

Winter 2009

## Review: The Newsletter and Journal of Dramaturgy, volume 19, issue 1

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# Review

The Newsletter and  
Journal of Dramaturgy

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Volume 19, Issue 1  
Winter 2009

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## SAVE THE DATE!

I hope the new year finds you healthy and happy. In the U.S. at this moment, all eyes are on Washington, D.C., as the country anticipates the inauguration of President Obama later this month. Dramaturgs and theatre people of all political persuasions have another reason to look toward the nation's capital later this year: the 2009 LMDA Annual Conference.

Please mark your calendars and make plans to join us!

*Shelley Orr*  
LMDA President



**LITERARY MANAGERS  
& DRAMATURGS  
OF THE AMERICAS**

**2009 LMDA Annual Conference  
"Out of Bounds"  
Washington, D.C.  
July 16–19, 2009**

# SAVE THE DATE!

2009 LMDA Annual Conference  
Washington, D.C.  
July 16-19, 2009

*Conference Planner: Danielle Mages Amato, Freelance Dramaturg*

*Conference Committee: Gavin Witt, Centerstage; Miriam Weisfeld and Elissa Goetschius, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company; Erin O'Malley, Freelance Dramaturg.*

*Supporting Theatres: Kennedy Center, Studio Theatre, Woolly Mammoth, Arena Stage, Centerstage, Active Cultures, Inkwell, Shakespeare Theatre Company*

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*Inquiries from prospective contributors are welcome. All inquiries should be directed to D.J. Hopkins: [dhopkins@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:dhopkins@mail.sdsu.edu). Review gratefully acknowledges the support of the School of Theatre, Television, and Film and the College of Professional Studies and Fine Arts at San Diego State University.*

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# OUT OF BOUNDS

*Conference planner Danielle Mages Amato and LMDA President Shelley Orr share ideas in development for the next conference.*

The diverse interests of our members have inspired planning for the 2009 conference. We hope to forge personal connections among artists in our field and the people who write our nation's stories—stories of our history (archivists), our culture (curators), and our political machinery (campaign managers and speechwriters). In practice, the conference theme will reflect the role that a dramaturg can play at the heart of helping to develop the theatre artists and practitioners of tomorrow, while also serving as a liaison between theatre and its allied arts, and between the arts and a wider negotiation of public discourse. Washington is the perfect place to explore how we as dramaturgs can extend our talents onto the national and international scene.

We want to explore dramaturgy in action in arenas as diverse as museums, scientific institutions, and the political system. Because the conference will be held in US's capital city, we will explore the challenges and opportunities raised in the highly charged national discussions following the 2008 election. The US's attention has been focused on how we define ourselves, on questions of who is an American, and on who will represent us to the world. The LMDA conference will explore these questions with a special focus on how we dramaturgs (of all countries) might define and redefine ourselves.

The Kennedy Center and George Washington University are set up to help host the 2009 LMDA conference. Conference chair Danielle Mages Amato and her committee are exploring the conference theme of dramaturgy Out of Bounds: how we function in other fields and how other fields impact us — especially museum culture and politics, because this is DC! Most theaters and universities in the DC area are invested in participating. GWU and Kennedy Center are located close to each other, and the conference hotel will be located in the downtown area. GWU dorms will be available for housing conference attendees as well.

A conference brochure with full details on the conference program and logistics will be available soon.

## Conference Sessions in development

The “Out of Bounds” Sessions:

- Science Stories. Science journalists and the head of one of DC's major science foundations welcome the opportunities for cross-pollination between the arts and sciences.
- Conference attendees visit selected museums and cultural institutions, learn how research conducted by those institutions is shared with visitors. Representatives of the museums will also present.
- Dramaturging Politics. How theatre plays a part in the political process, and who is doing the work of the dramaturg in this field.
- Breaking Down Our Four(th) Walls. This session will explore the ways in which a variety of fields can inform and be informed by dramaturgical methods. Lee Devin will be a featured speaker.

The “In-Bounds” Sessions:

- New Play Development in DC. A lively roundtable discussion among DC dramaturgs and artistic directors.
- Digital Dramaturgy. The impacts of technology on our work. Possible topics include: Teaching Theatre Online; Using Online Technology to communicate, compile, and distribute research; Database Technology for the Literary Office.



*The Capitol building, Washington, DC.*

# Developing Digiturgy

An early career dramaturg explores the uses of wikimedia while working on a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

**by Haviva Avirom**

Audiences and production staff alike, especially those of the younger generations, are moving online for their information and entertainment. It behooves us as dramaturgs to appeal to them by adding to our physical resources with a web presence, entering the realm of digiturgy. Whether in the form of private, long-distance script collaborations amongst the production staff, resources provided online for actors, a digital archive of a production, or audience outreach and extra-performative web enrichment, the internet is a communication tool and an asset that dramaturgs are in the particular position to utilize.

Two years ago, at the Minneapolis conference of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA), Geoff Proehl and I presented about the project we were working on at the time, a digital dramaturgical collaboration for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We were interested in using the existing wiki technology, the basis of the popular and perpetually editable Wikipedia, to attempt to create a sustainable, shareable encapsulation of our upcoming production: an archive, encompassing the play text with our edits and our glossary, prop and sound plots, costume and set sketches, and a compendium of dramaturgical research specific to our production. The wonderful IT department of the university allotted us server space and a domain (<http://oberon.ups.edu>), installed the appropriate software and input our text into the program. The rest was up to us.

From an editing standpoint, the project worked very smoothly: Geoff and I were each able, from our respective homes and offices, both in and out of Washington state, to make cuts and edits to spelling, word choice, and punctuation. The wiki format is distinctly well suited to furthering a conversation on the alterations that bring a script from page to production. It is possible to create linked pages after each edit to explain cuts and changes to the script on which other collaborators can comment and foment discussion. The *Midsummer* script is available in both clean and altered format at [oberon.ups.edu](http://oberon.ups.edu). [Fig. 1

Haviva Avirom is a graduate of the BA Theatre Arts program at University of Puget Sound and former student of Geoff Proehl, looking for a way to get paid for this crazy little thing called dramaturgy. Her focus is in Shakespeare and classical theatre, as well as ways to get more plugged into her computer, so this project was perfect for her. She's experimenting with ways to modify the traditional lobby display into a gateway experience for audiences. Her past credits include over 20 high school and university productions, Lillian Hellman's *The Autumn Garden* at Antaeus Company, *Hamlet* for the Independent Shakespeare Company, *Escape from Happiness* at Theatre 40, and *Hedda Gabler* at the newly formed Chrysalis Stage.

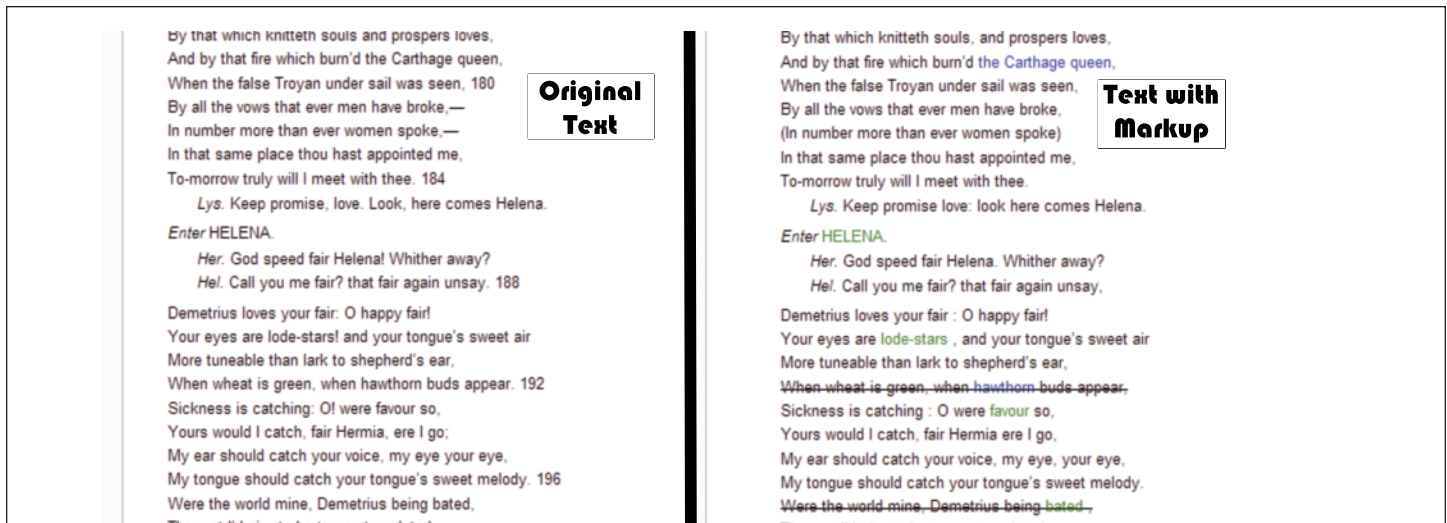


Fig. 1.

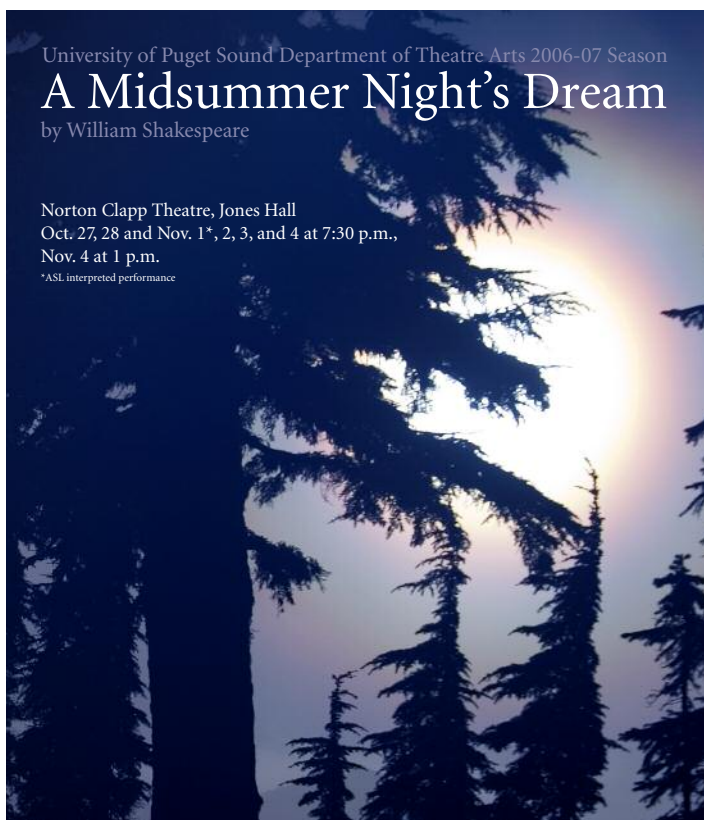
altered and unaltered text] For the convenience of the actors and production team, our IT staff integrated new code into our wiki which produces mouse-over glossary links so that hovering the cursor over links in green reveals a pop-up box containing the definition of the term. [Fig. 2] Linked pages were created for terms requiring more explanation. Geoff was able to input ideas for blocking, including scanned sketches, into pages linked to the appropriate dialogue. [Fig. 3] Information was uploaded to our Production Plot page any time that we had production meetings and raised new suggestions of music and practical lights and props. Two years later, when those involved in the production ask what was on the soundtrack for the show, I can point them to the wiki, where the information is easily

retrievable. [Fig. 4] The wiki facilitates a complete vision of the production, using the text of the play as a foundation, which anyone can access.

Though we were not faced with concerns of copyright infringement with our particular project, since we used an edited version in the public domain, the issue was raised. The IT people were quick to assure us of the ways that the framework we created could be adapted to deal with modern and copyrighted material. The wiki format allows for three levels of security. Under a complete password lock, all materials are invisible except to people who have been assigned passwords. An edit lock, like the one we used, allows anyone can find the pages and read them, but only those with user accounts have editing ability. An unlocked page, like Wikipedia, allows anyone to create an account and make changes to the documents. It is possible to use all three levels of security within one wiki. For example, one could completely lock the script to the production team in order to preserve copyright, leave research materials open but not editable, and conduct open forums where anyone can comment, ask questions, and discuss the production. Because of its structure, the wiki form is also well suited to organizing and displaying historical and dramaturgical resources.

For our *Midsummer*, set in a 1980s high school, I compiled lists of popular music, books, and films, and important events in history, sports, technology, and science of the era. Our dedicated research librarian, Lori Ricigliano, wrote a compendium of plants mentioned in the text as another resource for our actors. [Fig. 5] In addition, a separate page developed for each character had a separate posted page including evolutionary costume sketches and any mythological or historical character information available. [Figs. 6, 7] I also kept a running archive of the materials I gave to the actors, lists of reading material, the photocopies that I included, and a list of tracks on each actor's CD of period music.

In an attempt to fulfill the university's role as a part of the greater Tacoma community, we used our choice of a well-known and often taught play to foster communication and programs with local elementary, middle, and high schools: Grant Elementary, Bellarmine Preparatory, and Annie Wright School. I put together play study



The cover of the program for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at University of Puget Sound, 2006.

Lys. Helen, to you our minds we will unfold:  
 To-morrow night, when Phœbe doth behold  
 Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,  
 Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass  
 (A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal)  
 Through Athens' gates, have we devis'd to steal.  
 Her. And in the wood, where often you and I

Obe. How canst thou thus for shame Titania,  
 Glance at my credit with Hippolyta?  
 Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?  
 Didst thou not lead him through the glimmering night  
 From Perigouna, whom he ravished?  
 And make him with fair Egeus break his faith,  
 With Ariadne and Antiopa?  
 Titania's faeries stand behind her.




Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

guides for three different grade levels, including information about the play and playwright, instructions for being a good audience member, and activities aimed at appropriate age levels. The schools' faculty and Lori assisted me, and I used study guides from the LMDA archive as models. The study guides led to a series of three special after-school workshops with a group of twenty fifth graders at Grant. The demand was high: we likely could have added a second session, but my full course load made that impossible. Each school we visited was offered a block of tickets for our Wednesday night production at drastically reduced cost, subsidized by the university's outreach program. The students from both Jason Lee and Grant thoroughly enjoyed the show. Three University of Puget Sound classes also took advantage of our lectures on the play and the process. Three weeks before the show went up, Geoff and I invited university classes, the campus community, and the grant workshop students to a show-and-tell session. These sessions included presentations by the set and costume designers, short speeches by Geoff and me, and a question-and-answer period with the cast and production team. After the session proper, we arranged an opportunity for the Grant students to come up onstage to show the actors who played the Mechanicals the part of their choreography that the students had learned. A good

time was had by all, and it was great to see our university actors interacting with interested (and slightly hero-worshipping) fifth graders — not to mention seeing those fifth-graders actively interacting with Shakespeare.

We also attempted other forms of outreach: podcasting and blogging. Unfortunately, due to faulty audio equipment, we were only able to record one podcast. The blog also fell by the wayside as production shifted into high gear, and due to university regulations about writing about student events. With this experience, we hoped that the next time we attempted this kind of project, it might be more successful. Our IT staff was kind enough to post instructions for implementing a similar digiturgy project if another theatre wanted to follow our lead.


This project is a window into what can be accomplished if dramaturgs utilize new technologies to the utmost. Computers are, it seems, taking over the world, and the best thing to do is rush in and find ways to let the technology help us play in new ways, expanding the ways we talk, both to our productions staffs, and to the rest of the world.

Place for Production Plots: props, sound, music, dance, etc.				
Music Plot				
Act	Scene	Group	Music	Possible Songs
I	1	Lovers	Preshow	"Material Girl", Madonna; "Hey Mickey", Toni Basil; "Hot Night", Laura Branigan; "Call Me", Blondie; "Blister in the Sun", Violent Femmes; "Kids in America", Kim Wilde; "Walking on Sunshine", Katrina & the Waves
I	2	Mechanicals	Entrance: movement, upbeat	"Just Can't Get Enough", Depeche Mode
II	1	Faeries	Entrance: movement, rockin'	"Bela Lugosi's Dead", Bauhaus; "Spellbound"
II	2	Faeries	"come now, a roundel and a fairy song"	"Movement of Fear", Tones on Tail, "Spellbound"; "Your Eyes"
IV	1	Faeries	"the tongs and bones"	"Moondance"
IV	1	Faeries	Oberon and Titania dance	"Lullaby", Loreena McKennitt; "E Lucevan"; "Habanera"

Fig. 4.



**Dewberries (the fruit of *Rubus caesius*)** [ed]



A deep purple colored fruit coated with a waxy dew layer. It grows on a plant whose stems are covered with stickers.  
 "Feed him with apricocks and dewberries."  
 Act III, Scene i  
 Image Source: Wikipedia: *Rubus caesius* (Dewberry) growing on Newborough warren. (public domain image)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rubus\\_caesius#/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rubus_caesius#/)  
 -LR

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**Fig (*Ficus carica*)** [ed]



A shrub or tree whose fruit is edible.  
 Green figs were among the fruits offered to Bottom.  
 Act III, Scene i  
 Image Source: Flickr: Fig by antmoose  
<http://flickr.com/photos/antmoose/37614368/>  
 -LR

Fig. 5.

**PETER QUINCE**




**PROLOGUE**



Fig. 6.

- Upload file
- Special pages
- Printable version



In ancient Greek mythology, Theseus was one of the great heroes, ascribed with bringing democracy to Athens among other feats. King Aegeus of Athens married twice and neither of his wives bore him a son. He went to the oracle at Delphi to request guidance from the gods and on his way back to Athens, he rested at Troezen. There, King Pittheus maneuvered Aegeus into sleeping with his daughter, Aethra. Nine months later, Aethra bore Theseus. Myth is unclear about whether Theseus is actually Aegeus's son or the son of Poseidon, god of the sea. When he reached the age of 16, his mother took him outside the city to a large boulder. She said that his father had left him gifts which he could only have when he was old enough to obtain them himself. Theseus moved the rock and found underneath it the sword and sandals of Aegeus. At his mother's behest, he took the items and traveled to Athens to meet his father. On his way to Athens, Theseus encountered six foes.

- **Periphetes:** At Epidaurus, Theseus met Periphetes, a giant with a bronze-coated club who preyed on passing travelers. After some haggling, Theseus got the club away from Periphetes and hit him with it, killing him.
- **Sinis:** Some ways further on the road, Theseus ran afoul of Sinis, a robber and son of Poseidon. His modus operandi was to ask passers-by for help with his task, bending two pine trees towards each other. If a person consented to assist him, he tied the person's wrists, one to each tree. Eventually, weariness would force the person to loosen his grip and then he would be pulled apart as the trees snapped back upright. Theseus tricked Sinis into being bound to the trees and he suffered the same fate as his victims. At this time, he fathered several children with Sinis's daughter Perigouna.
- **Krommyon and the Pig of the Underworld:** When Theseus got to Krommyon, he was asked by the residents to slay a giant sow

Fig. 7.

# I'd Rather Shove a Bodkin in My Nowl or Wear a Bona Roba's Merkin Than Be *That* Kind of Dramaturg

## A DRAMATURGICAL MANIFESTA

by **Carrie Kaplan**

### Introduction

I was not entirely pleased to hear that my friend Kirk Lynn, Co-Artistic Director of the Rude Mechanicals, would be teaching a course in new play dramaturgy. Kirk and I have history. Of the dramaturgical kind.

Two years ago, the Rude Mechanicals visited a class that I was assistant teaching at the University of Texas at Austin. I had long admired the group, and had described them to my students as artists who fully integrate dramaturgy into their process and across their collective. However, when one of my students asked about dramaturgy, Kirk first denied that he was in any way a dramaturg, and then glibly described a dramaturg as “someone who looks up what a bodkin is.” Before I could stop myself I was on my feet yelling, “No!”

On the first day of our class this fall, Kirk re-told the story to the assembled playwrights, designers, and directors. He claimed that he still did not know what a dramaturg is or what a dramaturg does, which struck me as affected ignorance. He sent us off with our readings — including Terry McCabe’s “A Good Director Doesn’t Need a Dramaturg” — and our first assignment: to write about the relation between the readings and our own practice. I paced around my apartment, scrawled the word “Anti” in front of “Dramaturgy” on my course reader, and sent my classmates Michael Zelenak’s response to McCabe. I didn’t feel any better. We could go in circles on Zelenak and McCabe forever — that’s not the point. I felt profoundly misunderstood by an artist I had worked to understand, and whose performance and process struck me as profoundly dramaturgical. It is from this place that I wrote the following manifesta.

Its writing spurred a dialogue, and, in conversation back and forth with Kirk, I have come to realize that it is crucial to understand, claim, and articulate the desires that drive my work to those who make themselves vulnerable to me. From this place, as Kirk wrote in my final journal, “our ideas are not in a duel... they are in a Kenny Loggins song.”

Carrie Kaplan is a PhD student in the Performance as Public Practice Program at the University of Texas at Austin. Her dramaturgical practice includes teaching 400 non-theatre major undergraduates how to love a play like it was born to be loved, writing a dissertation on corruption as a dramaturgical aesthetic, working with the talented MFA playwrights at UT, and devising a Nancy Drew one-woman-show. During her stint as a bi-coastal itinerant intern, she worked at New Dramatists (NY), ACT and Book-It Repertory (WA), Portland Stage Co. (ME), and PCPA Theatrefest (CA). Before writing this piece, she could not define the word “bodkin.”

## The Manifesta

Within the course of the past two weeks, I have resigned from one dramaturgy project — in theory because of time — and found myself unable to refuse another — thus bringing what constitutes “my” time and labor into question.

I’ve been told that a dramaturg has no ego. That a dramaturg is silent, a witness, a short term expert, that the dramaturg is able to do what she does because she has no stake in the production, she is outside, impartial, serves the text, the production, the “ideal” theatre. I’ve read articles about “finding a chair at the table,” dramaturgs as the “useless appendage of the American theatre,” and been referred to as “the smartest person in the room” on more than one occasion in a way that makes me want to vomit in my own mouth. I’ve been told that dramaturgs should NEVER talk to actors, trained instead to write notes that resemble a geisha shuffling backwards out of a room with her head bowed, and told that opening night is the end of my process.

I say, bullshit.

To me, serving the “ideal” theatre doesn’t mean a nihilistic acceptance that the “real world” — and in particular the real world of the regional theatre model — is somehow cut off from a space where every person in the room is a critical thinker and an active participant. I don’t live up in the world of ideas. I bring my own chair, and then I start to wonder why the hell we are all sitting in chairs and why the chairs are ordered that way. Why is the stage manager all by herself at the end of the table? Doesn’t she have one of the most crucial jobs in the show? Shouldn’t she be able to do some exercises with us? Where are those designers going? Doesn’t anyone realize that their script analysis skills, what they know about the spaces, colors, heat, feel, touch, taste, sound, images, metaphors, systems, repetitions, symbols in this play trump anything we think we know? Let’s get rid of the table and rid of the chairs. Let’s be a company! Let’s be equals! Let’s make each other uncomfortable and leave our fingerprints all over each other and all over this script. What do we each know how to do? Who could we invite in here to help us with the things we don’t know? Let’s fall in love with this play and have an orgy every night until we open. Let’s get drunk and screw. Let’s *all* be dramaturgs.

But don’t think this is some kind of benevolent pity-fuck, lover. I’m here because I have something you need and you have something I want. It’s an honest exchange. I have information. Literal textual factual information, but I also know how to teach it. I know how to put research on the body. On your body. I know how to balance the past, the present, and the future on the tip of my tongue, but I want something back for that kind of kiss. I have an ego and an agenda. I want the space and time to do my work. I want workshops with your actors. I want venues for outreach events. I want your time. I want intimacy. I want a relationship. I want to see my notes on stage. I want you to be a little different when I leave you than you were before I came. I want to be a little different than I was before I came. I want you not to need me when I’m gone because I’m under your skin and I’m not going anywhere. I want you to teach me something new. I want to teach myself something new because you need me to. I want you to hug me when you see me months down the road because, really, we’re that close.

AND WHAT DOES THAT MEAN PRAXIS-TICALLY?

I ask myself a lot of questions before I take on a show.

**Do they need me?** Is there something here that I can do? Is there a director coming in that doesn’t know the community? Of actors, of community members, of resources? Is there something or someone else I know that other people don’t? Who can I put them in conversation with? Each other? Who can I bring in that can teach them what the body looks like when it’s gutting a pig? What can we do after? Can we have a dance-athon? A salon? Is there something I can do to keep the conversation going? Can I do that? Do I know people they don’t that can make that happen? Do I have access to funds for these things? Can I get a grant?

**Am I an expert?** Is there something about the form, content, structure, resonance toward the now, adaptation, that I have incredibly specific information and interest in that goes beyond what a smart person could figure out for themselves? Do I have some kind of experience that is going to add to the conversation in the room? Do they want it? Do they not know they want it but still need it?

Will you have a reason to thank me at the end of this process? Will I have given you both knowledge and a skill set? Will you need me just a little bit less? Will we have made the world of theatre just a little bit better?

**Do I have a stake, do I care, do I need them?** Will working on this play deepen my understanding of something I care about? Will it teach me something I don’t know? Will it push me to learn more about my community? Will it make me a better teacher / scholar / artist / writer / dramaturg / collaborator / person? Will I get to *make* something? An event? A choice? A conversation? A process? Do I have agency and free will? Can I make food for your audience and get them to talk about the moment when they realized they were feminists? Can I hand them pieces of paper and make them create the backdrop for the performance so it’s different every night? Is this a playwright whose script makes me weak in the knees and will reading and talking about her script with her over and over make me see the world in a new way? Can I look at your designers’ script analysis?

If I fail completely to change the world, if this process breaks my heart, will it still feel like it was worthwhile?

If the answer is no, then I don’t do it. If it’s yes, it’s hard to say no. And you know, in the ideal world I wouldn’t have a job, and yes we’d all be dramaturgs. But for the time being, I will keep working until I’ve made myself irrelevant.

# THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR

## In Residence as “Master of Verse” at Richmond Shakespeare Festival

**by Joanne Zipay**  
**edited by Lauren Beck**

As Founder and Artistic Director of Judith Shakespeare Company NYC, Joanne Zipay has served as Director / Dramaturg for one half of Shakespeare’s canon to-date, including the entire ten-play History Cycle. Ms. Zipay holds an MFA in classical acting from the Old Globe Theatre / University of San Diego, and has worked as a theatre artist, producer, and teacher for over twenty-five years across the USA and abroad. She was invited to be a panel member at the 2002 International Dramaturgy Symposium at Mt. Holyoke College, MA. She is a faculty member and director at Pace University in NYC and Collin College in Dallas, TX. Judith Shakespeare Company is dedicated to expanding the presence of women in Shakespeare performance, and also hosts the annual RESURGENCE play development series, which gives life to new plays written in verse and heightened language. Visit <[www.judithshakespeare.org](http://www.judithshakespeare.org)>.

Lauren Beck is an MA student in Theatre Arts at San Diego State University and the associate editor for Review. She recently served as dramaturg for the SDSU Theatre production of Charles L. Mee’s *Hotel Cassiopeia* (visit her blog at <<http://hotelcassiopeia.blogspot.com>>), and is currently dramaturg for *Good Boys* by Jane Martin with Mo’olelo, a performing arts company in San Diego.

*In the Summer of 2007, Richmond Shakespeare Festival in Virginia (Grant Mudge, Artistic Director) was awarded an LMDA Residency Grant making it possible for me to serve as “Master of Verse” on their production of Henry IV Part 1. Following the lead of the Globe Theatre in London, Richmond employs for each production a Master of Play (director) and Master of Verse (dramaturg/verse coach). This was an interesting experience, since as founder and Artistic Director of the Judith Shakespeare Company in New York City, I generally serve as director/dramaturg on most productions. Although I had previously served strictly as dramaturg, I had never worked with a director I didn’t know, at an unfamiliar theatre. The following selections from my journal focus on the ins and outs of finding and defining just the right niche in this situation. Fortunately, I had great collaborators, so in spite of natural disagreements, we overcame the obstacles along the way, and the production was a huge success.*

Joanne Zipay, October 2008

Jan-March: Began correspondence with James Alexander Bond, “Master of Play.” We learned we’re both very respectful of the text, but also not afraid to work quick-and-dirty. James hasn’t worked on any of the Histories before, and I’ve done them all with my company. We discussed that both of us should propose cuts (and the combining of characters) when looking at the play again.

Tues, June 5: First rehearsal. I gave the cast a very brief intro to the history preceding the play, complete with genealogy charts and map. After listening to the play read from beginning to end, paying attention to voices and the comfort level with the verse, I’m concerned that not enough people understand the details of the political situation, and I know that will be a big part of my work.

Sat, June 9: I requested a tour of the performance site — Agecroft Hall — a real Tudor mansion transplanted to Richmond in the 1920s. I took a good look at the playing area and the audience area in the



Daryl Clark Phillips as Falstaff, Jacqueline O'Connor as Mistress Quickly, and Phil Brown as Prince Hal in the Richmond Shakespeare Festival's 2007 production of *Henry IV Part 1*, directed by James Alexander Bond. *Photo: Eric Dobbs.*



Fight call on the Richmond Shakespeare Festival's outdoor courtyard stage at Agecroft Hall, Richmond, VA. *Photo: James Alexander Bond.*

outside courtyard. The acoustics are excellent. I don't think the audience will have any trouble hearing anyone who projects and enunciates.

Mon, June 11: The work I'm doing with the actors one-on-one seems to be making a difference — they seem confident and at ease. Gave the note that I'll be on everyone's case about consonants (esp. final consonants), and that the deadly koosh ball will be tossed at anyone who continually mispronounces words!

Tues, June 12: We had our first scansion argument with an actor, but James agreed with my proposal for the line, which bodes well; both of our jobs will be easier if we have a united front. James talked about seriousness with regard to Falstaff, and humor with regard to Hotspur — both great points. Hotspur is one of my favorite characters in the canon. I feel that actors and directors don't always figure him out, but that his character is critical to the structure and the effect of the play. It's all in the text, beautifully crafted by Shakespeare.

Hard when you're not the director and can't just take charge and work until we get it right. Frustrating to have to sit back sometimes and let the director do his work, even if you see potential roadblocks. Finding when to speak up and when to let go is the challenge. I can give advice and guidance through the text and help find clarity. It's all so integrated that if something in the text is "misinterpreted," as I see it, then the scenes, and potentially the play, cannot fully work. But this is James's show primarily, and there are things I'll learn by not forcing my views on it.



Phil Brown as Prince Hal and Daryl Clark Phillips as Falstaff. *Photo: Eric Dobbs.*

Thurs, June 14: Everyone got notes from me on verse technique and pronunciation, and the koosh ball did fly once or twice. When we came to the Hotspur/Lady Percy scene, I reminded them that it must be a scene about treason or else it's in danger of being a scene detached from the play. This [reminder] also helps to make sure the women characters are not shortchanged, as modern actors and directors sometimes overlook the fact that the women are political animals too. This actually makes the scenes more exciting — bringing the play to life with the strongest choices, driven directly by the dramatic action of the play.

Thurs, June 28: Had to speak to James about the Welsh. Since this [issue] would seem to fall in my domain to solve, although I'm not a voice teacher or dialect coach, I assured James I'd find out how to put all the pieces together. First of all, our Lady Glendower speaks Gaelic and has a lovely Gaelic lullaby which James wants to use in the scene. But our Glendower is using a Welsh accent. Plus, Lady Glendower has interpolated some Gaelic lines for herself and Glendower to speak, which sounds extremely different from the Welsh — jarringly so. James had suggested a “blending” of these various things, a solution I'm not comfortable with. But after some discussion, we decided on Gaelic song, Welsh lines. So now, on to the lines.

Fri, June 29: James knows an actress who can help us with the Welsh, so I emailed her the lines I have in phonetic Welsh from my last production of the play, along with the scene as Shakespeare wrote it. She should have something for us in a few days.

James and I still disagree about some things, but as a director, he has

to do his work. It's a dramaturg's job to “stand up for Shakespeare” and “defend the script,” but our differences may well be just taste or vision, so I will have to step back and pick my battles. Always a challenge.

Fri, July 6: In rehearsal this evening we were reviewing some of the war scenes in order to put together the acting scenes with the combat crossovers and fights. I was useful as a dramaturg by keeping track of the playwright's design for the scenes, clarifying what's happening, and therefore demonstrating how things need to flow in order to make sense.

Thurs, July 12: I really enjoyed listening to our Hotspur and our Hal speaking the verse in our preview tonight. They used the rhythms of the speech beautifully — it made me feel proud of the work we've all done. Oh yes, and in the program they listed me in one place as “Mater of the Verse” — so I'm “Yo Mama of the Verse!” Love it!

After Opening: The reviews of the show have been extremely positive, especially the rave in the daily paper, which actually mentioned strong work by the Master of Verse. The reviews also stated that this was the best RSF show to date. I believe this is because James and I trusted the text, got our actors to do the same, and together we all brought it to life with clarity and vitality.

# Theatre, Tears, and Rock

## Dramaturging *The Onion Cellar* at the American Repertory Theatre

by Neena Arndt

This article is part of an ongoing collaboration between LMDA and the Dramaturgy Focus Group of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE). The Dramaturgy FG's Debut Panel holds an annual competition. Papers submitted by talented Early Career Dramaturgs from across North America are selected by a jury of senior dramaturgs. For three years now, Review has invited debutantes to revise and submit their conference papers for editorial review and subsequent publication. Review is committed to publishing thoughtful, high-caliber work by early-career scholar-dramaturgs.



Amanda Palmer in the American Repertory Theatre's world premiere production of *The Onion Cellar*. Photo by Sheri Hausey for the ART.

Neena Arndt Bio.

In his 1959 novel *The Tin Drum*, Günter Grass describes a nightclub called the Onion Cellar in which patrons don't drown their sorrows in alcohol, but instead chop onions to stimulate their tears. These onion-tears prime the pump for emotional release. Grass writes:

The host handed them a little cutting board — pig or fish, a paring knife for 80 pfennigs, and for 12 marks an ordinary field-, garden-, and kitchen- variety onion, and induced them to cut their onions smaller and smaller until the juice — what did the onion juice do? It did what the world, and the sorrows of the world, could not do: it brought forth a round, human tear. It made them cry. At last they were able to cry again. To cry properly, without restraint, to cry like mad. The tears came and washed everything away. The rain came. The dew. (525)

At the American Repertory Theatre, we aimed to create a real-life version of Grass's fictional club. The show's seed was sown in the late 1990s when Amanda Palmer, then a student at Wesleyan University, read *The Tin Drum* for the first time. Intrigued by this mysterious club, the young singer/songwriter tucked the idea away. In the fall of 2000, Amanda met drummer Brian Viglione, and the pair formed a band called the Dresden Dolls. Three years later, they released their first CD, featuring songs penned by Amanda. (Their two best-known tunes are "Coin-Operated Boy" and "Girl Anachronism.") Amanda and Brian describe their style as "Brechtian punk cabaret" a term Amanda coined because she was afraid that others would dismiss her as merely "goth."

Amanda and Brian's glamorous anger and theatrical angst soon earned them legions of fans. Although Dresden Dolls fans are all ages, the most vocal, active devotees are the teenagers, who arrive for concerts in droves, all anguish and verve, sporting lots and lots of black eyeliner. These teenagers write letters to Amanda, make drawings and collages for her, imitate her style of dress, send her tracks of their own music, and friend her on MySpace. For thousands of artsy, punk teens who loathe the smack and pop of the latest bubble gum band, Amanda Palmer is a godsend and goddess.



Amanda Palmer and Brian Viglione in the American Repertory Theatre's world premiere production of *The Onion Cellar*. Photo by Sheri Hausey for the ART.

In 2004, just as the Dresden Doll's popularity was exploding, Robert Woodruff, then artistic director of the American Repertory Theatre, listened to their debut album. Entranced, he called Amanda to inquire about a possible collaboration. Amanda, recalling her college fantasy of creating Günter Grass's *Onion Cellar*, signed on for the project. The Dresden Dolls would be the house band in the *Onion Cellar*, and together with director Marcus Stern and a cast of nine actors, they would create a club. The *Onion Cellar* was slated for the 2006-2007 season.

I joined the project in late 2005, when I was a first-year MFA student and the show was only a germ of an idea. Right away, we were faced with some big questions: first, to what extent would this be a piece of theatre, and to what extent would it be a nightclub? What's the difference, anyway, between a nightclub and theatre? What sorts of things would happen in this club?

We started to answer our questions in December 2005, when the cast and artistic team gathered for a two-week workshop. The actors improvised scenes inspired by the Dresden Dolls' music, and everyone tossed out ideas for characters and situations. My fellow dramaturg Ryan McKittrick and I realized quickly that one of our major roles in the process would be to make sure that the evening had some kind of structure — but where would this structure come from? Narrative? Music?

In the months following the workshop, ideas flew fast, but little clarity emerged. By the time we began rehearsals in November 2006, it was clear that the piece wasn't going to be text or narrative driven, though it would have some spoken text and some narrative through

lines. The set design helped to clarify our ideas somewhat. The piece was going up in the ART's flexible second space, the Zero Arrow Theatre. Designer Christine Jones transformed the space into a nightclub, complete with a functioning bar that served beer, wine, and soft drinks. The audience was seated at cabaret tables and on barstools.

Despite the new clarity that the set design gave us, we still had a lot of questions. Such as: What is the role of the band within the club? In what way do the music and lyrics relate to the action? How is this night different from other nights at the *Onion Cellar*? Does the audience participate in the action? Will the actors, in a real sense, work in the club — i.e. serving drinks? One of the biggest questions was: will we actually have real, physical onions in the show? Giving cutting boards and knives to audience members seemed hazardous. The stench of onions wouldn't make for a pleasant evening at the theatre, either. Despite these problems, some felt that the show needed onions so the audience could have the physical experience that Günter Grass describes in his novel. What is the *Onion Cellar* without onions?

With hundreds of ideas on the table, we started to find images and snippets of text that resonated with each other. Through brief vignettes, several stories emerged: an old alcoholic relives the death of his daughter, whose drunken demise was a result of his neglect. A bartender strikes up a conversation with a girl who hides her body under a bear costume. A geeky misfit named Onion Boy finds his soul mate, Mute Girl. An MC tells stories about his father's firm belief that men should never cry. A jovial tourist couple reveals that behind their cheerfulness is the sorrow of nine miscarriages and no



live births. There were also a penguin playing the drums, a man whose body is bound by white tape, and doppelgangers of Amanda and Brian.

We played with these snippets of stories, putting them in different orders, underscoring them with music, and sometimes having multiple vignettes happening at once in different parts of the space. None of the stories were fully fleshed out, but each was enough that we got a sense of the characters' heartbreak or joy. The audience's imagination would fill in the rest. As a dramaturg, my main role was to take the ideas of many people and help shape them into something cohesive. I attended every rehearsal and took copious notes, keeping track of what worked and what didn't. Each night after the actors went home, I discussed the day's work with the rest of the artistic team. We cut, added and modified constantly, right up until opening night.

Concerned though we were with the snippets of stories, we knew that the heart of the show had to be the Dresden Dolls' music. Their songs are at once poetic and furious, amped up and mild, blending chaotic chords with lyrics that surprise, shock, and incite laughter. We chose a selection of songs in much the same way that musicians choose a set before a concert. We started off with an upbeat song to rev up the crowd; as the show reached its emotional depths, we utilized the Dresden Dolls' weightier songs. Periodically, we leavened the show with up-tempo music and humor. The tone of the show wasn't merely "sad" — we recognized that myriad human emotions can cause tears. The music aided us in our task of guiding the audience through the emotional experience of the evening.

We didn't want that experience to be passive. We toyed with ideas for involving the audience — everything from inviting them to slow dance on stage to asking them to keep their cell phones on and calling them in the middle of the show. Having nixed those ideas and a dozen others, we decided to kill two birds with one stone: audience participation and lobby display. We had the actors hand out slips of paper with questions on them for the audience to answer: "When was the last time you cried?" "Are you more like your mother, or your father?" "To whom did you lose your virginity, and where?" We designed the questions so that they could be answered quickly, concisely, and anonymously, yet would elicit interesting answers. The audience responses were collected, and hung in the lobby. By the end of the run, there were several thousand, a collective trust of human feelings.

If the show and lobby display were unusual, the audience proved even more so — the usual blue-hairs turned out, but so did the neon-pink-hairs. Fifteen-year-old Dresden Dolls fans sat at four-person cabaret tables with sixty-year-old ART subscribers: Harvard faculty, doctors from Mass General. Dresden Dolls fans came from all over the country and the world to see the show, flying to Boston from Seattle and Atlanta and Sidney. The lobby, especially on weekend night performances, pulsed with young, raw energy. Once inside the theatre, the crowds cheered, shouted, and waved their cell phones as though they were at a rock concert — as, in fact, they sort of were.

Indeed, we had rock and raucousness, but ultimately, no onions. In the last week or so before opening, the onion debate grew heated. Some were zealously pro-onion, some anti-onion, and some favored a middle ground, in which there would be one ritual onion chop at the top of the show. The idea of cutting onions became a metaphor for catharsis, rather than a physical means of reaching it. We decided that the onion, really, is the middle man: a way to access the real feelings. We realized that if the experience we'd created was authentic, nobody would need an onion at all.

#### Work Cited

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Thomas Derrah and Brian Viglione in the American Repertory Theatre's world premiere production of *The Onion Cellar*. Photo by Sheri Hausey for the ART.