

2015 ASTR/TLA Annual Conference

"Debating the Stakes in Theater and Performance Scholarship"

Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront

November 5–8, 2015

Distinguished Scholar Award: Opening Remarks from David Mayer, Chair, Distinguished Scholar Award Committee

The history of the Scholar Award has much to tell us about the demographics of ASTR, about how the study of theatre history and performance studies, and the practice of theatre research have evolved. Just one example: The Scholar Award began in 1982, its first recipients male because, in those Jurassic decades of the latter half of the 20th century, most theatre dinosaurs – almost by default - were male. It wasn't until 1985 that the first female scholar received our award, and it was another 5 years and then another 9 years and a further 4 years before the Award again went to female scholars.

The Distinguished Scholar Award was awarded to an outstanding, deserving, female theatre researcher, writer, scholar, Gay Gibson Cima.

In terms of her past work, where she taught us how female performance can valuably challenge patriarchal theatrical and cultural structures, to her recent work on performativity within female antebellum abolition movements, she is a scholar at the top of her game.

Giving this award is to challenge her – on the one hand we recognize considerable achievement, someone for us all to be proud of, to be immensely grateful for -- but, on the other hand, no finish line has been crossed. It's not a ticket for our awardee to lie on a beach, put up her feet, and drink mojitos. The Award is an incitement to continue, a demand that she keep on researching and writing (as we know she will). There are more questions for her to ask, more problems for her to solve.

Until this week I'd never met her, although - in our research and writing - we sometimes share a century. But her marvelous books are readily accessible, and we can enjoy their breadth, their nuanced critical analyses, their engaging contextualizing, their deep and persistent humanity.