

Women



&

Theatre

December 2016



WTP President, Lindsay Cummings

Letter from the President

As the work of the new semester begins, all too often the ideas that sparked so vividly at WTP and ATHE fade into the background, supplanted by more pressing demands. I suspect that is true for all of us, whether we work in academia or not. I want to take this opportunity to remember some of things that inspired or resonated with me at this summer's ATHE and WTP conferences.

One of the most powerful presentations at the Pre-Con was Gwendolyn Alker's keynote address, "Going into Contract Labor: A Feminist Rethinking of Academia." Alker challenged us to think about the changing academic workforce and whether

or not tenure remains the path to the most equitable and just working conditions for academics—particularly women. One study she cited stood out to me particularly, revealing that parental leave in academia, intended in part to help women, has in fact failed to do so. As Alker succinctly noted, "Women take parental leave to parent. Men take parental leave to publish." This was only one example of many Alker made as she built a persuasive argument that unionization is crucial in the context of the corporatization of academia.

Turning from the troubled waters of academic labor to more uplifting moments, I was overcome with joy and deep respect as WTP honored Vivian Patraka, LeAnn Fields, and Willa Taylor with this year's awards for Scholarship, Service, and Activism, respectively. Each

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Participants in the panel on theatre criticism in Chicago at the WTP pre-conference

woman is deeply deserving in her own right, but what made these awards even more special to me was the range of theatre work they represent. To think about Patra's impact on feminist scholarship and Holocaust studies, Fields' influence on feminist and queer academic publishing, and Taylor's influence on theatre education for young women and minority youth was not only inspiring, it also expanded my sense of community.

In fact, one of the trends I noticed at WTP and ATHE 2016 was an increased attention to women in areas of theatre outside of those that typically dominate our conversations. Along those lines, one of the highlights of WTP was a conversation of women in Chicago theatre with an emphasis on the role of theatre criticism. This panel featured Megan Carney of Rivendell Theatre Ensemble and the UIC Gender and Sexuality Center, freelance journalist and theatre critic Kerry Reid, theatre critic and dramaturg Martha Wade Steketee, and Willa Taylor of the Goodman Theatre, and was moderated by Joan Lipkin of That Uppity Theatre Company. In a spirited conversation, the panelists considered, among other things, the importance of making theatre a place where women and other socially minoritized groups feel at home, with a sense of ownership in the work, from a young age. [\(Continued on page 4\)](#)



Jill Dolan presents award to Vivian Patra

2016 Jane Chambers Award

By Maya E. Roth

It was a banner year for submissions to the Jane Chambers Prize—WTP's contest to honor excellent plays by women playwrights that feature feminist perspectives and substantive roles for women.

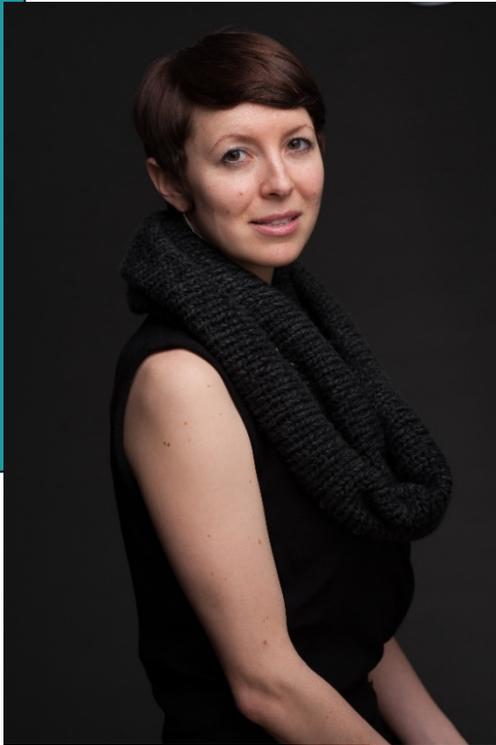
For the first time, we hosted electronic submissions, which vaulted submissions from roughly 125 annually to over 400. The quality of submissions was equally strong. Below are the plays

we are honoring in 2016. Consider them for your home seasons—and urge our favorite theatres to do so too!

The 2016 Jane Chambers Award Winner for excellence in feminist playwriting goes to EMMA STANTON for NO CANDY, which rose from among 414 submissions. No Candy (6W, 1M) centers on a multi-generational community of Bosnian Muslim women who have opened a souvenir shop near the Srebrenica Memorial and how they cope, both privately and publicly, with

their experiences of war traumas: via dreams of Julie Andrews; dressing drag in a father's clothes; late-night karaoke; visiting with a husband's ghost; creating uncanny greeting cards, inspired by the loss of a child; making pop-art t-shirts. Judges were struck with the creativity and social relevance of the play's feminist focus on the aftermath of Bosnian genocide on women's lives and its non-traditional representations of Muslim women. A full-length one-act, *No Candy* presents the persistence of humor, art

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Emma Stanton

Jane Chambers Award Continued

and absurdity in unimaginable times.

A Chicago and New York theater artist, **STANTON** shares that she wanted to write a work about women and war, partly because of her contact with Bosnian refugees, many of them visual artists, who her professor mother hosted in the US as Emma grew up. WTP's Reading, at ATHE was riveting, and featured all Chicago actors, many of whom had helped to originate the roles, song and dance, in a developmental workshop

with Stanton at Walkabout Theatre, as well as for a Columbia/Roundabout Underground Reading of *No Candy* in June. Jen-Scott directed the reading for ATHE with intelligence and panache. As this year's Winner, Emma was publicly honored August 11, and received 1k. For more on Stanton, who just completed her MFA at Columbia, see www.emmadalbeystanton.com

We are also pleased to recognize two Runner-Ups to the Jane Chambers Contest— LA LLORONA (5W) by Cecelia Raker & THE MADRES (3W, 2M) by Stephanie A. Walker.

Binding together Native American, Mexican and Jewish myths in choral segments, Raker's *La Llorona* focuses on three young girls' coming of age, refracted through complex pressures and their class, sexual and religious differences, set in New Mexico, with an exquisite ear for dialogue. Walker's *The Madres*, meanwhile, focuses on three generations of women in a family caught, and politicized, by Argentina's Dirty War; taut, activist and elegantly crafted, the play

also won the Boulder Ensemble Theatre Company's Generations Contest and is a finalist for the O'Neill National New Play Conference and the Ashland New Plays Festival.

Please join us in spreading news of these stand-out plays. Taken together, the feminist plays we are honoring in the Jane Chambers Contest this year—and since 1984—suit a diversity of missions, audiences, venues, and performance styles. For more about any of these plays or playwrights, go to our WTP Website, where we post not only submission guidelines, but also my curatorial notes on all of our honorees from the past decade, organized by year, alongside playwright bios <http://www.womenandthetatreprogram.com/jane-chambers.html>.

The deluge of submissions this year led to our expansion of readers (and slight revision of process). More than thirty feminist readers (theater artists, cultural critics, scholars) served as judges, all of whom are acknowledged on our WTP Website, including many of you. Thank You!

[Continued on next page](#)

Jane Chambers Award Continued

I am also pleased to acknowledge Season Ellison, who helped with spreading the news to ATHE and LMDA. Together, we're finding distinctive plays to honor—and to call out to colleagues as well as the field, on behalf of WTP.

We look forward to seeing work by each of our

honored playwrights in coming years. Consider producing them in your home seasons—and urging your favorite theatres to do the same. For more about all of the plays and playwrights, see our WTP Website. These plays, and past honorees, will excite artists and audiences. We continue to work on an anthology of plays from the

last decade: now being pitched to publishers as a twin-set of five plays each.

Maya E. Roth is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Performing Arts at Georgetown University. She has overseen the Jane Chambers Playwriting adjudication since 2007.

President's Letter Continued from page 2

Meanwhile, at ATHE, I had the pleasure of convening a roundtable on women in backstage and administrative labor. The roundtable, titled "Pedagogies of Gender and Labor: Women Working Backstage and Behind the Scenes," addressed questions related to teaching, including how we provide a more diverse view of theatre history (beyond teaching more plays by women), how we address unconscious bias (our own and our students'), and how we help young women enter areas of the profession still dominated by men.

I am thrilled that, as a field, we are broadening our focus to consider all aspects of theatre labor. A truly diverse and equitable workplace requires us to think beyond what is happening on our stages to encompass what goes on backstage, in shops, in admin offices and box offices, in outreach communities and programs, and beyond.

I should conclude with a little WTP business. First and foremost, the listserv is back! If you haven't rejoined already, please go to <http://www.womenandtheatreprogram.com/> where you will find a link to join.

I am also happy to welcome our new officers, who you will find listed on page 11. I'm so pleased to be working with all of them. This was a year of large turnover for WTP. To help us with transitions like this, we are moving toward a more formal mentoring system in several key positions, such as Conference Planner, so that officers rotating out will share a year with the incoming officer. We think this system will help ensure smooth transitions and allow for more dialogue and collaboration between our geographically dispersed membership!

Wishing you all happiness and health, until we meet again.

Lindsay Cummings is an Assistant Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Connecticut. Her book *Empathy as Dialogue in Theatre and Performance* (2016) is available from Palgrave.



WTP Vice President, Jessica Del Vecchio

I am thrilled to begin my term as Vice President of the Women and Theatre Program. In the years since I joined, I have been inspired by the organization's rich history and its devoted membership—an impressive mix of established and emerging scholars, graduate students, artists, and activists. The WTP pre-conferences always feel like home to me because they center on the issues about which I care most deeply, and their thoughtful curation always urges me—to borrow from this year's title—to dig even deeper.

I find all the pre-conference conversations to be very productive, whether formal discussions in panels, roundtables, and talkbacks, or casual chats over coffee, dinner, and between sessions in the bathroom line. In Chicago, I was struck by how “Laboring in the

Letter from the Vice President

Dark,” an afternoon session led by Laurel Koerner and Kerry Bechtel engaged the entire audience at Stage 773's Cabaret Theatre, with members asking tough questions and offering concrete suggestions on how to make our ordinarily invisible labor in the theatre department more visible to those outside of it. I

caught Amanda Feldman from History Matters/Back to the Future in the lobby long enough to check in on a former student of mine who is interning for the organization and to share my enthusiasm for their One Play at a Time Initiative, in which I participated for the first time this year. I loved hearing the audience's response after Kimberly Dark's fantastic performance, *Things I Learned from Fat People on the Plane*, shed light on our culture's pervasive fat phobia. In a cab back to the conference hotel that night, energized by her exceptional talk, I solicited advice

from keynote speaker Gwendolyn Alker on how adjuncts can advocate for full-time positions within their departments.

Lindsay Cummings set a high bar for pre-conference planning. I am so happy to be working alongside her, and with all of WTP's officers. Las Vegas presents exciting possibilities for engaging with women's issues and performance, and I hope the pre-conference will be as spectacular as the city and our conference theme encourages. As I begin to



Kimberly Dark performs *Things I Learned from Fat People on the Plane*

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MY CONFERENCE
TAKE AWAY

“Listening to the sessions about Women and Labor in theater and academia, the words and actions of two of my inspirations came back to me. In an era when it was custom for artists to enter through the back door, Martha Graham insisted on entering through the FRONT door. Twyla Tharp spoke publicly about demanding to be paid fairly for her work. We must continue to fight and advocate to be fairly paid and recognized for our work!”

--Elaine Molinaro, Newly Elected Student Jane Chambers Coordinator

Letter from the Vice President
Continued

organize the event, I encourage you to be in touch to share your ideas, your hopes, and your suggestions large and small.

We are in a fascinating moment in women’s history: after years of post-feminist malaise, there is finally a renewed interest in feminism in the academy, in politics, and in popular culture. I would like to use our time together at ATHE this year to think about how we might harness this feminist momentum, to ensure that it is not just a passing fad, to protect it against a sudden backlash—a receding of the waters until the next wave. (I am

still haunted by visceral memories of the swift and fierce response to Third Wave feminism’s brief moment of popularity in the late 1990s.) I would like to think of the pre-conference as a strategy session, a place to brainstorm ways that can we make our classrooms, our universities, and theatres more feminist, but also to make our feminisms intersectional and inclusive and therefore enduring.

Looking forward to talking with you soon!

Jessica Del Vecchio is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Theatre Department at Drew University. Her writing has appeared in Theatre Journal, Modern Drama, and TDR.



History Matters Monologue Readers Taylor Blim, Jacqueline Williams, Joan Vail Thorne, and Hollis Resnik

Performance Response

By Season Ellison

Kimberly Dark, “Things I Learned from Fat People on the Plane”

Performed at the Women in Theatre Program ATHE pre-conference, August 10, 2016, Stage 773, Chicago

My favorite elements of the Women and Theatre Program’s annual pre-conference are almost always the performances offered by our members and/or women from the communities surrounding our conference location. In most cases, these performances disseminate new ideas and perspectives and continue the dialogue from the day’s panel presentations. The 2016 pre-conference was no exception. I was struck, this year, by Kimberly Dark’s performance of “Things I Learned from Fat People on the Plane,” which was captivating, thoughtful, humorous, and engaging for WTP membership.

During the pre-conference performance, Kimberly came out to the audience “as fat,” and on her website, she writes of people who were upset by her doing so in other performances of the play. While I heard none of this sentiment from the WTP membership, the notion of coming out as fat is interesting to me, as I, too, am fat and have been fatter than I am now. I resonated with Kimberly’s performance because of what we have in common. Yet, I’ve never thought to come out as fat. What social pressures might fade away when the word “fat” is used as a “neutral, descriptive term” instead of as a loaded insult

(Dark)? Later, she asks the audience:

“Does coming out ‘fat’ in a thin-privilege culture seem a little like coming out as ‘black’ in a white-privilege culture for example? Or coming out as disabled? As long as you don’t talk about it, as long as you have other laudable identities to offer, the stigmatized traits might go unnoticed.”

At this particular performance, many in the audience have probably deeply studied the intricate workings of privilege. However, the notion of coming out as “fat” (or “black”) means highlighting for others to acknowledge, a visible stigma that you (at least appear to) embrace. By some definitions, doing so might be considered laborious. Labor, “Dig Deep: Women and Theatrical Labor,” was the theme of the 2016 pre-

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MY CONFERENCE TAKE AWAY

“As I begin life as an adjunct, I found the plenary and other attention paid to adjuncts, their needs and their experiences so important. My biggest take away from the plenary regarding adjunct labor is that while we as adjuncts need to continue to fight, we need our tenured and tenure-track allies to help us in that struggle—please don’t forget that people teaching in your departments may not get access to many of the things you take for granted (i.e., office space, access to funding, the right to vote in pretty much any situation, invitations to be a voice in the department!)”

—Lynn Deboeck, University of Utah



Kimberly Dark

Performance Response Continued

conference in Chicago. To improve our world and to promote acceptance (at a level of stigmatized identities becoming neutral descriptions), we might first do the labor of coming out.

It is important to keep in mind the general intended audience of Dark's performance. While we in WTP may share some similar perspectives on many of these issues, I imagine that her performance might feel dangerous to audience members who have not yet recognized the privileges they do carry. Dark's performance articulates that "coming out" is an important part of the process of acknowledging privilege in the world, which is an equally important first step to address (and eventually change) that privilege. But coming out can be challenging—especially when people, both performer and audience, may see the process of "coming out" as work-intensive—laborious. It is often easier to erase identity-positions than it is to recognize privilege. Dark's performance illustrates how we have much more work to do.

Using humor, thick description (pun intended), and exuding a confidence that can only come from an embracing of one's own

identity, Dark challenged the audience to view her – and by (seatbelt) extension, others and self, as neutrally, descriptively, fat. It's a fact that some people need an extended seatbelt on an airplane, just as it is a fact that some people must purchase "tall" jeans or a "petite" sweater. Frankly, the fact that seatbelt extensions must even exist is a problem of privilege. Just as if every building were accessibly designed all people could access that building, if planes were built for all bodies then all bodies might have comfort as they fly.

"Things I Learned from Fat People on the Plane" has great potential to speak to our students, just as it spoke to me.

Kimberly Dark (bio taken from, kimberlydark.com)

Kimberly Dark is a writer, storyteller and speaker who helps audiences discover that we are creating the world, even as it creates us. She's the author of seven award-winning performance scripts and a number of educational programs regarding the body in culture – how appearances and identities influence our experiences in the world related to gender, race, body type/size, beauty, ability, etc. She uses humor and intimacy to prompt audiences to discover their

influences and reclaim their power as social creators.

Dark is a regular contributor to both news and literary outlets like Decolonizing Yoga, Ms magazine, Everyday Feminism, Full Grown People and other print and online publications. She travels the English-speaking world doing performances and keynote presentations at colleges and universities, conferences, theatres and festivals. She has been invited to present her unique blend of performance and presentation, writing and workshops at hundreds of venues in the U.S., Canada, Australia, UK, Ireland and other nations during the past twenty years. She lectures in the graduate program in Sociological Practice at California State University, San Marcos.

Season Ellison, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Director of Liberal Education and Honors at Bemidji State University. She served as WTP Conference Planner, 2014-2016.

2016 Student Jane Chambers Award

By Maya E. Roth

This year, we recognize the **Winner of the Student Jane Chambers Award: Inda Craig-Galván for *Black Super Hero Magic Mama*** (3W, 5M), a gripping play about a black single mother who creates a superhero fantasy world to cope with the trauma of the shooting death of her 14-year-old son Tremarion by a white police officer. Timely and creative, ***Black Super Hero Magic Mama*** rose in an unprecedented pool of strong entries by MFA graduate playwrights, shared Carrie Winship, who expertly stewarded the Student

Contest. Craig-Galván is a Chicago native, where she studied at The Second City Training Center, prior to her work at USC’s MFA Dramatic Writing program. Her plays include: *Blaxploitation: The Remix* (MPAACT Theatre Company, Chicago), *I Go Somewhere Else* (Humanitas Award/CTG semi-finalist, Trustus Playwrights Festival finalist), *The Boy Who Cried Dragon* (Published by YouthPLAYS, 2015), and *Rules of the Debate* (Robey Theatre’s 10-minute Play Festival selection). She also has a screenplay: *Are They Dead*



Vivian Patra, Sara Warner, Charlotte Canning

Yet? (Urbanworld Film Festival finalist; Scriptapalooza semi-finalist).

In addition, Judges for the Student Jane Chambers Contest named two Honorable Mention recipients for 2016: **BEST LESBIAN EROTICA 1995** (5+F, 1-2 M if transmasculine) by **Miranda Rose Hall** (Yale University, MFA Candidate), a triptych play about love, lust, and domestic terrorism; and **tender of you too** (3W, 0-1M) by **Anya Richkind** (Yale University) about two young women cast as Frances Willard and Mary Bannister, two real-life 19th-century leaders of the Christian Temperance Movement, whose lives intertwined.

MY CONFERENCE TAKE AWAY

“I so enjoyed the panel about Chicago theatre. The panelists were eloquent. I got a very good picture of the trends and concerns, and it made me wish I could go back and actually see all the work”

--Jill Dolan, Princeton University

MY CONFERENCE TAKE AWAY

I always find the awards portion of our gathering to be a highlight. I like to hear the introductions by a WTP member about why someone has been meaningful to them and our organization and field. And invariably, the acceptance speeches and talks that the recipients then offer provide new insights into them and encouragement for our work. And how wonderful to celebrate each other. This year’s recipients of LeeAnn Fields, Willa Taylor and Vicki Patra were stellar.”

--Joan Appell Lipkin, Producing Artistic Director That Uppity Theatre Company



Joan Lipkin and Chicago theatre panelists

MY CONFERENCE TAKE AWAY

“I was particularly struck by Lydia Diamond’s key note, which was both wonderfully entertaining and productively challenging. To have such an event followed a day later by a reading of Naomi Wallace’s equally entertaining and challenging work has left me feeling charged to re-examine my own writing in light of some of the provocative questions Wallace’s and Diamond’s work take up.”

--Aoise Stratford

WTP MEMBERSHIP AND CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

WTP’S membership year runs from the first day of September to the last day of August. Members receive two newsletters each year, which include letters from the WTP President, WTP member features, reports on the Jane Chambers competition, ATHE conference news, and programming for WTP conferences. Please support WTP by joining our organization via the link from the WTP website at: <http://www.womenandtheatreprogram.com>.

ABOUT WTP:

The Women and Theatre Program is a self-incorporated division of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) that began in 1974. At that time, the goal was to bring professional theatre women together with women in academia. In the years since its inception, WTP has sponsored panels and activities at ATHE’s annual conference. In 1980, WTP began holding its own annual conference. WTP conferences feature panels, informal discussions, workshops, and performances as a means to foster both research and the production of feminist theatre activities. WTP conference topics have included the intersection of theory and performance, multicultural theatre, lesbian theory and theatre, and many related aspects of feminist inquiry. In addition, WTP, in collaboration with ATHE, sponsors the Jane Chambers Playwriting Award. The continuing goal of the WTP is to enable feminist inquiry and to provide opportunities for discussion between those who teach, perform, and theorize about feminism, theatre, and performance.

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From the Editor

The WTP Newsletter not only serves to disseminate information about WTP, but to provide a sense of community and connectivity amongst WTP members. To that end, I welcome any articles addressing issues relevant to WTP members and any questions, comments, suggestions or letters to the editor.

For example, submissions might include:

WTP Member Feature Column, an article that highlights a WTP member's recent or forthcoming project, WTP news and/or opportunities, brief publication announcements, summaries of articles, projects, performance reviews, updates on past Jane Chambers Award winners, Past President's Column, pictures of WTP members or happenings, etc.

If you are interested in submitting something, please email me. Thank you, Bethany Wood