough horsetail, planted in clumps around the perimeter of the terrace, animates the terrace with a staccato beat and architectonic verticality that play off the linear horizontality of the cantilevered roof plate. The flat, black river rocks in the splash troughs around the foun-
tains are just the right shape, size, color, and texture to make the transition from the fine scale of the ruddy ground plane to the dark, shimmering slab fountains as they slide through the landscape.

Thomas Phifer + Partners, the architects, and the Office of James Burnett, the landscape architects (along with consultants Altieri Sebor Wieber, Haynes Whaley Associates, Walter P. Moore, the general contractor Linbeck, and Barbara White Bryson, Rice’s associate vice president of administration, facilities engineering, and planning), have achieved a masterpiece with the Brochstein Pavilion and its setting. Instead of trying to design something that "looks like" Rice, they designed superlative spaces that, thanks to the generosity of Susan and Raymond Brochstein, are an integral part of Rice.

The Brochstein Pavilion is open to the general public as well as to members of the Rice community. Hours are:

- **7 a.m. to midnight, Monday through Thursday**
- **7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday**
- **8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Saturday**
- **8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday**

Coffees, teas, pastries, cookies, sandwiches and more are available, and the Pavilion has become a favorite spot for lunch. Early morning finds young mothers from West U. relaxing after their morning exercise around the Rice perimeter. Another group that has made the Pavilion a favorite destination is the canine population. There is a water bowl near the fountain labeled “Pavilion” for dog visitors. The newest Rice addition is drawing interest from all over. Susan Brochstein recently forwarded us a web site about it that originated in China!
On Beauty
by Zadie Smith
(Penguin Press, 2005)

By Cathryn Rodd Selman

I first heard author Zadie Smith’s name when the Friends of Fondren Guest Lecturer, Michael Cunningham (The Hours, Specimen Days), mentioned her as one of his favorite contemporary novelists. Judging from comments later that evening by some of my more literary friends, Zadie Smith was most definitely an author with whom I should already have been familiar. Her debut novel, White Teeth, published in 2000 by Random House a mere three years after her graduation from Cambridge, had attracted a hefty six-figure advance, and rapturous reviews described it as “astonishing” and Smith as “preternaturaly gifted.” (Such accolades notwithstanding, I must confess to being more intrigued by Rice English Lecturer Logan Browning’s pronouncement that Smith was “an amazing writer, and utterly gorgeous, and not yet even thirty!”)

My book club promptly tackled White Teeth, a story of two generations of working-class families in Britain – a Brit married to a Jamaican, and his unlikely World War II buddy, a Muslim immigrant who never gives up trying to live a traditional life. Although our group found much to admire in Smith’s style, command of dialogue, and ability to sketch a funny vignette, most of us confessed that ultimately we just “couldn’t get into” White Teeth’s characters, and didn’t care very much about any of them. (As an aside, it is worth noting that no one reading White Teeth after September 11, 2001 will fail to be unnerved by the author’s seemingly prescient inclusion of a subplot centered around the increasingly violent idealism felt by alienated young Muslim men in suburban London.)

Last spring our book group decided to try Zadie Smith’s new novel, On Beauty, when one of our most well-read members pronounced it considerably more “emotionally accessible” than its predecessor. For me and my fellow readers, On Beauty more than justified its writer’s reputation, and received a unanimous “eight thumbs up.”

On Beauty is set on an elite college campus outside Boston and concerns the tumultuous intersection of two families: British-born art historian Howard Belsey and his zaftig African-American wife, Kiki, and Howard’s academic rival and political opposite, visiting Professor Sir Montague Kipps, a right-wing Trinidadian with a mysterious, invalid wife. Much has been made of Ms. Smith’s explicit homage to E. M. Forster’s 1910 novel, Howard’s End; On Beauty’s plot closely parallels the classic, and readers familiar with Forster’s work will either enjoy matching similar plot devices or perhaps find the whole conceit somewhat distracting. Howard’s End echoes aside, On Beauty is an utterly engaging read, as the author’s razor-sharp outlines of the fictional university community, of marriages, and of intimate family drama invariably strike a chord of recognition, humor, and sometimes pathos.

In particular, Smith’s portrayal of relatively ordinary moments in the day to day life of the Belsey family is marvelous. Open the novel at random and within a few pages you will find a scene that resonates – whether straightforward or nuanced, insignificant or momentous – as the Belseys leap off the page and remind us...
of ourselves and those we know best. In fairness to readers of either sex, I reproduce here two examples:

That evening, when Howard returned home at dinner-time, there was no dinner – it was one of those nights when everybody was heading out. The search was on for keys, hairpins, coats, bath towels, cocoa butter, bottles of perfume, wallets, those five dollars that were on the sideboard earlier, a birthday card, an envelope. Howard, who intended to head back out in the suit he had on, sat on the kitchen stool like a dying sun his family were orbiting. Even though Jerome had returned to Brown two days earlier, the noisy clamour had not lessened, nor had the populated feel of the hallways and stairs. Here was his family and they were legion.

‘Five dollars,’ said Levi, suddenly addressing his father. ‘It was on the sideboard.’

‘I’m sorry – I haven’t seen it.’

‘So what am I meant to do?’ demanded Levi. (page 338)

And, near the end of the novel, as Kiki Belsey determines to clean the household storeroom:

It was a chaos of Belsey memories down here. Just to get in the door Kiki had to clamber over four massive plastic tubs that she knew to be full of nothing but photographs...Zora’s section, at the back, was the largest, simply because it was Zora who had put more words on paper than anyone else, who had joined more teams and societies, garnered more certificates, won more cups. But nor was Jerome’s space inconsiderable. In there were all the things Jerome had collected and loved over the years, from fossils to copies of Time to autograph books to an assortment of Buddhas to decorated china eggs.

Kiki sat legs crossed among all this and got to work. She separated physical things from paper things, childhood things from college things. Generally she kept her head down, but on the occasions she raised it she was treated to the most intimate of panoramic views: the scattered possessions of the three people she had created.” (pages 423-424)

Lest Flyleaf readers conclude from the above excerpts that On Beauty is primarily a gentle, rose-tinted look at family life, a word of caution is appropriate. Equally important to the plot are themes of bitter academic rivalry, as well as marital indiscretions conjuring up the infamous modern expression “train wreck.” (That said, while many readers will find Howard Belsey’s repeated Very Bad Judgment deplorable, my guess is that most have known someone like him.) Ultimately much of the story’s energy is pro-

“**Ultimately much of the story’s energy is provided by the narcissism of several adult characters and the fervent misadventures of the story’s five teenagers and 20-somethings.”**

vided by the narcissism of several adult characters and the fervent misadventures of the story’s five teenagers and 20-somethings. Zadie Smith is a decidedly modern writer, and this is a distinctly modern novel. But for those of you slightly put off by such a description (and you need not raise your hands), I predict On Beauty will be a delightful surprise – ultimately a big-hearted story about people wrestling with such eternal human challenges as love and jealousy, striving and arrogance, self-sacrifice and self-absorption, and joy and despair.
Snow

by Orhan Pamuk
(Knopf, 2004)

by Anne Ribble

Just weeks after the disaster of 9/11 Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk wrung his hands through words in The New York Review of Books. Pamuk wrote: “Now, as we hear people calling for a war between East and West, I am afraid that much of the world will turn into a place like Turkey, governed almost permanently by martial law.” He went on to say much more, and we can come back to that.

His seventh novel Snow was close to completion when the planes hit the World Trade towers. Pamuk had lived in the States for three years and could personally grieve. But he found his neighbors in Istanbul were not of this same mind.

Pamuk, the child of a family of engineers, had taken on writing as a career at age 24 and produced a body of work that has made him Turkey’s foremost literary figure, one who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2006. Influenced by writers such as Stendhal, Conrad, and Dostoevsky, he had produced six remarkable books, five of which had been translated into English. Today his works exist in 32 languages and he has gone on, after Snow, to write a memoir Istanbul, focused on and illustrated with photos from his first 22 years in that city. Today he, his wife and daughter live in the apartment building where he grew up.

We always suffer when we read a work in translation, no matter how skillfully it is rendered for us. Snow is a prime example. The protagonist is Ka, K A, a nickname the middle aged shy poet Kerim Alakusoglu, who has lived 12 years in Frankfurt as a political exile, has given himself. Reviewers recall Kafka’s famous K, the hero of The Castle, here. What’s more, the Turkish name for snow is kar, and Kars [the town and its river] mean snow water. So, it’s Ka in kar, in Kars.

And that is just the beginning. The book is fashioned in and of the falling snow. The remote town of Kars, near the Armenian border in northeast Turkey, is cut off from the rest of the country by a three-day blizzard. All is white without, while the red of bloodshed and the black of motivation mark the plot. One reviewer suggests that snow itself becomes a character.

Certainly it is a ubiquitous metaphor. Pamuk turns it like a prism to carry much meaning. As Ka rides into town on a bus following his mother’s funeral in Istanbul, he muses ‘it snows only once in our dreams.’ His lodgings will be at the rundown Snow Palace Hotel, where the owner and his beautiful daughters Ipek and Kadife become the heart of the story. Ipek and Ka will watch the snow fall following their tryst. Ka will use the geometry of the six-sided flakes as a diagram to plot places for the 19 poems he is inspired to write here. (We will only be allowed to read one of them). Even Orhan, the narrator, will fall under the spell of snow.

The story Orhan tells is a potboiler. It introduces us to almost more characters than we can accommodate, but with a level of verisimilitude that is amazing. Pamuk paints the town. He accounts for its past – for instance, the religious high school was once an Armenian mansion – and brings us to its outcomes in terms of people’s fates and futures. We have lost its Robin Hood, Blue, the outrageous outlaw and lover of both sisters; Pamuk tells us his body has been dumped from a plane into the sea, lest it become the cause for a shrine. Gone too is the actor and fomentor of the coup effected from the stage of the National Theater. Sunay is dead by his own design; in a second staging he has convinced Kadife to shoot him “with blanks” that are real bullets. And what of his widow, the belly dancer Funda Eser? She recovers from her mental breakdown to become the voice of a cartoon witch for Istanbul television. Serdar Bey, the newspaper editor who literally makes news by reporting events before they happen, is still very much alive. The cause of Ka’s murder on a Frankfurt street near the red
light district is finally explained as the work of “Blue’s Pilgrims,” who have formed a radical Islamist group in Berlin. A neon K flashes about the sidewalk where his body lay.

Orhan Pamuk skillfully creates and presents this world of conflict between Turkish nationalists who have a secular state, Kurdish rebels, and Islamists. No sooner does Ka come to Kars than the principal of the local school, enforcer of the national government’s refusal to allow schoolgirls to cover their heads, is gunned down in a pastry shop by a young extremist. Pamuk gives us the whole chilling dialogue between the two. Meanwhile, our Ka and the woman he loves are seated across the room, reopening their friendship from university days. They witness this drama, which relates to Ka’s formal reason for coming to Kars: He’s been charged to cover the mayoral election and Ipek’s former husband is the favored candidate. The Istanbul newspaper Republican has also asked him to find out, from friends and parents, why so many young women in Kars have committed suicide -- an act in opposition to the teachings of the Koran.

Complexity marks this narrative. It reminds me of the wooden dolls within dolls. Each major character has an alter ego, for instance. At the center, Ka has the narrator-author Orhan. Ipek has her sister, Kadife. Necip, the ill-fated student, has his best friend Fazil. At times, we must deduce who is out for whom. The mysterious Blue, we learn, was originally brought to Kars by Kadife’s former husband. Is Ka his ultimate enemy?

Or is it Sunay the actor, who literally stages the coup at the National Theater?

We are kept busy following a plot with many twists and turns, not all of them believable. Through the movements of the main and minor characters we visit the landmarks of the town: teahouses and cafes with delicious names such as Green Pastures and the New Life Pastry Shop.

Ipek is the story’s Helen of Troy, but to me her sister Kadife is much more subject than object. Kadife, it seems, comes full circle -- from Istanbul model who swings her hair to advertise shampoo, she arrives in Kars to deal with the girls who devoutly wear head scarfs, to make fun of them, and becomes a convert -- ‘head of the head scarf girls.’ No wonder Blue had fallen for her and managed a romance along with his dalliance with Ipek. And, by the epilogue, she has married the younger Fazil, produced a baby boy, and is in good graces with the law, having served 20 months for negligent homicide.

It is Kadife who spells out the reason women commit suicide in this culture: She tells Sunay “A woman doesn’t commit suicide because she’s lost her pride, she does it to show her pride.”

Ipek seems to be shown from the surface, from the outside in. Ka has adored her from afar from his college days. In fact, he has found a soft porn equivalent in the video store in Frankfurt and when Ipek lets him return to Frankfurt alone -- suspecting his role in Blue’s death -- Ka goes back to video watching. As Orhan, full of the local booze known as raki, falls under her spell four years later, she finally tells it straight: Love has never worked out for her, it’s off her list, but she’ll help Orhan with his book.

Orhan’s book? Why a book about Kars? Well, as noted, Ka’s book of poems, the green notebook that he’s written all his verse in, vanished when he died. Orhan collects all Ka’s things in Frankfurt; he can’t seem to part with anything, not even dirty socks, but finds only his copious notes on the Kars visit. And he wants to tell his friend’s story enough to seek out all the people, the newspaper man, and Kars Border Television to summon up the story.

This is his framework for the pithy reenactment of the tensions that rock Turkey today, internally and with the West. The hostility at the heart of things is well expressed by Fazil, former student, Kadife’s husband, TVgrunt worker. When Orhan asks what Fazil would like to see him put in the book we know as Snow, Fazil shoots back:

“Nothing….If you write a book set in Kars and put me in it, I’d like to tell your readers not to believe anything you say about me, anything you say about any of us. No one could understand us from so far away.”


In today’s Turkey unemployed men watch TV in teahouses, the secularism established in the 1920s by Kemal Ataturk is at war with the recent rise of political Islam, and a symbolic burning issue of women’s head scarfs marks the cultural divide between a Westernized elite and the masses of believers. Pamuk is brave to write about it.
Friends of Fondren

July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2007

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FOFL Announces Online Giving Web Site

In June, 2008 the new web site for online giving was successfully activated. This form enables you to enroll in the Friends of Fondren, renew your membership, and/or make a gift to Fondren Library—all by using your credit card.

Notification of a gift transaction is sent immediately to the Friends office where gifts and memberships are quickly processed. All gifts are made through a secure server. You will receive confirmation via email and a gift receipt and acknowledgement by U.S. Mail.

Just go to fondrengifts.rice.edu.

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Mark your calendars now for the upcoming Friends of Fondren Library events.

Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2009—Distinguished Guest Lecture

The Friends of Fondren will host Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Larry McMurtry, in the Grand Hall, Rice Memorial Center at 7:00 p.m. There will be no book-signing.

Thursday, Feb 26, 2009—Reception to Honor Rice Authors, Editors, Composers, and Artists

A panel discussion will be followed by a wine and cheese reception. Books will be available for sale.

Saturday, Mar. 28, 2009—Friends of Fondren Gala

This black tie dinner and auction at Fondren Library will honor Elizabeth and Albert Kidd.

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