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Review: A Publication of LMDA, the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, volume 17, issue 1

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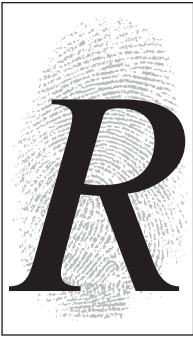
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Review

A Publication of LMDA,
the Literary Managers
and Dramaturgs
of the Americas

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Fall/Winter 2006

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EDITOR'S PAGE

A note from new LMDA President, Brian Quirt

Dear LMDA...

At the Minneapolis conference, I spoke about some of my goals for LMDA over the next two years. These include further expanding the membership (and opening our doors to colleagues in other disciplines), enriching our conversation about the making of theatre, an emphasis on international exchange, a commitment to diversity of form, culture and content, and renewed regional activity across North America. LMDA's Board recently ratified a new Three Year Plan which will continue to increase LMDA's profile, accomplishments, and services to its membership. But you have a role in that as well.

LMDA thrives on the contribution of its members. I urge you to volunteer on a committee, drive a new initiative, create a new activity. If you want to be a part of LMDA, please contact me or Louise or your regional rep, or a member of the Board or Executive.

There is one thing you can do right now: invite a colleague to become an LMDA member. We want to expand LMDA's membership, because there are theatre artists across North America whose voices should be part of our conversations on the listserv and at our conferences. Recommend LMDA to a student, an emerging dramaturg, or to an established artist you'd like to see at an LMDA event.

We will benefit from their contribution to our discussions (and, almost as important, from their membership fee!). Please take a moment to send the LMDA website link to a colleague and help LMDA grow.

And take a moment today to put next year's conference in Toronto — June 21–24, 2007 — in your date book. See you then.

Brian.

And, from the Editor...

Just a brief word of introduction to this issue. For some time now, *Review* has been in the process of outgrowing its previous incarnation as the newsletter of LMDA, and trying to take on a new moniker. Names like "journal" or "magazine" still seem a bit grand to me, but at well over 30 pages, this issue joins a growing body of back issues that weigh in at well over the scale of content suggested by the word "newsletter."

This issue also features what I (along with the LMDA administration) hope will be regular content: articles of a fairly substantial length. Quite a few back issues have included content of more than 500 words, but with this issue, *Review* is making a commitment to including two article-length pieces in at least every other issue. A small step, but a significant one for a publication that's still "hand-made" by the editor and the occasional helpful volunteer.

In terms of content, this issue features the writing of a large number of talented early career dramaturgs. Our conference overview pieces

demonstrate the valuable perspective of ECDs (though not exclusively), along with two terrific feature articles contributed by ECDs. These latter articles are drawn from the Debut Panel of the Dramaturgy Focus Group at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education. This juried session always produces high-caliber work, and the articles here are exceptional examples of what I hope will be a lasting connection between our organizations. My thanks to Cindy SoRelle, veteran mentor of ATHE's Dramaturgy debutantes.

This early career work stands alongside the work of established figures in our field. Mark Bly has assembled many voices from LMDA's delegation to the Gateway to the Americas festival in Mexico City; and a trio of pieces celebrate the Lessing Award, given to Michael Lupu at the annual conference in Minneapolis.

Lastly, as part of her new position on Prime Minister Quirt's new executive committee, Shelley Orr has been reassigned from *Review* to focus specifically on LMDA's internal and external communications. Of course, *Review* is part of the way that LMDA communicates, both with its members and with the wider world, so Shelley's association with *Review* is not likely to cease, though you may notice a greater proportion of singular first-person pronouns than in the seven issues that Shelley and I produced together.

As always, drop me a line with questions, comments, and your proposals — what are YOU writing for the next issue of *Review*?

D.J.

Review

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Inquiries from prospective contributors are encouraged. All inquiries may be directed to D.J. Hopkins.

"D.J. Hopkins" <dhopkins@mail.sdsu.edu>.

Review no longer does Regional Updates. Regional Update inquiries should be directed to your LMDA regional representative.

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Think Dramaturgically, Act Locally!

A Conference Overview

by Cristina Killingsworth

Dear LMDA,

I've written this conference wrap-up to best encompass the Minneapolis LMDA experience, but obviously I can only speak on behalf of what I've experienced. Please excuse the informality of it all! I hope this allows those who couldn't make it a glimpse into the conference weekend!

Wednesday July 19, 2006

Heaps of dramaturgs flocked into the twin cities (increasing the per capita IQ level, of course) and found their way to various housing establishments. Some stayed in hotels, but since ECDs are, in general, lacking in funds, we found other means of shelter for the weekend. Some stayed at Augsburg College in the dormitories, others found friends to mooch off in the city, and Lauren Ignaut (a fellow ECD) opened her home in Minneapolis to a few lucky interns!

Thursday July 20, 2006

Registration was at noon on Thursday, so after some much needed sleep we all made it to the new Guthrie! We received a package of information (including maps, schedules, and popular dining) and the coveted Target bags, and signed up for our Guthrie tour. The new building is huge and overwhelming!

If you haven't seen it, I recommend taking a look at the various spaces:



Allison Horsley, Xtina Killingsworth, Sarah, Janna, and Julie Dubiner at the LMDA Conference Bar in Minneapolis.

Photo: Ilana Brownstein

<http://www.guthrietheater.org/NewGuthrie/PhotoGallery/tabid/153/Default.aspx>

After our tours were over, we headed to a puppetry performance by the Open Eye Figure Theatre. They have put together a series known as 'The Driveway Tour' in order to bring together different communities around Minneapolis. A host family is chosen and is obligated to invite everyone in their community (not only the families that they know). Then the puppetry troupe performs a piece such as *The Adventures of Katie Tomatie*, the show we were lucky to see. It's a great way to promote community togetherness as well as their new theatre!

After a brief break, we headed into a Guthrie rehearsal room to see Kevin Kling give his keynote address. He is a local Minneapolis playwright, actor, musician, and storyteller whose plays have been performed at the Humana Festival, the Goodman, the Public, and basically all over the Twin Cities. His thought-provoking address about using storytelling to overcome obstacles was poignant and timely. Kling embodied the spirit of the Minneapolis theatre scene and thought globally while retaining his local charm.

<http://www.kevinkling.com/>

That was the end of scheduled activities for Thursday, but many of us headed to shows around the city. I went to the Guthrie preview of *The Great Gatsby* in the new theatre, though the PlayLabs show was the most heavily attended that night.

After the curtains closed, we headed to the conference bar, The Town Hall Brewery. The ECDs grabbed a table and chatted with each other and our amazing representative, Julie Dubiner. Though nothing official was discussed, it was great to have a conversation with a peer and NOT have to explain what a dramaturg is!

Friday July 21, 2006

We started off the day with a regional breakfast. See who's in your region:

http://www.lmda.org/blog/_WebPages/MemberProfiles.html

We discussed issues pertinent to our areas, so if you are interested in knowing what came up, feel free to contact someone from your region on that list!

After breakfast we all piled onto two charter busses and toured the twin cities for about three hours. Our tour guides (local Minneapolis/St. Paul thespians or critics) discussed the different theatres in the city and how they affect the cultural and historical make-up. It was great to hear about and see all the exciting work that's being produced in such an amazing theatre town! There are many, many theatres ranging from the Lort A Guthrie to small store-front spaces. We saw Penumbra Theatre Company, an African American troupe founded in a community center where August Wilson staged many of his works (<http://www.penumbraetheatre.org/>), Mixed Blood Theatre, a company dedicated to the spirit of MLK who stage many multicultural pieces and use theatre as a vehicle for social change (<http://www.mixedblood.com/>), The Jungle Theatre where I am My Own Wife was currently playing (<http://www.jungletheater.com/>), and many many many more! The Twin Cities is second only to New York in per capita attendance at theatre and arts events, so check it out one day if you have the chance.

We stopped at Minnehaha Park half-way through the tour. Not only is it fun to say, but its scenery and waterfalls were beautiful!!

Finally we headed over to the Playwrights Center for a pizza lunch and lots of mingling! When our tummies were full, the 'turgs gathered together to listen to a panel of local actors discuss the Minneapolis Theatre scene and their relationship with dramaturgs. Certain questions were raised such as, 'What can a dramaturg do to maximize an actor's use of an actor's packet?' 'What would you consider the best organization method?' Etc. As an early career dramaturg, I found it interesting to see the gap in communication between dramaturgs and actors. However, just as we were finally getting to the meat of the issue, time was up and we headed back to the Guthrie. I hope that some of the seasoned dramaturgs intend to follow up on this pertinent issue!

Back at the Guthrie, we broke into two different groups for the Dramaturg Driven Sessions. One group went to the 'Travel and Dramatic Imagination' panel, a discussion with playwrights funded by a grant from the Bush Foundation to travel anywhere they chose in the world and write a play for the Guthrie. Eleven playwrights were selected and journeyed to places such as Cambodia, Turkey, and the Palestinian occupied territories. But I didn't go to the workshop, so unfortunately that's all I know! I did, however, attend 'Dramaturgy Across the Pond,' a panel where dramaturgs from England and Ireland discussed dramaturgical trends in their countries. To begin with, the Dramaturgs' Network is their LMDA equivalent, so go check out the website!

<http://ee.dramaturgy.co.uk/index.php/site/front/>

The major issue that they outlined in the panel was the overeducating and understaffing of dramaturgs. More and more universities are graduating young dramaturgs but the theatres are not hiring them. Though this is a problem for many young ECDs in America, the dramaturgs in the UK are facing a similar, if not more daunting problem. I must say, the panel was slightly disheartening. However, the organization of the Dramaturgs' Network and the Literary Management Forum are promising steps forward. It is great that Liz Engelman and other LMDA members have taken the time to create a union between dramaturgs in the U.S. and overseas. We should take steps to further this alliance in the future!

I was a dramaturgical delinquent and skipped the last session, 'Twin Cities Ingredients: Sharing the Pie,' so I'm sorry I can't contribute with my experiences.

Friday night held more show-watching at PlayLabs, opening night of *Gatsby*, and of course we all found our way to the conference bar!

Saturday July 22, 2006

We once again were welcomed into the Guthrie with a delicious (and sinfully sweet) breakfast! We were able to meet as an ECD group and discuss the issues relevant to us. Julie facilitated the discussion and many questions were asked. The ideas of posting veteran dramaturgs' resumes online, updating the internship catalogue, what to do and where to go post undergrad and graduate school, creating a catalogue that will help us further understand what degree tracks are possible for grad school, what our options are if we cannot afford to intern for free, and much more were discussed. Julie took down all of our concerns and addressed the ones that she could. We all decided it was up to us, not Julie to assist with these issues, and so in the near future we will begin to update the ECD section of the LMDA website!

Most ECDs, institutional, and freelance dramaturgs headed to the 'Negotiating Skills' workshop. I know many of us found it informative and thought provoking, especially with the idea of negotiating salary for the first time looming over an ECD's head. A great packet was passed out which can be made available if anyone is interested. Also, for further reading, the moderator recommended the book *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, by Roger Fisher, Bruce Patton, and William L. Ury.

http://www.amazon.com/Getting-Yes-Negotiating-Agreement-Without/dp/0395631246/sr=1-1/qid=1160158736/ref=sr_1_1/02-9225855-1680950?ie=UTF8&s=books

Finally we began our breakout sessions, and though we had three choices, I can only speak of one! Session one consisted of 'Board Games: Dramaturgs and Boards of Directors,' 'Show Us the Money: Dramaturgs and Funders,' and 'Analyze This: Methods of Play Analysis.' I chose the second workshop looking for someone to fund me through my fabulous future endeavors (I'm allowed to dream!). Unfortunately, I think I chose the wrong session because there wasn't much discussed that was relevant to me. If you are from Minnesota you should look into the Bush Foundation's grants. The woman from TCG that was going to speak couldn't make it, so it was basically only geared towards Minnesotans and Canadians (of which I am neither). Oh well, you live, you learn!

Next, I had a choice between 'Prospero's Books: Dramaturgs and Archives,' 'Beyond Adjectives: Dramaturgs and Marketing,' and 'Who Let the 'Turgs Out: Dramaturgs and the Community.' I chose to head to the archival panel with Geoff Proehl, D.J. Hopkins, and Alan Lanthrop, the head of the Performing Arts Archives at the University of Minnesota. Alan handed out a sheet outlining which types of records hold permanent research value and expressed his hatred of multiple duplicate copies being archived! He articulated his concerns with the preservation of digitized archives and electronic communications. Geoff Proehl addressed this issue as he discussed his work in archiving the LMDA history and his work at the University of Puget

Sound. Also on the panel was ECD Haviva Avirom of the University of Puget Sound, who had created an archive of the UPS production of *Midsummer*. To see her great work, go to

<http://oberon.ups.edu>

They are digitally archiving while the production is still in progress! Finally, D.J. Hopkins spoke about his work teaching Shakespeare through performance, and contemplated whether a single stage production can ever be archived or if it can only exist in its moment of living history. Therefore, teaching the classics is most effective when the students are able to experience the performance and literary aspects of the play.

Archiving is a conversation with the future and it is worth preserving anything that could help the future better understand the pursuits of the past.

Next, we had a box lunch provided for us by the Guthrie! I'm telling you, the organizers totally hooked us up with food this year! It was a nice relaxing break on the never-ending bridge overlooking the river and a good time to chat and chew with the colleagues we had been reunited with or met throughout the weekend. The informality of the lunch gave us an opportunity to mingle with dramaturgs who fell outside of the ECD category.

The final Breakout Session consisted of 'Lost (and Found) in Translation and Adaptation,' 'Hooked on Classics: Old and New,' and 'Come Together Right Now: The Multigenerational Audience Revolution.' I went to the classics panel and I found it to be extremely interesting! Bradley Greenwald of *Jeune Lune* in Minneapolis discussed the theatre's work making classic operas new and innovative. Therefore, even people who know the opera won't know what is coming next, which thrills, surprises, and sometimes alienates. He explained that they are trying to have their audiences look at opera in a new way.

Michael Lupu characterized classics as fixed stars that we gaze at all the time. Many news plays are comets that disintegrate. In reference to dramaturging a classic, he stated, 'Theatre is about imagining and reimagining. It doesn't matter if they had zippers during *Don Juan*, it's how you imagine the pants they wore.' The classics are plays that can be reimagined and withstand the test of time. These reimaginings, he said, are as if you are on a different planet but looking at the same fixed star. As for dramaturging a new play, he thought that a playwright can do anything and put anything anywhere as long as he does it well. Shakespeare has so many 'atrocities' in his plays that we as dramaturgs would have fixed.

Many questions came up: As dramaturgs, do we owe it to an audience to show the original version of a show before an adaptation or reimagining? But what exactly is the 'original' version? How do you know the direction the playwright wanted to go? Does it matter? This sparked a somewhat heated debate with most people coming to the consensus of whatever you do, you must keep in mind the spirit of the play.

The general meeting was next, but I was incredibly tired and skipped it to take a nap.

After getting all dolled up, we headed to Solera, a Spanish restaurant, for our banquet! Though the sangria was nothing to write home

about, the food was good and the company was great! Michael Lupu was honored with the third-ever Lessing Award for Lifetime Achievement in Dramaturgy. His speech was sweet and hilarious with contributions from Joe Dowling (Artistic Director at the Guthrie), Liviu Ciulei (the former AD of the Guthrie, who hired Lupu) sent a letter in absentia, and Geoff Proehl. Amy Steele and Melinda C. Finberg were awarded the coveted Elliott Hayes award for their work in dramaturgy. Liz Engelman passed the torch of the presidency to Brian Quirt and announced that the conference will be held in Toronto next year!

Though there was an unfortunate shortage in dessert, it was still a great time!

On to the conference bar for drinks and more mingling! If you ever get to a conference, don't miss the bar scene after a long day of lectures and workshops! It's the best time to sit and talk to tons of wise and knowledgeable 'turgs!

The next morning we all crawled out of bed for the last breakfast at the Guthrie! From there we saw an amazing PowerPoint presentation by Porter Anderson, senior editor of CNN's Pipeline. He is hoping to start something similar for the arts by broadcasting performances over the internet. Then he signed on from Paris for a question / answer session over the phone. Some thought this would be a great way to broadcast our shows, others were more skeptical. He assured that no copyrights would be infringed and that it would bring audiences to the theatre rather than keep them away. Regardless, he claims that the internet should be further used to our advantage and dramaturgs can keep an audience informed through posting resources online. Imagine how awesome it would be to see a show at the Scotland Fringe from your apartment in Austin. We'll see what the future brings!

After the official conference wrap-up, we had our own ECD conference wrap-up while eating omelets and massive Caesar salads! It was a long and productive meal! However, we're still in conversation among ourselves and with Julie about where we want to go and what we want to do, so you should be hearing more about this in the near future. If you have any ideas, please feel free to voice them!

For more info on the conference:

<http://www.lmda.org/blog/Conference>

And of course, none of this could have been done without the thankless work of the organizers of the conference and our fabulous past president, Liz Engelman! I hope this overview helps you understand the 2006 LMDA conference experience! Can't wait to see y'all in Toronto!!!

Best, Cristina

Cristina Killingsworth is an undergraduate at the University of Texas at Austin. She is pursuing majors through the Liberal Arts Honors program in Middle Eastern Studies and Humanities with a focus on dramaturgy. She is in the process of writing her honors thesis on post-revolutionary Iranian theatre. Cristina has worked as a production dramaturg at the State Theatre Company and several University of Texas shows in Austin, TX.

I Was **MUGGED** at My First LMDA Conference

by Adriana Bucz

My first few moments in the main lobby of the Guthrie are spent in fear. Pure, unadulterated fear. The building itself is an imposing structure, but worse than that are the dramaturgs crowding around me, all excitedly chattering away. I feel small and unimportant. I don't think I qualify as a dramaturg. I've only taken one class on the subject (where my professor, DD Kugler, forced us all to join LMDA as a requirement of participating). My hand is being shaken by big names in the world of dramaturgy, names I previously knew only from articles and book covers.

I meet another newcomer who has the exact same stunned expression on her face, and we attend a puppet show in a hallway, which has dramaturgs of all ages and experience levels sprawled on the floor together, singing out loud. Then we head to keynote speaker Kevin Kling. He speaks about accidents and audiences, about community and compassion. He uses storytelling as a means of conversation with his audience; a two-way venture. Just when I think I have it figured out, dramaturgy surprises me again.

Liz Engelman asks the first-timers to stand up. We by far outnumber everyone else in the room. My typical newcomer fears start to dissipate. That night at the conference bar, instead of sitting at the Early Career table, I squeeze in beside Kugler, Brian Quirt, Lenora Brown, Paul Walsh, and other 'experienced' 'turgs. I want to soak up everything that is said, and end up shocked by how much everyone wants to hear about me and what I do. Our table stays out late and keeps chatting. This is about the connectedness of theatre folk; you sit down at a table of strangers and say, 'Hi, My Name is ... and This is Why I Came Here ... and This is Where my Work is At Right Now.' I answer 'I don't know' to a lot of questions. But so does everyone else. We mull the possibilities together.

The second day begins with a regional breakfast. I'm in the region known as 'Canada.' I'm beginning to see the differences in Canadian and American dramaturgy, and it's a wonderful opportunity to connect with other dramaturgs working in my country. It feels like a group of old friends meeting for coffee, even though I've just met most of the people at my table. We head onto a fun bus tour of Minneapolis-St. Paul theatres, which is a bit depressing when I compare the multitude of theatres I see with the handful of spaces I can think of back home in Vancouver. My friend Ashley and I talk about how we could push theatre to new limits. From what I hear on the tour, each theatre in Minneapolis seems to have its own aesthetics and own passion and mission. I want the same for my own theatre back home. How can I avoid conforming to one theatrical type for the sake of funding or audience? We don't come up with answers, but

we keep asking questions. I'm not just getting inspired in my study of dramaturgy, but in my conceptualization of theatre (and maybe there's no difference between the two).

We head over to the Playwright's Theatre Centre for lunch and a lecture. A group of us sprawl on the lawn and continue our chatter. We are always telling stories to each other. We are always making each other laugh. We are opening doors through conversation. This is the real conference. This is why you go.

At the end of the day, Ashley, Kugler, and I end up at a very expensive and fancy steakhouse, which Kugler insists is as important as any one-hour conference lecture. I agree with him wholeheartedly. As Ashley and I walk home from the conference bar that night, we are in high spirits, talking excitedly. Two men run past us and grab my purse, which gets hooked on my elbow, dragging me along with it. A long story short, I end up in the emergency room with one fewer purse and a fractured elbow. However, I can recommend this to you: if you're going to get mugged, always do it in front of someone with stage management training. And get Kugler to come to the emergency room; he can amuse you for hours.

For the rest of the conference I sport a fancy sling and half-cast, and am slightly high on painkillers. This actually works in my favour. I attain a miniature version of dramaturgical celebrity. Mark Bly comes up and introduces himself to me and we swap mugging stories (and I think talking to Mark Bly might be worth a mugging). For the rest of the conference, there is no more standing around wishing I had something to say. I just have to point to the cast and say, 'Yeah, I was mugged last night. You?'

Dramaturgy, as I read over and over again, is about conversation. The conferences are no different. The panels and lectures are terrific, but the best moments are in between, when you're standing in line for coffee, grabbing a beer at the end of the night, packed onto a bus with too many 'turgs, or even waiting around in an emergency room at 2am. Sure, I won't forget the mugging, and my elbow still has a long way to go to heal, but I won't forget the stories either. Not even two types of extra-strength painkillers could wipe those out.

Adriana Bucz is a recent graduate from theatre studies at Simon Fraser University's School for the Contemporary Arts. She is the co-founder of Craning Neck, a process- and ensemble-based theatre troupe currently operating out of Vancouver, Canada. She currently works as an actor, director, producer, is making small steps as a playwright, and has just embarked on her first adventure in freelance dramaturgy.

First-Timer **Fragments**

by Sarah Stanley

First of all. I had a great time. I met some wonderful people and reconnected with some wonderful people. I also learned a lot, both locally and globally. And there are a couple of people — who will go unnamed — that would never forgive me if I failed to mention that a deeply dramaturgical discourse was had at a disturbing (and fun) restaurant in Mall of the Americas.

Minneapolis. I couldn't believe it. An e-vite from out of the blue. Minneapolis. I exaggerate on two fronts. In the first instance, it was a dark December day, when the invitation arrived (there goes the blue) and in the second instance I have been a member of LMDA for a while (so why the surprise?) Perhaps it stems from the honour of being asked to speak at something that I would have loved to have been able to attend. This invitation meant that I could. But really. I couldn't believe it. Two things in particular. The Guthrie (The NEW Guthrie) and Mary Tyler Moore. And of course the conference....

But really.

The space. (A fictionalized account) 'Here is exactly what I would like.' said the architect. 'Exactly?' asked the project manager. 'Exactly.' said the architect. 'Okay'.

Seriously. If any corner was cut it was only to better refine what the architect and — undoubtedly — Joe Dowling wanted. The story that I heard was that of a commandeered crane, ordered to lift the architect and the artistic director up. As they looked over the river, in the bucket of a crane, Mr. Dowling reportedly said 'Here.'

The fact — a fact that history will preserve — that LMDA managed to



Ashley, Adriana Bucz (immediately pre-injury), and Louise McKay at the LMDA Conference Bar in Minneapolis.

Photo: Ilana Brownstein

have its annual conference on the opening weekend of 'here' is perhaps the single most majestic and dazzling aspect of my conference experience. A perfect frame for our discussions, an excellent metaphor for the uneasy meeting place of past and present.

There was a lot of discussion. (Some of it tightly planned and executed with marine-like precision — a bit odd given how landlocked the Midwest, on either side of the border, invariably makes me feel.) There was also a lot of looking down (from a bus onto a veritable hot bed of twin city theatrical productivity — this seriously energized me) and I caught a major amount of looking up. Looking up at The Guthrie. The printout smoke stack, the many, many, many times, larger-than-life faces embedded in the very fibre of the building. Yes we all looked up a lot.

And with that came a mixed bag of stuff. A roiling, a churning, a headache. The good end of the mixed mess made me ever more aware of our responsibilities as dramaturges, as directors, as writers, as people who love this ongoing investigation; to ensure that our present day writers/devisers/creators are being acknowledged as fully and as roundly as is humanly possible.

But the opposite end offered a less energetic response — a sense of ossification. What the Guthrie does, it does very well. So well in fact, that much of the Canadian Regional Theatre system (not to mention Stratford) has been modelled on its incredible success. And I have loved and wrestled (both) with the peculiarities of the democratic principle being applied to a relatively static form. That is to say, with the intention of making a high(er) art accessible to all. And while I think this endeavour held a certain noble place at its inception, I think now — and with the incredible largesse of 'here' as testament to this notion — the time has come to fully and thoroughly recognize that you can wear jeans to the theatre 'here' only if you know enough to know that you shouldn't.

And by that same token, on both sides of the border, this conference brought home the pressing need to remember the past as we look to the future, and to remember that palaces are for the palace-dwellers. Fair enough. Because we also must entrench our future thinking and note that 'Here' acts as a high contrast and a lush indicator for the theatre of tomorrow — that the forms that are emerging now, will not happen 'here.' This is not news but does leave me breathless. 'Here' sees yesterday with clear eyes but 'there,' wherever that is, will be where tomorrow's work will go.

Three shards that refract more. 1) I was moved by the opening production of *The Great Gatsby*. I was touched by its sense of belong-

ing. And I was jostled by how aptly it seems to mirror so much of what still appears to ail America. It was the musician who did the diagonal downstage cross that brought this home to me. Nonetheless or perhaps because of it, I was moved. 2) I was moved by some of the meaningful attempts to really wrestle with form. The ad-hoc meeting of potential and practicing dance dramaturges, the meeting with CNN[-affiliated produce, Porter Anderson] over a telephone coupled with a still much slower technology called the internet. But finally, and mainly, 3) I was moved by the sheer dramaturgical daring-do, the formidable literary management, that got us to 'here' at that most precious 'then.'

As at any successful meeting of people, I was reminded that I was not alone. People are, the North Americas over, wrestling with the very same dramaturgical questions. But, to my neophyte's mind I would suggest that there is no melting pot answer, no mosaic response, just individual shards, fragments, glistening in a field of glass. My hat's off to the outgoing president and her obviously beloved time in the hot seat; and my other hat (as it still gets colder in Canada) is off to Brian Quirt for standing by his principles and looking to the future with eyes the size of the sun and moon and two hands to plant on both sides of the border.

I was thrilled to be there. I will attend again. And I will extend a hand to others who may find it as useful and as challenging as I did. Mary Tyler Moore's statue eluded me – just as well, the hat flies more easily in my imagination. And for the unnamed – and any one else who might consider joining us – next year it is Canada's Wonderland.

Sarah Stanley is a director and dramaturge. She teaches at Concordia University in Montreal.



A view of the exterior of the new Guthrie building (left; G.B. Shaw's forehead is visible), overlooking one of the historic flour mills in the area near the theatre.

Photo: Ilana Brownstein



Stacia Rice and Sonja Parks discussing the Minneapolis theatre scene in a conference session.

Photo: Cindy SoRelle



Gavin Witt, Richard Shannon, and Hannah Slatne at the Conference Bar in Minneapolis.

Photo: Ilana Brownstein



Sarah Slight, Paul Walsh, and Jack Reuler and more conferees on the bus tour of Minneapolis.

Photo: Cindy SoRelle

The Lessing Award

2006 Michael Lupu

Introducing The Lessing (and Joe and Michael)

by Geoff Proehl

The following is Geoff Proehl's retrospective recollection of his introduction to the speakers on the occasion of the third-ever Lessing Award ceremony at LMDA 2006. Geoff prepared for the occasion, but gave his presentation on July 22nd without notes. Here, he recalls his process, and the event itself.

It was my job at the conference banquet to introduce Joe Dowling, who would then present Michael Lupu with the Lessing Award.

I had thought over several days about what to say. The main purpose of my remarks was to briefly explain what the award was and to then get out of the way. I was conscious of not taking too much time to do this, because I knew there would be several speakers that night: Joe Dowling; Paul Draper, who would read a letter from Liviu Ciulei; Michael's own remarks; the Elliot Hayes Awards; then Liz Engelman and Brian Quirt, LMDA's outgoing and incoming presidents. I also knew that I easily fall in love with the sound of my own voice — a tendency that I try, usually without success, to control.

What I had to say about the award itself was simple. I could lift it directly from the press release that Liz had written. I did not have access to a computer and I had not found time to pull this introduction together before I left Tacoma, so I just made some marks on a copy of the press release I had brought along, circling and underlining:

Tonight, Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas will present the Lessing Award to Michael Lupu. This award, rarely given, recognizes outstanding achievement in the field of dramaturgy and literary management. It honors dramaturgs of unparalleled distinction and vision. There have been only two previous recipients: Anne Cattaneo (1998) and Arthur Ballet (2002). It is my honor to introduce Guthrie Artistic Director, Joe Dowling, who will make our presentation, an appropriate tribute given the long tradition of dramaturgy at this flagship of the regional theater movement. Joe and the Guthrie have also been extremely warm and generous hosts for our conference.

That was all I really needed to say: quick, simple, to the point.

But I also wanted to say just a sentence or two more about this occasion than this basic information.

I thought, but rejected one idea that I thought would get a laugh and underscore Michael's achievements at the same time.

I thought about telling the story of a phone call that woke me at about 6:15 on a trip to Vancouver earlier in the summer. I had sent announcements to some folks about the award, but did not know the correct address in every instance. It seems I had sent a note by mistake to this older woman that she received by way of her daughter.

I'd listed my cell number in the contact information, so, this woman — I cannot recall her name — decided to call me. She was more than a little distressed. She wanted to know why she was being contacted about the Lessing Award.

My head was not all that clear. I was not ready to try to explain the award or dramaturgy or Michael to a woman who sounded as if she might be dealing with dementia-induced psychosis, when I was barely awake.

At some point, however, I just said to her, 'Michael Lupu is a Romanian dramaturg. He's the senior dramaturg at the Guthrie.'

Her response was immediate, 'I know that, but how did you get my address.'

The crazy lady did not seem at all confused by Lupu, Romanian, the Guthrie, or even dramaturg. It was getting unsolicited mail that disturbed her. I thought this, metaphorically, was a victory for the profession. It was, as if I'd said to her the name of a president or movie star and she replied, 'I know who Bill Clinton is, but why is he phoning me all the time.' I took her words as confirmation that the award was well-deserved.

It's difficult, however, to know how a somewhat wry story will be read, and so I passed on it.

I decided instead to mention another aspect of Michael that anyone who knew him would recognize: the way he went on a walk.

Michael has visited my house on a couple of different occasions. When he stays with us, taking the family dog Tobie for walks around the neighborhood is an important part of the day. I wanted to describe the difference between how Michael would let Tobie walk and how I let Tobie walk.

Michael, for example, is much more careful for Tobie's interest than I am. If Tobie wants to stop and smell where other dogs have peed, Michael lets him stop and sniff until he is sniffed out. I let Tobie get a little sniff and then, against his will, drag him on down the sidewalk. I found in this a little metaphor for ways of being in the world: Michael's being willing to take time in the moment and be thoughtful of those he is with; my rushing through the moment with little care for others.

But when I started to describe this in my introduction, I could not think of the word I wanted to use to describe just what Tobie was so interested in. I said 'urine' instead of 'piss' or 'pee' and it felt all wrong: too scientific for an informal moment; too specific for right after dinner. I'd hoped someone would laugh or chuckle at this image, a sign that people are with you, but silence was all that came back at me. I had wanted to be eloquent and now I felt as if I'd stepped in something more foul than piss, pee, or urine.

I could have also told about how Michael liked to let Tobie say 'hello' to other dogs. But what Michael tends not to realize is that Tobie does not know how to say 'hello' to other dogs. In fact, most other dogs incite in Tobie a shot of adrenalin that leads him to bark ferociously and wildly lunge at the end of his lead, even if Tobie's wearing a collar designed to pinch his neck if he pulls. The last time we walked Tobie, Michael sought to give Tobie a little meeting time with another friendly looking dog, only to have Michael's arm nearly pulled out of its socket.

I decided finally just to say that those who knew Michael would know that he was a frustrating person with whom to take walk. I meant, of course, *frustrating* in a good sense of the word. I'm not sure, but there must be some name for a figure of speech whereby you name a putatively negative quality in another person but really mean it as a compliment.

I actually don't find it frustrating to walk with Michael at all. To the contrary, I love walking with Michael *if* I don't want to get anywhere in a hurry. Michael walks like my mother walked: he notices, stops, and remarks. I remember walking with my mother and my daughter on visits to the home where I grew up in Northwest Oregon. It's a small town about an hour by car from the Pacific, a town totally surrounded by trees. To enter the forest, all we needed to do was walk down the railroad embankment and within a couple 100 yards, houses had vanished. But before we could get those 100 yards, my mother would have stopped at least three times, pointing out a bit of Queen Anne's Lace or some spider's web or the shiny leaf of some Oregon grape.

Michael's the same way. To walk with him is to be stopped in order to notice. And the quality of that noticing is, as was with my mother, almost always rich, seldom casual or indifferent. Michael might, for example, notice a point made a moment earlier in a conversation about whether theatre was grounded in hearing or seeing. Michael's passion, his *love*, for theatre is sharp, ferocious even, so such distinc-

tions are not to be taken lightly. Nor is it all that easy to come to a conclusion about any one point that he might notice. If, tiring of the debate, I ever try to switch to Michael's side, he, in a moment, swings around to another point of view and urges me to examine yet another perspective. Those perspectives, if not on soccer, most often have to do with theatre and theatricality. He cares for these topics more passionately than anyone I know.

Michael is not all joy and light. Sometimes what he notices excites not enthusiasm, but scorn. A billboard might launch an observation on the ways in which our lives — in and outside the theatre — are continually being coaxed into becoming artifacts of consumerism. At the end of such critiques, Michael usually sighs, shakes his head with a wise weariness, in one way or another throwing his hands in the air, frustrated but not at all surprised by our shortcomings.

But most often, at least if the walk is outdoors, Michael notices the natural world surrounding him with great appreciation and a constant sense of sophisticated yet childlike delight. Again, however, his responses are not always genial: Michael's thoughts on the weather are as finely tuned as his opinions about theatre. He hates, and he is quite articulate about this, drizzly weather. He would much rather it be quite cold and clear than cloudy and moist. Indeed, *moist* is for Michael the worst of all weather words.

The term, however, that I hear most from Michael's mouth — especially if it's something like a fine fall day in the Northwest (crisp, cool, clear) — is *fantastic*. It's the word a maple tree splashed with red evokes, the word given to a sunset on Puget Sound that shows water and mountains, moving from one variation of blues and greens to another, as the last of a day's autumn light blasts over the Olympics and toward the Cascades.

Fantastic.

It is this ability to help others see and re-see the world (and theatre) with wonder, with passion, with honesty, and most of all, with a profound love, that for me, most characterizes Michael Lupu as artist and person. It was for this reason that I was most happy that LMDA was taking a moment to notice him, even if, for him, all the attention was a little silly.

I tried to say some of this in my remarks, but felt I missed it for the most part.

I would have liked another run at it. I would take a moment to center myself before launching into my paragraph. I would say 'pee' instead of 'urine.' I would find time to write it all out more carefully before getting on a plane.

But that's the way it is sometimes, when making an introduction, when making a life, even when the moment is as important as this one was.

A Message Faxed From Romania

by Liviu Ciulei

As read by Paul Draper at the LMDA annual conference

I've been full of joy and very emotional when learning that Michael's life-time passion and his many years of commitment to and work for the theater are being recognized and rewarded with a prize of exception and distinction — the Lessing Award.

When I was appointed artistic director of the Guthrie Theater in 1980, I chose right away to bring Michael Lupu aboard, albeit he was then unknown to the American theater. But I was well acquainted with his work first as a theater and film critic in Romania. Later, from 1960 to 1971 (when he immigrated to the United States), we worked together at the "Bulandra" Theater of Bucharest, known not only as a first-rate theater in Romania but ranking at the top of Europe's theater movement in those years.

In my plans for the Guthrie, I wanted from the beginning to establish a solid and strong dramaturgical department. This intention was grounded in the knowledge of the historical fact that every single important theater company in the last century or so needed, relied on and benefited enormously from the knowledge, intellectual competence, and dramaturgical contribution of a competent literary staff. Just think of such extraordinary symbioses that prove my point: Stanislavski with Nemirovich-Danchenko, Giorgio Strehler with Luigi Lunari, Peter Stein with Botto Strauss and Dieter Sturm, Laurence Olivier with Kenneth Tynan. That's why I considered it an important priority to bring together within the Guthrie literary/dramaturgy department Arthur Ballet, Mark Bly, Tom Creamer, and the playwright Richard Nelson, along with Michael Lupu. They joined forces with Barbara Field, at the time the theater's literary manager.

Michael's contribution to the Guthrie has been outstanding not only in our intensive talks about selecting and deciding the repertory of plays, but also in his keen, specific inquiries and ideas regarding textual interpretations, as well as arduous rehearsals work. His function as a critical barometer was even more significant after the run-throughs as we approached the opening of a new show. His help in fine-tuning key final touches of a show has been indispensable. He has a remarkable ability to notice things that most others overlook, and shows an uncompromising insistence in articulating key critical points. These qualities are rooted in the solid ground of knowing classic and contemporary dramatic literature, and at the same time they reflect his rich, first-hand experience of today's world-wide theatrical practices. Often, I much appreciated his rigorous yet tactful

persistence in pointing out inconsistencies in a given "reading" of a scene, noticing cracks between the dramaturgical spirit of the play and the directorial approach/treatment of the material in production. Every time I work with Michael, I think of him as a sort of embodiment of my own directorial conscience. He doesn't miss a chance to bring up challenges, thoughtful reminders, and questions or comments meant to prevent me from deviating from or jumping away and too far beyond the true substance of the text.

Particularly valuable has been the steady support Michael gives to actors. He knows how to help them search deeper for the defining traits of a given character and toward grafting these features onto their inner, most personal artistic sensibility and performative skills.

Another aspect of Michael's work — quite important to my mind — has been his initiative, and firm determination to make each program and/or study guide for a production more than a disposable play-bill printing reductive explanations or short-cuts for a quick, shallow understanding of a show. Rather, he considers these publications to be substantial tools for the education of theatergoers. In their pages they can find and enjoy reading selections of first-rate critical views, memorable quotes, excerpts and comments about the author, the play, their cultural context and significance, all valuable long after the encounter with the play in performance. I cannot help but thinking of Michael when such published booklets turn out to be worth saving — an asset for one's personal library.

In the years since I left Minneapolis, the destiny of the Guthrie Theater has continued to be very close to my heart — always of major theatrical significance and impact. So, of course, I am truly delighted that the artistic leaders who succeeded me at the head of this second-to-none institution, the much-missed Garland Wright and now Joe Dowling, have in turn fully recognized and appreciated Michael Lupu and his priceless function in the theater.

I am quite sure — I know it! — that somewhere within the walls and under the hallowed roof of this citadel of the American theater, you'll find some indelible traces of Michael's spirit, his very heart!

Liviu Ciulei,
July 16, 2006

Acceptance Speech, Michael Lupu

First, I must say that I am overwhelmed, humbled and, of course, delighted by this occasion. For almost a year I have been carrying the weight of knowing about the kind and generous LMDA intention to present the Lessing Award to me at our 2006 conference. It was not easy to get used to such an honor and learn to accept it properly, with gratitude and little protesting!

Before anything else I feel compelled to use this opportunity and acknowledge the first two recipients of the Lessing Award, who preceded me in being given this honor: Anne Cattaneo and Arthur Ballet. They deserve our collective admiration and appreciation. Paying homage again to these exemplary colleagues is implicitly a way to recall their exceptional contributions to the foundation of LMDA and, moreover, to the practice of dramaturgy in the American theater as we know it today.

Next, I have to admit that I was quite frustrated trying to articulate some cogent thoughts to share with you in my acceptance speech tonight. My work tends toward invisibility. I am used to that, and see no ground for any change. In fact, as many of you must have noticed, there is a nice paradox in working in dramaturgy. Usually our activity doesn't get much credit; but, on the other hand, we don't get blamed either.

So what was I supposed to say? Somebody gave me the advice to show up, smile and be gracious, if I can. But my saving grace came unexpectedly in an e-mail received in the very last hours before the ending of our 2006 conference. It is a message from Lessing himself! And I'll read it to you now – a relief from the burden of delivering my own presumably substantive speech on such an astounding and exciting occasion.

Dear Michael,

By accident or rather by miracle (you choose the best word!) I hit several dramaturgical websites during one of my recent cyberspace explorations. To my surprise I discovered that my legacy is celebrated and emulated by hundreds of remote intellectual descendants of mine on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

I even learned that there is an award perpetuating my name while honoring colleagues of mine overseas. Is that why some like to call America a brave new world? Well, no one is a prophet in one's own land, although my plays are fairly often staged in Germany (yet much less anywhere else). I'd be curious to know what fellow dramaturges in Germany think of such an award...

As much as I continue to hope that my plays will attract more interest than my critical essays collected under the title *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, still for me it is a flattering idea to memorialize the job I once took at the National Theatre of Hamburg. At the time I was approaching 40 and, penniless, I was unable to generate sufficient income from the plays I'd tried my hand on. Taking the job was simply one of my attempts to make a somehow decent living.

Much too often in what I could call my 'dramaturgical career' I had to overcome dire financial circumstances. Eventually becoming the librarian at the court of Prince Leopold of Brunswick solved my worries and struggle for the rest of my life. But should that position qualify as that of a dramaturge?

Over the centuries the pattern of my job-seeking (a dramatist hardly making any money with his scripts, but welcome as a critic/commentator) appears to have been re-enacted in a wide range of variations by many fellows playwrights, drama critics, dramaturges. These bright minds lured by the stage keep attempting as ingeniously as they can to make a living while at the same time indulging their absolute attachment to an overriding literary/theatrical passion. The more inventive they prove in being managers, planners, fund-raisers, organizers of events, producers of all-sort of projects, promoters of new writing by others, and so on, the better they assert that dramaturgy (not necessarily writing plays) is a valid profession to which they dedicate their career.

Many things were different when I studied at the Protestant university of Wittenberg; and they might have been even more different long before me, when Shakespeare's imagined Danish prince attended courses at the same school. Yet one may see a tacit (perhaps a bit odd) consonance, a link connecting Hamlet and me: both of us took upon ourselves the task of being 'a scourge and minister' – in my case of literature, drama, and the theater. Was that the moment when dramaturgy came into being?

Still I could not have foreseen that the young, learned student of my first play *Der Junge Gelehrte* (1747) would be transformed into an intimidating, cynical, jaded, tough-to-please seventy-ish senior fixture of the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis.

Nonetheless I'm sure the occasion must give you a thrill. This dramaturgy award pleases me only mildly since I have ceased quite a while ago any struggle to gain recognition. Remember Cassio's despair when Othello demotes him? To my ears his gripping clamor

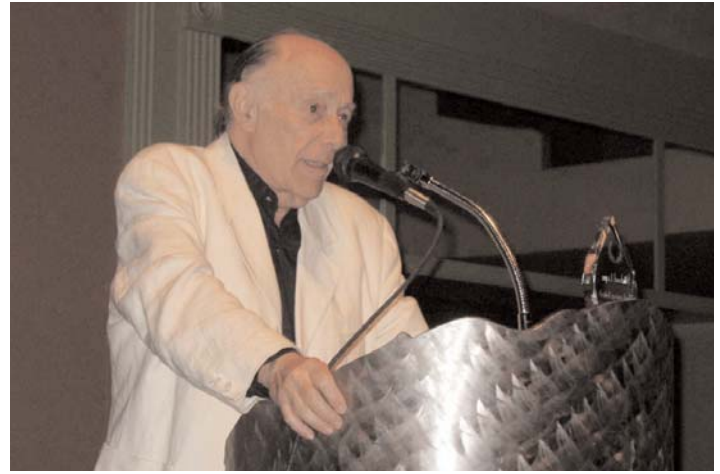
about having lost his reputation rings true especially because it seems to fit well many of you who refer to my work and name as their supreme model, without noticing how far remote I am from your post-enlightenment world.

In your time and specific circumstances it appears that reputation is not just vital to everyone. It is an inescapable 'branding' without which one risks to be nobody. Who would settle for that? So I see why this award must please you a lot, indeed. Be a good sport and accept it gleefully.

Just beware, now that you've achieved your fifteen minutes of fame, not to assume that your goals have been attained. To paraphrase a brilliant and quite enigmatic Irishman I came across in my strolls on the alleys of what for you remains still 'the undiscovered country,' go on with the work. What else is life for?

Congratulations,

Gotthold



Michael Lupu, delivering his acceptance speech on the occasion of his receipt of the Lessing Award.

Photo: Cindy SoRelle



DD Kugler, Geoff Proehl, Anne Cattaneo (herself a recipient of the Lessing Award), and Liz Engelman, at the annual banquet.

Photo: Cindy SoRelle



Michael Lupu, posing with Gotthold Lessing.

Photo: Cindy SoRelle



Geoff Proehl and Harriet Power share the spotlight with Gotthold.

Photo: Cindy SoRelle

At the annual conference in Minneapolis, Melinda Finberg and Amy Steele were awarded the 2006 Elliott Hayes Award for Excellence in Dramaturgy. Review invited Melinda and Amy to discuss their award-winning projects.

Producing *The Belle's Stratagem*

by Melinda C. Finberg

My goal was to bring Hannah Cowley back from the dead. I succeeded.

Hannah Cowley (1743 – 1809) was one of the best and most popular British playwrights of the late 18th century. Her works were performed to great acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic for more than a century. Then Cowley disappeared, essentially erased from theater history. Hers is not a case of a mediocre but popular playwright simply falling out of fashion. She disappeared because of contemporary cultural and political conflicts regarding whether (and what) a respectable female ought to be writing for the stage.

I became aware of Cowley's plays as a graduate student. As I became familiar with the forgotten women dramatists of the 18th century, I was astonished by the quantity and quality of their work. Their viewpoints seemed so fresh and modern; they were witty, sophisticated, and subversive. I published an anthology, *Eighteenth-Century Women Dramatists*, which has introduced students and readers to four of these playwrights, but my goal has always been to restore these women's works to the stage.

Director Davis McCallum read a copy of my edition of Cowley's *The Belle's Stratagem* and was struck by its vibrancy. When he became the Killian Directing Fellow at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) and was offered the chance to do a staged reading there, he immediately decided on *Belle's Stratagem* and called me for dramaturgical assistance. Thus began a collaboration that led to the full scale production at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

At every step of the way, Davis and I demonstrated the stageworthiness of Cowley's comedy. The actors reveled in the characters and dialogue, the audiences went wild and the critics raved. The OSF gave us its full support, providing us with outstanding designers and a first rate cast. My job was to make everyone understand how exciting a project we were embarking on and to make sure Cowley's comedy was accessible at every level to the company and to our audiences.

The production of *The Belle's Stratagem* succeeded beyond everyone's expectations. It was even profitable! My favorite line from a review was from an NPR reporter who said, 'I feel absolutely deprived to have never seen it before.' Excited audience members from all over the country approached me, wondering why their local regional theaters weren't producing such plays. The production also inspired Anne-Marie Welsh, theater critic from the *San Diego Union Tribune*, to write a major article, 'The Glass Curtain,' on the comedy and how the historical treatment of Cowley relates to women playwrights today.

The OSF and I brought Hannah Cowley back from the dead. But this is not enough. My goal is nothing less than revamping the repertory of the American stage. Productions of these suppressed women playwrights need to become the norm, not the exception. Only when Cowley and her colleagues become as standard in our repertories as the works of Goldsmith, Sheridan, and Wilde can their future health be ensured.

*Melinda Finberg is a freelance dramaturg specializing in plays by historical women playwrights. She was the dramaturg on the acclaimed Oregon Shakespeare Festival production of Hannah Cowley's *The Belle's Stratagem*, directed by Davis McCallum, and has also dramaturged plays and readings at the Prospect Theater and the Juggernaut Theatre in New York. Melinda is the editor of *Eighteenth-Century Women Dramatists* (Oxford University Press, 2001) and holds a BA from Yale and an MA and PhD from Princeton. Melinda has also studied acting at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco and acted in New York. She is a former Lecturer at Princeton University and was the writer for 'The Shakespeare Project,' a networked multimedia literature course piloted in Utah public schools. At Princeton, she taught Shakespeare, Modern Drama, and Contemporary Drama, and she continues to teach Shakespeare workshops for secondary school students and teachers. Currently, Melinda teaches production dramaturgy at Swarthmore College.*



Melinda Finberg and Amy Steele, winners of the 2006 Elliott Hayes Award for Excellence in Dramaturgy.

Photo: Cindy SoRelle

DRAMATURGING JUSTICE

The Exonerated Project at the Alley Theatre

by Amy Steele

The Alley Theatre's October 2004 production of *The Exonerated* by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, a documentary play about six individuals who were falsely convicted of murder and eventually exonerated or freed from death row, was particularly timely for Houston audiences. Since the death penalty was reinstated in the United States in 1976, the state of Texas has executed over 300 people, and more than 70 of those executions were for crimes committed in Harris County, the jurisdiction that has produced more executions than any other county in America (Houston is located in Harris County). These statistics are particularly troubling considering that the work of the Houston Police Department crime laboratory was under investigation during the run of *The Exonerated*. Not only was DNA evidence that was used to convict people being retested in nearly 400 cases because of shoddy forensic work, but faulty testimony from lab analysts had also led to the wrongful conviction of a Houston man on rape and kidnapping charges; the man spent 17 years in prison before he was exonerated in 2004. Another Houston man was also soon released from prison when retesting of DNA proved that he could not have committed the crime of which he was convicted.

Motivated by a need to respond artistically to the crime lab fiasco, Alley Theatre artistic and education staffs developed the idea for *The Exonerated* Project. The goals of the project were to provide audiences with a safe forum in which to react to the play and to promote dialogue in the Houston community about *The Exonerated* and about the death penalty and innocence issues the story raises. Since these

topics were being analyzed almost daily by the Houston media, Houstonians had a particular interest in these concerns.

To achieve the project's objectives, the production of *The Exonerated* was conceived of as a two-act evening, with the first act being the production and the second act a talk-back that followed every performance. The talk-backs were moderated in rotation by members of the Alley's education department, the Alley's general manager, and me (the production dramaturg). Members of the cast participated in the talk-backs, along with volunteer discussion leaders.

With the guidance of the Alley's general counsel as well as an attorney with the Texas Defenders Service, the Alley's former education director recruited the discussion leaders, who included lawyers who had represented men who had been wrongfully executed; criminal justice scholars; members of the Alley Board of Directors; judges; directors of innocence networks; philosophers; Texas state representatives; exonerated individuals, including Kerry Max Cook, whose story is featured in *The Exonerated*; and the playwright Jessica Blank.

Although I was excited about *The Exonerated* Project, I must confess that I wasn't nuts about *The Exonerated* as a play. Despite the fact that each of the six characters in the story follows a distinct and incredibly moving journey, I was having a difficult time finding my 'hook' into the world of the play. I finally found the necessary stimulant in our discussion leaders' stories.

The director of the production, Rob Bundy, Alley Theatre Artistic Director Gregory Boyd, former Alley Theatre Education Director MaryScott Hagle, and I thought it would be constructive to invite the discussion leaders to the first rehearsal. Since *The Exonerated* Project was designed to inspire dialogue, we believed the sooner we could get the conversation started, the more effective the discourse would be. Little did we know at the time what a significant impact the first-rehearsal experience would have on the dramaturgical process.

The rehearsal opened with my sharing information about *The Exonerated*, why the Alley was producing the play at that time, and the goals and format of *The Exonerated* Project. A design presentation and read-through of the play followed. Once the actors had finished the reading, the discussion leaders shared stories with us about clients they had represented who had been affected by wrongful convictions and other experiences they had had with innocence issues.

Many of the discussion leaders' stories were more heart-wrenching



The first rehearsal for *The Exonerated* at the Alley Theatre. Kevin Rigdon (standing) is giving a presentation on his set design. Steele is in a green sweater, center right. The discussion leaders are in the foreground, their backs to the camera.

Photo: Joel P. Johnson

than those told in the play, and as they were speaking, it was as if they were ‘performing’ for us and we became their audience. What was most striking about their ‘performance’ was the straightforwardness of their delivery, which made the stories all the more powerful. It was in this revelation that I found my ‘hook’ into the world of the play: the discussion leaders were telling us stories in a simple, concise manner, and even though many of the stories were devastating, each individual took something hopeful away from that experience. For instance, some made career shifts from being prosecutors to defense attorneys, another left a high-power law firm to work for a non-profit advocacy defenders service, someone else started an innocence network with students at a local university. This type of active determination is a central theme of *The Exonerated* because the individuals in the play made similar discoveries on their journeys to, through, and away from death row. Their stories, as a result, are tales of hope and perseverance, rather than sorrow and defeat. Believe it or not, I hadn’t completely grasped this theme until I heard our discussion leaders’ tell their stories in such an uncomplicated manner. The dramaturgical spark they ignited in me would fuel my work during the rehearsal period.

Throughout the rehearsal process, the director, cast, and I continued to contemplate the discussion leaders’ stories, and the director urged the actors to adopt their matter-of-fact delivery style to keep their performances and ideas fresh. To supplement this stylistic guidance, I provided the actors with continually updated news and research about the Houston Police Department crime lab investigation, features about the death penalty and innocence issues, current court cases and legislation about the death penalty, and contemporary public attitudes toward the death penalty and other topics that *The Exonerated* addresses. I found that providing the cast with new or updated information on a regular basis helped them to stay focused on the importance of doing *The Exonerated* in Houston at that particular moment in time.

The Alley’s education director and I thought the audience could benefit from the dramaturgical research as well, so I compiled the material and displayed it in the lobby. At the top of every week of the run, I updated the information. Many audience members not only read the hand outs while waiting for the production to start, but some also used them during the talk-backs to inform their questions. On many occasions, the discussion leaders themselves used the lobby materials to support points they made.

Although the production of *The Exonerated* was affecting, I don’t think it would have been as successful, or even complete, without the talk-back second act. At least 75% of the audience stayed for each talk-back, and the discourse among the actors, discussion leaders, and audience members flowed freely (the audience was more diverse than the typical Alley crowd, too, and included many students). While there were several moments of tension and intense debate, that conflict only helped to provoke more meaningful dialogue. Many thrilling and disturbing things happened during the production’s run that further fueled the intensity of the talk-backs: a columnist for the *Houston Chronicle* wrote an opinion piece about *The Exonerated* Project and invited all the prosecutors in Houston to see the play — he even offered to buy their tickets. One of our discussion leader’s clients had just been exonerated the day prior to his talk-back, and his client was one of the two Houston men who were exonerated

because of mistakes made by the Houston Police Department crime lab. A few nights later, however, our discussion leader was representing a man who would soon be executed.

To update Alley staff as to what was happening with *The Exonerated* Project, the assistant stage manager took meticulous notes at every discussion, and the production stage manager included the most interesting facts from each talk-back in her rehearsal reports; these notes now reside in the production archive.

Another profound phenomenon occurred during *The Exonerated* Project: just as the stage managers served a dramaturgical function without realizing it by sharing and archiving their notes, the discussion leaders also unwittingly functioned as dramaturgs. By engaging the audiences in dialogue about significant and timely world-of-the-play issues, they vigorously enhanced the audiences’ play-going experience. So I wasn’t the only person the discussion leaders helped to find her ‘hook’ into the world of *The Exonerated*. I, therefore, cannot take credit for all of the effective *Exonerated* dramaturgy, since it was truly a collaborative project. I can, however, and will continue to promote how invaluable this type of community engagement is for artists and audiences. Through this form of idea exchange, not only do all involved become dramaturgs who help to breathe life into the world of the play, but many illuminating and hopeful discoveries are also made.

Postscript: Because of the success of *The Exonerated* Project, the Alley’s cast was invited to read the play at the 2005 National Association of Women Judges’ Conference, which convened in Houston. The reading was used as a springboard into a panel discussion on capital punishment and legal issues regarding habeas corpus.

Amy Steele is the Alley Theatre’s former Resident Dramaturg. She is currently the Alley’s Director of Education and Community Engagement.

Past President Liz Engelman: Some Appreciations

Following the annual conference in Minneapolis, at which the Engelman regime passed the torch to incoming President Brian Quirt, Review asked four established members for a few words about Liz.

Liz Engelman's contribution to Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas is captured by one of my most recent images of her: running, along with husband Michael Bigelow Dixon, up and down the Guthrie stairs a million times, letting us in and out of session rooms for our most recent conference. Liz and Michael were the bridges (or the card keys) to our conversations. That's my metaphor anyway.

Liz Engelman has provided outstanding leadership over the past two years of her presidency. Indeed I can think of no one who has spent more hours — at least from my years as president to the present — in thoughtful, innovative work for LMDA than has Liz. She and her amazing executive committee have passed on to the LMDA's new president, Brian Quirt, an exceedingly healthy and vibrant organization, but not only that, they have nurtured a community of people who are passionate about theatre and an ongoing conversation that tries, continually, to think about what it means to live and create here and now. Liz has worked to understand what it means to be a dramaturg in and with a community, both global and local.

For me, a primary sign of the work that Liz has done is the wonderful mix of folks at this last conference: old timers, academics, freelancers, institutional dramaturgs, and, perhaps most importantly, early career dramaturgs and students, the organization and field's future.

Thanks, Liz

Geoff Proehl, Univ. of Puget Sound

Liz has changed dramaturgy. During her administration, she led us to consider ways for dramaturgs to move from the back seat into the driver's seat. Did this idea, I've come to wonder, begin to grow during an ASK project with Ruth Maleczek that she and I attended almost six years ago? Mead Hunter invited Liz, Merv Antonio, and me to combine our dramaturgical skills with something we love outside the theatre to inspire a new theatrical creation. Liz chose the sun. What a change this workshop inspired. No longer were we dramaturgs actively responding to a finished or almost finished text. No, now we were conceiving the art. What a thrill. What freedom. What possibility. What I've seen throughout Liz's tenure is a commitment to that freedom, the dramaturg's ability to not just add to a project and grow another's idea but to create. I applaud her for taking us to a new level and challenging us all to continue on the path she's cleared.

Lenora Inez Brown, DePaul University

Sociologists report that loyalty to a group can be achieved as much through commitment to the people involved in the work as to the nature of the work itself. My experience with the leadership of LMDA during my years as an active member (through the presidential terms of Jayme, Geoff, DD, Michele, and Liz) certainly bears this out. My life affair with theatre and dramaturgy is enhanced beyond measure by my love affair with the committed voices of this organization— and none more than our most recent president, the inimitable Liz Engelman. She is that younger person to whom I say, 'You are my role model, friend.' Many years ago, the feminist author and artist Charlotte Perkins Gilman predicted, in her poem 'She Who is to Come,' the greatness that the future could expect from an empowered generation of women leaders. 'A self-poised, royal soul, brave, wise and tender, No longer blind and dumb; A Human Being, of an unknown splendor, Is she who is to come!' Thank you brave, wise, tender, splendid Liz.

With love and affection, Cindy.

Cythia SoRelle, McLennan College

It is rare in our discipline to encounter artists or administrators who can live in the creative moment while anticipating what is beyond the horizon at the same time. During Liz's tenure as LMDA President, she has shown in many of the initiatives she has created that hidden in the recesses, the folds of what appears to be small idea, are whole dramaturgical universes she has glimpsed and released into our universe. The word 'visionary' has been diluted and debased by the casual application of it in our culture, but surely her intimations of other realms of possibilities have earned her such an approbation. As the LMDA Board President for five years, I learned to trust Liz's intuition and her desire to create an LMDA that was inclusive and expansive not exclusive and closed. She has launched us into future and there is no looking back!

Mark Bly, LMDA Board President 2001–2005

The Toronto Mini-Conference

Coverage by Laura Braslins and Lauren Taylor

(reprinted from the LMDA Canada newsletter)

LMDA Mini-Conference, Reflections on the First Day

By Laura Braslins

In July, I attended my first LMDA mini-conference in Toronto. This is a brief reflection on what I heard that first day. Within the guidelines of ‘inspiration for the piece, highlights of the process, and success of the production or process,’ two remarkable women spoke with candour about their past and future work. Rosa Laborde detailed the fairy-story-esque nature of the development of her hit play *Léo*, and about the challenges in creating a new work at the Tarragon Theatre. Sarah Stanley spoke about the collaborative effort in the development of her new piece *Press*, and addressed more widely the issues of criticism, judgement and failure, and the differing concerns of young theatre practitioners from their seasoned counterparts. For those of you unable to attend the mini-conference, I regret that this article does not report more directly on Rosa and Sarah’s insights, but I wrote about what I heard and about what concerns me about what I heard — namely physical theatre, faith over fear of failure, and community.

Physical theatre

The first session of the first day was dedicated to ‘Who is doing what?’ Everyone present spoke briefly (or not so briefly) about their professional affiliations, an upcoming project that they’re excited about, and a ‘hot button’ topic — something that’s been on their mind or something that they’d like to address. I heard some people talk about their current physical theatre projects and many more express the desire to explore physical work, whether they had before or not. For personal artistic reasons, I find that exciting. The human body has so much theatrical potential, and as someone who has created a company that does physically-based theatre, I loved hearing that other people are exploring this avenue as well. I’ve felt for some time that, in Canada, there is a growing interest and a movement toward physical theatre among emerging artists. It was gratifying for me to come to the conference and hear how that is being realized.

Faith over Fear of Failure

The personal process of creating new work was talked about a lot at the conference. I was surprised by the number of times the word ‘failure’ cropped up beside it. I heard a lot of hesitancy and fear at the conference. I heard people lacking faith in themselves and their process and fearing the jump — that creative ‘leap of faith’ that the act

of making art demands. When people spoke of fear of failure at the conference, it was often necessary to distinguish their concern from a mislabelled fear of judgement or criticism. Sarah Stanley made this distinction when she spoke about this as someone who, she says, has had some spectacular failures. She has created shows that have not worked, that the audience and critics have disliked and that have been labelled ‘failures.’ This result (which from the perspective of the creative process is just as valid as a success) is different from the difficult personal feeling of a lack of self-worth which results from a negative judgement of your art. This too was discussed at the mini-conference, but in my mind doing the work and going through a creative process is never failing. Not doing the work because you’re too afraid of taking the leap or of taking a chance is really failing.

Dennis Hayes, a teacher of mine at Sheridan College once said that as artists we should not be jumping out of bed and enthusiastically asking ‘How am I going to succeed today?’ but rather ‘How am I going to fail today?’ In running the risk of failure — and you will fail — by committing to the process of creation, you inevitably learn something. To me, the solution to surmounting the fear of creation lies in the power of a supportive group. At the conference, however, I heard the hesitancy and fear surrounding that leap of faith echoed in the discussion surrounding communities.

Community

One of the most intriguing things that I heard throughout the conference was the pressing desire for a supportive artistic community. There were some who directly said they wanted to work with a group in a collaborative effort, but didn’t know people to invite to be a part of that process. Or that they wanted to work with a lighting designer or sound engineer but didn’t know who would be interested. I heard the wish for community again in the questions from playwrights seeking guidance and support for their process. Having a dramaturg who can help you out of the muck or hold your hand while you’re in a rut is hugely beneficial, but what if you aren’t at that stage of your process? I immediately started thinking of solutions such as a web-based online community where people can ask questions of each other, get support and find like-minded artists with whom to create. But technologically grounded solutions do not satisfy me. The age in which we live has provided all sorts of opportunities for communication, but it seems to me that as we develop more and more devices which try to enable communication, it becomes increasingly difficult to honestly connect with another human being, let alone do so on an artistic level. Conferences like this one have the potential to provide

a place to meet people, to share ideas, to dream, and then to form communities in which to enact those dreams. So where is the disconnect? Even within the relative safety of a theatre space, among people who all have enough in common to attend an LMDA Mini-Conference in Toronto, people still seemed afraid to reach out and ask for this community to support them.

The communities that could develop out of conferences like this one could provide exactly the support needed when the fear of making a creative leap does become crippling. It's an unfortunate thing that we live in a society where asking for help often feels like an insurmountable obstacle. We fear judgement, scorn, and not being understood. We resist making the effort and fear what could happen if it all goes wrong. As creative people gifted with the ability to touch others, I think it's our responsibility to go beyond the fear. If not us, then who? If we, as artists, can reach beyond the fear, ask for support, create a powerful community and take that leap of faith, then I believe we run the risk of not only making art – be it great or be it a failure – but also of setting an example. It's our task as artists to face the fear...and to have the faith that it will work out.

Mini-Conference On Dramaturgy, Day 2

By Lauren Taylor

Exposed pipes run along the roof. Naked bulbs light up the ratty two-tone brick, paint chipped and stained. The pock-marked walls remind me of crumbling apartment buildings in post-communist Budapest, where bullet holes lodged at street level remind us of history. Violence brought to life in architecture.

The Theatre Centre is, in short, the perfect place for a theatre. Or a Dramaturgy Conference.

Brian Quirt (Director, *Nightswimming*; LMDA President) has organized a two-day mini-conference, featuring a line-up of artists from Toronto who are here to talk about their experiences with dramaturgy and recent work. They are exclusively female.

Attendants are from all over Canada. The healthy cross-section of people here is vital — playwrights, dramaturgs, directors, actors, literary managers, students, academics, and the odd trainspotter. It provides the opportunity for information-gathering and sharing, networking and professional development, and meeting with our community. The event is also —gloriously and democratically — free.

TREY ANTHONY, DA KINK IN HER HAIR

Trey Anthony begins by talking about her incredible journey with *Da Kink in her Hair*, her phenomenally successful theatre piece set in a West Indian hairdressing salon. From its beginnings at the Toronto fringe to a sell-out season with the Mirvishes and international success, *Da Kink* and the story of its origins are fascinating.

As a comedy performer doing her own shows at the North York Public Library for three years, it became Trey's policy to do two important things: 1) always sit and talk with the audience after a show, and 2) tell the audience to come back and bring a friend. If they didn't

like it, they got their money back.

Trey's dramaturgical process seems to be largely informed by working with people she feels are right, rather than based on how much experience that person has. Truth in all forms is vital. She happily incorporates the input of others, such as director Weynie Mengesha's music, based on the collective understanding that at the end of the day, she has creative control. This has even been written into her high-end contracts. She speaks about placing value on the work, our work, as artists. Create the rules for yourselves. Be prepared to do the work that no one else will do. She is truly an inspiration.

Linda Griffiths, Improvisational Process

Linda's background in improvisation forms the key part of her writing and performing process. Some performance works include full-scale improvisational pieces, based on a concept, a structure, and little pieces of narrative. She assures us she writes 'paper plays' too, but that process is more about her and her relationship with the computer and the inside of her head. Improvisational storytelling is more about the flesh.

It's as if someone has perfectly spliced together a playwright with a dancer and given them the voice with which to speak. Griffiths's approach to text and performance is grueling in its constant search for truth – the truth of the experience, the truth of the story, the truth in the telling of it, and the inevitable truth in the audience's response to it. She regards the audience as the chief dramaturg. 'They teach you with their flesh.'

She describes the process of working with Daniel MacIvor on a piece she wants to perform the day she arrives home from her research trip, a reunion between her father and his war buddies. She refers to Daniel not as director but as 'buddy' — the person who will create a structure for the improvised performance, based on a conversation with her, and who will tape and observe the result. The observer is key to the process.

'I don't know how this works. I am trying to stay, to dwell in the world of 'I don't know''

At this point, Linda treats us to a small section of *Baby Finger*, in performance. Her structured improvisation seems to be a performative way of connecting to the spoken word. As she recollects the improvisation, she appears the same as an actor remembering her or his lines of written text, but the difference seems to be that when she does remember and speak, her voice is absolutely connected to the 'text.' Her performance is immediate, alive with unpredictability.

Q: 'Who are the audience for you?'

A: 'They're my lovers. I am afraid of not being good enough but I love you more. The minute you aren't an audience anymore, we break up. All you can do as an artist is be open hearted and honest.'

Nina Aquino — Artistic Director, Fu-Gen Theatre

Nina Aquino talks about her theatre company, Fu-gen, and the process of making their successful play *Banana Boys*. Based on the novel of the same name, *Banana Boys* tells the story of a group of Chinese-Canadian friends at university together. The title refers to

the term ‘banana,’ used in some Asian communities to describe [an assimilated person of Asian descent] as someone who is white on the inside, yellow on the outside. Nina describes it as ‘kind of like Joy Luck Club for men, but with an edge.’

She goes on to say, ‘We wanted a piece that reflected us — Asian-Canadians of today. It was the first book that talked about the experiences unashamedly, and it shattered a lot of stereotypes.’

It took two years to do the adaptation. Working with the playwright, who was friends with the author, Nina often felt that they would have to go ‘beyond the novel’ to create the stage version. Her main dramaturgical questions to the writer as the play developed were: Where’s the drama? What are you promising me as an audience member will happen?

She reads us a passage from the book and compares it to the stage version, showing unique theatrical solutions for capturing dramatic action. A passage in the novel has one character reflecting on his struggle to find a career amidst family pressure to become a doctor or lawyer. In the play [this struggle] becomes a fantasy sequence on a game show, with the host offering that character a vast array of choices.

Someone from the audience asks: ‘How interventionist are you as a dramaturg?’

A. What does that mean?

Q. Tells the writer what to do.

A. I never tell the playwright what to write. As artistic director, the only thing I told Leon was that if it wasn’t any good it wouldn’t be produced! But I did offer to postpone the time of production to allow him time to finish.

Nina sees the role of her company as important in telling the stories of her community and peers. When asked about why she is looking exclusively for Asian-Canadian plays for Fu-gen’s play development program, ‘The Kitchen,’ she responds honestly, saying that the balance needs to be addressed, that there are no Asian-Canadian stories or plays or roles at Shaw or Stratford or on any of the main stages in town.

She says in an ideal world this wouldn’t be the case. ‘We need to take care of our community right now because that’s what’s needed.’ She laments the lack of Asian production managers or theatre workers because it’s still not seen as a viable career option. ‘Parents are really tough.’

Alisa Palmer, Resident Director, Lord of the Rings

Hearing Alisa Palmer speak about her experience as resident director for the commercial theatre adaptation of Lord Of The Rings left many of us wanting to stick pins in our eyes. Palmer is a well established Toronto theatre director who wanted to try her hand at the challenges of commercial musical theatre. And challenging it was. From cultural differences to artistic processes to adaptation, LOTR proved a big job indeed and a testament to all that worked on the show.

As resident director, Alisa’s job is more akin to an elevated stage management role: she organizes and maintains the casts, and remains on call from 4pm every evening to cover any last-minute shuffling. Her role is to maintain the show.

She first read the script on the flight over to London, UK, where the pre-rehearsal workshop was held. She was surprised that there was no dramaturg in the room. Ever. Coming from Canada, where dramaturgy is second nature to many people involved with creating or adapting new work, she felt there was something missing. There was no one whose sole obligation was to the script. This was left up to the writer and the director, who was also co-writer.

Alisa talks about the success of the workshop, in a scaled-back version, which generates a discussion about small stages versus big, and the odd phenomenon of a workshop performance being somehow more powerful than the full final catastrophe (we’ve all been there — what is that about?)

Alisa also runs us quickly and succinctly through our Aristotelian principles (the five act structure in particular) and applies it to the storyline of LOTR, to great effect. Alas, her job didn’t involve conveying that to any of the writing or directing team! We all moan. Collectively. Inside.

The show is a massive undertaking. We are reminded again that no matter what the scale, new work is always risky, always growing, and always far easier to be critiqued by those furthest away from its creation. Less than generous reviews in Toronto have meant that the show is being reworked for the UK season, with some of the traditional musical structures now being applied to what was, in principle, going to be a musical that rejected conventional musical form.

And now Alisa is going on to her own show in the Summerworks Festival. We wish her every success.

Laura Braslins is a recent graduate from the University of Toronto and Sheridan College co-program in Theatre and Drama Studies. She is based in Toronto but also works in Ottawa as an actor, singer and mover and is one of the founding members of S.O.S. Theatre, a physically-based theatre troupe.

Lauren Taylor is a director from Melbourne, Australia, with a focus on new plays. Recent directing work includes Love by Patricia Corneliuss and A View Of Concrete by Gareth Ellis for Malthouse Theatre (Winners 2004 and 2005 Wal Cherry Play Of the Year Awards, respectively). Other work: Literary Associate, Playbox Theatre Company; Dramaturg, PlayRites Colony at the Banff Centre; 2005 Lincoln Centre Director’s Lab NYC; Royal Court Young Writer’s Department, London UK.

Gateway to the Americas, the LMDA Delegation

A REPORT FROM MEXICO

by Mark Bly

with Liz Engelman, Brian Quirt,
Vanessa Porteous, Yael Prizant,
Michael Bigelow Dixon, Madeleine Oldham,
Felipe J. Gorostiza, Harley Erdman,
and Pier Carlo Talenti

The cure for boredom is curiosity.

There is no cure for curiosity.

—Dorothy Parker

Sheer curiosity. How else can I explain our quixotic gesture? In 2003, Michele Volansky, then LMDA President, and Liz Engelman, President Elect, and I had several conversations about our desire to connect with artists in Mexico, Central and South America. These exchanges gave me the courage to write a letter to an old friend Sabina Berman, a theater artist from Mexico. In October 2003, I proposed to Sabina that LMDA and a group of artists and educators from Mexico should hold a conference where LMDA members could learn more about playwriting and dramaturgy beyond our southern borders. How do our southern neighbors make theater? How do dramaturgs practice their arcane but necessary craft there? What are the issues these artists face in the 21st century? I shared in my letter to Sabina, a gifted playwright-director from Mexico City, ‘This may sound like a dream, Sabina, but I believe we need to begin to break down between our communities the not-so-invisible artistic borders that exist now.’

Fortunately, Sabina responded by contacting several key artistic and academic leaders in Mexico City, including Victor Hugo Rascon Banda, the sage president of Mexico’s Writers’ Union (SOGEM). Rascon Banda acknowledged that the profession of the dramaturg as practiced in the US and Canada did not exist in his country. Still, he was immediately attracted to the idea of creating a gathering where artists and educators from Canada, Central and South America, Mexico, and the United States could enjoy a provocative exchange of ideas and plays. After Sabina had garnered support for a conference, she shared with me in a letter the spirited enthusiasm that my proposal had generated. Sabina assured me by echoing thoughts from my original letter: ‘Mark, it is not a dream. It is something that has to happen. All the elements are there. Economic globalization is already here, and if culture does not become part of the phenomena, we are headed for a bad ending: globalization is a new imperialism.’

I shared with Liz Engelman, by now LMDA President, my correspondence with Sabina and her interest in a Mexico conference. Not unexpectedly, with her own curiosity and abiding interest in creating international LMDA initiatives, Liz embraced the proposal. In May-June 2004 we flew to Mexico City to meet with our potential conference hosts. While there we saw *eXtras*, Sabina Berman’s astonishing adaptation and staging of Marie Jones’s novel, *Stones in His Pockets*. Then at a dinner party hosted by Sabina, Liz and I gave an impromptu clinic on dramaturgy while championing the idea of a conference and its mutual benefits. Much of the evening’s animated conversation focused on Mexico’s 2006 presidential election and the imminent US presidential election in the fall of 2004. At the end of the dinner, President Rascon Banda gave us his blessing for the conference and then in nearly the same breath exhorted Liz and me to do everything in our power ‘to keep Bush from being reelected.’ After returning to New Haven, I wrote Sabina, ‘You are all visionary artists who understand the pressing need for artists to take the lead in globalizing our communities with artistic gestures and not merely monetary ones.’

Lofty words, but Liz and I found out that planning a multicultural conference long distance is an enormous challenge. Liz and I visited Mexico City again in November, 2005, to move the process forward. Much had happened since our 2004 meeting: scores of e-mails and phone calls and a growing respect for our colleagues in Mexico. As one of my last acts as LMDA Board Chair I nominated Sabina Berman to be our first board member from south of the Rio Grande. In Mexico we met at the SOGEM offices with President Rascon Banda, Sabina, and Silvia Pelaez, a playwright-translator who had been chosen as our Mexico City coordinator. The conference was scheduled for June 2006 so that participants would also have the option of staying for Mexico City’s Gateway to the Americas Festival. Although another key planner, Mario Espinosa, the Director General for the Gateway Festival and for FONCA, the National Fund for Culture and Arts, was unable to attend our meeting, Liz and I finally felt secure and confident that the conference would happen. Liz and I scouted the magnificent city we had chosen for the conference. We visited the Aztec *Templo Mayor* ruins; the National Museum for Archaeology, which houses the legendary Aztec Sun

Stone; the historic Zócalo and the Coyoacán area where Trotsky, Frida Kahlo, and Diego Rivera lived. We felt ready to lead our friends from the North....

In the first season of the HBO series *Deadwood*, one of the founding fathers of this Mahagonny of the High Plains shares a piece of wry wisdom: 'If you want to hear God laugh, tell him your plans.' During the winter/spring of 2006, the co-planners in Mexico City proposed a more simplified conference. Under Mario Espinosa's direction the Gateway to the Americas Festival would invite us to be their guests during the June 1–4, 2006, international event. This gracious invitation allowed LMDA to bring ten delegates from Canada and the United States, with housing provided by the Festival. We were invited to participate in a series of roundtables, meet selected playwrights, translators and educators, and attend the Festival's dance, music, and theater presentations. Liz and I realized that this generous invitation would allow us to achieve many of our original goals for the conference without the logistical complications. It also meant that LMDA officers would not be trying to plan two conferences simultaneously—the one in Mexico City and the annual LMDA conference to be held in Minneapolis in July. We accepted Espinosa's invitation and kept our sanity intact.

Ten LMDA delegates flew to Mexico City in June 2006. Over three days we participated in a series of roundtables about the difficulties facing playwrights in Mexico and Latin America in the areas of translation, circulation, publication, and production opportunities. Participants discussed possible solutions and proposed websites to aid in the circulation of their plays. We listened to the artists' fears about the upcoming Mexican presidential elections of July 2006. (Possibly the election turned out even worse than the artists imagined. The margin of victory for the winner Calderon was so small that the results are still being challenged by his opponent Obrador, leaving the future of Mexico an enigmatic nightmare.)

International politics also hovered over our conversations. Discussions in the United States about building a wall along the country's southern border were well-publicized in Mexico and left an ominous heat in the air. While leading a 'Meet the Playwrights and Dramaturgs Session' with twenty Mexican writers and our LMDA delegation, I shared with them my original desire to help break down the 'invisible artistic borders' between us. I confessed my shame as a US citizen at the prospect of a wall, and reminded them that, 'They cannot build a wall around our curiosity. They cannot prevent our imaginations from touching.'

Liz and I were proud of our delegation for their boundless curiosity and energy. We created relationships (I am nurturing the Mexican playwright Ximena Sánchez's desire to be a dramaturg); extended invitations to submit plays; started the development of websites for our southern neighbors; and discussed potential residencies for various artists and companies. We exchanged countless CDs, scripts, play anthologies, journals and business cards. But for many of us nearly three months later it is the stagework that remains most alive in our consciousness: *Mestiza Power*, *Las Chicas del 3.5 Floppies*, *Pescar Aguilas*, *La Piel*, and *eXtras*. Berman's play, *eXtras*, which Liz and I witnessed three summers ago, was even more powerful and immediate this time, as it deals with two migrant workers shoved to the periphery of society by forces beyond their control. Berman uses

the vocabulary of film to convey their marginalization, their position at 'the edge of the frame.' In the Gateway Festival performance the virtuosic actors burst onto the stage at the end of the play and flashed two placards with the words '*¡Muro no!*' ('No wall!') scrawled on them. The audience chanted and cheered. This electric moment was somehow a fitting coda to our visit. The only moment of a higher order for me came several days later when I climbed the Pyramid of the Sun and Pyramid of the Moon at the ancient city of Teotihuacan.

In the aftermath of the Festival, our greatest desire is to awaken in other LMDA members and North American artists an interest in what we have begun with our formative gestures. The reports and reminiscences that follow, and Liz Engelman's forward-thinking, horizon-bending international initiatives, all reflect the pressing need for us to stay open to other ways of creating theater in the new millennium. We hope that you will share our curiosity, 'incurable' as it may be.

—Mark Bly, Dramaturg, Arena Stage

I recently joined a delegation of LMDA members to the Gateway to the Americas Festival in Mexico City, June 1–4, 2006. This was the culmination of a three-year process led by Mark Bly and Liz Engelman to establish a significant meeting place between LMDA and our theatrical counterparts (including writers, directors and producers) in Central and South America, with a particular focus on Mexican artists.

The ten-member delegation's participation in the Gateway Festival directly addressed one of my own goals for LMDA: the need to fuel our work as mainly North American theatre artists with inspiration, information, and challenges from artists working in other countries. For me, it is not about shopping for new plays, though that is an important element for many of my colleagues at producing theatres. Rather, my focus is on searching for new contexts: how do artists in other milieus work and live? And in experiencing this — even briefly — to explore more deeply my own assumptions about theatrical process, storytelling, institutions, and audiences.

Our visit to Mexico was short but illuminating. We eight Americans and two Canadians spent four days in Mexico City as guests of the Puerta de las Américas Festival. This is a massive showcase event, offering forty-plus theatre, dance, and music presentations, plus an arts market with 150 organizations promoting their work, including a colloquium in each discipline.

The Festival and SOGEM (the Writers Union of Mexico) invited us to participate in the theatre colloquium, specifically a series of round table discussions focusing on translation and the dissemination of published works. Mark Bly and Vanessa Porteous led our team and spent nine hours over three mornings discussing translation topics including publication problems, copyright issues, internet dissemination, and many others. On the third day, our delegation spent four hours meeting small groups of Mexican playwrights and directors, largely from the capital city, but also several from northern Mexico and the border states. The discussions were frank and revealing about the current political climate and anxiety about cultural policies (or lack of them) at issue in the upcoming Presidential elections; the venues in the city; the absence of North American-style institutional theatres; the three generations of writers now at work and the fasci-

nating struggles they share, as well as the issues that divide them.

The writers were eager, of course, to have their work produced in the US, in Spanish or in translation. Boris Schoemann's theatre in Mexico City has produced many contemporary Canadian plays (including Jason Sherman, Michel Marc Bouchard, and Norman Chaurette; Wajdi Mouawad's *Littoral* was on while we were there), but in general their knowledge of Canada and Canadian theatre was as weak as our knowledge of Mexican theatre. But the desire to reach beyond our mutual neighbor was great, and Vanessa and I are optimistic that several valuable relationships were launched. We hope in fact that several artists, including Mexico's best known theatre artist (and a member of LMDA's Board of Directors), Sabina Berman, will attend next summer's LMDA Conference in Toronto.

If you're interested in more information about the shows we attended (including an excellent Haitian-Canadian band), the artists we met, or opportunities to connect with Mexican theatres, please write us. And if you have or are opening up links to Central or South America, we'd like to hear about it. LMDA wants to connect artists working internationally in order to facilitate a more extensive, more open conversation about theatre process and creation.

— Brian Quirt, President, LMDA; Artistic Director, Nightswimming

No Wall: La Puerta de las Americas, Mexico City

'¡Muro no!' read signs held up by the actors at their tumultuous curtain call for *eXtras*, Sabina Berman's Mexican adaptation of *Stones in His Pockets* by Marie Jones. It was the last day of La Puerta, a showcase of theatre, dance, and music from across the continent. Berman said they were seeking partners for a US tour of the Spanglish version of this luminous, hilarious, passionately political production. As I headed home to pack I felt the joyful anguish of a great afternoon at the theatre.

Two intense days of meetings with Mexican playwrights, directors, and assorted theatre people had plunged me into a scene about which I knew almost nothing before I landed in this city — this magnificent city with a population equal to Canada's and about five hundred theatres. They repeated the number to me in English when they saw that

it astonished me: that's right, 500 theatres.

Though the morning sessions were in Spanish I understood a lot. Funding is scarce; politicians are indifferent at best; we need a new audience; writers don't get paid a living wage; the regions are struggling; and so on. It all seemed so familiar. They were surprised and a little disbelieving when I said that I related.

In the evenings, however, it was harder. It's depressing how difficult it is to follow theatre in another language. Still, I recognized themes: loneliness, longing, the desire for a better life. I felt at home with the characters: some of them could have stepped right out of Judith Thompson. I followed the emotional action even when the plot escaped me, and I felt the jokes coming even when I didn't have a clue what they meant.

The days were dizzying. There was no time to grasp more than a tiny fraction. Back home in my beloved, square-edged town of Calgary, I caught my breath. Cross-national projects aren't built in three days, no matter how packed with passionate talk and grand visions, no matter how many business cards you exchange, how many CD-ROMs of plays you promise to read, emails you promise to send.

But it was a beginning. We should not let this drop. Mexican artists should sit at the table at the LMDA. We should help our members work with artists from all of North America. We should use our influence to commission and program more translations so the work can cross the language barrier. Our audiences would love to hear these voices. We have far more in common than we realize on this multifarious continent of ours. Our history and our fates are intertwined. There should be no wall.

—Vanessa Porteous, Calgary, Canada

My experience in Mexico was astounding. I had no idea that the theatre community there was so interconnected, but also insular. I was surprised to hear that actors aren't expected to audition for major productions, but are simply chosen by directors who already know them. It seems this would make it particularly hard for new/young/untrained actors to participate at all. Yet, it also seems to necessitate networking, close bonds, and some type of theater educa-



Mexico delegates Liz Engelman, Vanessa Porteous, Madeleine Oldham, BQ, and Mark Bly.

Photo: Pamela Anderson

tion, whether at a university or elsewhere, just to make the connections needed to work. Intriguing...

I was equally surprised by the situation there for playwrights, who are not given a method of submitting their works to theatre companies and/or producers and/or directors. Without any literary managers or departments, the playwrights, like the actors, must also rely heavily on networking. They are forced to give their script directly to those who make theatre, not those who read it — also interesting. I can't help but wonder how this directly effects the work getting produced (is it more stageworthy? less literary?) and the way it is directed (if a director found the project, does that imply greater enthusiasm for producing it?) In addition, it seems getting one's theatrical material published is much easier in Mexico than in the United States. Dozens of playwrights explained that their several of their as-yet-unproduced plays have been included in magazines, anthologies, etc. Does that somehow privilege reading plays over seeing them? And, in a society with a significant portion of illiterate residents, how are these works being circulated, if at all? Are they dependent on schools? Libraries?

I was taken with how incredibly well organized this encuentro seemed to the visitor. We were given a chance to experience SO much, possibly too much, in the five short days I was present, yet it was not entirely overwhelming. I felt guided, yet I also felt I had choices. The staff were wonderfully helpful, friendly, and intelligent, an enormous relief! I knew what was expected of me and when. They also chose a great spot for the conference — centrally located, extremely comfortable, and well-managed. All in all, it was a very positive experience, one that would take me back to Mexico City and back to work with its theatre professionals (and amateurs!)

—Yael Prizant, Dramaturg, Company of Angels

It's so great to see theater in another country. The onslaught of new cultural information is so stimulating. The unfamiliar sights, smells, and sounds all contribute to one's heightened awareness of the event — not just of performance — but of the totality of theater-going. And it's just plain wonderful to have one's sense of wonder refreshed and recharged. (Note to self: I wonder if we're creating enough enlivening 'atmosphere' around the event of theater-going at the Guthrie?) Then there were the wonderful theater, dance, and music performances themselves. On a user-friendly level, if you're looking for a dynamite two-character play with great roles for two actresses, you should definitely check out *Las Chicas del 3.5 Floppies*. Written by a young Mexican playwright, Luis Enrique Gutierrez Ortiz Monasterio, this sassy seventy-minute comedy delves into the dreams and disappointments of two women pushed to their limits by drugs, prostitution, boredom, and economic hardship. Contact sebas73@aventel.net for the script in English (translated by British playwright Mark Ravenhill) or in Spanish. For great ensemble work, check out *Pescar Aguilas*, a play without words that offers a brutal investigation of a father-son relationship in a powerful desert aesthetic (rinoimss@yahoo.com), or look into the witty and passionate *La Piel*, a comedy comprised of dreams about skin, created and performed with SITI Company-like prowess by Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes (www.ciertoshabitantes.com). A visit by any of these companies — or North American performances of these plays, for

that matter — would infuse any north-of-the-border theater season with a welcome jolt of Mexican verve.

—Michael Bigelow Dixon, Guthrie Theater

If I picture Mexico, I don't see it. I hear it — Mexico makes me hear music in my head. It's got a legacy of distinctive sound from *ranchera* and mariachi bands to *meringue*, and nowadays everything from indigenous jazz to hip hop. Going to Gateway and seeing theatre in Mexico City actually augmented those sounds for me, rather than diminished them. It made me realize that seeing a word-based (generally speaking) art form in a language you don't understand is a lot like live music. You can absorb emotion, follow stories, and be taken on a ride. You just sometimes have no idea what anybody is talking about so you might as well stop trying to figure it out and start enjoying the feeling of it. So the line between theatre and music got really blurry. Some of my favorite theatre of the weekend was Nortec — this group of filmmakers, DJs, artists, and who knows who else from Tijuana. They played with a gigantic twenty-something piece brass band called Banda Agua Caliente, and brought their laptops, their accordion, their cowboy hat, and their trippy video installations. And they were mesmerizing. I also loved Dobacaracol, these two French-Canadian dreadlocked women who drummed and sang and were serious *performers*. Musicians and actors have a lot in common. So much, that I'm super-into the idea of cross-pollination — let's have playwrights write for bands. Or musicians write plays. They're not so far apart. The musicians chosen by the Gateway festival certainly confirmed this for me. *Viva la musica!*

—Madeleine Oldham, Literary Manager/Dramaturg, Berkeley Repertory Theatre

I was thrilled to be included in the delegation, as I had lost touch with the Mexican theatre community. I was also hoping to find playwrights and plays I would like to translate, and that could be brought to US stages. The trip allowed me to learn about the current thought and practice in Mexican theatre.

Two works stood out for me.

Dramafest's *Las Chicas del 3.5 Floppies* is one of those works that maddens a translator, for it begs wider distribution, yet it presents wholesale problems in bringing the rich patois and cultural ground-intact into a different language and setting.

The Life and Death of Pier Paolo Pasolini, by the Cuban group Argos, was quite interesting, as much for what didn't happen on stage as for what did. Having Yael as an 'interlocutor' was very helpful, as she explained the clash of strictures and artistic exploration within the Cuban performing arts scene.

I found Mexican theater adventurous, with high production values. Although the presentations were mostly of (or an attempt at) cutting edge material, there was a full spectrum of theory, technique, and style.

The meeting between LMDA members and Mexican playwrights/directors allowed me to learn about the circumstances under which they produce their work, and the complexity (artistic,

economic, and political) of the theatre environment in Mexico

Having participated in the Festival Cervantino some twenty years ago as a performer, I knew that logistical nightmares were handled well. The Puerta staff's mastery of this multi-venue, multidisciplinary, multilingual, and surely multi-attitudinal festival, however, was impressive. I was amazed by the amount of work accomplished with a rather small professional staff and student volunteers. The command of logistics was impressive, too. Everyone performed their duties with grace, especially given the number, diversity, and state of mind of the participants. Special kudos to Monica, Isadora, and Bruno.

The performance venues were wonderful. They were esthetically pleasing, comfortable, and well designed for performance. The 'makeshift' venues in the park were also intelligently used, with multiple performances blending seamlessly for the most part.

My only suggestion for future encounters is that the conveners create a 'casual' time for Mexican artists and visitors to meet and talk, without the structures and pressures of designated 'roundtables' or meetings.

—Felipe J. Gorostiza, New Jersey Repertory

I want to thank LMDA for extending me the opportunity to be part of this delegation. Partly the experience was valuable for me because I was able to see a wide variety of live showcases. While as a chair of a theater department I am not a presenting organization, I do often work in partnership with presenters, and we saw at least one show (*Mestiza Power*) that we may bring to UMass under the auspices of New WORLD Theater. In that respect, the short-term results are likely to be quite direct and concrete.

More important, however, in the long-term, was the opportunity to meet and receive work from a large number of contemporary Mexican playwrights. At our Saturday roundtable, I personally met ten different writers, most of whom gave me CDs and/or printed editions of their plays. I now have a large library of contemporary Mexican drama to peruse — in coordination with a number of other LMDA delegates, who are also reviewing these plays and sharing reactions. While I don't yet know what this review will bring, I am excited — as a translator — about the potential represented by this material and hope to find some scripts worthy of translation and, eventually, production in English, whether here at UMass or elsewhere. I also learned about some web sites that post contemporary Latin American plays and translations

I would like to put in a word for the organizers of Puerta de las Americas. It was a first-class conference and experience all around. They were gracious, professional, and on top of all the details.

Finally, I want to thank Liz, Brian, and Mark for their leadership — and for helping solve a longtime translation challenge: how do you say 'dramaturg' in Spanish?

'Dramaturgista' seemed to do just fine. And it needs less explanation than our own English-cum-German term.

—Harley Erdman, University of Massachusetts

My most thought-stirring moment of the weekend occurred when at one of the playwright round tables, Barbara Colio, a Baja-based playwright, asked, 'Are you looking for Mexican or Chicano plays?' Apparently, though she lives in Baja not far from the border, she's found that American theaters, particularly Southwest theaters, think her plays don't explore immigrant and border issues enough to appeal to their Chicano audiences, whether existing or prospective. I have not yet read Ms. Colio's plays and therefore cannot surmise if there are other reasons why theaters may have passed on her plays, but her question is important. The issue was further complicated when a day later I saw Sabina Berman's production of *eXtras*, her adaptation of Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets*. Berman decided to tinge the play with some border politics, but a few Chicano colleagues of mine found both Berman's writing and the (otherwise talented) Mexican actors' portrayals of border characters inaccurate and deeply offensive. In this case, at least according to two Chicano members of an otherwise enthusiastic Mexico City audience, a renowned Mexican playwright/director got Chicano issues all wrong.

My theater, thanks in large part to the work of the now-defunct Latino Theatre Initiative and the artists who ran it over the years, has nurtured new plays by a variety of Latino writers and performers and has continued to build a Latino — and largely Chicano — audience in Los Angeles. Now Center Theatre Group, under its new artistic director Michael Ritchie, would like to present and/or produce more international work, including work from Latin America. I myself dream of a mini-season of contemporary Latin American plays performed in Spanish with English supertitles. But I don't think it's as easy as saying, 'We'll treat plays from Mexico just as we treat plays from Poland, Israel, or Nigeria; it's all international work.' There are so many questions to ask, and most of them probably don't and shouldn't ever have answers, or at least any easy ones.

What's the difference between Mexican and Chicano plays? Is it the playwright's cultural background? Is it the play's target audience? Is it its subject matter? What kinds of plays would a first generation Chicano audience like to see? What kind of play would a second or third generation audience prefer? What are the corollaries in other multi-ethnic theater towns such as London and Paris? What if a Mexican playwright writes a play about the border? What if a Chicano playwright writes a play that has nothing to do with border or immigrant issues? Who expects what from whom and why?

Since the World Cup has been reigning supreme in the global conscience over the last few weeks, though, I think I've gotten at least one hint. I've been thinking about all of the Mexican flags that were flying in Los Angeles whenever Team Mexico played a match and about the huge Korean and Korean-American audience that sat in downtown's Staples Center to watch Korea play France. I doubt that it was mostly recent immigrants or aliens, whether resident or not, who were flying Mexican and Korean flags. The fact is that one's ties to one's country of origin are strong and probably survive for at least a few generations. I imagine that a season of Mexican plays or Korean plays would attract immigrants and several generations of descendants from each respective country whether the plays directly addressed the concerns of Chicanos or Korean-Americans. But then again I am also aware of how easy it would be to slight or offend unintentionally an audience who so seldom get an opportunity to see themselves and their life experiences onstage.

I don't know. I'm still thinking. And I intend to keep asking.

—Pier Carlo Talenti, Literary Manager, Center Theatre Group

Connection. Conversation. Contacts. Cross-cultural. Community. A whole lot of c-words, I know, but all tremendously important. If I had one dream for this convening, it was for us as dramaturgs, theatre-makers, North Americans, neighbors, human beings to learn a little more, share a little better.

There is nothing like face-to-face contact, nothing like rubbing passions up against one another, for innovation and exchange to happen. We had to start somewhere. So we started with conversations. So what next? As you have read, planning this first meeting was challenging, time consuming, and a rigorous process. To think that was the easy part! The challenge now is how to make the seeds we planted bear fruit. Now, the rigor is in the follow through. From these spirited dialogues we hope to reap rich results. Already, a readers circle has begun, thanks to Yael, to insure that the piles of scripts and CDs we took home with us don't merely languish on our shelves, but rather find their way integrally into our daily networking and exchanges. Let's widen the circle.

First steps towards this is LMDA's working with sister organizations such as Theatre Without Borders, the Translation Think Tank, No Passport, and ITI [International Theatre Institute (<http://www.iti-worldwide.org/>)] to find ways of connecting translators to Spanish plays, to further discussion about support for translation, publication, knowledge about intellectual property law, to put on the table issues that come up out of international exchange. Where should all the plays live that we all receive every time we go abroad on a trip? What kind of database might there be for connecting translators with authors? How can we expose international plays and playwrights to a wider audience? How does language not become a barrier as we try to introduce new works into our programming?

Brian Quirt's new executive team will be looking at how to connect with international artists, a focus spearheaded by two of our Mexico delegates, Madeleine Oldham and Vanessa Porteous. Be on the lookout for their updates, queries, etc. as they begin to build upon what we have initiated — what may have started out as curiosity, as Dorothy Parker's cure for boredom, and has become an organizational mandate.

You have read above about the many issues that came out of the festival weekend. Our task now is to share them, as we are with this article, stir them, keep the sparks alive, and hopefully to spark conversation, awareness, communication and action amongst our colleagues here back home. You. And it's not Mexico-specific. Let's look broader than that. Let's learn more about theatre-making, cross-cultural connections, and community building in other parts of the world as well. So that we can continue to grow as dramaturgs, theatre-makers, North Americans, neighbors, and human beings. We ask you to join the dialogue, to volunteer to read some plays in Spanish, or any other language, and, if you know how, to want to translate, to come to No Passport's February 2–3 conference at CUNY in NYC, where these issues will continue to be raised and wrestled with. This conference was three years in the making, heralded by the fearless Mark Bly, and was successful thanks to a spirited and dedicated dele-

gation. Now, we need to ask, what can happen in these next three years? Curiouser and curiouser!

Let the games begin! *Vamos a la playa!*

—Liz Engelman, Past President, Board Chair, LMDA

Imag[in]ing Poverty: Creative Critical Dramaturgy for Suzan-Lori Parks's *In the Blood*

by Louise Edwards

In the opening scene of *In the Blood*, playwright Suzan-Lori Parks describes the setting as follows: 'Home under the bridge. The word 'SLUT' scrawled on a wall. Hesters oldest child Jabber, 13, studies that scrawl. Hester lines up soda cans as her youngest child Baby, 2 yrs old, watches' (7). Parks's stage directions introduce the audience to several important aspects of her play. First, we see a mother struggling to make ends meet and teach her own children how to survive in a world where ends have gotten 'further apart' (32). We see a child caught between having to label his own mother a slut or pretend that he cannot read at all. We see the word itself graffitied on the wall, emblazoned not unlike the infamous 'A' of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel. And we see their world, a theatrical space that Parks describes as 'spare, to reflect the poverty of the world of the play' (4).

In the Blood, which premiered at the Joseph Papp Public Theater in the fall of 1999, works as a loose, contemporary interpretation, or appropriation, of Hawthorne's nineteenth-century American classic, *The Scarlet Letter*. It follows several days in the life of Hester, who appears here as a mother of five living on welfare under the main bridge in a nameless city. But the representatives of the institutions established to help a woman like Hester are concerned more with their own problems than with helping Hester solve her problems. And the other adults in Hester's life likewise manipulate her for their own benefit. As the play progresses, Hester retains less and less control over her life – the more desperate she becomes, the more power she loses – until the play reveals the tragic result of a life eclipsed by society's in-built injustice.

In considering the relationship between form and content, John Dias, the production dramaturg for the premiere of Parks's play, notes several hallmarks of the playwright's style in general: 'boldly nontraditional, nonlinear storytelling and densely layered dramaturgy, rich with imagery, drunk with language' (149). And while he notes that *In the Blood* seems to possess a more linear narrative than some of Parks's other plays (Dias 153), the importance of and relationship between imagery and language is very much present. It would become my job, as dramaturg, to imagine and articulate that relationship through more than just words.

In the spring semester of 2005, I served as dramaturg for a production of Suzan-Lori Parks's *In the Blood*, produced by the Performing Arts Department at Washington University in St. Louis. The show was directed by Aundriel Potier as her Senior Thesis Project; she completed her undergraduate degree that same semester. The entire production staff (save for myself) consisted of undergraduate students, with additional technical support provided by the department. The performances ran Saturday and Sunday, March 19 and 20, 2005 in the A.E. Hotchner Studio Theatre on campus, a black box space with flexible seating. Admission was free and open to the public.

My work on the production began towards the end of the fall semester of 2004. Aundriel, a talented actor and director, was looking for additional support in her first attempt at directing a full-length show. She felt that a dramaturg would provide essential help in understanding and accessing the world of the structurally and thematically complex play. Aundriel had already assembled an all-female design team with varying degrees of experience and expertise. Auditions were held during the fall semester, as the winter break and other commitments of those involved in the production demanded that table work begin in December. I joined the team shortly before rehearsals and serious design work began — you might say that I hit the ground running and never stopped.

My first meeting with Aundriel covered a variety of ideas surrounding the play. When she asked for my initial response, I immediately pointed to its double nature as a family tragedy and a social tragedy. The meaning created by the double-casting in the play speaks to this aspect in particular; the five actors playing Hester's children also appear as the five adults in the play. In Scene 1, an actor appears as the Baby of the family, in our production running around in his red long-johns. In Scene 3, that same actor appears as Reverend D. (note the clear reference to Dimsdale of Hawthorne's novel). We quickly discover an obvious connection between the two roles – the Rev (as we liked to call him) is Baby's father. Needless to say, there is a striking resemblance between father and son when both roles are played by the same actor. But we also see a stark contrast. Baby, whose vocabulary is limited to periodic exclamations of 'Mommy!'

Louise Edwards recently graduated from Washington University in St. Louis with a Master of Arts in Drama. While at Washington University, she received the Herbert E. Metz Award for outstanding literary essay in dramatic criticism and the English Department Chair's Award for excellence in teaching. Louise has worked with the education department at the St. Louis Shakespeare Festival and the education and development departments at the Goodman Theatre. She holds a BA in Theatre and English from the University of Notre Dame. She plans to continue her graduate work in theatre, drama, and gender studies, with a particular interest in the emergence (and later representation) of the Restoration actress.

to convey the full range of his emotional and psychological world, is juxtaposed with the Reverend, who has a motivational cassette for every possible situation.¹ Parks's theatrical genius reveals itself with the double casting in Scene 3, when Hester approaches the Reverend for help. She has brought a picture of Baby with her to strengthen her appeal. After looking at a picture of Baby (in other words, himself, due to the nature of the double-casting), Reverend D. instructs Hester to confront the deadbeat father. The dramatic irony is palpable; he unwittingly provides Hester with the very argument to use against himself. And his subsequent rejection of himself, his flat refusal to accept any responsibility as Baby's father, is all the more heartbreaking because of the visual connection between father and son.

This effective double-casting works throughout the play. Jabber and Chilli, Jabber's father, are also played by one actor. Chilli tracks down Hester in Scene 7, when his firm belief in an overly idealistic remembrance of their relationship prompts him to propose marriage. Despite having a wedding dress and an engagement ring in his picnic basket, Chilli seems reluctant to accept his role as a father. Overjoyed at the prospect of finally escaping their desperate circumstances, Hester calls for Jabber to meet his daddy. And even though we know it is physically impossible (because the actor playing Jabber is already onstage), it seems almost possible. Our understanding of this, that father and son can never meet within the theatrical framework constructed by Parks, only makes us long for it more. While this does provide a thought-provoking structural aspect to the play for all the characters, it also poses a challenge to the student actors in their creation of multiple roles. The structural elements of the play – the casting, scenes, and confessions – became touchstones for me as the dramaturg of the show in that they most clearly represent the playwright's trajectory. Parks uses them to complicate the relationships between the characters in the play and the audience's own implication in its outcome. Helping both the director, designers, and actors grasp their significance in a way that would enhance their own creative work surfaced as one of my main goals for the production.

I wanted to serve this production in an active and engaging manner, not limiting myself to research outside the rehearsal room with a *laissez-faire* attitude to bringing my own work to the table. Serving the project meant helping Aundriel to support the overarching ideas

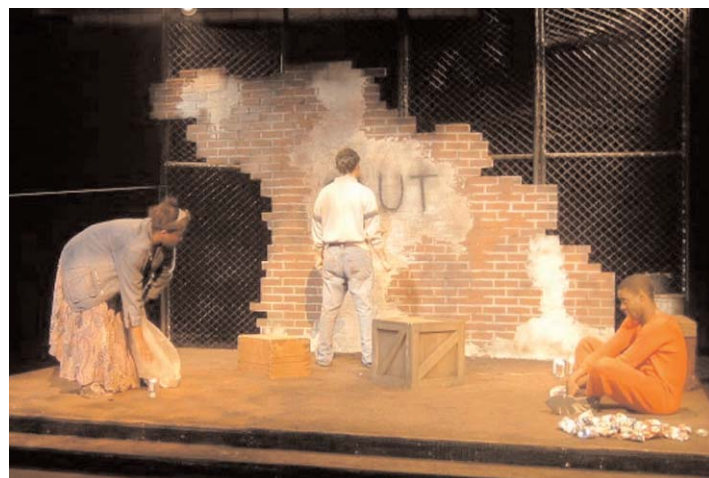


Photo 1. The opening of the play with Carrie Lewis (Hester), Matthew Goldman (Jabber), and Chauncy Thomas (Baby).

Photo: Kaitlin Eckenroth

of the text and her vision of it, while staying true to what Parks hopes to explore within her play. I suggested bringing in images that speak to the world of the play as created by Parks and understood by myself, taking into consideration the ideas that Aundriel had shared with me about her directoral approach. While embracing the double-casting and often allegorical naming of the characters, it was equally important to me that the cast, designers, and ultimately the audience understand the reality of the world of the play. The inherent theatricality of its structure coupled with the harsh reality of poverty seems to fully capture the range of issues raised in Parks's writing. I decided that I wanted to bring some sort of slideshow to the first rehearsal so that the cast would have a sense of what I planned to share with them throughout the rehearsal process. This slideshow, which originated with only seventeen images, eventually developed into boards containing more than 100 images relating to various aspects of the play. Gregory Gunter describes his image work with Anne Bogart as:

a springboard for her company members to begin from. They move beyond it quickly, because each actor brings with herself or himself a great wealth of imagination and experience. But there will always be one image to refer back to, one body position to recreate to achieve a state of being unlike any other, and that's rewarding. (178)

Gunter's methodology inspired my own. My initial image search on the world of urban American poverty burgeoned into an exploration of all of the characters in the play and their relationships to Hester. The image boards were divided up by category and lived with the actors in rehearsal. The slideshows were also shared with the designers for the production as another source of inspiration for their own work.

The image work continued to open up the play for me in new and exciting ways throughout the production process. While assembling images related to the children in the play, I felt it was important to capture the range of emotion and expression explored throughout the various scenes. What I found emerging in the images also emerged onstage. It is tempting to approach *In the Blood* solely through a reading of its tragic end. But that short-changes the journey embedded in its action. To play the ending from the beginning is to miss the moments of humor and love that reveal themselves along the way. In the midst of the family's struggle is great camaraderie and compassion. And ultimately, the moments of joy and laughter more starkly contrast the play's dark ending. The images relating to the roles of the children ranged from more contemplative, serious portraits to those of children playing and laughing. And it became clear that the children in the images could never be fully separated from their surroundings: a mischievous looking girl peering through the bars of a metal gate, children sitting on a simple wooden platform on a large dirt lot, even the presence of someone or something seen outside of the picture's frame. These images encouraged everyone to consider their work from this perspective – what happens if we just put a whole lot of dirt on stage? What does it look like if family dinner is served on an upside down wooden crate? Where does Hester 'press' the children's clothes after they go to bed? These were questions that were grounded in an understanding of the world of the play and a willingness to imagine and to image that world, and they were questions and images that encouraged an artistic exploration on the part

of the director, the designers, the actors, and myself [Photo 1].

The visual research, which included photographs, paintings, sculptures, architecture, and eye charts, also served to complement my inter-textual research for the production, and influenced exercises brought into the rehearsal room. I was fortunate enough to work with a director that openly responded to a variety of approaches to the play. In addition to having me provide another set of critical eyes for her work with the actors, Aundriel invited me take a more hands-on approach to our work in the rehearsal room. I'm not sure where or when the idea occurred to me, but I suggested expanding the image work from my own outside research to research shared and created by the actors. One example of this occurred at our first rehearsal after the holiday break. Since the actors had spent more time with their scripts at that point, I suggested an exercise to help them think about their roles as the children in the play. The danger in playing children lies in the tendency to generalize – about their age, their ideas, their level of maturity. So I asked each of the actors to draw a picture of her or his favorite day with mommy from the child's perspective. The day could be real or imagined, or blurred between the two as is often the case. Meanwhile, Hester drew a picture of the story that she tells to the children before bedtime in Scene 1. After they finished their pictures, each child described her or his picture to Hester. The result was striking. Jabber's picture shows him walking hand-in-hand with both his mommy and daddy (despite the fact that he has never met his father and never does in the course of the play). Bully drew a picture that was somewhat surprising in its 'girlishness' – the toughgirl tomboy of the family selected pink paper and colored in the sun and clouds and a big table full of food, with herself and mommy standing next to it. The drawing displays another side of the character, a vulnerability she attempts to mask through her words and actions in the play. Trouble's picture shows him speeding down a highway with mommy in the passenger seat – the sun is out and the speed limit is 95 mph – the perfect day when no one will get into any trouble at all. Beauty's picture clearly depicts a house drastically different from the setting of the play. It celebrates the day that mommy brought Baby home from the hospital. Beauty is holding Baby while the smell of roasted turkey fills the room and diamonds rain from the sky outside the home. [Photo 2] And the actor playing Baby, whose picture was appropriately abstract for a 2 yr old, explained that it was him and mommy and food. Needless to say,



Photo 2. Beauty's favorite day with mommy, a picture colored by actor Judith Lesser.

Aundriel and I were thrilled with the actors' creativity. Their own image research, in the guise of a child's coloring session, asked them to think creatively and critically about the text, their roles in the world of the play, and their individual relationships to Hester. It seems significant that only Beauty's drawing included one of her siblings. This work supported conversations that Aundriel had with the actors later in the rehearsal process – that each child fights for Hester's attention in her or his own way in each scene. I certainly can't take credit for the creativity of the individual actors in this moment, but I like to think that my image work, introduced at the first rehearsal and incorporated throughout the rehearsal process, encouraged the actors to think about alternative ways of exploring, interpreting, and engaging with Parks's evocative text.

The actors willingly joined me on a dramaturgical joyride throughout the rehearsal process, gamely responding to any of my dramaturgical instincts. They were even brave enough to share photos of themselves that were taken when they were about the ages of the children in the play. I suggested they bring these in as a further way to tap into the lives of their characters. There is something about looking at a photo from our own childhood – it calls to mind music, friends, teachers, birthdays, anything related to the context of the photo. It seemed an effective way to remind the actors, 'Yes, that's what it was like to be 13, or 12, or 10, or 7, or 2.' Moreover, it helped the other actors to think of them in this light, to think of them as young children, as part of a family. [Photo 3] I did not plan to use the photos outside of the rehearsal room (to the great relief of the actors - not all bar mitzvah photos are the most flattering), but later decided to incorporate them into the lobby displays. The actor's drawings from rehearsal were displayed alongside their childhood photos on a smaller board directly outside of the studio – their own contribution to the visual world of the play. We even considered hanging them on the clothesline on stage – a replacement for the absent refrigerator door. Whether it was coloring pictures, reading passages from the Bible, or throwing bouncy balls at each other, the entire group embraced the work with thoughtful energy. And the efforts of everyone involved directly contributed to the success of the production.

Looking back on the production and the process of our collaboration, I am particularly proud to see the ways in which my own creative response to the play inspired the creative work of the actors and other members of the design team. The production photos display a connection between my early image work and the fully realized sets, costumes, and lighting. Moreover, the images became the basis for other important work related to the production. The image used for the poster and the program was an image included in my original slideshow for the first rehearsal, an image that had influenced our understanding of Hester, the children, their home, the set, the lighting. In addition to this work, I created the lobby display outside of the studio – two graffitied boards which used a combination of images from my research and text from the play. In the final scene of the play, the cast circles around the now-imprisoned Hester bombarding her with a tirade of unforgiving, degrading accusations. This text was originally conceived by Parks as a theatrical framing device for the play, occurring as both a prologue and epilogue. The original prologue was cut during rehearsals for the show's premiere, but the epilogue was incorporated into the final scene of the play. The damning words come from unnamed characters; they are not clearly iden-

tified as any of the adults we have seen in the play. Rather, the words stand as society's response to Hester, implicating the audience in this final moment of the play. I chose to use these words, and those from the original prologue, as my graffiti. Even though the prologue was no longer embodied in the production, the lobby displays served as a theatrical framing device not unlike the idea originally conceived by Parks for her play. [Photo 4] The use of the text and the images reflected the interdependence of these elements throughout the rehearsal process and helped to establish the world of the play, both visually and textually, before the audience even entered the theatre.

The work has even made its way outside of the rehearsal room and the theatre. What began as a project done in part to fulfill the requirements for a Dramaturgical Workshop I was enrolled in that semester, became a fully realized production, and finally an example of the diverse and creative research that can be done at a 'research' institution. My dramaturgical workbook, inspired by the work in *The Production Notebooks* edited by Mark Bly, was presented as part of an interdisciplinary gallery exhibit of graduate work at Washington University. The workbook was displayed alongside paintings, sculptures, drawings, and a myriad of other artistic creations — the same type of creations that had fueled my dramaturgical research in the first place. The exchange between text and image worked in all its settings as it continued to speak to larger issues at hand in Parks's play. Can we write our own lives, even if we cannot read? Is there another way of writing, of speaking, of communicating with one another that perhaps exists outside of the socially acceptable standards? In her essay, 'Elements of Style,' Parks raises a question that could be asked of her own work — 'Why does this thing I'm writing *have* to be a play?' (7, italics in original). I think she answered this question on the first day of rehearsal for the premiere production, as recorded by Dias:

I was writing a play ... and about a year ago I got into a conversation with the characters in the play. To make a long story short, I decided to change the names of all the characters. The main character had been called Hester, and I decided to change her name to something else. I began writing *Fucking A* afresh, and Hester said, 'What about the play that I'm in?' I listened to what she had to say and let her lead me to a story about a woman with five kids. (160)

The story, then, is Hester's, not Parks's. Parks may have written the

play, but it is Hester who is telling us her story. And as the dramaturg, I was looking for complimentary ways to tell the story of a woman who never gets farther than the letter 'A.'

I like to think that Parks would approve of the imagistic, alternative form of research and creation that inspired our work on this production. A dramaturgically creative and critical approach helped the actors and artistic team to access the world of the play, a world that Parks describes as 'Here' and 'Now.' It helped the audience to understand the world of the play, and to understand their own role within that world and the world it represents. And it helped an even wider audience to better understand and appreciate the artistic and academic work that takes place in a university performing arts department. Imagine that.

Notes

¹ Or, as John Dias describes it: "Reverend is Baby's father; Reverend is the most articulate; Baby doesn't speak" (168).

² The work of two photographers stands out here, some of which can be viewed online. The photojournalism of Esther Bublely captures thought-provoking images of both people and places (www.estherbublely.com). Harvey Finkle's socially and politically charged documentary photography includes a series on "Child Poverty" that was particularly relevant (www.harveyfinkle.com).

³ My apologies for continuing to break this promise!

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Photo 3. A family photo of actor Chauncy Thomas, taken when he was about the same age as Baby.

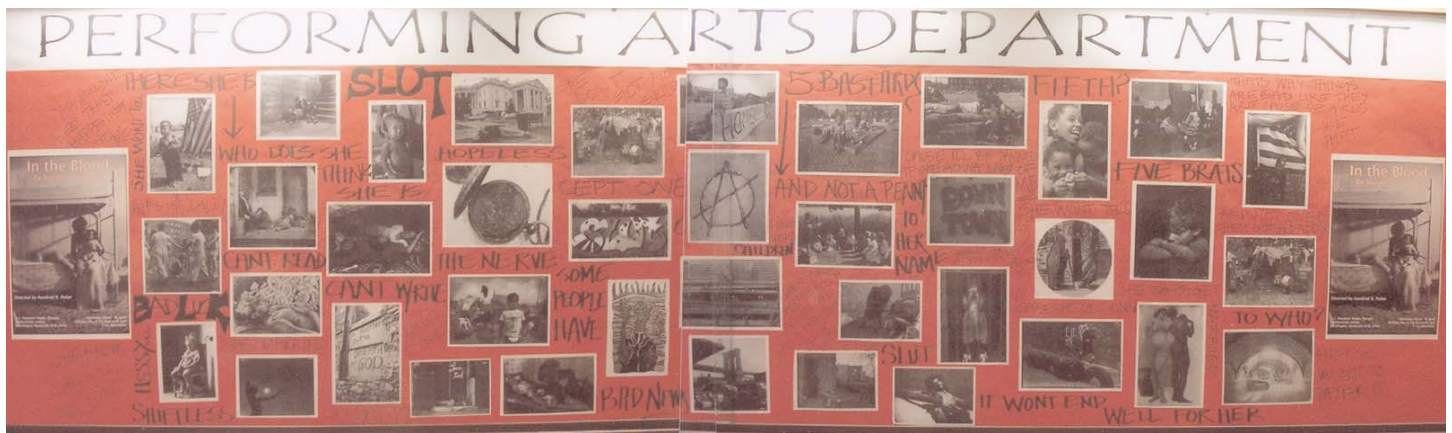


Photo 4. The lobby display outside of the A.E. Hotchner Studio Theatre.

Photo: Louise Edwards

Some additional photos from the WashU production of *ITB* discussed in Edwards’s article.



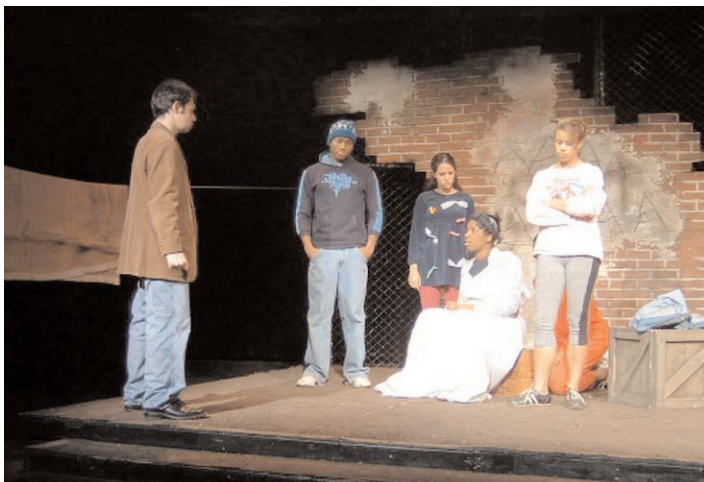
Carrie Lewis (Hester) and Jimmy Brooks (The Doctor).

Photo: Kaitlin Eckenroth



Carrie Lewis (Hester) and Judith Lesser (Amiga Gringa).

Photo: Kaitlin Eckenroth



Matthew Goldman (Chilli), Jimmy Brooks (Trouble), Judith Lesser (Beauty), Carrie Lewis (Hester), and Lesli Williams (Bully) with Chauncy Thomas (Baby) hiding in the background.

Photo: Kaitlin Eckenroth

Hester, La Negrita in Iowa City Staging “Spells” and Homelessness in Suzan-Lori Parks’s *In the Blood*

by Bryan Moore

An unfortunate event proved timely in the development of the University of Iowa’s production of *In the Blood* in November 2005. Louisiana, Mississippi, and other states along the Gulf region were devastated by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The entire country felt the effects of these storms. Iowa City was among the many areas across the country to accept displaced families and individuals from the destroyed Gulf region. Since their move to Iowa City, adults have reestablished their lives, and students have begun taking classes at Iowa City grade schools and at The University of Iowa. Ironically, before these hurricanes, dozens of individuals already in Iowa City had been looking for the same type of assistance that numerous hurricane-affected people needed, and that Hester — “La Negrita,” as Parks calls her in the list of characters and in some stage directions (*Red Letter* 3, 7, 106) — from *In the Blood* desires: “All I need is a leg up. I get my leg up I’ll be ok” (*Red Letter* 28). Unfortunately, people ignore or do not consider that an affluent college town like Iowa City would have an issue with homelessness.

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 defines “homeless” as:

People without fixed nighttime shelter or who live in places not ordinarily used for humans (such as cars), people whose primary residence is a temporary congregate shelter or transitional housing, children living in institutions who have no home to return to, and people living doubled-up with family or friends temporarily.

The reality is that homelessness knows no racial or social boundaries, and is as present in smaller towns in Iowa as it is in larger, more urban areas like Chicago and New York. Poverty and homelessness in the state of Iowa is around the US national average. More specifically, in Johnson County, which includes Iowa City, fifteen percent of residents were living below the poverty level, which is about \$20,000 for a family of four in 2006 (Shelter House, Register).

My dramaturgical work for this production covered three main areas: on stage, above the stage, and beyond the stage. First, my onstage work involved the staging and presentation of homelessness and

poverty, specifically in Iowa City. This included using a chorus to represent the Iowa City society and the staging of Parks’s “Spells,” which director Tisch Jones and I called “architectural moments.” Second, above the stage, we incorporated the use of slides to share local images and information directly pertinent to the local problem and possible solutions with the audience. Third, beyond the stage my work included arranging outreach activities, such as local volunteering and a donation drive, as well as educating the cast, crew, and audiences.

Through these multiple approaches, Jones and I hoped that this production of *In the Blood* would inform everyone involved — presenters and observers — about the problem of homelessness in Iowa City. My role as dramaturg unofficially spilled over into a sort of coach/director’s assistant and jack-of-all-trades. I assisted in this production both in and outside the rehearsal room, all the way to opening night.

On Stage

Jones and I met prior to the rehearsal process to discuss some foundational choices about staging homelessness. First, Parks intended the main cast to play the chorus for the play’s prologue and epilogue. Jones cast a separate group of actors to create a racially, economically and socially diverse chorus that observed and responded to Hester’s homeless situation and to the other characters throughout the play. The chorus was composed of a policeman, a judge, a PTA member, a photographer, an accountant, and a politician; these characters shared the lines of the chorus, as well as interacted with Amiga Gringa and Reverend D, and observed Hester doing her “house chores” under the bridge. I assisted Jones in the division of lines and the blocking of the chorus for the prologue and other scenes.

Second, pictures and literature helped the actors reflect on homelessness. Several actors requested visual examples of people living on the street. My main resource was a book of photographs by Howard Schatz called, *Homeless: Portraits of Americans in Hard Times*

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(1993). These photographs provided a plethora of visual representations of the physical and emotional struggles faced by homeless people. I also found a book of poetry by Tony Medina called, *Sermons from the Smell of a Carcass Condemned to Begging* (1998), which includes over one hundred poems and messages spoken by a homeless man. I read a poem or two from time to time to the entire cast, which provided emotional references and motivations that the actors used toward developing their characters.

Third, Jones and I wanted to make the confessions and spells stand out from the rest of the scenes. Parks explained in an interview with Bonnie Metzgar that, while writing the play *Fucking A*: “[In the Blood’s] Hester said, ‘What about the play that I’m in?’ I listened to what she had to say and let her lead me to a story about a woman with five kids” (*Stagebill* 50). Similarly, when Parks sat down to write the confessions for the play’s adult characters from Hester’s past and present, their monologues “wrote themselves” in a Pirandellian fashion (Dias 160). Their direct-address confessions explain their initial encounters and involvement with Hester, which resulted in each of her children. Lighting designer Bryon Wynn illuminated the actor just enough to distinguish these moments from the larger setting of the play.

The “spells” were another challenge, a staging practice that is unique to the works of Suzan-Lori Parks. In her essay “Elements of Style,” Parks defines a “Spell” as:

An elongated and heightened (Rest). Denoted by repetition of figures’ names with no dialogue. Has sort of an architectural look:

Reverend D.

Hester

Reverend D.

Hester

This is a place where the figures experience their pure true simple state. While no action or stage business is necessary, directors should fill this moment as they best see fit. (*Red Letter* ix)

According to dramaturg John Dias’s notes on the Joseph Papp Public



Hester (Joniece Abbott-Pratt, standing, face unseen) confronts Trouble (Ken Peterson, in hat) with the stolen nightstick during a “spell” while the other kids watch. From left to right, Barrington Vaxter (Baby), Jamyl Dobson (Jabber), Kayla Borja (Bully).

Photo: Reggie Morrow

Theatre production of *In the Blood*, published in *The Production Notebooks: Theatre in Process, Volume Two* (2001), the production staff discussed the topic, but they did not choose a specific action. I also did not notice any specific choices made by the Guthrie Lab’s production that I saw in spring of 2001. After our discussions, Jones and I agreed to present these “spells” as architectural moments, or compact, physical events, which share non-verbal stories that look inside the mind and heart of a character for an instant. For each character’s name listed in a “spell,” Jones asked that the actor create a pose expressing his/her character’s feelings about that moment. Sound designer Anton Jones integrated the sounds of background street noise over a slow heartbeat. I assisted in rehearsals with the creation of these moments, which only lasted about two seconds per name in the grouping. Lighting designer Winn intensified these moments with the help of a white spotlight. These brief moments presented a stronger emotional image than words could have expressed.

For instance, in Scene One, Hester’s children are settling down for dinner. In the process, Hester discovers the billy club that Trouble stole from a policeman. Hester pulls the club out from the back of Trouble’s pants and asks: “Whered you get this?” Then, the following lines appear in the published script in boldface type:

Trouble

Hester

Trouble

In our production, Trouble gasped and froze with a frightened, guilty look on his face. Then, Hester, with exhausted disgust, lifted the club ready to strike Trouble. Finally, Trouble reacts to the imminent hit with a panicked expression, while leaning away from his mother. All of this was brightly spotlighted at center stage. Then, the standard light returned and dialogue continued with Hester asking, “I said—,” and Trouble pleading his case. Throughout these moments, the sound of cars speeding over the bridge and blasting the radio could be heard. In this particular spell, a police siren also blared. I helped the sound designer find song lyrics that reflected selected architectural moments in the play, such as Pink Floyd’s “Money” and Kanye West’s “Golddigger” when Hester asked for money.

Each fully developed “spell” showed the physical and emotional relationship between characters in a specific situation. For the production as a whole, the presentation of these architectural moments offered new insight to the play’s events, as well as allowed for stronger emphasis on the homeless condition and its consequences for Hester and her family.

Above the Stage

The major mission of this production was to create awareness about the issue of homelessness in Iowa City. Set designer Scott Needham modeled the main scenic element, the bridge, after an Iowa City bridge near campus. To complement this decision, I thought it would be helpful to present images and statistics to our audience, showing the facts of homelessness in Iowa City. But rather than putting the images and information on a lobby display, I felt that incorporating the information before and during the performance would create a stronger con-

nection between real-world homelessness and that shown in the play, which would increase awareness of Iowa City's homeless situation.

Subsequently, Needham integrated my dramaturgical research into the scenery. Needham included two projection screens placed above the scenery at the downstage corners. He then photographed familiar locations around Iowa City and the UI campus, and I collected these images and looped them into a PowerPoint pre-show presentation. As a short pre-prologue to start the show, I used Needham's images from under the bridges of two main roads in the area, which showed evidence of people currently living in those areas. These black and white images were presented as the stage went to black.

Additionally, I chose to add informational slides within the play to assist with transitions between scenes. I created a PowerPoint show that included statistics and details about topics discussed in the previous scene, including gender, race, cost of living, locations where the homeless sleep, and affordable housing challenges.

These slides reminded the audience that this was not just a big-city story about a black woman with five children living on the street. Hester's story could exist in their town, and could belong to someone in that audience — or to any one of us at any given time. After meeting Amiga Gringa in Scene One, audiences learned that over two-thirds of the homeless people in Iowa are white, while eighteen percent are black, seven percent are Hispanic, and so on (*Homeless Study*). After the Doctor chastises Hester about not keeping up with learning her letters, audiences learned the flip side via a slide: four out of five homeless adults have at least twelve years of education (*Homeless Study*). Similar information was shared about welfare, minimum wage, and so on.

Finally, I created title card slides to introduce the "Confessions" made by the central, adult characters. These slides mainly helped to create smooth transitions between scenes and direct-address monologues. The combination of image and information on these slides contributed effectively to the presentation and awareness of the local homeless situation.

Beyond the Stage

Since we knew we wanted to reach out to the community concerning



Hester (Joniece Abbott-Pratt, standing) serves dinner to her kids: (from left to right) Baby (Barrington Vaxter), Jabber (Jamyil Dobson), Trouble (Ken Peterson), Bully (Kayla Borja), and Beauty (Christina Frank).

Photo: Reggie Morrow

the local homeless situation, we needed to go to a more direct and local resource. We found it at the Shelter House in Iowa City, the only general-use shelter facility in Johnson County. The Shelter House has provided emergency and transitional housing since 1983. It also provides phone, laundry, and bathing facilities, and serves an evening meal. The Shelter House is open to all throughout the week, but fire codes restrict the occupancy of the current two-story house to only 29 people overnight, which forces the facility to turn away about 100 people each month—from 3 to 15 a day (Miller). Their occupants have come from within and beyond the county and state, including Chicago and, more recently, the hurricane-affected areas. These individuals arrive alone or as a family, some with as many as four or five children.

In preparation for our production, Jones required cast members and designers to visit and volunteer at the Shelter House in order to interact with the people and witness the state of homelessness. I arranged the initial meetings and the cast members arranged their own service times. Production volunteers helped with meals and interacted with the current residents. Some cast members read *In the Blood* with the current residents, which encouraged some residents to talk about their own experiences. We also offered about a dozen complimentary tickets for residents to see a matinee performance, providing a unique opportunity to bring the homeless and non-homeless communities together. And the cast took a trip to a local bridge, where there was evidence of homeless residency. These experiences exposed the cast to real individuals and stories, which the actors carried into the rehearsal room for their characters, as well as into their own lives. In addition to using their volunteer experience to develop their characters emotionally and physically, some cast members chose to continue helping the Shelter House beyond their required commitment.

Jones and I also met with Shelter House staff members and gathered information and statistics on the local homeless problem. I used the information in the slide presentation and the program article. In an effort to get the Iowa City community more involved in the homeless situation, I also arranged for the Theatre Arts Department to conduct a donation drive, which allowed the public to contribute "Coats, Cans, and Cards" to the Shelter House and other local agencies throughout the run of the production. The Shelter House informed us that phone and gift cards could be used by residents to contact loved ones and to buy necessities. Donations could be made on performance evenings at a table staffed by volunteers, as well as during the day at the Theatre Department Main Office. We gathered over \$300 in phone and gift cards, as well as numerous cans of food, clothing, and other supplies. We delivered the cards to the Shelter House, and divided the remaining items for delivery to local agencies and to homeless people currently living on the street. The donation drive added an element of public engagement to the production, as it provided an immediate opportunity for audience members to make a difference, while encouraging them to consider the homeless issue in the future.

In retrospect, I do not know if it is possible to gauge if, or to what extent, our production of *In the Blood* helped reduce Iowa City's homeless situation. Regretfully, many of us from the production admit that we were not able to continue volunteering at the Shelter House after the production, at least not to the degree that we did before and during the production. I believe our efforts were well-

intended during the production process, but our ever-changing schedules and commitments forced us to find other ways to support and volunteer. But this situation begs the question: What are the boundaries of doing outreach for the sake of a production? How does one prevent this type of production-based public engagement from becoming exploitative? If one truly wants to help, I think there are many ways and places to provide resources and assistance; but for future productions, this dilemma needs consideration.

Other Reflections

Two other questions arose from my dramaturgical work on this production. First, how would our visual approach to the “spells” and confessions in *In the Blood* carry over to Suzan-Lori Parks’s other “red letter” abortion play, *Fucking A*, which includes ten songs and Parks’s self-created “foreign language of TALK” (*Red Letter* 115). Could this approach carry over to her other plays, like *Topdog/Underdog* or *The America Play*? Jones and the designers made solid and meaningful choices in creating the “spells” in our production. A similar consideration of visual “spells” should be made, even if the specific technical approach and choices made in our production of *In the Blood* are not applicable.

Second, considering the variety of my tasks for this production, I wonder: When is the work that a dramaturg does no longer considered “dramaturgy,” but rather something else? I am a jack of all trades, and I often look at a dramaturg as “all of the above,” but I’m curious about where, or if, others draw the line—or is it simply an individual choice?

The combination of the architectural moments, the presence of society in the chorus, the background of images and statistics through projections, and the charitable efforts of the donation drive and volunteering resulted in a production of *In the Blood* that achieved its goals of awareness and assistance to the local and wide-ranging problems of homelessness. With this production as a model, I want to encourage my department and all of us to continue to find opportunities to challenge and explore our plays, and to educate our society and ourselves.

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The Future of Theatre Is...

(a creative contest)

In the fall of the year, I posted the following to the LMDA listserv:

Get out your Sharpies! Start up Photoshop! LMDA's online journal *Review* is soliciting contributions of quick-and-dirty, word-based art to be included in a gallery at the end of our next issue (R 17.1). In a spirit of early New Year's Resolutions, *Review* is inviting dramaturgs and other theatre artists to complete the sentence: "The future of theatre..." in 1 to 20 words. Hyperbolic, understated, laconic, verbose, cynical, naive, political, whimsical: commit your utopian vision for the theatre to words, with a flourish. We're looking for creative, hand-written or computer-assisted responses.

Judith Rudakoff's submission showed up in my In box within a day or so. Her beautiful image is below. Judith writes: "If you'd like to see more of my lomography, check out my website at www.yorku.ca/gardens. Throughout the site you'll see my pix and if you click on 'creative/research team' and then my name, you get to my bio page. Scroll to the bottom and click on 'lomographs.' Geez. That sounds like a lot of clicking and scrolling...."

Judith Sebesta's contribution followed. She and some of her students developed phrases in response to the prompt.



Judith Rudakoff.

The future of theatre will reflect the concept of the "rejuvenile," as explored in Christopher Noxon's recent book *Rejuvenile: Kickball, Cartoons, Cupcakes, and the Reinvention of the American Grown-up*.

Amber Wright and Emily Alexander

The future of (Broadway) theatre will involve more of the "Usher Complex" — the casting of film stars on Broadway (or should we refer to it as "Movieway"?)

Nick Halder and Katie Alvord

Seventh Annual Call for LMDA Residency Proposals

Description

LMDA offers a \$2,000 stipend for a dramaturgical residency within a theater project, program, and/or community that seeks an on-site dramaturgical presence but is unable to fund a dramaturg at this time. LMDA member dramaturgs are encouraged to approach theaters and introduce a dramaturgical role and relationship that would become part of an event within the upcoming season beginning January 2007. The dramaturg and the theater together would then determine the role and extent of dramaturgical activity for: a show, a special project, literary management support, play development workshops, or other carefully defined events.

Grant Mission: To foster partnerships between dramaturgs and theater communities that will continue to grow into strong, well defined, ongoing dramaturgical relationships and positions within the world of theater at large.

Grant Application Deadline: December 15, 2006

Grant Notification: Approximately Jan 5, 2007

Application Format

- 1) Identification of the theater. Include their website if possible.
- 2) Identification of the dramaturg. Please attach a current bio or resume.
- 3) A short and concise description of the project, playwright, and dates of performance, reading, workshop, etc.
- 4) A simple statement about the theater's goals for dramaturgical input into the project. Include the theater's expectations for dramaturgical functions and the relationships that the theater hopes to foster with a dramaturg on board. The entire stipend is meant to go to the dramaturg for salary and living expenses and not for a theater or dramaturgical budget. The theater should be able to cover all other dramaturgical budget items.

Procedure

- 1) While the process can begin with either the dramaturg or the theater, the application is to be submitted by the theater. The applications will be reviewed by the LMDA Residency Committee and the criteria will be based upon perceived benefits of dramaturgy within the project, the needs of the theater and the understanding and advocacy of dramaturgy as a vital part of the theater-making process.
- 2) A simple letter/report from both the theater and the dramaturg will be required at the end of the residency telling us how it went.
- 3) LMDA's assistance in each residency must be acknowledged in programs, flyers, posters, and other project literature.
- 4) Membership in LMDA is required for a residency grant. All Canadian members and theater companies are eligible to apply.
- 5) All applications should be emailed to Maxine Kern at <mkern5@nyc.rr.com> and cc-ed to Louise McKay at <lmdanyc@hotmail.com>.
- 6) Questions should be emailed to Maxine Kern, and they will be answered in a FAQ.

All Best,

Maxine Kern
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