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FROM THE EDITOR

When I was in middle school, the smartest kids in my class were girls: Dawn and Samantha. I was so convinced of their superiority that a rivalry never materialized. Firmly entrenched in third place, I viewed the occasional moments when I outscored one or both of them as a fluke. Today, it might be akin to managing a layup against LeBron James or carding a lower score than Rory McIlroy. I knew I was lucky. As a preteen, I did not recall ever thinking about gender identity or assigning meaning to being repeatedly beaten by girls. I never paid any attention to the fact that one was African American and the other Palestinian American. Dawn and Samantha were the best.

Unfortunately, we live in a world in which we allow people to throw obstacles in the path of women in a concerted effort to slow their progress and lessen their achievements. The most accomplished women are judged often by their appearance as much as by their intellect and social contributions. Entire regions of the world (including the most developed countries) deliberately curtail the promise of women of all ages in favor of conservative religious, social, and cultural beliefs. Historians privilege men and leave women on the margins. Female employees, including in the university professoriate, make less money than their male colleagues. The professional theatre, which has a majority female audience, overproduces the writings of men and hires a depressingly homogenous group of guys to stage those works.

This issue focuses on women in theatre. It is not a "special issue." All of the essays were submitted as part of *Theatre Survey*'s regular, rigorous, double-blind review process. Together, they demonstrate a refreshing shift in theatre studies toward more fully considering the representation and experiences of women both onstage and off. Of course, the authors of these essays stand on the shoulders of numerous scholarly giants (and their feminist allies) who called for a consideration of women's experiences in the writing of theatre criticism in the 1970s and 1980s. What differs here is that the assumption is not that such work needs to be brought from the periphery to the center and given "special" attention but that women's experiences already are (and should have always been) central to critical and scholarly considerations of theatre production.

Lisa Biggs opens this issue with an ethnographic study of a set of performances by incarcerated women at Sun City Prison in South Africa. Biggs partnered with local performers and artist Rhodessa Jones to create original theatrical pieces that offered insight into the lived experiences of women behind bars. Like Jones, she is interested in those day-to-day events of gender discrimination and oppression that provide the backstory to women's incarceration. Whereas the state might view prison theatre programs, especially ones that perform for the public, as an opportunity to showcase the regret and rehabilitation of prisoners, the author challenges this assumption by noting that some Sun City women created

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"personal narratives that uncovered the persistent fallacies of the criminal legal system and the patriarchal beliefs and practices that undergird it."

Grace Overbeke's interview of Young Jean Lee provides a glimpse into the esteemed playwright's writing and production processes. In this wide-ranging conversation, Lee shares her view on humor, her perspective on the importance of collaboration in dramatic creation, and her strategies for writing across gender, racial, and cultural difference. This interview is the third in *Theatre Survey*'s recent series of conversations with major dramatists who are changing the face of the American theatre. Previous issues featured Thomas Bradshaw (January 2014) and Quiara Alegría Hudes (May 2015).

Mary Christian looks at *A Doll's House*, specifically the "discussion scene" between Torvald and Nora. Situating the play against a backdrop of earlier melodramatic fare, Christian notes that the moment when the Helmers sit down, share their perspectives on their world, and address the state of their marriage marks a significant shift in dramatic storytelling. Exploring the alternative versions of *A Doll's House* (some parodic) that commented on this scene—by such writers as Eleanor Marx, Walter Besant, and F. Anstey—she observes that its insertion in Ibsen's play served as a "starting point both for better marriages and for better theatrical performance."

Emily Roxworthy casts a spotlight on mothers and motherhood. Indeed, many of the most compelling characters in the dramatic canon are mothers. Roxworthy studies three of them: Jocasta (*Oedipus the King*), Cio-Cio-San (in Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly*), and Anna Fierling (*Mother Courage and Her Children*). Shifting across these three texts as well as addressing the contemporary fascination with celebrity motherhood, Roxworthy offers an astute study that reveals the similarities across the experiences of "fictional, real, and fictionally real" women.

Christine Simonian Bean draws attention to the food performances of performance artist Karen Finley, adding to the scholarship on the artist by focusing on the material objects that Finley incorporates into her performances. Bean reminds her readers that it is Finley's use of "sensually provocative material that makes the body visible in the first place." This material, chocolate and honey, "sticks to the body, and at times overwhelms the body, changing the way it signifies." A study of food in performance allows Bean to chronicle Finley's career, engage the political controversies related to funding her artistry, and account for the experience of attending a Finley performance. Bean makes a compelling case for an analysis of food (and other "sensually provocative materials") in performance. She writes that food in performance can "invite identification and cause revulsion, concretize meaning and absent it, reveal the body as an excessive symbol or reduce it to an object of disgust."

Elizabeth Bonapfel compares the photographs of late nineteenth-century English royalty and popular actresses as collected in the Elizabeth Robins Papers at New York University. Her study of the publicity photograph, including the *carte-de-visite,* cabinet card, and postcard, reveals how the embrace of this image-capturing technology by Queen Victoria helped to bolster its popularity. Bonapfel writes, "the photographer's connection to the queen nevertheless seemed

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to authorize the entire apparatus of photography." In addition, this "connection" helped to rehabilitate the professional reputations of actresses. Reading the images of royal women and actresses, Bonapfel chronicles how both combined to set "a new standard of idealized feminine beauty."

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