

SCENES FROM THE HISTORY OF WOMEN ON U.S. STAGES, 1787–2007



*W*omen have appeared on and around stages in the United States since the country's establishment. This case looks at a series of “scenes” from this long history of text-based stage performance, not to offer a comprehensive narrative of that history, but rather to invite viewers to pose and consider questions about what is at stake for gender and performance at various moments: How does the embodiment of performance practice intersect with gender presentation and representation? What is the relationship of gender to genre and audience? How does gender identity overlap with or diverge from the staging of race and class? How does performance represent or elide the feminisms of any given moment?

Gender formation and self-identification are complex, variable, and vitally important, and women are a heterogeneous group. The text in this exhibition occasionally uses the term “women+” to include cisgender women, transgender women, non-binary individuals, and others experiencing gender-based oppression, particularly when the individuals and institutions under discussion have adopted this term. The terms “woman,” “women,” and “female” are used with the knowledge that they deserve examination.

Portrait of Aida Overton Walker, James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection.

The Stages of the Early Republic

Diverse performance traditions existed among Indigenous communities in North America, but for settlers in North American colonies, particularly those founded by Puritans in New England, theater was generally banned on the grounds of immorality throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. Most of these strictures were phased out with the establishment of the United States in 1787-1789, with the New England states the last to adopt theatrical performances. Repertoires in the early years of the United States consisted primarily in comedies of manners, farces, and Shakespeare, and women occupied roles as husband-seeking young women, mothers, and wives. Though many plays featured nearly equal distribution of roles for female and male performers, roles for women often fell into stereotypical categories to be filled by stock performers. Nevertheless, the presence of women on the stage, particularly when it was still relatively novel, served to sanction the participation of women in the public sphere more generally.

Charlotte, Letitia, and Maria Discuss Hoops and Boys

The Contrast, sometimes considered the first play in the United States, was written in 1787, in tandem with the Constitution. Published anonymously, it was attributed to a “Citizen of the United States.” The play is a romantic comedy of manners that compares British aesthetes unfavorably to more salt-of-the-earth Americans. Like many romantic comedies, the play includes robust speaking parts for female players, even if they often discuss either fashion or men, or both, as in the play’s opening scene, devoted to trends in the shape of skirt hoops and Charlotte’s interest in the British dandy Billy Dimple. This focus on heterosexual romantic escapades and fashion stressed the objectification of women on 19th-century stages (an objectification that has remained problematic into the 21st century).

Royall Tyler, *The Contrast: A Comedy in Five Acts* (frontispiece, title page, and opening scene), Philadelphia: Thomas Wignell, 1790.

Mrs. Johnson Breaks the Fourth Wall

A curious epilogue accompanies William Dunlap's *The Voice of Nature* (1803). Dunlap appended his own epilogue to the play, which he adapted from a French courtly melodrama. The speech is given by "Mrs. Johnson," putatively breaking character as the actor playing Alzaira, a mother who forsakes her child as an important plot device. Speaking in direct address to the audience, "Mrs. Johnson" rejects her character's behavior as against a mother's nature. In thus breaking the fourth wall, "Mrs. Johnson" points to the fiction of stage representation in a speech that revolves around the actor's performance of gender. First, the actor proclaims that the character she portrayed could not be a "true" woman and mother, then she lays this failing at the feet of "unfeeling *man*, / *Man* takes the pen." Mrs. Johnson at once appears to be liberated from the male playwright's pen, speaking as herself, while all the while just playing another character created by Dunlap. Instead of the cruel and unfeeling mother she plays in the story, she is, underneath it all, a devoted mother: "Alzaira...is so at variance with the female heart / That mine *revolts* *whene'er I read the part*;" "I'll do my best, / To represent a being — *I detest*."

William Dunlap, *The Voice of Nature: A Drama in Three Acts*, New York: David Longworth, 1803.

RECENT ACQUISITION

The Repertoire of an Early American Theater

While it’s well known that for centuries women were forbidden to appear on many European and Anglophone stages, by the early decades of the United States those prohibitions had long been dropped. Nevertheless, many theaters, like the Baltimore Theatre, followed a convention from the preceding century of listing women performers separately, in this case always at the end of a bill. The aim of this practice may have been partly to set off and emphasize the novelty of having female performers, but the effect was sometimes odd, as when lead characters like Juliet or *As You Like It*’s Rosalind were listed third and fourth from the end, respectively, in the dramatis personae. Many of these plays share the misogynistic stock female parts of the day: eligible ingenues, scheming bachelorettes, griping wives. Hannah Cowley’s *Belle’s Stratagem* is the only play written by a woman in this collection. One of the most popular plays of its time, *The Belle’s Stratagem* has been celebrated for its portrayal of sharp, witty women and is still occasionally produced.

Baltimore Theatre Playbills, 1804-1808.

The Greatest Actresses of the Century

By the middle of the 19th century, women performing on American stages began to experience the beginnings of the celebrity with which we equate today's performers. Actresses retained their longstanding notoriety, being frequently conflated with the loose sexual mores associated with theaters (prostitutes were barred from U.S. theaters by the 1850s). "Respectable" women could not attend the theater unaccompanied by a man, except at matinees. With the rise of mass production, images of actors began to circulate as commodities: Fanny Kemble's likeness appeared on ceramics and other knickknacks, and visiting card portraits of actresses, both in and out of costume, were distributed and collected by the 1860s. Women performers continued to test the fixity and norms of gender, not only by their very presence, but also by taking on and specializing in parts for male characters. These so-called "breeches parts," established after women were readmitted to the stage in the 1660s, became a fad, titillating audiences in part with the very act of gender transgression, and in part because, by cross-dressing in breeches onstage, women revealed much more of their legs than was otherwise the norm. Both the performers featured here inspired women's rights advocates, as well as being themselves early feminists.

Fanny Kemble

The daughter of a famous English acting family, Frances Anne “Fanny” Kemble performed ingenue roles in London, appearing as Juliet at Covent Garden at the age of 20 (opposite her father as Romeo). Her performances, imbued with the demure virtue of what was then idealized as “true womanhood,” were said to have inspired 19th-century women’s rights advocates including Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

In 1834 Kemble married Pierce Butler, a wealthy absentee scion of several slaveholding plantations on the Georgia sea islands. Kemble retired from the stage, only to find Butler controlling, abusive, and adulterous. (Butler was later the notorious beneficiary of the largest sale of enslaved people in U.S. history—an auction of over 400 human captives, now memorialized as The Weeping Time.) Kemble’s *Journal* was published in two volumes a year after she married Butler, and its candor caused a sensation. It thrilled and shocked readers with tales of backstage gossip, unappreciative audiences, and uncouth American accents and slang. After divorcing Butler, Kemble found herself unable to return to ingenue roles. She published an abolitionist memoir of her visit to Butler’s plantations, later making her living giving dramatic readings.

Fanny Kemble, *Journal of a Residence in America*, Paris: A. and W. Galignani and Co, 1835; *Journal*, vols. 1 and 2, Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard, 1835.

Charlotte Cushman

A transatlantic star remembered as the greatest actress of the 19th century, Charlotte Cushman began her career playing cross-dressed “breeches parts.” A list compiled by the 19th-century theater historian Joseph Ireland includes famous Shakespearean roles in which the cross-dressing occurs within the dramatic action, such as Viola and Rosalind, as well as traditionally male parts like Hamlet and Romeo. Cushman’s Romeo, played opposite her sister’s Juliet, was especially celebrated, at a time when at least a dozen other women played Romeo on New York stages.

Acclaimed for her acting talent, particularly her more naturalistic acting style – unusual for the period – Cushman enjoyed a long career. She was eventually remembered as the greatest Lady Macbeth of her age, as well as for her performance as Queen Katherine in *Henry VIII*. Her relationships with women, some of them also actors, were an open secret. The novelist Louisa May Alcott, though she questioned the morality of stage performance by women, included admiring portraits of Cushman in her novels *Work* and *Jo’s Boys*, even while discouraging women from following in Cushman’s wake.

Album page and enlargement of carte de visite portraits of Charlotte Cushman, Meserve-Kunhardt Collection; Joseph Norton Ireland, “Characters Performed by Well-Known Artists in America,” manuscript notebook, ca. 1860s-1880s, Joseph Norton Ireland Papers.

Melodrama and the Female Audience

As theatergoing evolved in the early 19th century to become more respectable, women began to make up more of the theater audience, becoming the majority by the century's close. Rising theater construction in the 1820s and falling ticket prices meant that audiences were increasingly mixed in terms of both gender and class (most audiences would remain racially segregated for another century or more).

This new audience supported an emerging theatrical genre: melodrama, which entailed sensational plots, stereotypically virtuous heroines, and dastardly villains. Melodramas were popular with diverse audiences, but some, advertised as "moral dramas," claimed to offer middle-class women an educational and morally uplifting experience. Combination theater-museums such as the Boston Museum provided cover for anyone who had reservations about playgoing. Tracts were still published against theaters, but playgoing continued to rise. The most popular "moral drama" of them all was the stage adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Plays adapted from Stowe's novel, and the "Tom shows" that ultimately bore little resemblance to it, spawned their own industry of commodities, including sheet music that could be played at home, knickknacks called "Tomitudes," and other merchandise.

Louisa Medina: Most Produced Woman Playwright of the 19th Century

Employed as an in-house writer for the notoriously exploitative proprietor of New York’s Bowery Theater, Thomas Hamblin, Louisa Medina cranked out 34 plays between 1833 and 1838. Medina’s short life – she died suddenly at 25, under mysterious circumstances – was charged with scandal, mostly from her association with Hamblin, to whom she was briefly married. Unfortunately, only three of her plays were published, all after her death; scholars have recovered about eight more. Historian Faye E. Dudden notes that the women become bolder and more assertive in Medina’s adaptations, when compared to the male-authored novels from which they were often drawn. In *Nick of the Woods*, for example, Medina’s Indigenous heroine Tellie Doe wins a physical confrontation with the villain. (Tellie Doe exemplifies a racist fantasy of Indigeneity, bearing no relation to actual lives of Indigenous people, common to many 19th century melodramas.) In *Last Days of Pompeii*, a young woman who is vision-impaired also confronts the villain directly, instead of assisting others in apprehending him as in the source material.

Louisa Medina, *The Last Days of Pompeii: A Dramatic Spectacle Taken from Bulwer’s Celebrated Novel of the Same Title*, New York: Samuel French, ca. 1850; *Nick of the Woods: A Drama in Three Acts as Originally Produced at the Bowery Theatre*, New York: Samuel French, ca. 1856.

Getting Up Home Theatricals

With the rise in women going to the theater, there was an attendant resurgence of home amateur theatricals. Acting in plays at home had grown popular in the 1700s but had been questioned as an appropriate activity for young women. By the mid-1800s, some households that would not venture into a public theater would nevertheless perform plays at home. In service to this practice, amateur acting editions of plays were printed, such as those of Louisa Medina’s plays displayed at left. Samuel French, Inc., to this day the best-known publisher of acting editions, was founded in 1830. French also issued guides and make-up and costume kits to be used to “get up” one’s own home theatricals. The acting guide here lists various female character types comprising the stock-in-trade of melodrama: Heroines, Fine Ladies, Hoydens, Chambermaids. The guide to home theatricals advertises “new temperance plays,” aligning home theater-making with the progressive temperance movement.

The Art of Acting; or, Guide to the Stage, In Which the Dramatic Passions are Defined Analyzed and Made Easy of Acquirement, New York: Samuel French & Son, 1855; *The Amateur’s Guide to Home Theatricals: How to Get Them Up and How to Act in Them*. New York: Samuel French, Publisher, 1866.

The “Great Moral Drama”

Theater makers were quick to capitalize on the sensation caused by Harriet Beecher Stowe’s antislavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. First published in weekly installments in *The National Era* between June 1851 and April 1852 and issued as a two-volume book in March 1852, the story appeared in two prominent adaptations by that fall: George Aiken’s version began in Troy, New York, in September, and Henry J. Conroy’s version premiered at the Boston Museum in November. Neither adaptation was authorized by Stowe: copyright law at that time did not prevent the creation of derivative works. Aiken’s text ultimately prevailed as the more commonly produced (and pirated) version, but both adaptations were just as wildly successful as the novel, performed by enormous casts comprising all white performers, some in blackface. The story provided numerous opportunities for female performers, especially Eva, popularized by Cordelia Howard, the child of an acting family. Topsy, an orphaned and enslaved Black child in the novel, was viewed as a malleable figure to be exploited for racist comedy: she was often played by an adult white woman in blackface, or even by an adult man.

Boston Theatre Playbill for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 1852; George C. Howard, *Eva to Her Papa: As Sung by Little Cordelia Howard in Her Original Character of “The Gentle Eva” in Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, New York: Horace Waters, 1853; George Linley, *The Slave Mother: A Ballad*, London: Chappell, 1852.

The Christian Slave and Tom Shows

Harriet Beecher Stowe herself opposed the theater on moral grounds, and she initially refused to entertain the idea of a stage adaptation. She did, however, write her own play version, titled *The Christian Slave*, which hews closely to the novel and was read in a parlor setting by Mary E. Webb, a free woman of color.

The Civil War and its aftermath saw the ascendance of entire theatrical troupes that specialized in performing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. These “Tom shows” were increasingly sensational, racist, and divorced from Stowe’s original text or intent. They featured a suite of famous scenes from the novel (and sometimes not from the novel) designed to maximize entertainment and spectacle, and to showcase racist stereotypes and bolster white supremacy. Whereas in Conway’s 1852 adaptation Eliza was imagined to be pursued by barking hounds, with barking sound effects heard from offstage, the Tom shows frequently included large packs of real bloodhounds that would chase the actress playing Eliza. One company even advertised a live alligator in pursuit of Eliza. Many included other live animal bits, especially ones involving donkeys. Most of the Tom shows were known for including dance, comedic interludes, and other hallmarks of blackface minstrelsy, from which the adaptation had originally evolved.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Christian Slave: A Drama Founded on a Portion of Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Co., 1855; Advertisements for Uncle Tom's Cabin companies, 1880s-1890s; “Uncle Tom's Cabin: Uncle Tom at Home” Staffordshire plate, 1855.

Pioneers: Remaking Performance from the Margins

For all its expansions, the 19th century stage remained exclusionary on many grounds, serving to reinforce classist, white supremacist, and heteronormative conceptions of proper womanhood. Many Black women performers created a counterpoint to this image, one that would both overtake, and be unfortunately absorbed by, the musical theater stage. The cakewalk, a dance featured by early Black musical performers, would come to epitomize questions of counter-cultural performance and cultural appropriation, wherein, as performance studies scholar Daphne Brooks summarizes, “fundamentally at issue is the question of who is ‘imitating’ whom in this legendary two-step romp.” The results yielded by the influence of early Black musical theater on the mainstream musical stage would similarly call into question notions of participation and ownership, as Black performers were excluded from the very same musical revues that adopted some of their early practices.

In the context of American settler colonialism, Annie Oakley pioneered a just-rough-and-tumble-enough brand of stage performance, presenting a demure image that idealized settler femininity even while she demonstrated her sharp-shooting prowess.

Annie Oakley

Born Phoebe Ann Mosey, Annie Oakley was often billed with a nickname, “Little Sure Shot,” attributed to Lakota leader Sitting Bull, whom Oakley claimed to have met. Oakley left her Ohio home at 15, after growing up in desperate precarity, the sixth of nine children. That year, 1875, she entered a shooting competition against Frank Butler and beat him. The two were married within a year. While she was the superior shooter, Oakley initially was barred from that role in Butler’s traveling show. Ten years later, when Butler and Oakley joined Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, Oakley became the first woman to be a featured performer. Some of her best-remembered feats included shooting playing cards in half, shooting cigarettes out of Butler’s mouth, and shooting over her shoulder using a hand mirror. Insistent on participating on her own terms, Oakley eschewed the leg-flashing of her contemporaries, sewing her own costumes and riding side-saddle. Perhaps to offset the threat posed by her gun, Oakley cultivated a traditional Victorian femininity, resulting in a complex portrayal of settler womanhood, one that was used to attract women to the Wild West Show’s audience.

Portraits of Annie Oakley, Yale Collection of Western Americana Card Photograph File.

The Hyers Sisters

Extraordinary singers Anna Madah and Emma Louise Hyers, celebrated as prodigies and often billed as The Hyers Sisters, were pioneers of early Black musical theater. Anna, a soprano, was the older sister and is typically described as more reserved; Emma, a contralto, was a comedian. Plays featuring the sisters were some of the first to combine a continuous scripted story with musical interludes, as opposed to the variety format used in minstrel and vaudeville performance. Among these was *Out of Bondage*, developed in the early 1870s and first produced with that title in 1876. The play followed a group of friends and family, as the synopsis suggests, from slavery through freedom to prosperity, with the principals attaining said prosperity as concert and stage performers. The Hyerses collaborated with novelist and journalist Pauline Hopkins, who created an adaption of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for them. (Tom companies had historically been racially segregated; the Hyers Sisters were part of one of the earliest integrated ones.) In at least one production, the sisters were billed as “two Topsyys,” with Anna sometimes doubling as Eliza.

Playbill for Peck and Fursman's Uncle Tom's Cabin Company, ca. 1880s; Program for *Out of Bondage* performance at Norombega Hall, Bangor, Maine, 1878.

Stella Wiley and the Cake Walk

The cakewalk was a staple of both Black stage performance and blackface minstrelsy in the decades following the Civil War, and it has long been iconic in contestation over racial authenticity, parody, and appropriation.

Stella Wiley, whose scrapbook preserves these clippings featuring her performances, could claim “genuine” cakewalks along with the Williams and Walker Company. Performers navigated this promenading partner dance with both grace and comedy, in a mode that both strived for respectability and rejected the terms of social participation that invented respectability. Cakewalks were frequently choreographed by and featured the female half of dance partnerships (Wiley’s husband was the songwriter and performer Bob Cole). Wiley gave this scrapbook to James Weldon Johnson when he was at work on *Black Manhattan*, his history of Black entertainment in New York.

Scrapbook on the stage compiled by Stella Wiley, 1897-1912, James Weldon Johnson and Grace Nail Johnson Papers.

Aida Overton Walker: More than Queen of the Cake Walk

Superstar Aida Overton Walker led the celebrated Williams and Walker vaudeville troupe as performer and principal choreographer. As James Weldon Johnson would write decades after her prominence, she was “beyond comparison the brightest star among women on the Negro stage of the period; and it is a question whether or not she has since been surpassed.” Not only an iconic actor and dancer, Walker was also an outspoken advocate for her art and Black and women’s causes of the day. She earned the nickname “Queen of the Cakewalk” when she performed in *In Dahomey* and was also praised for her comedic talent. Walker refused to play stereotypical roles and ingeniously navigated the complex intersection of racial and sexual stereotypes while playing the title role in *Salome*. When her husband George Walker became ill in 1908, Walker donned his costume in *Bandanna Land* and performed his role in drag. After George’s death in 1911, Walker enjoyed a successful solo career, tragically cut short by her death at 34.

James Weldon Johnson, “Ada Overton Walker,” draft essay, undated, James Weldon Johnson and Grace Nail Johnson Papers; portraits of Aida Overton Walker, undated, James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection Photographs.

From *The Black Crook* to Ziegfeld Follies: Half a Century of Legs

The story of 19th-century women on the United States stage is a story of legs. Since women began to appear on American stages, their bodies have been used to attract audiences, a move seen as both liberating and objectifying, empowering and exploitative. By the middle of the 19th century, it was common in the U.S. for women to cross-dress and perform in “breeches” parts. Some of the appeal in these performances was the exposure of the performer’s legs. The same period saw the rise of so-called “leg shows,” proto-musical theater spectacles in which women paraded and made tableaux in thick, woolen tights. Over the succeeding decades, with the emergence of the “chorus girl,” the tights grew thinner and sheerer as musical theater and variety acts grew larger and more elaborate, incorporating more dance.

The Original Leg Show: The Black Crook

Proto-musical comedy *The Black Crook* took New York stages by storm in 1866. With a forgettable melodramatic plot, the main attraction was the large-scale ballet and musical numbers with over 100 women in tights set in tableaux or marching. The extravagant scenery also drew crowds, with the play becoming the first New York production to gross \$1 million.

The Black Crook: A Most Wonderful History, Philadelphia: Barclay and Co., 1866; Emil Stigler, March of the Amazons in The Black Crook, New York: Dodsworth and Son, 1866.

Loie Fuller

A choreographer and entrepreneur also credited as an innovator in stage lighting and projection design, Loie Fuller was born Mary Louise Fuller in the Chicago area. She began performing onstage as a child. Fuller started her career on the variety circuit as a “skirt dancer,” one who skillfully manipulates the folds of a skirt to create spellbinding, sculptural effects. Fuller developed this genre further by experimenting with the weight and type of fabric and the size and cut of the skirt, eventually arriving at her “Serpentine Dance,” which awed audiences with fluid movements that seemed to defy gravity. Fuller’s innovations in lighting design grew out of her interest in enhancing the spectacle of her own dances. She eventually moved to Paris and performed with the Folies Bergère.

Napoleon Sarony, Portrait of Loie Fuller, ca. 1870s, Photographs of Theatrical Performers.

Bonnie Clark’s Kickline

Music hall and variety theater began at the turn of the 20th century to introduce dancing women en masse, eventually called “chorus girls.” Their dance styles were adapted from the French can-can and from Black American dances including the cakewalk. Soon, traveling acts including a team of dancing women became a common feature in the transition from minstrelsy to vaudeville, with some of the most prominent chorus lines including the Gaiety Girls, John Tiller’s and Florenz Ziegfeld’s eponymous Girls, and The Rockettes, founded in 1925. Combining sexual liberation and exacting confinement mimicking the efficiency of machinery, the chorus line, epitomized by its signature kickline, encapsulated the status of women on the modern stage.

Bonnie Clark was a vaudeville performer who specialized in female impersonation. He frequently performed with partner Semoura McClain Clark (whether sister or spouse is not clear). The two traveled on the infamous Theatre Owners Booking Association circuit in the early 20th century, performing variety sketches and a musical called *Bonnie Clark’s Dixie Days*.

**Photograph of “Bonnie Clark’s Dixie Days,” Bonnie and Semoura Clark
Black Vaudeville Photographs and Ephemera.**

Shuffle Along

Langston Hughes credited blockbuster Black musical *Shuffle Along*, produced in 1921, with inaugurating the period that would later become known as the Harlem Renaissance. Of people crowding to see it, James Weldon Johnson would later quip that it forced “the Traffic Department to declare Sixty-Third Street a one-way thoroughfare.” *Shuffle Along* was especially celebrated for its music and dance. The show’s branding demonstrated that the legs of chorus girls could be suggested by the bared lower legs of short-hemmed flappers. Like *The Black Crook* before it, *Shuffle Along* is credited with innovations in the chorus line, incorporating synchronized movements beyond the standard kickline and marching formations. The chorus of *Shuffle Along* boasted a who’s-who of the era’s Black performers, including Florence Mills, Josephine Baker, Fredi Washington, and Adelaide Hall.

Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake, *Shuffle Along*, music from the musical *Shuffle Along*, New York: M. Witmark and Sons, 1921.

Helen Gates Struble in Ziegfeld

Helen Gates Struble appeared in *Ziegfeld Follies* in the 1920s, in the second half of the revue’s near-quarter-century run. By the time Struble joined the *Follies*, it had gained its reputation for a proto-Vegas-style high spectacle, with elaborate scenery and costumes and featuring dozens of women in the chorus. After going on to play in the chorus in a number of Broadway musicals, Struble joined and was active in the Ziegfeld Club, a professional organization and mutual aid association for former Ziegfeld performers.

Helen Gates Struble Photographs Related to the *Ziegfeld Follies* and the Ziegfeld Club, 1922-1924.

The Mothers of Modern American Drama

A common gender story is strikingly reproduced in histories of modern American drama. Those histories offer rosters of well-remembered men and frequently overlook the women who were central to efforts to create an innovative American theater. For every Eugene O'Neill, there was a Susan Glaspell, a Nina Moise, and a Neith Boyce; for every Harold Clurman or Lee Strasberg there was a Cheryl Crawford. Where Lawrence Langner is often credited as the founder of the Theatre Guild, Theresa Helburn was its indefatigable engine. Zora Neale Hurston collaborated with Langston Hughes on one play and many “dramatic possibilities,” but Hughes had far more success in getting his plays produced.

Modern American Drama's concerns of innovation, experimentation, psychological naturalism, and portraying everyday people were very adaptable to the interests of first-wave feminists working in Greenwich Village and other “little theatres” around the country. Many of these women, in straddling the divide between home and family and professional life, found only short-lived stints in the theater, while others made long careers of theatrical engagement.

The Women of Provincetown

The non-commercial, literary strain of American drama born at the tip of Cape Cod was nurtured into existence by women theater artists. As theater historian Cheryl Black notes, the Provincetown Players were notable for their inclusion of women in all aspects of production. More than 120 women were associated with the Players, including 29 of the company’s founders. Playing, writing, directing, and producing the lives of wives, mothers, lovers, professionals, activists, and intellectuals, the women of Provincetown brought the Bohemianism and first-wave feminism of Greenwich Village to the edge of the east coast, and to eager audiences. They interrogated stereotypical gender norms, exposed domestic abuse, and explored free love and open marriage. Susan Glaspell’s play *Trifles* portrays an investigation in which two neighbors, both women, astutely deduce what led a woman to murder her husband as a response to abuse, while two police detectives overlook all the evidence (alluded to in the play’s title). *Trifles* suggested that women might recognize themselves and feel recognized in the non-trivial evidence of their everyday lives, and it placed those lives on the stage.

Playbill for Provincetown Players signed by Nina Moise, Provincetown Players Programs and Announcements; Susan Glaspell, *Trifles*, New York: Washington Square Players, 1916.

The Women of The Theatre Guild

The Broadway producing powerhouse that began in 1919 as a spinoff of the Washington Square Players included Helen Westley (seated in front in the photograph) as a founding board member. Within a few years, the Theatre Guild was co-directed by the indomitable Theresa Helburn (sitting on the arm of the chair to Westley's left). Helburn brought innovative, experimental works such as Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (which originated the word robot), the American premieres of several of George Bernard Shaw's plays, and Eugene O'Neill's later plays. She was behind drawing room comedies like Philip Barry's *Philadelphia Story*, the Guild's first major hit, starring Katharine Hepburn and running on Broadway for over a year. Helburn was the first to cast husband and wife Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne as co-stars in 1924, and she is credited with matching Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, first pairing them for *Oklahoma!* in 1942. Armina Marshall, who held several administrative roles in the company and married Lawrence Langner, produced the Theatre Guild on the Air radio series and co-founded Westport Country Playhouse with Langner.

Photograph of Board Members of the Theatre Guild, 1919; Vandamm Studio, Photographs of *R.U.R.*, 1922-1923; Vandamm Studio, Photograph of *The Philadelphia Story*, 1939-1940, Theatre Guild Archive.

Zora Neale Hurston’s Drama

In her oft-cited essay “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” Zora Neale Hurston celebrated drama: the “little plays by strolling players...acted out daily in a dozen streets in a thousand cities.” Hurston found much of the dramatic in everyday life, but she also sustained a lifelong engagement with more formal performance. Just after leaving home as a teenager, Hurston worked as an assistant to a performer in a traveling Gilbert and Sullivan troupe. She later served as a drama coach for the Federal Theater Project at Harlem’s Lafayette Theater. And she wrote numerous plays, most of them drawn from her ethnographic research, and most of them unpublished and scarcely performed in her lifetime.

Several of Hurston’s unpublished plays were rediscovered in the late 1990s by staff at the Library of Congress, where Hurston had sent manuscripts to register them for copyright. One of those manuscripts – *De Turkey and De Law* – was a version of the play *Mule Bone*, on which Hurston had collaborated with Langston Hughes. A dispute over the authorship of the play ended their friendship. In a letter to Hughes from 1929, Hurston recounts her own performance, in New Orleans, of poems by Hughes and Helene Johnson, promises to share more of her ethnographic findings, and adds, as a postscript, “I have some dandy theatrical ideas for us to work out.”

Zora Neale Hurston, Letter to Langston Hughes, 3 April 1929, Langston Hughes Papers.

Cheryl Crawford and The Group

Founded in 1931 by Cheryl Crawford, Harold Clurman, and Lee Strasberg, the Group Theatre spun off from the Theatre Guild, aiming to produce experimental theater with an ensemble. The Group is remembered for its leftist political commitments, particularly in premiering the plays of Clifford Odets, as well as for introducing the acting technique of Russian theater director Konstantin Stanislavsky to the New York theater scene.

Crawford, who had been a casting secretary and producer at the Theatre Guild, arranged to borrow money from the parent company to keep the Group afloat. When their third production, a Marc Connelly play, opened, she invited Guild co-executive director Lawrence Langner to “see the baby out of swaddling clothes.” Many members of The Group went on to dominate Broadway productions in later years. Stella Adler, actor and founding company member, studied with Stanislavsky in Europe and branched off from Lee Strasberg’s more dominant interpretation of the technique. Adler would eventually found an acting school to rival Strasberg’s Actors Studio.

Cheryl Crawford, Letter to Lawrence Langner, 1 March 1932. Theatre Guild Archive.

Women and Labor Theater: *Pins and Needles*

Mainstream American theater was never more engaged with the political left than during the Depression, when the lines between theater and reality were often blurred: plays staged union meetings and strikes; unions devised theater scripts in their meetings. In 1937, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, which used The Princess Theater in Times Square as a meeting hall, mounted a revue starring members of the union, with songs by composer Harold Rome. The resulting musical, *Pins and Needles*, was initially performed to entertain striking ILGWU members. It became a Broadway hit, running for three years – at that time a record for the theater district, where the Princess was renamed Labor Stage. Songs from the musical, the most popular of which was “Sing me a Song with Social Significance,” changed to stay current with news of the day, satirizing J. Edgar Hoover (“When I Grow Up (G-Man Song)”) and Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini (“Four Little Angels of Peace”).

Program for *Pins and Needles*, 1938.

Back to the Village

The period following the Second World War saw theater makers who had fought their way uptown to Broadway heading back downtown to found the Off-Broadway movement. Introduced as a designation in Actors Equity Association contracts, the term Off-Broadway soon became associated with less commercial, more artistic or avant-garde theater being produced in small, usually downtown venues. These productions incubated new plays by American playwrights, experimental European plays, and revivals, and gave rise to new talent. Some were beneficiaries of new postwar training programs founded by alumnae of The Group Theatre, including Stella Adler's studio, The Actors Studio, co-founded by Cheryl Crawford, and The HB Studio, where Uta Hagen began teaching in 1947.

Off-Broadway proved more welcoming to Black theater makers as well, serving as the platform for playwrights Alice Childress and Adrienne Kennedy, and performers including Billie Allen, Ruby Dee, Diana Sands, and actor/director Clarice Taylor. The political commitments of the Village attracted unwanted attention, including FBI surveillance, questioning by the House Un-American Activities Committee, and even persecution and rejection by concerned fans of theater and performance.

The Red Scare Persecutes Theater Makers

Given their strong engagement with the political left, theater workers were prime targets for surveillance and outright persecution in the decades of deep anti-communist sentiment in the United States. Actors, directors, playwrights, and producers were questioned and harassed by Joseph McCarthy, the House Un-American Activities Committee, and self-appointed concerned citizens. A complaining letter from a group calling itself the American Society for the Preservation of Sacred, Patriotic, and Operatic Music put director Margaret Webster, a frequent collaborator with the Theatre Guild, at the center of a “Red Web” of subversive activity that included Stella Adler, Shirley Graham, Fredi Washington, Lena Horne, and Lillian Hellman, as well as Garson Kanin, Langston Hughes, and Orson Welles. The Hollywood blacklist, which prevented employment in the film industry of those suspected of subversive activity, ruined or stalled the film careers of many performers, directors, and writers, though one positive outcome was to lure many of those artists back from Hollywood to the theater.

American Society for the Preservation of Sacred, Patriotic and Operatic Music, “Open Letter on the House Bill to Exempt the ‘Met’ from Taxation,” 10 February 1951, Margaret Webster file, Theatre Guild Archive.

Geraldine Page in the Village

Geraldine Page lent this reprint content to the young *Phoenix*, a Greenwich Village magazine, in 1957. Page writes of coming to Greenwich Village in 1950, when she was in her 20s. She recalls longing for the 1910s and 1920s, when the Village was a hub of experimental theater with companies like the Provincetown Players and Washington Square Players. She was surprised and reassured to discover an “Off-Broadway” on the rise. The *Phoenix* issue also included contributions by the founders of the Living Theatre, Judith Malina and Julian Beck.

Geraldine Page, “Peanut-Butter Sandwiches and Dreams,” *Phoenix*, Fall 1957, Geraldine Page Papers.

Judith Malina and The Living Theatre

Founded by Judith Malina and Julian Beck in 1947, the Living Theatre became a cornerstone of the Off-Broadway avant-garde over the next decade. Their productions were initially held in small black box theaters or even living rooms, and featured the work of Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, Diane di Prima, Bertolt Brecht, and Luigi Pirandello. By the early 1960s, the company had established itself in a theater at Broadway and 14th Street, performing politically radical and aesthetically provocative pieces.

With increasing notoriety for its experimental and sometimes confrontational tactics, the Living Theatre drew the attention of the Internal Revenue Service, which in 1963 closed the theater on 14th Street for failure to pay income taxes. The company began a voluntary exile in Europe, developing new plays and touring them around the continent. These included an adaptation of *Antigone* directed by and starring Malina, and the infamous *Paradise Now*, also directed by Malina. These plays relied on improvisation, experimenting with the boundaries between audience and performer in an occasionally antagonistic way.

Posters and Flyers Advertising Living Theatre Productions, 1951-1963.

Women Inside The Actors Studio

Often remembered as a training ground for Hollywood stars cultivating a specifically white, hypermasculine strain of Method acting, The Actors Studio was home to many notable woman performers as well, including in its early years Anne Bancroft, Marilyn Monroe, Kim Stanley, June Havoc, and Geraldine Page. Page served on several committees and joined the Studio’s board of directors in 1962.

Though initially focused on scene work and classes, the Studio eventually expanded its programming to play development and full-scale productions. Among the first was Anton Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*, starring Page, Stanley, and Shelley Winters. But the Studio had its critics, especially of its director, Lee Strasberg, who could be domineering and plainly sexist. Havoc, primarily remembered as an actor, began directing with the Studio and joined its playwrighting unit, only to have a proposed production of her play canceled. In a letter to Strasberg, she renounced her lifetime membership. Explaining that she initially viewed Strasberg as a “master [and] genius,” Havoc writes that she now sees a “dictator.” She concludes, “I don’t wish to die as a second class human.”

Advertisement and Membership Card for The Actors Studio; June Havoc, Letter to Lee Strasberg (carbon copy), 24 June 1963, Geraldine Page Papers.

Enter Adrienne Kennedy

Adrienne Kennedy’s debut, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, charged onto the downtown scene in 1964 like nothing anyone had ever seen. Incubated in Edward Albee’s playwriting workshop at Circle in the Square, the play esoterically but unflinchingly explored Black womanhood and the cultures and politics that inform it, including beauty standards and colorism, history and heritage, anticolonialism, and mental health. In the play, Sarah is haunted by characters ranging from her mother to Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg, Congolese independence leader Patrice Lumumba, and Jesus. In dialogue with these projections of herself, Sarah probes her feelings about her mixed-race parentage, as well as long-standing myths about Black and white sexuality. The play premiered at the East End Theater, winning an Obie Award for Distinguished Play. Kennedy seems to have shared this copy of the script with Langston Hughes. Though her work has been more often taught than performed, several new readings and productions of Kennedy’s plays have been mounted in the last year, with more announced. Kennedy’s experimentalism dared to reflect the complexity and fractures of Black women’s experiences.

Adrienne Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, 1964, Langston Hughes Papers.

Women+ Write American Plays

Playwrights like Adrienne Kennedy and Lorraine Hansberry prefigured a boom in playwriting by women in the final decades of the 20th century and into the 21st. These writers, from the radical fringe to Broadway, engaged a great variety of topics, styles, and forms, but frequently addressed themes relating to gender, sexuality, and feminism. Often, their work was received as breaking new ground or transgressing traditional boundaries, especially in relation to women's bodies. None of these writers would ascribe to a singular notion of womanhood, an embrace of diversity that is made the focus of plays like Wendy Wasserstein's *Uncommon Women and Others*. By the early 2000s, the idea of "woman" as a fixed identity had been thoroughly challenged, and the complex interplay of many vectors of identity, including gender and sexuality, was increasingly reflected on the stage, particularly in the rise of documentary plays incorporating multiple voices. Though they remain underrepresented on stages in the United States, playwriting is the area in which women+ making theater have had the most growth in representation in recent decades.

Uncommon: Wendy Wasserstein

Wendy Wasserstein’s plays offered wry commentary on the challenges posed to women of the baby boom generation by women’s liberation, popular culture, and the pursuits and obligations of career and family. They also created robust roles for women performers. In *Uncommon Women and Others* (1977), her master’s thesis for Yale School of Drama, Wasserstein examined the paths taken by a group of students graduating from Mount Holyoke, where she received her own B.A. The New York production with the Phoenix Theatre starred Glenn Close, Jill Eikenberry, and Swoosie Kurtz. *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988) follows its heroine through the decades of the feminist movement, beginning when Heidi is in high school and concluding when she has achieved career success as an art historian. The play won both the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Tony Award for Best New Play and has been frequently revived, most recently in a Broadway production starring Elisabeth Moss in 2015.

Script and Production Photographs for *Uncommon Women and Others*, 1977, Phoenix Theatre Records.

And Her Friends: Maria Irene Fornés

Described as the “quintessence of Off-Off-Broadway’s insouciance and resourcefulness” by one theater historian, Maria Irene Fornés is remembered as the progenitor of plays that were antic and deadly serious, and often both at once. Born in Cuba in 1930, Fornés immigrated to New York City at 15. She initially studied painting and was nearly thirty years old when she wrote her first play. Fornés’s best-known and most frequently produced play is *Fefu and Her Friends*, written in 1977. *Fefu* is considered one of the first experiments with what is sometimes called site-specific or environmental theater. Just as revolutionary is its content: eight women candidly discussing sexuality, marriages, and same-sex relationships.

Fornés won nine Obie awards, a number exceeded only by Sam Shepard. Two of the Obies were for directing. A devoted teacher throughout her career, Fornés mentored a generation of theater makers, especially many fellow Latinx theater makers, principally at the INTAR Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residence Lab, which she ran for ten years. Playwrights crediting her as an influence include Cherrie Moraga, Caridad Svich, and Nilo Cruz.

Robert Giard, Photograph of Maria Irene Fornés, 1996, Robert Giard Papers.

Paula Vogel: Women Win Theater Prizes

Like Maria Irene Fornés, whom she has credited as an influence, Paula Vogel has become an icon of lesbian and feminist playwriting. Her plays focus on the lives of women, tackling issues of health and body image, abuse, and sexuality, all with a dizzying combination of erudition and “low” humor, whimsy and gravity. Vogel is best remembered for *How I Learned to Drive*, a boundary-defying, darkly comedic consideration of child sexual abuse, “*Lolita* from *Lolita*’s perspective,” as Vogel often describes it. Since gaining prominence, Vogel has become an outspoken critic of the theater industry’s sexism in casting, staffing, and play selection.

One of the most decorated theater makers of her generation, Vogel has won many prizes named for extraordinary theater women, and often awarded exclusively to women or, in the wording of some prizes, women+ (a term that includes cisgender women, transgender women, non-binary individuals, and others experiencing gender-based oppression). These include the Lucille Lortel Award, the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, and the Lilly Award. Vogel has herself become the namesake of several theater awards, including one for early-career playwrights, given by the Vineyard Theatre with a residency and commission.

Photographs of Paula Vogel winning the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize (with Edward Albee) and the Lucille Lortel Award (with Lucille Lortel); Scrapbook Page and Program for *How I Learned to Drive*, 1997, Paula Vogel Papers; Paula Vogel, *How I Learned to Drive*, revised edition, New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1998.

Documentary Theater and a Multiplicity of Voices

The 1990s saw a rise in a documentary theater style pioneered by playwright/performer Anna Deavere Smith. Beginning with *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities*, an exploration and reckoning with the 1991 Crown Heights uprising, Smith's much-imitated practice was to record interviews in the field and perform those verbatim as monologues in a one-woman show. These solo, but multivoiced, productions laced their documentary style with often unexpected, poetic themes.

In 1996, solo performer Eve Ensler introduced *The Vagina Monologues*, a play modeled on the documentary style. Celebrated for its frank discussion of female anatomy and for drawing attention to violence against women, *The Vagina Monologues* became a cottage industry, with annual "V-Day" ensemble performances, usually on college campuses. Long criticized for misrepresentations, the tradition has been questioned more recently for excluding trans and non-binary voices, resulting in the cancelation of some productions. Still, Ensler's play inspired many subsequent projects. Dutch theater maker Adelheid Roosen interviewed Muslim women living in The Netherlands and compiled *The Veiled Monologues*, which was brought to the World Performance Project at Yale in 2007.

Anna Devere Smith, *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities*, New York: Anchor Books, 1993; Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues*, New York: Villard, 1998; Program for *The Veiled Monologues* by Adelheid Roosen, World Performance Project at Yale Records.

ROLES FOR WOMEN



It's a cliché to call theater a collaborative art form, but the work of theatrical production involves numerous functions, often — though not always — performed by specialists working together to create a single work in performance. Specialties have multiplied and diversified over the 20th and 21st centuries, so much so that this single case cannot represent every kind of role. Some are only briefly discussed. Each discrete function, described at the start of each section, is associated with one or more exemplary individuals, with documents illustrating those individuals' contributions. Women have performed these various functions for centuries, but serious gender disparities persist in certain sectors, notably directing and design and technical work. The disparity is especially evident in the most lucrative divisions of theatrical production: Broadway, Off-Broadway, and the League of Regional Theaters.

Gender formation and self-identification are complex, variable, and vitally important, and women are a heterogeneous group. The text in this exhibition occasionally uses the term “women+” to include cisgender women, transgender women, non-binary individuals, and others experiencing gender-based oppression, particularly when the individuals and institutions under discussion have adopted this term. The terms “woman,” “women,” and “female” are used with the knowledge that they deserve examination.

Oscar Hammerstein II and Theresa Helburn at auditions for *Oklahoma!*, Theatre Guild Archive.

Producers

Now often associated with the practices of fundraising for (and profiting from) theatrical productions, especially high-financed stagings like those on Broadway, producers have assumed many duties in theater-making. Producers conceive projects, commission work from playwrights and composers, cast and staff productions, secure space and plan for other logistics, and do anything else that needs doing to get a show up and running. Producing, generally speaking, may be considered one of the oldest roles in the theater besides performing and writing, and many of the roles in theaters today have been hived off from producing only in the last century, some in recent decades.

Theresa Helburn

The engine behind many of the Theatre Guild’s most memorable productions, and especially its groundbreaking musicals, Theresa Helburn deserves credit for first teaming up Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, whose names would become a shorthand in American musical theater. The result of Helburn’s initial matchmaking was *Oklahoma!* (1943), often recognized as the first American musical with completely integrated story and music. It had been Helburn’s idea to attempt a musical adaptation of Lynn Riggs’s play *Green Grow the Lilacs* after seeing a revival of the play performed with folk dances choreographed by Gene Kelly at Westport Country Playhouse. *Oklahoma!* ran for 2,212 performances on Broadway, setting records at the time; it injected sorely needed finances into the Theatre Guild. Helburn would reunite Rodgers and Hammerstein for a musical adaptation of *Liliom*, a Hungarian play by Ferenc Molnár the Guild had produced in the 1920s. That play would become *Carousel* (1945).

Photograph of Oscar Hammerstein II and Theresa Helburn auditioning singers for *Oklahoma!*; Photograph of the cast of *Oklahoma!* with Theresa Helburn (center, wearing hat) celebrating production’s first anniversary; Theresa Helburn, Letters to Lynn Riggs (carbon), 18 May 1942 and 28 September 1942; Scrapbook on *Oklahoma!*, Theatre Guild Archive.

Cheryl Crawford

Cheryl Crawford began as an executive assistant to Theresa Helburn at the Theatre Guild, also serving as a casting director. She left to co-found the Group Theatre in 1931, where she produced the premieres of Clifford Odets. By 1937, Crawford had ventured out as an independent producer, showcasing her talent for cultivating playwrights like Lynn Riggs. She co-founded with Eva Le Gallienne and Margaret Webster the short-lived American Repertory Theater in 1946. In 1947, with Elia Kazan and Robert Lewis, she co-founded the enduring Actors Studio. Among several commercial successes, Crawford produced four premieres by Tennessee Williams, including *The Rose Tattoo* (1951) and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1963). The latter starred Geraldine Page, the recipient of a gossip letter from Crawford in which she offers a two-sentence review of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* ("much better than I expected.... I wish Edward Albee would cut half an hour") and mentions having had dinner with "Tenn" that week.

Cheryl Crawford, Letters to Lynn Riggs, 16 July and 8 December 1937, Lynn Riggs Papers; Letters to Geraldine Page, 25 March 1960 and 5 October 1962, Geraldine Page Papers.

Directors

Directing is undoubtedly the best known non-acting position in stagecraft, but it emerged as its own role in American theater only at the turn of the twentieth century. Since then, women+ too numerous to list have overseen the artistic conception of shows, interpreted the text for three dimensions, coached actors in their roles, and planned and blocked stage movement. But directing remains a field of theater-making particularly guilty of gender disparity. While some regional and non-profit theaters have approached parity in directing positions, a 2019 analysis of directors of League of Regional Theaters (LORT) productions in the preceding seven seasons identified just 35% of positions occupied by a person using “she/her/hers” pronouns. Broadway remains especially unequal, with fewer than 25% of directing positions held by women the last two times the measure was taken by the Society for Directors and Choreographers (SDC), in 2014 and 2019. On top of this, SDC’s analysis showed that women directors are typically compensated \$0.81 for every dollar paid to a male director.

Margaret Webster

The daughter of an English acting family, Margaret Webster was born in New York City and gained acclaim as an interpreter of Shakespeare's plays, specializing in deep character studies. She directed *Twelfth Night* for the Theatre Guild in 1940. In a letter to Theresa Helburn she discusses several casting choices, disputing Helburn's suggestion for Orsino and advocating for quality over looks: "[I] am convinced that the right quality is more important than the right inches [...] I must have someone with a languishing, elegant, super-romantic side." In 1943, Webster directed the first production of *Othello* in the United States to star a Black man — Paul Robeson — in the title role. To this day, her *Othello* is still the longest-running Shakespeare production on Broadway. In 1946, she co-founded the American Repertory Theater with Eva Le Gallienne (then her romantic partner as well as a business partner) and Cheryl Crawford. Her book *Shakespeare without Tears*, published in 1942, offers interpretation and production tips for each of the Bard's works.

Margaret Webster, Letter to Theresa Helburn, ca. 1940, Theatre Guild Archive; Production Photograph of *Twelfth Night*, 1942, Theatre Guild Archive; *Shakespeare without Tears*, Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Company, 1955.

Judith Malina

The Living Theatre built a reputation for anarchy, but director Judith Malina's style was exacting: "PAUSE – THEN 1ST BELLY PUNCH," she writes. Malina's script from a 2007 revival of *The Brig*, first produced in 1963 and revived when Malina was 80, is score-like in its precise orchestration of a hyperrealistic U.S. military brig. In her essay "Directing *The Brig*," published with the play in 1964, Malina detailed how she imposed a system of discipline and punishment modeled on the *Guidebook for Marines* during the rehearsal process. She issued "Rehearsal Regulations," agreed upon by the company, that replicated the extreme formality and oppressive structures of military culture, in direct contrast to what had been the prevailing atmosphere in the company. Performers drilled at the start of rehearsals and after lunch breaks. In this way, Malina suggests, they instilled in themselves the camaraderie and blind dutifulness born of the repetitive structures and shared experiences of military life. Malina credited the teachings of Erwin Piscator and Antonin Artaud for her directing style, particularly the latter's "theatre of cruelty," designed to awaken the audience out of its complacency.

Script for *The Brig*, 2007, Living Theatre Records.

Vinnette Carroll

A clinical psychologist-turned-performer then director, Vinnette Carroll helmed Langston Hughes's gospel play *Black Nativity* in 1961. The production encountered a crisis when several cast and staff members – among them Carmen De Lavallade and Alvin Ailey – resigned in protest of the play's title (it had been changed from “Wasn't That a Mighty Day!”). But Carroll steered the production to a successful opening. She would develop a specialty in gospel musicals, describing theater as “a dramatic fusion of words, dance, and song.” Hughes and Carroll reunited on *Prodigal Son* in 1965. The two enjoyed playful exchanges with each other: He calls her his “favorite director” before asking her to reinsert a soliloquy that she cut from his play. Carroll would become the first Black woman to direct on Broadway in 1972, with *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope*, thirteen years after Lloyd Richards broke Broadway's color barrier for directors. Staging *Black Nativity* in London in 1962, Carroll writes to Hughes of her rivalry with Richards, “Do let me know all the directing Lloyd is getting while I'm here.”

Photograph of *Black Nativity*, 1961, Langston Hughes Papers; Vinnette Carroll, Letter to Langston Hughes, 6 August 1962, Langston Hughes Papers; Langston Hughes, Draft Telegram to Vinnette Carroll, 11 May 1965, Langston Hughes Papers; Programs for *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope* and *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God*, Richard S. Becker Collection of Alex Bradford and Arthur Alexander Papers.

Choreographers and Coaches

The work of choreographers and coaches overlaps with that of directors in planning stage movement, on the one hand, and preparing actors for performance, on the other. Dance was long included in stage production, but choreography's designation as a distinct role for theater arose in the twentieth century with American musicals. Though now typically associated with large-scale musical productions, in which they might direct as many as 50 or more people on the stage, choreographers also plan less recognizably formal movements, often in much smaller productions. Those directing stage combat are sometimes called "fight choreographers" or "fight directors," and they also plan complex stage movements.

Coaching and training performers, both informally and formally, has a long tradition on the stage. It became much more common as theater professionalized in the early- to mid-20th century, giving rise to university drama schools as well as acting schools in major theater districts. Though rival acting techniques are associated with some legendary names, such as Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg, many of these coaches remain all but anonymous in theater history.

Agnes de Mille

A classically trained ballet dancer, Agnes de Mille is remembered for creating dances in musical theater that advanced the dramatic action, rather than offering an entertaining interlude. It is appropriate that de Mille’s first major musical choreography was for *Oklahoma!*, often described as one of the first musicals that integrated song, story, and dance into a single arc. Writing to Theresa Helburn at the Theatre Guild with her credentials in 1942, de Mille touted her specialization in American folk dance: “I have made a very deep study of American folk material and have become something of a specialist in the field.” She invited Helburn, Richard Rodgers, and Oscar Hammerstein II to a performance by the Ballet Russe of her American ballet *Rodeo* at the Metropolitan Opera. Notes “will see ballet self—O.H.” and “remind T.H. to go” suggest that Hammerstein and Helburn did attend. They must have been impressed: de Mille was hired, and she would win acclaim for incorporating folk elements into *Oklahoma*’s dream ballet, which established such sequences as a signature element of musical theater throughout the 1940s and 1950s. De Mille reprised her collaboration with Rodgers and Hammerstein on the Theatre Guild’s *Carousel* in 1945.

Vandamm Studio and Graphic House, Photographs of the Dream Ballet in *Oklahoma!*, 1943;. Vandamm Studio and Maurice Seymour, Photographs of dances in *Carousel*, 1945. Theatre Guild Archive.

Alice Hermes

An eminent voice and dialect coach active for decades in Greenwich Village, Alice Hermes trained hundreds of actors over the course of her career. She is described in one profile as a “female Henry Higgins,” and she had a reputation for snobbery that entailed training her pupils’ speech to conform to elitist standards of diction. But her teaching handouts suggest that she was interested more in precision and cultivating linguistic awareness in her students than she was mere prescriptive propriety in speech. Hermes served as a voice and speech coach for the American Negro Theatre in the 1940s and taught English in New York City high schools. She was on the faculty of Herbert Berghof’s HB Studio, and was briefly married to Berghof before his more longstanding partnership with the actor and teacher Uta Hagen.

Alice Hermes and Milenko Radosavljevich, Handouts for “Spoken English” Course, ca. 1960, Geraldine Page Papers.

Actors

It is impossible to generalize about actors identifying as women. Despite Hollywood's and American industry's well-known influence on beauty standards, and its distortions of age and body types, celebrated women+ actors have come from all backgrounds and in many sizes and ages. Representational disparities persist, particularly along lines of race and ethnicity, sexuality, and gender expression.

In the United States, actors have been some of the most prominent celebrities, inspiring a reverence for acting that is commonly held, even as Uta Hagen lamented a lack of respect for craft of acting in the title of her much-celebrated first book. The word "actress," freighted with complications, first appeared in the English language in the Restoration period, a few decades after women were permitted to appear on stages. But, beginning in the United States in the period following the Second World War, women performers began to eschew the term "actress" as belittling their talent. By the 2000s, most journalistic publications had ceased using the term, favoring "actor" or "performer" in all contexts, and in recent years even the major awards, which remain segregated by gender in selection, have sought and adopted gender-neutral language.

Rose McClendon

Regal and impassioned, specializing in playing long-suffering wives and mothers, Rose McClendon starred on Broadway in dramas written by white southerners, including Paul Green’s *In Abraham’s Bosom* and Dorothy and DuBose Heyward’s *Porgy* (which would be adapted by the Gershwins into the famous opera), as well as in Langston Hughes’s *Mulatto*. McClendon’s dream was to create a Black theater in Harlem, and she realized it with the founding of the Negro People’s Theater, just before her untimely death in 1936. The success of the Negro People’s Theater had a huge impact: McClendon was invited to advise the Federal Theater Project on its creation of “Negro Units” in about 20 cities, greatly expanding opportunities for Black theater workers throughout the United States.

Portrait of Rose McClendon inscribed to Carl Van Vechten, Photographs of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection; McClendon’s side for *In Abraham’s Bosom*, 1926, James Weldon Johnson Collection Files.

Tallulah Bankhead

The daughter of a prominent old political family in Alabama, Tallulah Bankhead fit the consummate stereotype of a certain brand of mid-century celebrity actress: flamboyant, demanding, and self-destructive. She originated the role of Regina Giddens in Lillian Hellman’s *The Little Foxes* in 1939 and won a New York Drama Critics Circle Award for creating the role of Lily Sabina in Thornton Wilder’s antic farce *The Skin of Our Teeth*, despite continual conflict with producer Michael Myerberg. (She complained about Myerberg at length to both Thornton and his sister Isabel.) For a time commanding top billing and Hollywood success, Bankhead gained notoriety for her forceful personality and exploits. Theatre Guild executive director Lawrence Langner once wrote to Bankhead that he’d dreamed of being attacked by a lion and woke up thinking of her – whether a reference to her pet lion cub (named Winston Churchill) or the actor herself was left unsaid.

Carl Van Vechten, Portrait of Tallulah Bankhead with lion cub Winston Churchill, 15 July 1941, Carl Van Vechten Papers; Tallulah Bankhead, Letter to Thornton Wilder, 10 November 1942; Calling Card inscribed to Isabel Wilder; Telegram to Thornton Wilder, 18 October 1942, Thornton Wilder Papers; “Revival Suggestions for Tallulah Bankhead,” 18 January 1942; Armina Marshall, Memorandum regarding Tallulah Bankhead’s Contract Requirements, 23 December 1944, Theatre Guild Archive.

Merry Xmas
Isabelle [sic] old
fish bait old
skunk pot.
Lily Sabina

Uta Hagen

Born in Germany and emigrating to the United States as a child, Uta Hagen developed an early interest in acting and eventually became one of the most celebrated teachers of acting craft over multiple generations. Her students included Debbie Allen, Liza Minnelli, Sigourney Weaver, and Amanda Peet. A brief resume is suggestive of her own tremendous range: Hagen had her professional acting debut as Ophelia opposite Eva Le Gallienne’s Hamlet in a 1937 production Le Gallienne directed. She first appeared on Broadway the next year, as Nina in the Theatre Guild’s production of *The Seagull*, also starring Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. She would go on to star as Desdemona in Margaret Webster’s 1943 Theatre Guild production of *Othello*, with Paul Robeson in the title role and then-husband Jose Ferrer as Iago. In 1963, she won a Tony Award (her second) for creating the role of Martha in Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Her 1947 book, written with Haskel Frankel, *Respect for Acting*, achieved wide adoption as a college and university course text and helped popularize many terms derived from Stanislavsky in American theater practice.

Vandamm Studio, Photograph of Uta Hagen and Richard Whorf in *The Seagull*, 1938, Theatre Guild Archive; Uta Hagen, *Respect for Acting*. New York: Macmillan, 1973, Copy belonging to Marian Seldes.

Ruth Ford, the Understudy

Model and actor Ruth Ford appeared in several Broadway productions, but she served as the understudy for Jessica Tandy in the premiere of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, preparing the part and learning the dialogue, but rarely, if ever, appearing. Her script includes detailed stage directions and subtext: as Blanche first meets Stanley, “she thinks, ‘That man is my executioner That man is going to destroy me.’”

A rider on Ford’s Standard Minimum Contract, negotiated through the Actors Equity Association, specifies how much Ford will be paid both to stand by as understudy and to perform, and how her salary will be affected if the production is extended or tours. The rider also stipulates that, though not required to go to the theatre in person before every performance, the understudy is in many ways still tethered to the grueling daily rhythm of Broadway productions: she is required “to check in with the stage manager by telephone before each performance, to make her whereabouts known to the stage manager for the duration of the performance, and to be in such available localities” that she can reach the theater on short notice.

Tennessee Williams, Rehearsal Script for *A Streetcar Named Desire* used by Ruth Ford, 1947, Ruth Ford Papers.

Characters

Though created through the collaboration of the entire theater-making enterprise, including the work of playwright, performer, director, dramaturg, designers, and others, characters can take on outsized roles of their own, carrying with them the weight of previous performances, popular imagination, and the stereotypes and prejudices that inform stock characterization in company practice. A sampling of a few character types — daughters, wives and mothers, and woman warriors — is suggestive of the range of characters that have dominated and shaped the scope of women's presence on American stages over centuries; a broader yet still non-exhaustive range of characters can be seen in the selection of portraits hanging in the stack tower.

The stock characters of performance seen everywhere from Italian *commedia dell'arte* to American television sitcoms have helped to perpetuate gender stereotypes, as performers seeking repeated employment have tailored themselves to available stock roles in a self-reinforcing cycle. The notion of aging out of *ingenue* roles and into “character” roles has been explored in the art itself, memorably in the character of Irina in Anton Chekhov's play *The Seagull*. Type-casting, and especially racist type-casting, torments Wiletta Mayer in Alice Childress's *Trouble in Mind*.

Daughters: Juliet and Li'l Bit

Played by a younger woman specializing in *ingenue* roles, a daughter often exposes gendered challenges and rites of coming of age, seeking either marriage or liberation from the path of heterosexual marriage. Juliet's wisdom beyond her years (she is 13) epitomizes a common cliché for portraits of young women. In *How I Learned to Drive*, Paula Vogel bends these centuries-old coming-of-age narratives with Li'l Bit and her *Lolita*-inspired story of childhood sexual abuse. Li'l Bit recounts her story in retrospect, rendering her age ambiguous (Mary-Louise Parker, who created Li'l Bit in 1997, is reprising the role in 2022, in a revival postponed two years by the Covid-19 pandemic.)

Pinchot, Photograph of Eva Le Gallienne as Juliet, 1930, Civic Repertory Theatre Records; Paula Vogel, Draft of *How I Learned to Drive*, ca. 1997, Paula Vogel Papers.

Wives and Mothers: Hedda Gabler and Ruth Younger

Women playing wives and mothers are often portrayed as either quietly suffering the burdens of domestic labor and hindering their spouses, like Hansberry's Ruth Younger, or chafing against these strictures, like Ibsen's Hedda Gabler. Whether such portraits are viewed as feminist, critiquing the patterns of misogyny under capitalism, or sexist, reinforcing those patterns, may depend on a variety of vectors, including playwright and interpretation by performer and director.

Maurice Seymour, Photograph of Eva Le Gallienne as Hedda in *Hedda Gabler*, 1948, Civic Repertory Theatre Records; Friedman-Abeles, Photograph of Ruby Dee and Sidney Poitier as Ruth and Walter Younger in *Raisin in the Sun*, 1959, Philip Rose Papers.

The Woman Warrior: Saints Joan

George Bernard Shaw’s tragic treatment of Joan of Arc— who was canonized by the Catholic Church just a few years before he wrote *Saint Joan*— has long been viewed as an opportunity for a female actor to showcase virtuosic talent. The play has been revived countless times, with Joan played by Winifred Lenihan in the 1923 world premiere, Uta Hagen in 1951, and Diana Sands, in a noted early instance of so-called non-traditional casting, in 1967. Other celebrated performers to play Joan all over the world are legion, and include Katharine Cornell, Lynn Redgrave (in a New York production, at Circle in the Square, 1977), and Condola Rashad. The figure of Joan has captivated multiple playwrights, as well, suggesting the pervasive symbolic power of her legend.

Photograph of Winifred Lenihan in *St. Joan*, 1923, Theatre Guild Archive; Photograph of Uta Hagen in *St. Joan*, 1951, Theatre Guild Archive; Caricature of Diana Sands as *St. Joan* from *Sunday News*, 31 December 1967, Clippings File of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection; Clive Barnes, “Shaw’s ‘Saint Joan’ at Lincoln Center,” *New York Times*, 5 January 1968, Clippings File of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection.

Designers, Technicians, and Stage Managers

They create the illusion from an empty box, whether of the fourth wall or of Brigadoon, and they keep the show running from before lights-up to long after curtain. Stage design can involve distinct individuals coordinating scenic, lighting, costume, sound, and projection design. Specialized technicians carry out the design vision for each of these domains. Historically, these are some of the professions with the most lopsided gender distributions: with the exception of costume design, most of the scenic arts are dominated by men. Stage managers supervise rehearsals, notating the coordination of design elements and often blocking or movement, and they oversee the execution of technical cues at every performance.

Designers, technicians, and stage managers are each represented by distinct labor unions that also serve as professional organizations. Some have historically excluded women. United Scenic Artists, Local 829, which represents designers and scenic painters, barred costume designers from voting membership until the 1950s. The International Association of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) represents technicians and stagehands, and stage managers are represented along with actors by the Actors Equity Association.

Lucinda Ballard

Born in New Orleans, Lucinda Ballard studied art in Paris and fashion at the Traphagen School of Design. She apprenticed with scenic designer Norman Bel Geddes when it was still common for scenic and costume design to be executed by one person. When the specialties split, many male designers went into scenic design, while costume design was relegated to female designers. The first time a Tony Award was given for costume design, Ballard won it—for five productions from that season.

Ballard designed costumes for *The Glass Menagerie* in 1945, then applied her local expertise to *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1947, in designs that would become iconic when she revised them for the film version starring Viven Leigh, Kim Hunter, and Marlon Brando. Other memorable Ballard designs included those for *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), and *The Sound of Music* (1959). Her designs for *Allegro*, a 1947 Theatre Guild musical written and composed by Rodgers and Hammerstein, include detailed notes and, for Roberta Jonay’s simple dress as Jennie, fabric swatches.

Lucinda Ballard, Designs for *Allegro*, 1947, Theatre Guild Archive.

Florine Stettheimer

Painter Florine Stettheimer briefly made cellophane fashionable when she used it for the backdrops in *Four Saints in Three Acts*, but, as a note made after the production suggests, Stettheimer felt the shiny plastic may have been too dazzling under strong stage lights. Stettheimer’s design was noted, much like her paintings, for its colorful use of pinks, blues, purples, and oranges. In planning her designs, Stettheimer constructed small models of the stage action decorated with paper doilies.

Stettheimer was also responsible for the costumes in this opera, which has a complex relationship to the history of Black music and performance. Composed by Virgil Thomson and written by Gertrude Stein, it starred an all-Black cast of performers led by Beatrice Robinson-Wayne and Edward Matthews, under the music direction of Eva Jessye, a conductor who was the only Black member of the creative team.

Florine Stettheimer, “Florine’s notes on the difficulties she had with direction of 4 Saints,” 1934, Florine and Ettie Stettheimer Papers; Photograph of Act I of *Four Saints in Three Acts* showing Cathedral of Avila, glass portal with chained lions and cyclorama of blue cellophane, 1934, Florine and Ettie Stettheimer Papers; Photograph of “Puppet Set” design maquette, Florine and Ettie Stettheimer Papers.

Kate Drain Lawson

Kathryn “Kate” Drain Lawson, who would later design costumes and perform in Hollywood, served as the technical director for the Theatre Guild in its early years. In this capacity, Lawson oversaw all technical aspects of the production and execution of design, often performing roles that would in later years be assigned to positions subordinate to the technical director. These included creating a plot of the lighting cues and a ground plan illustrating the furnishings for Karel Čapek’s futuristic prophecy of robot rebellion, *R.U.R.* An illustrative draft telegram, to Tim Cashman at the National Theatre in Washington, reads, “Buy Rumble cart / wood crash shot guns / 1 revolver stop. / Am Sending scrim to Baltimore / KD Lawson”

Kate Drain Lawson, Notes, light plot, and ground plan for *R.U.R.*, 1922, Theatre Guild Archive.

Madeline Mingino

Responsible for planning rehearsals and for overseeing the execution of each performance, stage managers administer at a detailed level the entire effort of theater-making, often in the form of plots, checklists, and reports. A formal report on each rehearsal, and, subsequently, on each performance over the run of a production, might be shared with the director, producers, design team, and members of the company’s leadership. In these reports, stage managers like Madeline Mingino will often remark on the performers’ or audience’s energy, errors such as early or late cues, forgetting lines (“going up”), injuries, and other issues.

Madeline Mingino, Stage Manager’s Daily Reports for *Uncommon Women and Others*, Phoenix Theatre, 1977, Phoenix Theatre Records.

Playwrights

Playwrights create the text for a performance, and the relationship between writer, text, and performance has evolved over the last century. Increasingly since the end of the Second World War, playwrights in the United States have not just provided a script, but also have participated actively in the production and rehearsal process, especially for a premiere production. Some writers incorporate details from the production process, including stage direction, scenery, and costuming, into published versions of their plays. In other cases, plays may be written chiefly for reading as “closet dramas,” rather than for performance.

Georgia Douglas Johnson

Born in Atlanta, a graduate of Atlanta University, and remembered for her Saturday Night literary salon at her S Street home in Washington, D.C., Georgia Douglas Johnson cultivated Black writers, disproving the geography of the period’s common name, the Harlem Renaissance. Johnson herself wrote and published poetry and plays, including multiple one-act plays protesting against the atrocity of lynching. She is credited with helping give rise to the anti-lynching play as a genre. A carbon copy manuscript of her play *The Starting Point* includes a list of her works, distinguishing her anti-lynching plays from her other plays (and including a now-lost novel).

Georgia Douglas Johnson, *The Starting Point*, typescript carbon copy, undated, James Weldon Johnson Collection Files.

RECENT ACQUISITION

Lillian Hellman

One of the most celebrated playwrights of the 20th century, Lillian Hellman explored the lives of women hemmed in and sometimes corrupted by social mores. Her best-known plays include *The Children’s Hour* (1935), in which a boarding school student accuses the school’s two headmistresses of an having an affair, and *The Little Foxes* (1939), a few-holds-barred drama portraying a backbiting Southern family and the manipulative woman at its center, excluded from her family’s wealth by customs of patrilineal inheritance. Politically active, Hellman was persecuted under McCarthyism and blacklisted. Hellman’s notebooks for *The Little Foxes* include her research on Southern culture at the turn of the 20th century and a detailed ground plan for the imagined homestead of the family. In 1981, Maureen Stapleton played Birdie in a revival of the play starring Elizabeth Taylor as Regina Giddens; unlike Regina and Birdie, Taylor and Stapleton became close friends.

Lillian Hellman, Notes and Research Notebook for *The Little Foxes*, 1937-1939; Photograph of Maureen Stapleton as Birdie and Elizabeth Taylor as Regina in *The Little Foxes*, 1981, Maureen Stapleton Papers; Lillian Hellman, Letter to Maureen Stapleton for opening night of *The Little Foxes*, 5 May 1981, Maureen Stapleton Papers.

Alice Childress

Beginning her career as an actor with the American Negro Theatre in the 1940s, Alice Childress grew frustrated with the limited roles available to Black women performers and began to write her own plays. The words in her 1969 *New York Times* essay “But I Do My Thing” resonate with more recent self-examinations of the theater community around the distribution of roles for Black Americans, Indigenous people and other people of color in all aspects of theatrical production. Childress loved to turn her sardonic eye on the theater itself, nowhere more brilliantly than in her 1954 backstage tragicomedy *Trouble in Mind*, which satirized white racial protest plays, Method acting, and pious liberal directors. *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White* challenged taboos against the portrayal of interracial love on stage and screen. The play was first produced in 1966, but not staged in New York until 1972, with Joseph Papp’s New York Shakespeare Festival. A 1973 television adaptation of the play broadcast on ABC was not aired by several affiliates.

“Africa Lives!” Flyer for production of *Gold Through the Trees*, produced by the Committee for the Negro in the Arts, 1952; Alice Childress, “But I Do My Thing,” 1969, Clippings File of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection; Alice Childress, *Wedding Band*, ca. 1965, Script File, New Dramatists Records.

Quiara Alegría Hudes

Written and produced while she was an undergraduate at Yale, Quiara Alegría Hudes’s musical *Breakway, Steal* prefigures elements common to many of her plays, including a chorus, mythical or spiritual elements, and “ritual,” that is, movement- rather than text-centered actions provided by the playwright. In her invocation of ritual, Hudes has described being inspired by the concluding “laying on of hands” scene in Ntozake Shange’s momentous “choreopoem,” *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*. As a playwright and composer (she majored in music at Yale), Hudes’s works create intricate music from everyday, contemporary life, often drawing on her childhood in West Philadelphia or her mother’s Puerto Rican heritage.

Quiara Alegría Hudes, *Breakway, Steal* manuscript, undated, Paula Vogel Papers.

Dramaturgs and The Audience

They've been called play readers, literary managers, critics, researchers, and more, but the functions of reading and interpreting plays all fall to those who train and specialize in the field of dramaturgy. People with the title "production dramaturg" are relatively new to United States theaters, having emerged near the end of the 20th century. But the functions performed by dramaturgs are much older. Dramaturgs collaborate with or stand in for playwrights, helping with interpretation and cuts; they research past productions and historical context, and work with the director and the design team on the show's overall concept; they write interpretive program notes for audiences; they lead discussions about shows, meet with student groups, and give lectures; some dramaturgs serve as literary managers, reading and selecting plays for production and developing new plays; some dramaturgs become theater critics, interpreting plays for audiences and for posterity.

R E C E N T A C Q U I S I T I O N

Sandi Carroll

Sandi Carroll served as production dramaturg for early stagings of August Wilson’s *Seven Guitars*, which premiered at Chicago’s Goodman Theatre in 1995 and went on to Broadway in 1996. Carroll’s files include extensive notes by both Wilson and herself, revealing detailed revisions of multiple drafts of the script between 1995 and 1996, including the version that was prepared for publication.

Sandi Carroll, “Script Questions/Notes” regarding rehearsals for *Seven Guitars*, undated; Sandi Carroll and August Wilson, “Script Changes” for *Seven Guitars*, 4 January 1996, Sandi Carroll Papers Relating to Early Productions of August Wilson’s *Seven Guitars*.

Anita Block

Responsible for reading European plays and deciding whether to recommend them for production by the Theatre Guild (which would often entail commissioning an English translation), play reader Anita Block read and spoke German, French, and Italian fluently. She was born in New York and studied Ibsen at Barnard, later recalling that her instructors told her, “no nice girl would dream of reading Ibsen.” Block was drama critic for *The Call*. Her play reports, typed on pink paper for rejections and yellow paper for recommendations, are full of acerbic wit, wry erudition, and exacting taste. Theatre Guild executive board members could consult and initial play reports kept on file; on the report for *Le Dictateur*, Lee Simonson notes that he saw it in Paris and found it “dull, tedious, hopeless.”

Anita Block, Play Reports on *The Nights of Brother Vitalis* and *The Dictator*, 1926, Theatre Guild Archive.

Margaret Croyden

Best known for her writings on experimental theater, especially directors Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski, Margaret Croyden was a theater critic whose work appeared in *The New York Times* and *The Village Voice* as well as *The Nation*. Croyden was the author of several books of criticism, including *Lunatics, Lovers, and Poets: The Contemporary Experimental Theater* and *Conversations with Peter Brook: 1970-2000*. Her interest in the avant-garde was international in scope. She hosted a program on CBS called *Camera Three*, interviewing many artists, including Irene Worth, Vanessa Redgrave, and Joseph Papp. Croyden was a co-founder of the League of Professional Theatre Women, an advocacy organization for women in leadership roles in regional theaters.

Margaret Croyden, Notes on *Marat/Sade*, undated, Margaret Croyden Papers; Margaret Croyden, “When the Telephone Rang, Did She Know It Meant War?” *New York Times*, 14 August 1977, Margaret Croyden Papers.

RECENT ACQUISITION

The Playgoer

Theater audiences, however imagined or convened, are essential to theatrical production, and women have constituted the majority of American theater audiences since the late 19th century. A playbill for an unidentified show from the 1880s asserts that “LADIES AND CHILDREN can go to this GREAT FAMILY EXHIBITION Where the[re] is nothing produced to offend the most refined.” The “moral dramas” exemplified by *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were similarly marketed to the perceived sensibilities of “ladies.” The scrapbook of Harriet Thompson from the turn of the 20th century reflects the fandom around celebrity performers still very familiar to us today. Thompson’s love of Alla Nazimova, Minnie Maddern Fiske, and others indicates the ways the star system used iconic female performers, in roles often written by men, to reinforce sometimes regressive conceptions of womanhood.

“Novelty/The Sensation this Exhibition has created/owes its effect to the wonderful accuracy...” San Francisco: Francis Valentine & Co., ca. 1860; Harriet R. Thompson Performing Arts Scrapbooks, ca. 1899-1911.

HER NAME IN LIGHTS



The rows of jewel-box cases on either side of the mezzanine feature individuals and groups of women robustly represented in Beinecke's collections. Each case is intended as an invitation to learn more about these individuals, some fairly well known, others largely forgotten. Some regularly had their names appear on theater marquees, while others may never have wanted to be so featured, but here all their names are in lights.

"Clotilde," Bonnie and Semoura Clark Black Vaudeville Photographs and Ephemera.

Semoura Clark McClain and Bonnie Clark

Bonnie Clark and Semoura McClain (active 1910s, also billed as Semoura Clark) were a traveling act who toured with the Theatre Owner's Booking Association (TOBA). The organization provided entertainment to segregated Black communities across the South and Midwest while gaining notoriety for its exploitation of performers, who referred to it as "Tough on Black Asses." The Clark-McClain duo performed comedic sketches, often with Clark in drag as a female impersonator. They sometimes appeared as "two girls out for a frolic," and they would sing the contemporary hits "Daddy Come Home" and Eva Tanguay's "I Don't Care." They closed with a tango.

This collection of photographs and ephemera inscribed to Semoura and Bonnie offers a fascinating glimpse of burlesque sketches and chorus lines, minstrel shows and opera selections. In Black vaudeville, boundaries could be crossed, the lines between genders and art forms blurred. This collection visually embodies that blurring and the history behind it.

Photographs and ephemera from the Bonnie and Semoura Clark Collection of Black Vaudeville.

—adapted from text by Isaac Scobey-Thal '20

Gertrude Stein

An avid playgoer in her youth, Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) attended a typical turn-of-the-century repertoire (for a child and woman of means). But Stein's experience was anything but typical. As she recounts in her 1934 lecture "Plays," she noticed the strangeness of the theatrical conceit: the way the spectator's sensations always seem out of step with the action on the stage, the way plots and patterns of excitement in drama differ both from fiction and from real life. Her solution became to focus on the rhythm of language without being concerned with its sense. This radical theory of theatrical cognitive experience led Stein to her own dramatic writings, which focused on rhythm and repetition, creating an opacity that resisted meaning-making. She noted: "I wanted to tell what could be told if one did not tell anything."

Stein wrote dozens of plays and libretti, and even those considered "closet dramas" were given dramatic readings and performed on small stages. The late opera *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* became a favorite of the avant garde long after Stein's death, with adaptations mounted by theaters from The Living Theatre to The Wooster Group. Though Stein's plays have been received and parodied as esoteric, she defended her work as more pleasurable than mainstream theater, writing, "Anyway I am pleased. People write me that they are having a good time while the opera is going on a thing which they say does not very often happen to them at the theatre."

Four Saints in Three Acts, Stein's most celebrated dramatic text, previewed at Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum before opening on Broadway in 1934, starring an all-Black cast. The Broadway program featured a portrait of Stein, then at the height of her celebrity.

Playbill for *Four Saints in Three Acts* featuring portrait of Gertrude Stein by George Platt Lynes, 1934, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers.

Stein scholar Bruce Kellner framed by players outfitted as Stein and her lifelong partner Alice B. Toklas at a festival of Stein’s plays in 1959.

Gertrude Stein Collection.

An invitation to Stein’s lecture “Plays” sent to Florine Stettheimer, who created the scenery for *Four Saints in Three Acts*.

Florine and Ettie Stettheimer Papers.

The Princeton University Players reading a Stein play in a common room in 1949. The University Players performed in the summers, and drew their female talent locally, from off-campus.

Gertrude Stein Collection.

Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights, an adaptation of the Faustus story, features one character with the name “Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel.” Stein’s manuscript notebook shows that she expanded the name from “Ida and Annabel” in the course of revisions.

Gertrude Stein, *Faust an Opera or Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, manuscript notebook, undated, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers.

Wooster Group, *House/Lights: After Gertrude Stein's Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, New York: Wooster Group, 2000.

boy her name is

Marguerite
Helena
^ Ida and ^ Annabel, no

no no says Dr.

Faustus yes yes yes

says the dog, no

says the boy yes says

the dog, her name is

Marguerite
Helena
^ not Ida and ^ Anabel

and she is not ready

yet to sing about

day-light and night light,
~~Montana and Iowa and~~
moon light and star-light
electric light and twilight.
~~Kentucky and Tennessee~~

she is not she is

Adele Gutman Nathan

Born in Baltimore, Adele Gutman Nathan (1889-1986) became interested in theater while she was a student at Goucher College. After graduating, she became an active participant in the nascent Little Theatre Movement, traveling to Provincetown, Massachusetts, where she directed performances, cofounded two theater groups, and met a then-unknown Eugene O'Neill. When the Federal Theatre Project was formed in 1935, Nathan was invited to helm the New Jersey unit.

Nathan grew to specialize in staging pageants and other commemorative spectacles, mostly in an American exceptionalist vein, beginning with the 1927 centennial of the B&O Railroad. She produced or consulted on pageants for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair and the 1939 New York fair, a spectacle titled *Niagarama* about the famous falls, and multiple commemorations of the Battle of Gettysburg.

When her heirs donated Nathan's theatrical collection to Yale, they established a fund for the care of the collection that could subsequently be used to build American theater collections. The Adele Gutman Nathan Theatrical Fund has supported decades of acquisitions, including the papers of Paula Vogel, Sarah Ruhl, and Maurine Watkins seen in this exhibition.

Article clipping and script of *These Our Freedoms*, 1941; Photograph and ephemera for *Mr. Lincoln Goes to Gettysburg*, 1952; Program for *Four Industrial Pageants*, 1942, Adele Gutman Nathan Papers and Adele Gutman Nathan Papers Addition.

R E C E N T A C Q U I S I T I O N

Vaudeville Acts in the *Variety* Protected Material Submissions

In 1916, in response to widespread complaints of piracy among vaudeville performers, the entertainment trade publication *Variety* created its Protected Material Department. Performers could write out scripts or descriptions of their acts and send them in a sealed envelope bearing the name of the owner, thus establishing the date and priority of their creative output. Envelopes would only be opened if a complaint was received, whereupon *Variety* would investigate and publish the results. *Variety* maintained the Protected Material Department until 1925. Most of the envelopes remained sealed when Yale acquired the collection in 2018.

The Protected Material collection comprises a broad range of regions and performance styles, many of them featuring women’s roles, often fulfilling heterosexual tropes. One duet deploys vaudeville’s brisk repartee in a song of courtship and rejection, leaving all the punch lines to the girl. Women complaining about men’s failures was also a popular source of comedy. Many submissions are on hotel stationery, reflecting the itinerant lives of performers.

Variety Protected Material Department Submissions.

Twin sisters Maud and Mabelle Newton, billing themselves as “Gemini, Gems of the Dance,” appealed to *Variety* on reading a review of an act featuring an idea they had already been performing for a year.

Vera Wilson describes “toe-posing,” back bending and deep lunges accomplished while en pointe.

This comic song duet by Charles Grass and Betsy Mooney features propositions by a “He” that are repeatedly and comedically deflected by a “She.” The boy wins the girl in the end, but their exit has him handing her “a roll of money.”

This sketch by Marta Golden features two women commiserating about their shared disgust with the men in their lives after one, a thief, interrupts the other in the middle of contemplating self-harm.

R E C E N T A C Q U I S I T I O N

Goldie Russler

An actor in the American Yiddish theater, Goldie Russler (1904-1997) specialized in performing Yiddish folk songs. She performed for most of her career as a member of the leftist Yiddish company Artef (*Arbeter Teater Farband* or Workers Theater Association). Russler was born in present-day Ukraine and immigrated to the United States as a teenager in 1920 with the name Golda Rosler. She began performing with Artef in 1929, typically in supporting or character roles. Her first appearance was in Sholem Aleichem’s *Aristocrats*, an Artef staple, as Fanitshka, a role she would reprise at least four times. Russler appeared in fourteen Artef productions between 1929 and 1938. As a repertory company actor, Russler played a variety of character types suited to her gender, size, and age, including young maidens and occasionally boys. Russler performed with Artef until they disbanded in the late 1930s and continued to appear for several more years after that; she seems to have retired from theater after marrying Abraham Burstein in 1946.

Goldie Russler’s membership card for the New Theatre League, 1936; Receipt for dues paid to the Workers Theatrical Alliance, 1929, Goldie Russler and Abraham Burstein Papers.

Photograph of the Artef company, undated (Russler is fourth from the right in the third row), Goldie Russler and Abraham Burstein Papers.

Playbills from productions of Aleichem’s *The Aristocrats*, in which Russler appeared as Fanitshka at least four times, Goldie Russler and Abraham Burstein Papers.

Russler in *Aristocrats* (top center), *Naftali Botwin* (top left), *The Recruits* (bottom left) and several unidentified productions, Goldie Russler and Abraham Burstein Papers.

Poster for a variety show featuring Artef members, “ARTEF Playing in Brownsville,” (Russler is top right), 1942, Goldie Russler and Abraham Burstein Papers.

R E C E N T A C Q U I S I T I O N

Maurine Dallas Watkins

Maurine Dallas Watkins (1896-1969) was born in Kentucky and educated at Radcliffe, the women’s college neighboring Harvard, where she spent two years studying playwriting with George Pierce Baker in his famous English 47 course. After graduating, Watkins joined the staff of the *Chicago Tribune*, reporting on the murder trials of women who had allegedly killed their lovers, as the headlines of the day put it. Disgusted by their acquittals and the sensationalism with which these women’s crimes were reported, Watkins reunited with Baker, by then at Yale’s new Drama Department, in a class that was nearly fifty percent women. Watkins wrote a play satirizing the newspaper industry and the criminal justice system, trying out the titles “A Brave Little Woman” and “Play Ball” before landing on the one by which we know it today: *Chicago*.

After previewing at the Shubert Theatre in New Haven, *Chicago* opened to great acclaim on Broadway on December 30, 1926, while Watkins was still enrolled as a drama student. Watkins went on to write twenty more plays, as well as short stories and articles for *Cosmopolitan*, but her reputation was cemented as the author of *Chicago*, which received two film adaptations before the iconic 1975 musical.

Photographs, script, and clipping from the Maurine Watkins Papers.

The renowned musical treatment of Watkins’s play originally starred Gwen Verdon and Chita Rivera and was directed and choreographed by Bob Fosse, with music and lyrics by John Kander and Fred Ebb. Watkins would not live to see the musical adaptation: though she received repeated offers to adapt the play, her opposition prevented it until after her death. Watkins, whose morality was as firm as her wit flexible, feared her satire had had the opposite effect to its intention, exalting murder and celebrity instead of criticizing it.

“Gwen Verdon as Roxie Hart in ‘Chicago,’” *After Dark*, June 1975. Maurine Watkins Papers.

Theresa Helburn

Called the “‘Top Man’ on Broadway” in a 1936 article, Theresa Helburn (1887-1959) was one of the most influential women in American theater, even though her name is less well known today than many of her noted collaborators. Born in New York City, Helburn graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1908, studying for a master’s degree at Radcliffe. While there, she took George Pierce Baker’s English 47 workshop at neighboring Harvard. Helburn began working as a theater critic, signing on as a play reader for the budding Theatre Guild in 1919. Before long she was co-administrative director, and in her role as co-leader of the organization, she shepherded experimental productions like *R.U.R.* and Eugene O’Neill’s later plays, premieres of George Bernard Shaw, and, perhaps most memorably, the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein — a team she played a role in creating.

Having trained and aspired to be a playwright, Helburn was noted not only for her producing prowess, but also for cultivating emerging playwrights. After leaving the Theatre Guild briefly to work in Hollywood in the 1930s, she returned to her post and established the Bureau of New Plays in 1936, committed to developing playwrights through both a seminar and a competition.

In a 1938 plan for a playwriting seminar, Helburn identified the young Arthur Miller as among possible candidates.

Theatre Guild Archive.

Theresa Helburn. “Excerpts from Remarks Delivered at the Dinner of the Yale Drama Alumni, Yale Club, June 4, 1944.” Theresa Helburn Papers.

Theresa Helburn with Theatre Guild co-executive director Lawrence Langner (left) and playwright William Saroyan.

Theatre Guild Archive.

Laurence Langner (left), Theresa Helburn, and Armina Marshall with *Carousel* director Rouben Mamoulian and Azadia Mamoulian during a rehearsal in Boston, 1945, Theatre Guild Archive.

One playwriting seminar Helburn planned was to be co-taught by playwright John Gassner and director Lee Strasberg, with an all-star cast of guest speakers.

Theatre Guild Archive.

Helburn’s instructions to Antoinette Perry, a judge in the playwriting competition (and name-sake of the Tony Awards), emphasize that Perry should be looking for potential rather than polish in the competitors. Perry’s distaste for “unborn infants” probably refers to portrayals of pregnancy, which were also prohibited in Hollywood during the Production Code era.

Theresa Helburn, letter to Antoinette Perry (carbon copy), 19 September 1936; Antoinette Perry, letter to Theresa Helburn with judge’s evaluation form, 1936, Theatre Guild Archive.

Eva Le Gallienne

A powerful stage performer who began acting at 14 and was receiving raves on Broadway by 21, Eva Le Gallienne (1899-1991) cited meeting Sarah Bernhardt backstage as a formative experience. Like Bernhardt, Le Gallienne specialized in classic roles and often played male or androgynous figures, including Hamlet, for which she received both acclaim and ridicule. In 1926, alienated by Broadway's commercialism and proclaiming that everyone should be able to see "good plays well acted," Le Gallienne founded the Civic Repertory Theatre, whose performances at the Fourteenth Street Theatre charged reduced ticket prices. Le Gallienne's repertoire included classical drama and modern plays by Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen. A devoted interpreter of Ibsen, Le Gallienne translated, directed, and starred in productions of *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*, and others. Though she "declared Ibsen cheerful," a 1928 *Peter Pan* was among CRT's most successful productions, starring Le Gallienne as Barrie's first ever boy to fly over the audience on a wire. In 1929, Le Gallienne was pictured on the cover of *Time*.

Le Gallienne's relationships with women were an open secret that erupted into a brief public scandal in 1930, when partner Josephine Hutchinson's husband named Le Gallienne in divorce proceedings. She later became an LGBTQ icon.

Josephine Hutchinson as Nora in *A Doll's House* at Civic Repertory Theatre, 1934, Civic Repertory Theatre Records.

Le Gallienne’s notes on the title character in *Hedda Gabler*:

In presenting Hedda Gabler one should treat the play, in my opinion, quite simply; with truth, pace, humor, and excitement. One should avoid all sense of awe; sometimes actors when face to face with a ‘classic’ are afraid to behave like human beings, and this fear inhibits them and is apt to make their performance stiff and lifeless. These people that Ibsen writes of are all extremely human; though they lived in another era and in another land, the workings of their minds and hearts are universal and timeless. Though Hedda herself might be considered a little ‘special’, still she is ^{unfortunately} by no means in isolation.

The play is short, but when the curtain falls we are intimately acquainted with every one of the characters involved; this is typical of Ibsen’s genius. With all his economy of language and action, he makes us keenly aware of every facet of these peoples natures: of ^{all} the various & insensible elements that have made them what we see them to be. The canvas is strong, vivid, eliminated, ruthless and conclusive.

The actor ^{must} think clearly, play truly, follow Ibsen and eliminate himself. If he can do these things the performance will be good and both he & the audience will be the richer for it.

Civic Repertory Theatre Records.

Photographs of Le Gallienne as Hedda Gabler, 1928-1930, and pressbook page, Civic Repertory Theatre Records.

Women of the Negro People's Theatre: Shirley Graham, Rose McClendon, Fanny McConnell

Efforts to form “people’s theaters” in Black communities blossomed during the Great Depression, and companies were founded in Harlem, Cleveland, Chicago’s Bronzeville, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Richmond, and Seattle, among other locales. These ventures, often led by Black women, inspired the creation of “Negro Units” when the Federal Theater Project (FTP) was formed in 1936. In particular, FTP director Hallie Flanagan consulted with celebrated actor Rose McClendon (1884-1936), who advised forming the Negro Units before her untimely death. In her final days, McClendon, a veteran of Broadway, famously advocated for “a theater of our own.”

Shirley Graham (later Shirley Graham DuBois, 1896-1977) was appointed by Flanagan as head of the FTP Negro Unit in Chicago. After leaving the FTP, Graham enrolled in Yale’s Drama Department, graduating in 1940. Fanny McConnell (later Fanny Ellison, 1911-2005), studied theater at the University of Iowa before becoming director of the Negro People’s Theatre in Chicago from 1938 to 1939.

R E C E N T A C Q U I S I T I O N

As head of the Negro Unit in Chicago, Shirley Graham’s work with the Federal Theater Project was nimble and pragmatic, taking full advantage of the opportunities the federal project offered while working to retain integrity for Black artists, despite the skepticism of some collaborators. In a 1937 letter to potential theatergoers, she pitches John Charles Brownell’s “comedy drama” *Mississippi Rainbow* as a work that will “lift the general level of our people.” The note of uplift might draw charges of elitism today, but Graham knew how to frame the show for her audience.

Shirley Graham, Advertisement Letter to Audience Members, John Charles Brownell Papers Relating to *Mississippi Rainbow*; Carl Van Vechten, Portrait of Shirley Graham, Carl Van Vechten Papers Relating to African American Arts and Letters.

A Broadway veteran, Rose McClendon co-founded the Negro People’s Theatre in Harlem with Dick Campbell in 1935. Their first production was an all-Black-cast version of *Waiting for Lefty*. McClendon’s “at last” in a letter to Langston Hughes echoes her curtain speech on opening night. By then ailing with the lung disease that would claim her life at just 52, McClendon praised the “left-wing movement” for giving her the theater she had longed for: “If I die tomorrow, I will die happy. At last, we have a theatre of our own.” She tells Hughes she wants a full-length play from him for their next production, hinting that she wouldn’t mind a little more leftist content— “something pink, if you get what I mean.”

Rose McClendon, Letter to Langston Hughes, Langston Hughes Papers; Portrait of Rose McClendon, Richard Bruce Nugent Papers.

Fanny McConnell led the Chicago Negro People's Theatre in a production of Langston Hughes's play *Don't You Want to Be Free?* in 1938. The group selected the play after Hughes – a celebrity – visited them in Chicago. McConnell had just completed her degree in the theater program at University of Iowa. Like Shirley Graham and Rose McClendon, McConnell balanced deftly between radical and more centrist members of both her company and audience in advancing a “progressive” theater. She welcomed Hughes's offer of an alliance between Chicago and New York groups.

Fanny McConnell, Letter to Langston Hughes, Langston Hughes Papers; Portrait of Fanny McConnell, James Weldon and Grace Nail Johnson Papers.

HER NAME IN LIGHTS



The rows of jewel-box cases on either side of the mezzanine feature individuals and groups of women robustly represented in Beinecke's collections. Each case is intended as an invitation to learn more about these individuals, some fairly well known, others largely forgotten. Some regularly had their names appear on theater marquees, while others may never have wanted to be so featured, but here all their names are in lights.

Judith Malina and ensemble in *Women of Trachis*, Living Theatre Records.

Provincetown Women: Susan Glaspell, Nina Moise, Neith Boyce Hapgood

The Provincetown Players, best remembered for bringing Eugene O'Neill to prominence, espoused a gender equity that is remarkable even by today's standards. According to theater historian Cheryl Black, over the seven seasons of the company's existence in Provincetown and New York, nearly half of the productions were directed or co-directed by women, and 42 percent of the productions were written by women. Plays written by Susan Glaspell (1876-1948) and Neith Boyce Hapgood (1872-1951) brought the Bohemianism and first-wave feminism of Greenwich Village to the outer reaches of Cape Cod. Performed first on the Hapgoods' summer rental veranda and eventually in a fishing shack perched on a wharf, early Provincetown plays focused on questions relevant to the lives of heterosexual, cisgendered, white women, such as equality between the sexes and within heterosexual marriage; free love and open marriage; domestic abuse; and stereotyping and conventional gender roles.

The Players were joined in their third season by Nina Moise (1890-1968), who would become one of the most important directors to work with the company, particularly as an interpreter of O'Neill's early plays.

Responding to Nina Moise’s cuts to his play *Rope*, Eugene O’Neill complains that she has so marked up his copy that he will have to have it retyped. What’s worse, he feels he can’t ask his new wife, actor Agnes Boulton, to type it for him.

Playbill for *The Long Voyage Home*, Provincetown Players Programs and Announcements; Eugene O'Neill, Letter to Nina Moise, Eugene O'Neill Collection

Susan Glaspell writes from the Village to Agnes Boulton O’Neill about an upcoming production of one of Eugene O’Neill’s plays, adding, “I’m lonely here without you all from Provincetown.... I get awfully homesick for Provincetown – and tramps – and the sea.”

Photograph of Susan Glaspell, Nilla Cram Cook and George Cram Cook, ca. 1922, Hapgood Family Papers; Susan Glaspell, Letter to Agnes Boulton O’Neill, November 21, 1920, Agnes Boulton Collection of Eugene O’Neill.

Neith Boyce Hapgood

A handwritten list of Neith Boyce Hapgood’s plays numbers around twenty titles, with character breakdowns for each. Hapgood’s one-act *Constancy*, in which she also starred, was one of the first plays produced by the Players. Based on the affair between Provincetown regulars Mabel Dodge and John Reed, *Constancy* portrays ex-lovers Moira and Rex awkwardly rehashing their breakup, as Hapgood satirizes sexual double-standards and pushes the boundaries of what was then considered polite conversation.

Neith Boyce Hapgood, List of plays and manuscript draft of *Constancy*, Hapgood Family Papers; Production photograph of Hutchins Hapgood and Neith Boyce in *Enemies*, Provincetown, 1916, Hapgood Family Papers.

Carlotta Monterey O'Neill

Carlotta Monterey (1888-1970) met Eugene O'Neill when she appeared as Mildred Douglas in his play *The Hairy Ape* in 1922. Four years later, the two began their legendarily turbulent romance, marrying in 1929. Despite decades of jealousy, possessiveness, and spite on both sides, Carlotta was companion, inspiration, secretary, and household manager for Gene. Perhaps the most momentous action she took was her decision to release her husband's play *Long Day's Journey Into Night* for publication and performance in 1956. O'Neill had stipulated that the play, a painfully autobiographical family drama of addiction, abuse, and neglect, be kept sealed until twenty-five years after his death in 1953 – and then that it only be published, and never staged. Carlotta's decision to countermand this wish has been thoroughly examined and found many sympathizers: The play won a posthumous Tony and Pulitzer Prize for O'Neill, and it immediately entered the American canon as the playwright's masterpiece. While some have charged Carlotta with cashing in on her husband's legacy, the proceeds from the play went to Yale, where a fund established in her name would support playwriting. The annual Carlotta Festival of New Plays at Yale's David Geffen School of Drama is named for this gift.

Carlotta Monterey in *The Hairy Ape*, 1922, Eugene O'Neill Papers.

When she published the play, Carlotta included an inscription from Eugene, written in 1941 for their 12th wedding anniversary, from a manuscript of the play. O'Neill also inscribed this typescript of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* to Carlotta, on their 23rd anniversary.

*To Carlotta, my beloved wife,
this play, written in blood
and tears, is dedicated. She
did the slavery on it, typing
it twice, encouraging me, giving
faith and love and making
it possible for me to go on
with work which daily broke
my heart with poignant memory!*

*To Carlotta, again, wife,
friend, helper & lover, and I
hope this work is worthy of
her help!*

*I have loved you for 23 years
now, Darling, and now when
I am old and can work
no more, I love you more
than ever!*

Your

Gene

Dec. 27, 1951

Eugene O'Neill, Draft of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, 1951, Eugene O'Neill Papers.

Banner from premiere of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* at the Royal Dramatic Theatre Stockholm, 1956, Cartier pocket watch, engraved to Eugene O'Neill from Carlotta Monterey O'Neill, 1930; Antoinette Perry ("Tony") Award given to *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, 1957, Eugene O'Neill Papers.

Carlotta faithfully kept a private diary – one that by 1954 she knew would join her papers in the Yale Collection of American Literature (in fact, she spent much time the same year recopying some of her old diaries in ink for the collection). Her diaries reflect grief for Gene and agony over her decision about *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, as well as, perhaps, a consciousness that she is creating a record of her thinking for posterity.

[May 29] Agnes Brennan (Gene's 2nd cousin & only relative he ever saw!) arrives about 5:30 – and I try to explain "Long Day's Journey Into Night" to her. Which leads her to telling me all about Gene's babyhood, childhood, and boyhood. – Unwanted, no love or tenderness, no care, no discipline, no protection! If I had only known this fully – not in bits & pieces!

[May 30] Agnes goes to Mass before breakfast. After, I give her "L.D.J.I.N." to read. It upsets her no end. But, when she has settled down – she tells me the play is understatement – spends hours weeping & telling me of the O'Neill family. – She (Agnes) was Gene's mother's cousin – & they saw a great deal of each other living a few blocks apart.

A sad, unnecessary mess! What a heritage! Now, I understand different traits in Gene's character – that just had to burst out now & again. Thank God I did for him what I did do! Now I understand why & what he meant, when he was so ill, he would hold my hand & kiss it, & say, "Now, at last, I have found a Mama – you are my Mama, now"!

Carlotta Monterey O'Neill, Diary, 1954, Eugene O'Neill Papers.

Geraldine Page

“People say I always play neurotic women,” actress Geraldine Page once quipped. “Well, who doesn’t play neurotic women?” Though she had over seventy stage and screen credits to her name, Page (1924-1987) is best remembered for bringing to life the obsessive, faded heroines of playwright Tennessee Williams – she originated roles including Alma Winemiller in *Summer and Smoke* (1952) and Zelda Fitzgerald in *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* (1980). Like Williams, Page was a midwesterner, born in Missouri and raised in Chicago. After receiving her bachelor’s degree from The Art Institute, she relocated to New York and found a creative home in Lee Strasberg’s Actors’ Studio.

In *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959), Page played the aging, alcoholic film star Alexandra del Lago, whose attempt to re-launch her career is momentarily sidelined when a handsome young actor/gigolo, Chance Wayne (played by Paul Newman), brings her back to his Mississippi hometown in a cynical attempt to make his childhood sweetheart jealous. In other hands, the character’s portrayal might have been stereotypical. But Page’s sympathetic performance resonated with theatergoers – particularly with gay men who saw their own experiences reflected in Alexandra’s struggle to gain society’s respect, and in her tragic, romantic entanglement with a dashing young hustler.

Photographs, playbill, and script from the Geraldine Page Papers.

Guest curated by Elizabeth Wiet, Ph.D. ‘20

Page’s status as an unexpected gay icon was solidified by her close friendship with James Dean and her performances in plays by Terence Rattigan and André Gide. Two letters on display here, postmarked from Gay Street in the West Village and Provincetown, Massachusetts, detail the depth of devotion her gay friends and fans felt toward her.

Photograph and fan letters from the Geraldine Page Papers.

Lorraine Hansberry

Launched to stardom at just 28 when her first play was produced on Broadway, Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965) has been celebrated, and those celebrations reexamined, revised, and amplified, continuously since her tragic death from cancer at 34. *A Raisin in the Sun* entered the United States literary canon with its compassionate, righteous, and shrewd observations of a Black Chicago family struggling to realize “dreams deferred.” Hansberry adopted the title from a poem by Langston Hughes, whom she credited as an inspiration and eventually befriended. The play’s success gave Hansberry a voice and a seat at the negotiating table in the Civil Rights Movement.

Even before *Raisin* opened on Broadway, Hansberry evinced a surprising ambivalence about the play, born, it seems, of both humility and frustration with how it was interpreted by both collaborators and audiences. The success of *Raisin* has overshadowed Hansberry’s other works, including *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window*, a wry and tragic portrait of Greenwich Village, and *Les Blancs*, her critique of colonialism responding to Jean Genet’s *Les Nègres*.

Lorraine Hansberry, Letters to Langston Hughes, Langston Hughes Papers.

Friedman-Abeles, Photograph of the producing team of *A Raisin in the Sun*: David J. Cogan, Lorraine Hansberry, Lloyd Richards, Philip Rose, Sidney Poitier; Lorraine Hansberry, script for *A Raisin in the Sun*, corrections in an unidentified hand; Playbill for *A Raisin in the Sun*, 1959, Philip Rose Papers.

A Raisin in the Sun launched Lorraine Hansberry to stardom, with press coverage emphasizing her youth and beauty. *Vogue* featured now-iconic portraits of Hansberry in her Greenwich Village apartment by photographer David Attie. One, in particular, comments reflexively on Hansberry's rising stardom: she leans coolly against her desk, dwarfed by what appears to be a projection of another portrait of herself, alongside a poster for the play, with yet another smaller headshot on the desk beside her.

David Attie, photographer, "Lorraine Hansberry," *Vogue*, June 1959, Clippings File of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection.

In rehearsals for the play's New Haven tryout, Hansberry issued a detailed memo to the producing team ("my dears," including then-husband Robert Nemiroff). It includes notes, some cryptic, for all four principals, and it ends with a trace of exasperated resignation: "I am not deeply fond of this play but I must say that I think it is getting a worthy production. Love to all of you....".

Lorraine Hansberry, Letter to Lloyd Richards, Philip Rose, and Robert Nemiroff, 11 January [1959], Philip Rose Papers.

Maureen Stapleton

A highly decorated and forever-working actor on stage and screen, Maureen Stapleton (1925-2006) was routinely praised by critics as “no-nonsense,” “earthy,” and “real.” These terms may have alluded to Stapleton’s frequency in supporting, rather than leading, roles, but also to her ability to inhabit everyday characters believably, time and again. She received her first major recognition 1951 as Serafina in Tennessee Williams’s *The Rose Tattoo*, for which she won her first of two Tony awards. She found plenty of work throughout her long career. Armed with a fierce sense a humor and a foul mouth, Stapleton once joked that she was “dedicated to the job like a plumber,” perhaps alluding to the unglamorous, everyday labor of her professional life.

Stapleton formed a lasting friendship with Williams, whose letters to actors surface frequently in Beinecke’s collections. She played several memorable Williams roles on television, including Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* and Big Mama in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (opposite Laurence Olivier), earning her the nickname “Maw” to Williams’s “Paw” in their correspondence.

Maureen Stapleton and Laurence Olivier in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, 1976; Maureen Stapleton and Tennessee Williams; Tennessee Williams, postcard, notes, telegram, and script, Maureen Stapleton Papers.

Maureen Stapleton’s archive reveals her great capacity for friendship. Broadway theater namesake and “first lady of the American stage” Helen Hayes kept up a correspondence with Stapleton full of encouragements. In a letter from Cuernavaca sent in 1971, the year she would retire from the stage, Hayes cheers Stapleton toward an Oscar nomination after winning her second Tony. (Stapleton would receive a Golden Globe nomination that year but would wait another ten for the Oscar.) After costarring with Stapleton in a Broadway production of *The Little Foxes* in 1981, Elizabeth Taylor threw her a surprise birthday party.

Helen Hayes and Maureen Stapleton with friends; Helen Hayes, letter to Maureen Stapleton; Invitation to Birthday Party for Maureen Stapleton; Maureen Stapleton Papers.

Judith Malina

Judith Malina (1926-2015) sought to instigate social and political change through her work as actor, director, writer, translator, and poet. Highly influenced by her studies as a teenager with the German “Epic Theatre” director Erwin Piscator at his Dramatic Workshop, by Antonin Artaud’s concept of the “theatre of cruelty,” and by her anarchist and pacifist activism, Malina co-founded the Living Theatre with her eventual husband Julian Beck in New York City in 1947. For the rest of her life, she inspired and provoked audiences in hopes of bringing about (as she often quoted Beck), “the Beautiful Nonviolent Anarchist Revolution.” From early presentations of classical and modern plays in their West End Avenue apartment, to productions collectively created by the company and performed internationally in venues including schools, prisons, mental institutions, and factories, Malina became an icon of activist theater.

Malina lived a nomadic and adventurous life, touring and residing with the Living Theatre throughout Europe, South America, and the United States, periodically arrested for civil disobedience, income tax evasion, indecent exposure, and drug possession. Yet she saved voluminous documentation of her own and the company’s activities, preserving the legacy of her life’s work.

All items from Living Theatre Records.

Guest curated by Susan Brady, Beinecke Library archivist

Malina and Beck staged the Living Theatre's first performances, an evening of plays by Bertolt Brecht, Paul Goodman, Federico García Lorca, and Gertrude Stein, in their New York apartment in August 1951, with programs hand-made by Beck. Malina organized and participated in anti-war rallies throughout her life and was arrested for her activism on several occasions. The photograph of Malina and Beck was taken at a peace march in New York City.

Program for "Four Plays" performed by Living Theatre, 1951; Photograph of Julian Beck and Judith Malina at a peace march in New York City, 3 April 1958.

Paradise Now, perhaps the best-known production of the Living Theatre, was performed throughout Europe and the United States in 1968 and 1969. It was both acclaimed and ridiculed for its unconventional dramatic form, simulated sex, nudity, and direct confrontation of audience members. Malina and Beck documented discussions with each other and with company members, as in these early notes for the collective creation of *Paradise Now*, made while "snowbound by avalanche" in Arth, Switzerland, January 27, 1968.

Living Theatre production photograph from *Paradise Now*, Berlin, 1969 December; *Paradise Now* notebook, 1968.

Malina spent several years translating Bertolt Brecht's German translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. In a diary entry from May 21, 1966, she reflects on her work during a thirty-day incarceration for tax evasion and contempt of court the preceding year. Malina said that her detailed diaries gave "a sense of order and form" to her life. Her directorial attention to detail is seen in her notes for actors following a performance of the Living Theatre's production of *Frankenstein* in Reggio Emilia, Italy, in 1966.

Judith Malina, Diary entry regarding *Antigone*, 21 May 1966, from 1966 May 5-June 3 diary; "Notes taken in Reggio Emilia" for actors in *Frankenstein* [1966].

The Living Theatre performed Malina’s translation of Brecht’s *Antigone* hundreds of times, beginning in 1967. The production photograph shows Julian Beck as Creon, Judith Malina as Antigone, and at right, Hanon Reznikov as Tiresias/Theban. In a carbon copy of her to War Resisters League staff member and friend Karl Bissinger’s request for an essay on prison experiences, Malina reports on the European political climate and the company’s work there.

Photograph of Julian Beck, Judith Malina and Hanon Reznikov in Living Theatre production of *Antigone*, undated; Judith Malina, Letter, typescript carbon, to War Resisters League staff member Karl Bissinger regarding prison notes, 9 September 1978.

R E C E N T A C Q U I S I T I O N

Paula Vogel

Famous for probing transgressive and taboo topics with wit and whimsy as well as gravity, Paula Vogel’s plays have been performed on nearly every continent and in countless regional and college productions. Vogel has been highly decorated: she won her first Obie Award in 1992 for *The Baltimore Waltz*, a play drawn from her experience of her brother Carl’s illness and death from AIDS. *How I Learned to Drive* received numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize that year. It was almost most produced new play among regional theaters in 1998. Nearly two decades later, *Indecent*, Vogel’s 2015 collaboration with Rebecca Taichman, was a top-ten most-produced new play in the 2018-2019 season. Vogel’s plays have often explored identifiably feminist themes but introduced these concepts in unexpected, even zany, ways, as with *The Mineola Twins*, about two women who are identical twins except for the size of their breasts, a difference that may be responsible for their social and political polarization.

A renowned and transformative professor of playwriting at Brown and Yale, Vogel views her career in teaching as central to her life’s work. She counts among her students multiple award-winning playwrights, including Sarah Ruhl, Nilo Cruz, Quiara Alegría Hudes, and Lynn Nottage.

Draft script, playbills, ticket stubs, advertisement, Paula Vogel Papers.

RECENT ACQUISITION

The 2018 National *Ubu Roi* Bake-off

A bake-off is a somewhat playful, mildly competitive group writing assignment Vogel first created with some friends in the 1980s, then further developed through her teaching. Writers are prompted to take a set list of “ingredients” drawn from a classic play and then write their own new play, often under a time constraint. Final plays are read in a group setting. In 2018, Vogel announced a national bake-off, in response to Donald Trump’s presidency, to take place on Presidents’ Day. She used Alfred Jarry’s absurdist sendup of monarchy and tyranny, *Ubu Roi*, as inspiration. “Ingredients” included “a strange use of the English language,” “covefe,” and “a groveling, conniving, servile counselor who believes in conversion therapy for queers and trans & does not spend time in the company of women except his wife.” Writers participated from all over the country, many of them affiliated with regional theaters, and many of the scripts have been collected at Yale.

National Ubu Roi Bake-off Collection.

Sarah Ruhl

Until her junior year at Brown University, Sarah Ruhl’s preferred genre was poetry. Poetry’s resistance to translation or interpretation emerges in her plays. Ruhl has urged theater critics and dramaturgs to “remind audiences that theatre is an enormous, bodily, and irreducible experience.” It’s no wonder that Ruhl’s body of work resists simple description. Critics have noted her wild imagination, quirky humor, beautiful stage pictures, realism mixed with anti-realism, and strangely timed emotion: one critic remarked on her “flair for joining humor to sadness.”

Ruhl’s notes and drafts offer a glimpse of her imagination at work. Her notes range all over a page or a draft in small blocks of text. They often appear only on the first page of a draft, as if used in a reading or rehearsal – capturing gestures made in the dark of a theater house. They range from the broadly thematic to small rewrites of dialogue. The drafts of *Melancholy Play (A Contemporary Farce)* reveal the development of the play’s central themes and plot. The play features Tilly, a bank teller who is afflicted with melancholy, a state recast in Ruhl’s world as “Bold, Outward, Sassy, Sexy, and Unashamed.” All the characters Tilly encounters eventually fall in love with her, at which point Tilly becomes unattractively happy. **Notebook and drafts, Sarah Ruhl Papers; *Melancholy Play (A Contemporary Farce)*, New York: Samuel French, 2015.**

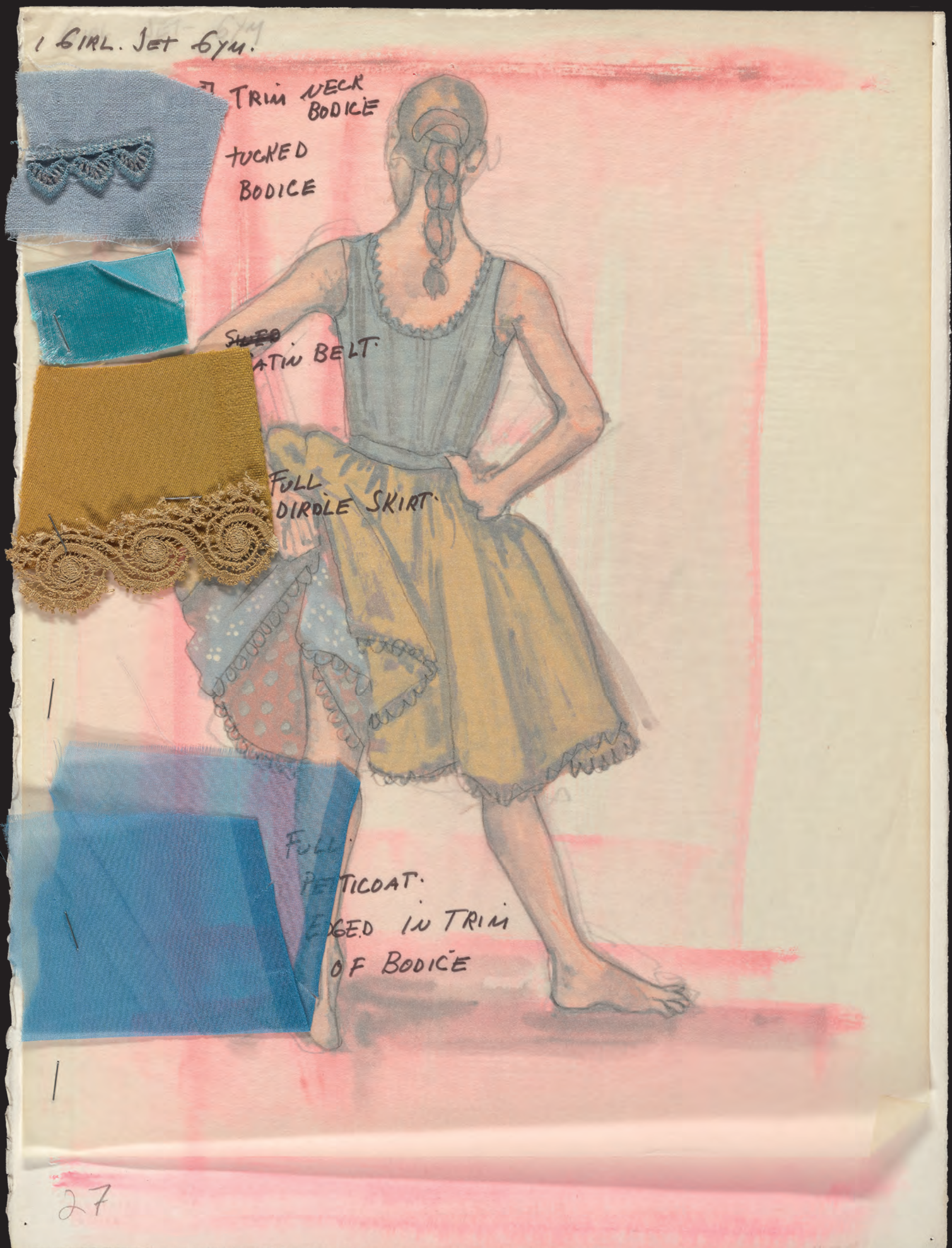
Seeing and Being Seen: Representation in Contemporary U.S. Theater

Women of color have challenged the overwhelming whiteness of American theater — especially in its most professionalized, most visible reaches — for more than a century, by creating their own alternative theater spaces and programs, and by demanding and gaining entry to Broadway and New York’s theaters. By the turn of the 21st century, incubation sites like MFA programs and prize competitions like Perishable Theatre’s Women’s Playwriting Festival were training and promoting a new generation of theater makers exploring complex intersections of race, class, and gender in their work.

Demands for inclusion in professional theater gained new purchase and new urgency in the wake of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black Americans in the spring of 2020. A coalition of hundreds of theater artists of color issued a document titled “We See You White American Theater,” calling on theaters across the nation to do more to combat systemic racism in the industry. The ongoing efforts of these and other activist-artists have implications for Beinecke’s collections, which in their elisions and omissions are too reflective of the industry at large. It is Beinecke’s goal to expand and enhance its collections to reflect a greater scope of theater activity in the United States.

Quiara Alegría Hudes, Letter to Aishah Rahman and Paula Vogel and manuscript for *Coconut Therapy*, Paula Vogel Papers; Perishable Theatre Women’s Playwriting Festival Anthologies, 1996 and 1999; Selected plays by Julia Cho, Jackie Sibblies Drury, Larissa FastHorse, Danai Gurira, Aleshea Harris, Quiara Alegría Hudes, Young Jean Lee, Dominique Morisseau, Mary Kathryn Nagle, Lynn Nottage, Suzan-Lori Parks, and Caridad Svich, 1996-2021.

HER NAME IN LIGHTS
IRENE SHARAFF





Costume Designs by Irene Sharaff

*C*OSTUME DESIGNER FOR over 60 stage productions and 29 films, Irene Sharaff is best remembered for her extraordinary sense of color at grand scale. Most viewers will be able to conjure a mental picture of one of her designs, whether the modernist-painting-inspired dream ballet at the conclusion of *An American in Paris*, the jewel-toned silks and hoopskirts of *The King and I*, the hip windbreakers and colorful crinolines of *West Side Story*, or the gold feathers, gauzy robes, and custom jewelry of *Cleopatra*.

Sharaff began her career as a fashion illustrator before apprenticing with Aline Bernstein at Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre. Her first opportunity as lead designer was for Le Gallienne's *Alice in Wonderland*, for which Le Gallienne wanted the design to reproduce John Tenniel's original black and white illustrations. Sharaff reimagined the costumes in full color, winning a Donaldson Award for design. Often designing productions with hundreds of costumes, Sharaff thoroughly researched and conceptualized every component. Even the blue jeans in *West Side Story* were specially constructed and dyed to showcase the dancers' movements. Sharaff's sense of movement drew frequent commentary and admiration. Even though her choices were always informed by deep research and a commitment to authenticity, viewers would be right to consider Sharaff's complicity in the racist stereotypes and exoticism for which several of her most notable productions are now remembered. Sharaff's dedication to research may be what led her to donate her archive and library to the Design Department of Yale School of Drama on her death in 1993. Sharaff also bequeathed the library she built with her partner, the writer, painter, and translator Mai-Mai Sze, to the New York Society Library. The papers from YSD's Design Department were transferred to Beinecke in 2018.

All items from Irene Sharaff Papers.

Due to extreme light sensitivity, facsimiles have been substituted for some designs.

Curved Case North A

An American in Paris

Sharaff was brought in to *An American in Paris* to design the film's concluding dream ballet, for which she conceived over 500 costumes.

Designs for *An American in Paris*, 1951.

Sharaff frequently remarked that pinks, reds, and oranges were her favorite colors. Her papers include multiple palettes and paint sets.

Paint palette.

Curved Case North B

The King and I

Sharaff persuaded actor Yul Brynner to shave his head for his role as the King in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical that is loosely based on the memoirs of Anna Leonowens, who served as a royal governess in Siam (now Thailand). Sharaff replicated the large hoopskirt ball gown she created for Gertrude Lawrence on Broadway for the film version of *The King and I*, which starred Deborah Kerr.

Yul Brynner as the King of Siam in *The King and I*, 1956.

Deborah Kerr as Anna in *The King and I*, 1956.

Curved Case North B

The King and I

The King and I is notorious for its racist stereotyping of the King and the Thai people, as well as its use of yellow-face casting. Sharaff’s costumes drew on her considerable research in traditional Thai dress and dance costume, including for the ballet sequence “Small House of Uncle Thomas,” a somewhat bonkers cocktail of stereotype, fantasy, and cultural appropriation based on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Villain Simon Legree’s mask may have been adapted from demon masks in Thai *khon* dances, based on the *Ramakien*, the Thai version of the *Ramayana*.

Designs for Eliza and Angel George, 1956.

Design for Simon Legree, 1956.

Fabric swatches collected by Irene Sharaff.

Curved Case North C

Designing *The King and I*

This small model headdress may have been sent to Sharaff by Jim Thompson, a U.S. Army veteran who settled in Bangkok after the Second World War and built an export business, helping to globalize the Thai silk trade.

Model *chada* or *mongkut* headdress, ca. 1954.

Designing *The King and I*

The King and I includes a sequence in which Tuptim, who is enslaved in the royal household, writes an abolitionist stage adaptation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which is then performed by members of the household. Sharaff drew on Thai classical dance costume for this performance, studying, adapting, and reproducing the tall, ornate, pointed headdresses (*chada* or *mongkut*) worn by royalty and used in *khon* dance, a Thai dance tradition derived from the *Ramakien*.

Designs for headdresses in *The King and I*, ca. 1954.

Designing *The King and I*

Jim Thompson was a U.S. Army veteran-turned merchant based in Bangkok. He settled in Thailand after deployment there in the Second World War. He began promoting Thai textiles, particularly silks, worldwide. Sharaff met Thompson after a visit to the small New York outpost of his business, Thaibok. When she began work on *The King and I*, Sharaff wrote Thompson asking for help with research, and he sent her copies of photographs from the Royal Archives in Bangkok, including photographs of past kings and Thai women in traditional dress. Sharaff recounts in her memoir devising a way to construct traditional Thai dress, which was typically draped, so that it could be donned and removed in quick changes.

Photograph of Thai women in traditional dress, undated; photographs of Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn from the Royal Archives, Bangkok, Thailand, undated.

West Side Story

In her memoir, Sharaff writes, “In the fifties, the teen-age boys one saw on the streets of New York had arrived at a uniform of their own – not yet taken up as fashionable by men and women – consisting of blue jeans or chinos, T-shirts, windbreakers, and sneakers. It was of course an outfit economical and comfortable. For the Sharks, the Puerto Rican gang, I used sharp purple, pink-violet, blood red, and black; for the Jets, the other gang, I chose muted indigo blues, musty yellows, and ochre.” Sharaff reveals her own investment in the play’s racial stereotypes when she refers to the Puerto Ricans as “exotic” and “aggressive.”

Costume designs for the Jets and the Sharks, 1961.

West Side Story

Many of Sharaff’s sketches portray both the character and the already-cast performer, as with these drawings of Rita Moreno in her iconic, Oscar-winning role as Anita. Moreno had been cast repeatedly in roles for “exotic” women (including Tuptim in *The King and I*, another show Sharaff costumed). She has talked about how, as a Puerto Rican, she saw Anita as a tremendous breakthrough role, even as she performed in a work by an all-white production team alongside white actors in brownface. Moreno later criticized the film’s makeup artist for using dark brown makeup for the Puerto Rican characters.

Costume designs for Anita, 1961.

West Side Story

Sharaff’s costume designs are often exacting, with notes stipulating the smallest details – the size of polka dots or the folds in petticoats. The fabric swatches were often drawn from her personal collection.

Due to their light sensitivity, the designs for *West Side Story* will rotate throughout the exhibition.

Sweet Charity

Sharaff designed the Broadway production of *Sweet Charity*, which starred Gwen Verdon.

Costume design for *Sweet Charity*, 1966.

Cleopatra

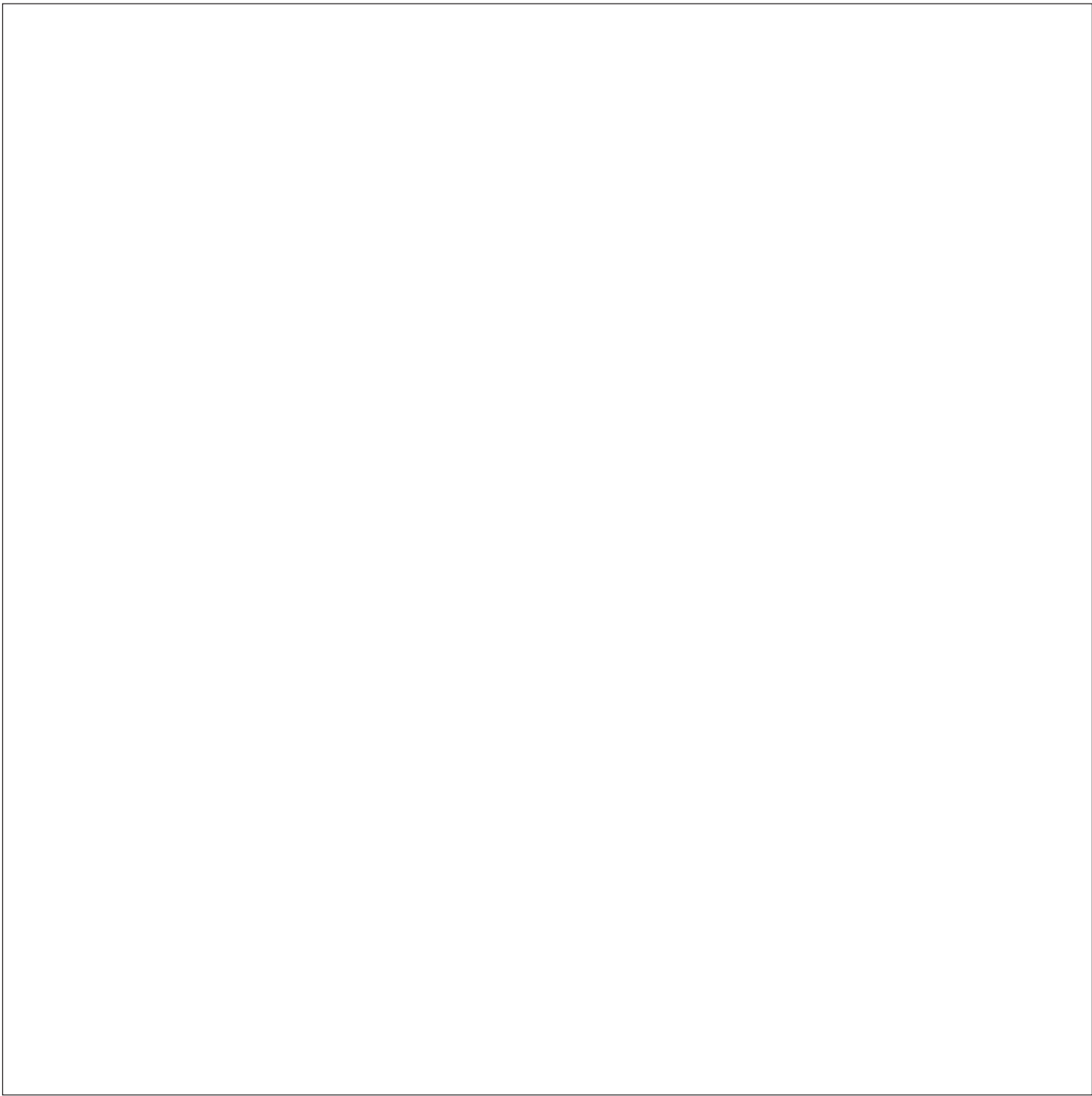
Sharaff was brought in to design costumes for Elizabeth Taylor in *Cleopatra* after the producers decided to start over, scrapping several months’ of filming and much of the production staff. She conducted detailed historic research, identifying quilted “trapunto” corsets and loose, flowing robes in ancient sculpture, and constructing much of the jewelry and ornaments herself.

Costume designs for *Cleopatra*, 1963.

Broadway and Hollywood

Irene Sharaff’s career by the numbers is staggering: 57 Broadway productions, 14 ballets, and 29 motion pictures. She was nominated for 14 Academy Awards and won 5 times: for *An American in Paris*, *The King and I*, *West Side Story*, *Cleopatra*, and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Her memoir, titled simply *Broadway and Hollywood*, relates in dry, pragmatic prose the stories of many of her most memorable productions, but it doesn’t completely capture what others have argued: that, through her designs, she shaped the institutions in her title, Broadway and Hollywood.

Academy Awards won by Irene Sharaff.



GENDER AND PERFORMANCE
IN THE LAURA BAILEY COLLECTION



Jessie Calef.

[Over.]

Gender and Performance in the Laura Bailey Collection of Gender and Transgender Materials

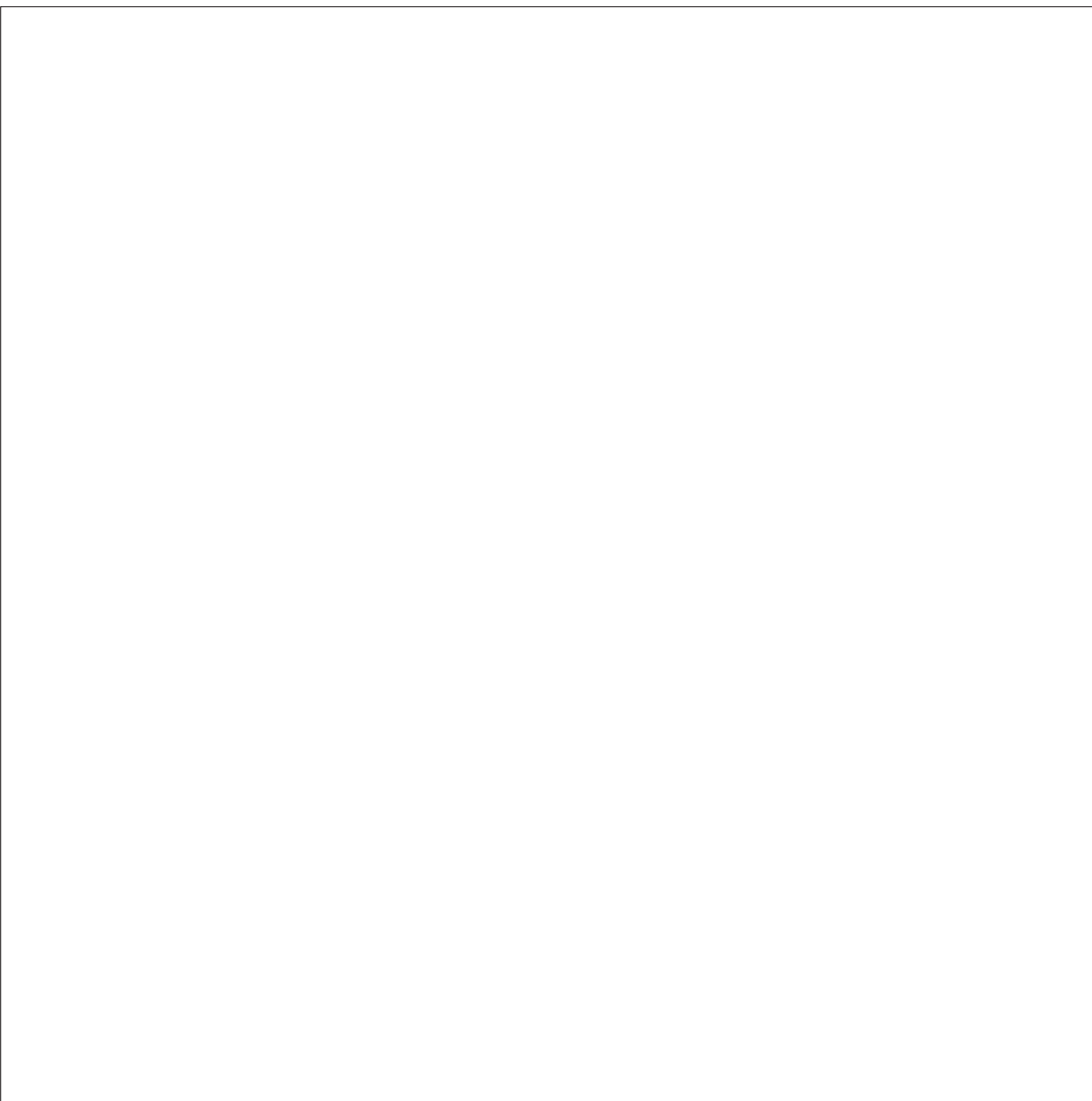
*I*F WE CAN recognize gender onstage as a disguise, then we should be able to recognize gender offstage as a set of customs followed — often unconsciously — in everyday life. Performance has for centuries served as a means to challenge fixed notions of gender. In the United States and Europe, cross-dressed performance is often credited with destabilizing the association of various behaviors and visual cues with biological sex.



In the 1980s, philosopher Judith Butler cemented this line of thinking as an influential school of thought tying gender explicitly to performance. Butler argued that gender roles as practiced in everyday life are themselves a form of drag performance, that is, all expressions of gender are an ongoing set of practices that are constantly adopted and performed, and not fixed, natural, or biological. Gender fluidity onstage should be viewed as an important argument for greater flexibility around our societal gender norms, but it certainly hasn't been a historic antidote for prejudice, hate, and anti-trans behaviors and policies. Despite centuries of stage performance disrupting views of gender, it has been rigorously policed in the United States, with both formal laws and customs oppressing anyone outside a narrow set of norms, for the better part of history.

A lifetime collector and dealer in rare materials and human rights activist, Laura Bailey compiled an enormous archive of ephemera, photographs, and publications relating to gender expression. Bailey's collection, acquired by Beinecke Library in 2010, encompasses a broad scope of gender expressions, from cowgirls and female truck drivers to beauty pageants and body builders. This case offers highlights from the collection as they relate to stage gender performance: male and female impersonation, drag, and other forms of cross-gender portrayals. The Bailey collection is not comprehensive in its representation of cross-dressing practices. It does not, for instance, have examples of the drag scene in Harlem in its heyday, nor does it include examples from outside the U.S. or Europe. Still, the collection includes many salient and wide-ranging examples of cross-dressed performance from the 19th and 20th centuries.

Cross-dressed performance may appear to be temporary or adopted out of convenience: many cross-dressing performers lived their everyday, off-stage lives assuming gender identities of their births. For some, like Julian Eltinge, celebrity as a female impersonator depended on the assertion of masculinity when offstage. Other drag performers, such as La Coccinelle, were transgender. Bailey's collection illuminates the diverse relationships cross-dressed performance could have to both the critique and the reinforcement of gender norms.



Curved Case South B

Sarah Bernhardt as L’Aiglon

French actress Sarah Bernhardt, widely regarded as among the greatest performers of the 19th century, gained renown in part from her performance as Hamlet. Bernhardt took a number of so-called “breeches” roles throughout her career, and French playwright Edmond Rostand created the title role of Napoleon’s son in *L’Aiglon* for Bernhardt. One historian described this performance as “a marvelous *tour de force* that at the age of fifty-six she could impersonate a young man in a manner which should not only be convincing but triumphant.”

Postcards of Sarah Bernhardt in *L’Aiglon*, ca. 1900.

Breeches Parts

Women were readmitted to the European stage in the 16th and 17th centuries (England was the last European country to allow women to perform, during the Restoration in 1660). Not long after, they began to appear on stage dressed as men. An early goal of these so-called breeches parts was to reveal women’s legs clad in tights. Shakespearean roles requiring provisional cross-dressing, such as Viola from *Twelfth Night*, Rosalind from *As You Like It*, and Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*, were popular in the repertoire, while the parts shown here were undoubtedly drawn from a great variety of productions now forgotten. While some women performed in these roles only when younger, like Charlotte Cushman; others, including Sarah Bernhardt, performed breeches parts throughout their careers.

Cartes de visite portraits of women actors, performers, and singers in masculine dress, 1870s-1890s.

Cross-Dressing in College and Amateur Productions

Cross-dressing for stage performance was often sanctioned because it arose out of necessity, especially for amateur and single-sex educational groups with limited recruitment capabilities. For such productions, cross-dressing could be viewed as a temporary, non-transgressive act; in the 20th century, these roles were often played for comedy. This characterization of transgender expression as absurd might be viewed as regressive or even reactionary, but the very exaggeration of gender roles ultimately confirms their dependency on custom rather than biology.

Photographs of productions with cross-dressed performers, ca. 1920s-1940s; “Varsity Show,” *College Humor*, March 1940.

Julian Eltinge: Vaudeville Female Impersonator

Julian Eltinge was a performer specializing in what was known as “female impersonation,” a chiefly comedic practice that became popular in the age of vaudeville. Female impersonators played the disparity between their performed and lived gender for laughs, delighting audiences with an often strangely dissonant experience: the impersonation was designed both to wow them with its authenticity and constantly remind and reassure them of its artifice. Eltinge and other female impersonators often concluded their shows with a dramatic revelation of their “true” gender, such as pulling off a wig, perhaps while singing a high note.

After more than a decade on the vaudeville circuit, Eltinge starred in a series of musical comedies in which he played men who spend much of the show disguised as women, including *The Fascinating Widow*, *The Crinoline Girl*, and *My Cousin Lucy*. Sheet music from these shows frequently featured portraits of Eltinge both in and out of women’s costume, stressing his transformation. Eltinge especially impressed viewers on stage and screen by performing with his singing voice: he could perform contralto parts.

Julian Eltinge and Raymond A. Browne. “Today’s My Wedding Day (I’m Going to Be Married),” Chicago and New York: The Music House of Laemmle, 1910; Percy Wenrich, composer, and Edward Madden, lyricist, “Sweetheart.” New York: Leo Feist, 1916.

“The Ambi-sextrous Comedian”

As with the sheet music above, the composite portrait of Julian Eltinge both in and out of costume emphasizes his transformation into fictionalized performance and stresses his masculinity when out of costume. One critic impressed with Eltinge’s ability to perform in both female and male roles coined the portmanteau “ambi-sextrous” to describe him. According to his own self-manufactured legend, as a child Eltinge had delivered costumes to vaudeville performers on behalf of his mother, a seamstress. The vaudeville performers used to dress him in women’s costumes, and he realized his aptitude for cross-dressed performance.

Novelty program from *The Crinoline Girl*, 1914; portraits of Julian Eltinge, ca. 1910s.

Curved Case South C

“The Handsomest Woman on the Stage is a Man”

At one time among the highest paid theatrical performers in the United States, Eltinge’s name graced a theater on 42nd Street that was opened in 1912 by producer A.H. Woods after the success of *The Fascinating Widow* (1910). Perhaps as an indication of his precipitous decline in the 1920s, Eltinge never performed there. At the height of his fame, Eltinge’s name was used to sell cold cream and other beauty products, as well as a magazine for which he produced much of the content himself. Advertisements for cold cream revealed the perplexing logic of how Eltinge’s likeness was used in marketing: “The Handsomest Woman on the Stage is a Man. The Man is Julian Eltinge, Made So by the Julian Eltinge Cold Cream.” These advertisements would seem to suggest the transformative powers of the cold cream alone, but they simultaneously emphasized the talent inherent in Eltinge’s performances.

Postcard portrait of Julian Eltinge; *Julian Eltinge Magazine*, 1914; photograph of Eltinge Theatre, ca. 1910s.

Curved Case South D

“THE ENTIRE SHOW COMPANY IS MALE!!!”

Named for its address at 82 East 4th Street in Manhattan, Club 82 or the 82 Club opened in the early 1950s featuring stage entertainment by its all-drag in-house revue. The waitstaff, many of them cisgender women, wore tuxedos. Club 82 catered to an overwhelmingly white, mainly heterosexual and cisgender audience, implying that transgender performance was primarily a spectacle and exclusively the purview of the stage. By the 1960s, many municipalities had passed ordinances against cross-dressing. In New York City, older existing laws were increasingly aggressively enforced and transgender individuals persecuted by police.

“Who’s no lady?” Club 82 Souvenir Postcard, 1970; Club 82 Souvenir Program, 1969.

“The Gentleman Doesn’t Shave”

Most performances at Club 82 featured drag queens, but the revue also occasionally “turned the tables,” as with Jo Vaughn, a drag king. The idea that every performer could be “really” identified with their assigned sex at birth was reinforced with the use of titles: “Mr. Rene Del Rio” and “Miss Jo Vaughn.” The act of transgender performance was often treated with lighthearted references to grave, single-gender subjects, as with the allusion here to the Vietnam War draft: “All the ‘ladies’ shown are waiting to hear from their Draft Boards.”

Club 82 Souvenir Program, ca. 1960s.

“The Most Interesting Women are Not Women at All”

Beginning as a speakeasy during prohibition, San Francisco’s Finocchio’s began featuring female impersonators not long after its repeal. The club’s early years were marked by run-ins with the police, who frequently raided the establishment and arrested the drag queens. Performers like Li Kar (who seems to have created the artwork on the cover on the right) demonstrated the popularity of Asian exoticism in drag practice, including “geisha” costumes and routines. Finocchio’s stressed that its performers “impersonated, glorified, and satirized” a wide variety of types, including “the shy woman” and “the raucous woman,” “the ‘kept’ woman” and “the coquette.” Drag performance has come to be identified with high artifice, exaggeration, frivolity, and the ironic disconnect between its presentation and what is assumed to be “real.”

Finocchio’s Souvenir Programs, ca. 1950s.

The Jewel Box Revue and Stormé DeLarverié

The Jewel Box Revue took its name from a gay club in Miami but toured North America from the 1940s to the 1970s. Even though drag traditions had existed among white and Black performers for decades, the Revue claimed to be the first racially integrated drag company. The shows were often emceed by Stormé DeLarverié in a tuxedo or occasionally a naval uniform. Born in New Orleans and raised in California, DeLarverié began performing as a singer in her teens. She had a baritone singing voice and often performed dressed as a man. She joined the Jewel Box Revue in the 1950s and remained with the company through the 1960s. A formidable gay rights activist, she was present at the Stonewall Uprising in 1969 and is often credited as having thrown the first punch.

Jewel Box Revue Souvenir Programs, ca. 1960s.

La Coccinelle

Performing under the stage name Coccinelle (French for ladybug), Jacqueline Charlotte Dufresnoy was a transgender actor who performed regularly at Le Carousel de Paris, a cabaret that featured female impersonators. A beloved celebrity and style icon in France, Coccinelle was the first person in the country to undergo gender affirmation surgery, and she became an outspoken activist for transgender rights.

Carrousel de Paris souvenir program, ca. 1950s; photographs of Coccinelle onstage, undated.

Laura Bailey’s Albums

Most of the photographs and ephemera in Laura Bailey’s collection are organized into topical albums, from “Artists” to “Women in Uniform,” including “Female Impersonators” and “Bearded Ladies.” This organization has been retained in the collection as it is now catalogued.