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## LMDA Canada Newsletter, September 2001

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# LMDA CANADA NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2001

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# Toward New Developmental Structures – DD Kugler

The 2002 Annual Conference of LMDA is being held in Vancouver, noon Thursday June 13th through noon Sunday June 16th. Although there will be reports and discussions about the on-going work of LMDA – including the vital activities of the Advocacy Caucus – the primary focus will be upon play development.

As one of the Conference Planners, I'm less interested in panels that describe institutional development models, and their successes. I'm more interested in asking:

- Why are so many interesting shows developed in processes that are in conflict with existing developmental programs?
- Why are theatres producing work that could never have been developed inside their own development structures?
- What's not getting developed/produced inside the current development models?
- What plays/performances are current structures not serving?
- What developmental structures might encourage a broader range of theatrical production?

It is my feeling that we are developing and producing a relatively narrow band work within the broad theatrical spectrum. I don't want to disparage the work currently being produced. But I would like to think about how we, as literary managers and dramaturgs, might help expand the development/production spectrum.

I am almost always engaged and excited by productions developed by ensembles largely outside the common institutional models. Perhaps the fact of "company" plays a critical role. A panel on Ensemble Theatre at the ATHE Conference (Association for Theatre in Higher Education, Chicago, August 02-05/01) was represented by what the moderator defined as four distinct ensemble theatre models: narrative (Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble), non-narrative (Saratoga International Theatre Institute), grass-roots (Cornerstone), and performance art (Goat Island).

Each panelist described a distinctive development process. Some companies developed and produced work completely outside of institutions. Others (SITI) evolved a distinctive development process, but relied on institutions (Actors Theatre of Louisville) for portions of development, and finally, for production. But the development processes of all four companies had evolved from specific circumstances; and even now, their structures are not fixed, but continue to evolve in response to locale, company members, the material at hand, etc.

During the panel discussion SITI's Leon Pauli reported that in response to Anne Bogart's question: "Why a company?", JoAnne Akalaitis responded: "No piece has profoundly affected me not created by a company". Could the simple fact of a fluid and responsive developmental process contribute a company's elemental power?

In Canada, the "radical" activity of the '70s – largely collective creation, and eventually development of Canadian playwrights – has now become institutionalized. The PACT category is, in fact, "established alternative." Developmental organizations (largely non-producing) are also now established across the country. The broadly defined, but narrowly understood, Canadian Creation criteria for Canada Council funding has resulted in such a proliferation of development programs that virtually every theatre receiving operating funding has now incorporated a structure for new play development – even Stratford.

I hardly object to time and money committed to the development of Canadian work, but I wonder why all these developmental programs look so much the same – the playwrights unit, the pre-scheduled reading or workshop festival, etc. If theatres have distinct mandates, why wouldn't their developmental process evolve from that mandate, and be equally distinct? If a theatre commits to the development of a play/playwright, wouldn't they build a developmental process that reflects the distinct needs of that play/playwright?

Sometimes I feel like, after two plus decades of evolution in Canadian play development, we've arrived at a one-size-fits-all process. The process clearly works, please don't misunderstand me, and I'm not discounting the considerable work that particular process has produced. But have we stopped thinking – really thinking – about the developmental process itself? Do we merely imitate, or adopt, existing structures? Are we doing new play development by rote? "Hey, that's how you develop new work." Well, is it? Always?

I feel it's necessary in theatre – and elsewhere – to expose and examine our underlying assumptions. If the examination re-affirms those assumptions, so be it. But if not, perhaps there's the possibility of re-thinking and re-shaping a process so that it more appropriately mirrors the mandate of the company, the aspirations of the playwright, whatever... but something.

During the Chicago panel someone stated that "ensemble theatre is antithetical to institutions." And perhaps it is. Maybe I'm calling for a kind of theatre that can only be developed by companies, and largely outside the institution. But I don't think so.

Let me give you an example.

When Brian Quirt was dramaturg with the Theatre Centre in Toronto, he inherited a venerable series called R&D (research and development). He discovered that the while Theatre Centre did lots of "D," they had done virtually no "R." So he solicited applications for funding/space to support a Research Workshops – "up to three days in the Theatre Centre's black box space, with actors as required, with full technical support as required, to explore a specific theatrical question." Pure theatre research, unrelated to production. The projects included:

- exploration of live dj-ed music with theatrical text;
- shiatsu as a tool to generate emotional exploration which could then be utilized in rehearsal;
- theatrical silence – scenes worked on with the text, and then without, to explore the limits of communication between actors, and between actors and audience;
- how to manipulate and score bird songs and, from them, generate a vocal text.

Let me reiterate: Brian's goal "was to offer completely unfettered time in the space to experiment."

A willingness to invest in pure theatrical research may be the first step in evolving a new process of development. Maybe it's possible to broaden the spectrum of theatrical production – even inside the institution – if we really think about the developmental structures we so often put into place automatically.

Over the months leading to the LMDA Conference in Vancouver, please re-consider your process of development, and contemplate alternatives. What might you have been done differently in your greatest development failures? Who has an unusual development process that you'd like to hear more about? What needs to happen at the LMDA Conference to invigorate Canadian theatre with myriad thoughtful and distinctive developmental structures? If you have suggestions, Brian <bquirt@interlog.com> and I <ddkugler@sfu.ca> would like to hear from you.

– *DD Kugler, President, LMDA*



# The Good Conversation:

## Denver and Toronto 2001 – Rachel Ditor

After sitting on the sidelines reading newsletters and following discussions on the listserv I took the plunge this summer and attended both the LMDA annual conference in Denver in June, and the Canadian mini-conference in Toronto in July. My experience at these events was wonderfully enriching and satisfied a near visceral need to talk to other dramaturgs about the work we do. I'm hooked now. The next time there's a gathering of dramaturgs, I'll be there (if there's still a search for the right word to describe such a gathering I'm putting my vote in for "clutch"), especially since the next annual meeting is in Vancouver, where I live.

I'm still sorting through my thoughts from the conferences, which is a good thing, except that it may not make for the most coherent article. I'll do my best to share with you some highlights and lingering questions – the things that continue to distract me.

### Denver June 7-10

Moments before I stepped on the plane to Denver I was asked to be a last minute replacement on a panel about how one makes a life as a dramaturg. During the session I was fascinated by the stories of the other panelists: conference Chair Gretchen Haley, a dramaturg in the business sector, and Nichole Gantshar who works as both a sports writer and dramaturg. I also found it very liberating to hear Mark Bly talk about moments in his career when he wondered if he made the wrong choice, made a mistake. Two thoughts here: 1) it was a little odd to be presented to a group of people as a person who has made interesting career choices. I wasn't aware I had made *any* conscious career choices – just the usual weighing of compromises in an effort to facilitate a career dictated by my interests. *Ah, but that is a choice, and if it is true for me then...* and 2) Mark Bly made a career mistake?! Hmm...seems he survived that. Good to know.

Lunch with Brian Quirt. We walked to the Brown Palace hotel. Brian had spotted it some days before and wanted to show me the lobby. When we arrive it looked as though high tea was being served. This is a room I will return to many times in my mind (and later in this article).

Two conversations I hope to pick up again at next year's annual conference: 1) with Megan Monaghan, my gracious Denver roommate (currently on her way now to a new job at the Alliance Theatre Company in Atlanta), about strategies for working in play development companies, and 2) with Douglas Langworthy (Oregon Shakespeare Festival) about the difficult process of disengagement with a playwright. Both discussions reminded me how necessary and inspirational it can be to share information.

A session led by Des Gallant from Florida Stage (who I had not seen since we were both Montreal residents playing at Shakespeare) discussed various community outreach programs that dramaturgs were leading for their theatres. Des and the other panelists, Lee Devin (People's Light and Theatre Company), Mary Resing (Woolly Mammoth), and Paul Kosidowski (Milwaukee Rep), all shared stories of their successes and frustrations. Ever since that session I have kept in my mind a running list of questions about outreach programming, including: What kind of *experience* does an outreach program aim to create for an audience? Are we trying to demonstrate to people that a play is relevant to their lives? Are we preparing people to experience a play more deeply, or cushioning the effect of a play? Are we trying to give a play a broader context historically, or are we trying to reach people emotionally? Or both? Why? To extend an experience they had in the theatre, or to make up for the *lack* of such an experience? Do you book the guest speakers and panelists that you want to talk to,

or people your audience wants to talk to? Is there a difference? How do you know? How have we invested ourselves, as audience members, in other theatres?

I enjoyed chatting and getting lost with Joanna Falck as we made our way to lunch at the Denver Centre for the Performing Arts. At the Centre we heard Bruce Sevy, the company's Associate Artistic Director and Head of New Play Development, discuss the evolution of their new play festival, TheatreFest. The story of this festival was an eye opener for me and sparked another running list of questions, this time about play development programs and new play festivals. I'll save my list for our next annual meeting in Vancouver when we explore what's *not* working well in play development. However, the core of my questioning comes from a desire to re-examine and clearly separate the needs and timelines of the host company from those of the playwright.

I found both the advocacy discussion and the banquet to be quite moving, particularly the presentation of the Elliot Hayes award to Judith Rudakoff. At both events people were talking about their work and themselves in the same breath. I started to formulate an answer to my question about why I love what I do...

One of the most memorable events was the walk back to the hotel after the banquet. The Denver Avalanche team had won the Stanley Cup on the theme of Dramaturgy and Community with a headlong dive into a glorious, raucous crowd of strangers who were stopping us every couple feet to share high-fives. There we were, in the very centre of the crowd, happily walking in the opposite direction to the flow of traffic - something fitting about that, too.

### **Toronto July 7-11**

I found my time in Toronto to be as rich and stimulating as in Denver partly because from the moment I arrived everything else in my life was put on hold for a few days and I was free to focus on the craft of dramaturgy. How wonderful, and not just for me but also for people with whom I'm working in Vancouver who benefit from my renewed energy, clarity, and information.

Here's some of what I came back with:

As fascinated as I am with the Electric Company's unusual creative process I can probably help them most by ensuring that there is adequate time for script dramaturgy *before* they head into rehearsals. Thank you all for such a lively, enthusiastic conversation - it's definitely helped move my thinking forward.

I surprised myself in my response to Linda Griffiths' comments about working with a dramaturg. Why do I feel compelled to assure people that working with a dramaturg doesn't have to be a debilitating experience? (This is not what Linda was saying for those of you who weren't present.) I direct and I don't feel this way about directors, and there are artists with horror stories about directors. So what's up with that?

Which leads me to another thought: I wonder if for some people hiring a dramaturg is a bit like taking out an insurance policy on the play. Call it: Process Insurance. As if to say, "*This* time the show will be about process, not just product. This time we'll get to all those important, meaty questions *before* the show has opened." This is great except that it makes me wonder if sometimes there is an unarticulated, hidden expectation that simply our presence in the room (in the building?) will result in the production of better new plays. Key words here are: presence and better. Does this have any resonance with other 'turgs?

My time outside of the scheduled conference hours was immensely productive. I needed to research in-house development programs and people were wonderfully forthcoming and candid. In particular I would like to thank Iris Turcott, Ben Henderson, Andy McKim, Kelly Thornton, and my two most

constant and dear navigators, Kugler and Quirt. It was good to reconnect with Joanna Falck, Henry Bakker, and theatre artist Ruth Madoc-Jones, share thoughts with Claudia Buckley, and lunch al fresco with Don Druick and Stephane Kirkland. I also managed to catch up with my old Montreal compatriot Michael Devine. Exhausting but joyous, all of it.

So. I got what exactly what I hoped to get from attending these conferences – good conversations. Which leads me back to Brown Palace: on a certain level perhaps people want us to be a part of their work because we embody the hope of The Good Conversation – the one we all hope will happen on each play we do, the one where everyone walks away feeling enlarged, like they have just discovered a previously unknown room in the play, one that is unexpectedly tall and light, capped by radiant stained glass and surrounded on four walls by doors and staircases all leading somewhere worth investigating.

*Rachel Ditor is the dramaturg at the Arts Club Theatre, associate dramaturg for Rumble Theatre, and associate artistic director and dramaturg for Touchstone Theatre. She is also pleased to be on board as dramaturg with the Electric Company for Flop, and the Gateway Theatre for the late Michael David Kwan's A Season in Purgatory, which she will also direct.*



## DATES TO REMEMBER:

- **LMDA Canada Annual Meeting:** Friday March 1, 2002, 1pm  
Alberta Theatre Projects, Calgary, AB  
ATP playRites Festival Blitz Weekend
- **Canadian National Theatre Conference:** May 30 - June 2, 2002  
Joint meeting of PACT, PUC, ADC,  
CAEA and ITT, Ottawa, Ontario
- **LMDA Annual Conference:** June 13 - 16, 2002  
Vancouver, British Columbia
- **Mini-Conference on Dramaturgy:** July 8 and 9, 2002  
In association with the Theatre Centre,  
during the Toronto Fringe Festival



**LMDA Canada – Membership List**

(Sept. 1, 2001)

- Philip Adams -
- Henry Bakker
- Bruce Barton
- Crystal Beliveau
- Lindsay Bell
- Diana Belshaw
- Mary Blackstone
- Kathryn Bracht
- Naomi Campbell
- Frank Canino
- Anne Chislett
- Michael Clark
- David Copelin
- Michael Devine
- Rachel Ditor
- Andrea Donaldson
- David Duclos -
- Katrina Dunn
- Joanna Falck
- Stephen Heatley
- Ben Henderson
- Andrew Houston
- Deborah Hurford
- Chapelle Jaffe
- Shain Jaffe
- Stephen Johnson
- Denis Johnston
- Urjo Kareda
- Katherine Kaszas
- Kathryn Kelly
- Stephane Kirkland
- DD Kugler -
- Jennifer Lord
- Kim McCaw
- Marie Mendenhall
- Deirdre Murphy
- Winston Neutell
- Yvette Nolan
- Natalie Papoutsis
- Wendy Philpott
- Vanessa Porteous
- Gerry Potter -
- Brian Quirt -
- Gyllian Raby -
- Alison Ramsay -
- Lisa C. Ravensbergen -
- Brian Richmond
- Richard Rose -
- Judith Rudakoff -
- Stuart Scadron-Wattles -
- Laurel Smith -
- Heidi Taylor -
- Vern Thiessen -
- Kelly Thornton
- Rishi Trikha
- Iris Turcott -
- Craig Walker -
- Bob White

# Mini-Conference on Dramaturgy:

Day One, July 9, 2001 – Joanna Falck

Brian Quirt, the Conference Co-ordinator, began the day by talking about next year's LMDA Annual Conference in Vancouver and introduced the theme of that conference: New Play Development. The aim of the Vancouver conference will not be to examine only successful case studies (which are normally highlighted) but rather to talk about what is **not** working—what is not working within the developmental systems in place? Who is not being served? How can the independent artists, who are creating their own methods of development, influence the institutional models? What connections are possible? These questions became the jumping off point for the day's discussions.

## **Introductions**

The first session began with round the table introductions of everyone attending the conference. There was a wide range of participants: from playwrights and actors at the Fringe Festival (which was taking place during the conference) to established directors and dramaturgs, undergraduate and graduate students, professors and arts administrators. Brian asked each person to talk about current projects and to explain why they had come to the conference. I won't list everyone's responses but one general observation about the make-up of this year's participants was that many were attending because they wanted to know more about dramaturgy. Playwright who had had a previous good experience with a dramaturg, in particular wanted to know more about what dramaturgs do. Others wanted to hear more about different developmental processes. In other words, many were there to learn about the role and function of dramaturgy. We were all struck by the large attendance this year from Regina and it was great to hear about the particular challenges of working in Saskatchewan. Other issues raised were the challenges of adaptation, the importance of the designer in the development process and questions regarding the role of a dramaturg in a process—does a dramaturg ensure a “good” process?

## **The Speakers**

The speakers reflected the range of work a dramaturg can do on any given project and each addressed a variety of dramaturgical challenges. Each project demanded something new and different from the dramaturg and this became a theme repeated throughout the day: each project demands its own process and any preconceived ideas of what should happen or who should do what must often be abandoned. For me, their talks reflected the ways in which play development can respond to the needs of an individual project because each described ways of working which had to be tailored to the unique challenges each project presented.

## **Iris Turcott: The Challenges Facing Current Dramaturgy**

Iris spoke passionately about her need to connect with writers and her rejection of methodologies. Her talk focused on the dramaturg's relationship with the playwright and the idea of challenging one's own notions about what kind of dramaturgy is supposed to happen on any given project. Her passionate and long-term relationships with playwrights go beyond the boundaries of any traditional notions of playwright/dramaturg relationships. She challenged everyone to go in and find the process along the way, which often means walking in scared, not knowing exactly how things are going to work.

Other challenges Iris discussed included the difficulties of long distance dramaturgy, how to have



that personal relationship with writers over the phone or email. She also questioned the kind of discussions dramaturgs should have with playwrights – do you help them make their play more truthful or do you help them make it producible? As a dramaturg, you can help make a play actor- or director-proof but is that the play the playwright wanted to write? She also described her own challenges in her current work on the stage adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, particularly how to theatricalize a character's internal monologue and her need for a designer early in the process in order to theatrically realize the character's point of view.

### **Rachel Ditor: Vancouver's Multi-Media Electric Company**

Rachel described the work of this four member company and her work on their up-coming show, *Flop*. She described how their plays are created by the company members who each do a great deal of research and improvisational work to generate material. She had worked with the company before but this was the first time she had come in from the beginning and she was unsure exactly what her role was to be. One role she had played for the group was facilitating discussions between members and getting them to articulate their process. Since they had worked together for so long, ways of working had gone unstated between the group members. Rachel's questions revealed underlying assumptions in the group and these discussions of process became useful for them.

The company also challenged Rachel's assumptions about what her work on the project should be and the group's unique process allowed her to define her role in new ways. Rachel had felt she should perhaps be trying to shape their research but the project moved in ways which she could not have anticipated. Her talk articulated the differences between what a dramaturg might think she should be doing and how a project can move a dramaturg's work in new directions.

Other challenges Rachel articulated included recording multi-disciplinary work for future publication and the challenges in documenting this company's visual vocabulary. How do you create a code for work that seems to defy codification?

### **John Delacourt: Steve Lucas' *Breath(e)***

John talked about the challenges inherent in this piece specifically regarding narrative and theatre. In what ways can theatre communicate? How can theatre tell a story? The project looked at how to create a narrative without text and how to allow the audience to have an individual rather than a collective experience of a piece. With this piece, they wanted to explore different models of narrative, as the prose model is just one possible model to follow.

The play took Beckett's *Breath* as a jumping off point and asked, if there is no performer on stage, how can it still be theatre? John referred to Richard Foreman and his definition of theatre which states that theatre takes place in a defined space and things enter and leave that space. The project focused on form and content and the desire to move away from theatre that was illustrative. The challenge was how to create a narrative within a soundscape which consisted of the sound of breathing. John described different strategies he and the director gave to the actor performing the breathing including having her listen to music and breathing and faking an orgasm using only breath. Eventually they found that having the actor move through the chakras was the most useful means of creating a narrative for the breath and this became the way for the performer to create a 27-minute soundscape. The play challenged what they saw as the visual bias of traditional theatre. *Breath(e)* instead created meditative cues with sound and design that did not illustrate what the audience was hearing, thus creating a new range of effects on the audience.

*Joanna Falck is a PhD student at the University of Toronto's Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama.*

# Mini-Conference on Dramaturgy:

Day Two, July 10, 2001 – Kathryn Kelly

A dusty theatre, the interior slightly gloomy, and in the centre a circle of forty, seated neatly at large desks. A round table? A vicious circle perhaps? No, simply a room full of dramaturgs, ready to luxuriate in a day of navel-gazing and discussion: How is dramaturgy practiced? Who benefits? Who cares?

The format of the day flowed around five presentations. Each speaker brought a rich and generous spirit to the table. *Darren O'Donnell* spoke candidly about the fusion of performing and writing in the development of his agitprop comedy *WHITE MICE*. *Judith Rudakoff* related how she began working on the glorious integrated dance theatre piece *REVEALED BY FIRE* as a dramaturg and was enticed into writing text. *Mary Blackstone*, an academic from the University of Regina, discussed the challenges of creating a community of writers across genre and geography. *Linda Griffiths* spoke eloquently about traversing the ground between performer and writer, and threw down the gauntlet to a room full of dramaturgs: What is your stake in creating? *Kelly Thornton* closed the day, with a practical and thoughtful analysis of her first season as the director of *Buddies* in *Bad Times' RHUBARB!* Festival.

## **How is dramaturgy practiced?**

*REVEALED BY FIRE* is a journey of reclaimed identity, based on the experience of Lata Pada, founder of Sampradaya Dance, after she lost her husband and her two daughters in the Swiss Air crash sixteen years ago. Judith and Lata were old friends, but through the development process forged a deep and trusting collaboration. Judith brought gifts of dramaturgical insight to the show: the mechanics of writing text, the construction of a theatrical world and the sequencing of the dance pieces to frame the central vision: the only way out is through. Other dramaturgs in the circle affirmed the complimentary mix of dramaturgical analysis and the broad expanses of choreography.

In contrast, Darren O'Donnell didn't work with a dramaturg and seemed slightly baffled at the thought. After reflection, he described a number of relationships he relied upon to provide dramaturgical support: a trusted improv mentor; a good friend who armed him with political information; and a long-term director who helped him shape the dramatic through-line of the show and insisted on layering emotional sub-text into the first act of *WHITE MICE*.

Both Mary Blackstone and Kelly Thornton discussed utilizing dramaturgical practice in large-scale script development enterprises. Mary is trying to build a sense of community across disparate networks of writers in Saskatchewan. The grant program she is currently creating, under the aegis of the Centre for the Study of Script Development at the University of Regina, depends on dramaturgs to broker the collaboration between partners and to document the lessons learnt. Kelly contemplated how to offer high quality, personalized dramaturgical input for emerging playwrights within *RHUBARB's* tight yearly timelines. Suggestions included matching emerging dramaturgs with the chosen playwrights early in the cycle of selection.

## **Who Benefits?**

The politics of representation were fiercely debated across the day. *WHITE MICE* follows two brothers, one of which, Robert, keeps returning from outside the house with horrendous stories about the treatment of brown mice. Only after they break up do we learn that Robert has sourced all his information from a brown mouse he was dating. Darren O'Donnell wrote the play to challenge



the standard white/middle-class/liberal responses to racism. Wryly acknowledging the play has cemented his legitimacy as a playwright, Darren confessed he has been disappointed at the responses of audiences. What was meant to incite action has become a release valve to expiate white guilt.

How does political theatre realise such powerful expectations? Can the ideas gestate and bear fruit in action later? Is the most powerful political theatre that which poses questions instead of offering solutions?

Darren chose not to represent the brown mouse on stage; all the analysis is quoted with sources highlighted. Many in the room had seen the play and were discomfited by that absence and a sense that the brown mouse operated as 'saviour'. Men and women of colour described both joy and marginalisation in their experience of watching the show.

Judith also struggled with issues of appropriation. Mid-way through the development process of REVEALED BY FIRE, Lata asked her to write the text. Do I dare cross this boundary Judith asked herself, blurring the lines of race, individual experience and the delineation of roles cherished by dramaturgs. Judith chose to write, and described the process as an emotional burst unlike any of her previous experience. Lata marveled that "no-one could tell it was not written by me". Judith was unsure whether she was complimented or frightened.

### **Who Cares?**

Linda Griffiths challenged the concept of distance and its incorporation into dramaturgical practice. Speaking on her feet, describing the painful, gutsy creative process that birthed ALIEN CREATURE, she questioned how dramaturgs added value if they had no stake. Dramaturgy is dangerous. It is remote. Critiques, anger, input can only be earned by being inside a piece, committing to a long, often frustrating, occasionally epiphanous creative process.

The challenge cut to the heart of dramaturgical practice. The closest to consensus we came was a deeply expressed conviction that each project is utterly different. Roles and presence are negotiated in the context of the particular work. Distance *can* be a precious gift to offer a collaborator.

No closed endings, but a feeling again that the boundaries are shifting. Despite wildly divergent theatrical interests, each speaker had explored the shadowland between traditionally defined roles: between performer and playwright, between dramaturg and writer and between administrator and provocateur. We sat in a circle of peers and were inspired by singular and vigorous stories of creation. For me, an Australian dramaturg practicing in Canada, it was a day of decadence, a chance to wallow in the joy of words and connection that brought me to the profession in the first place.

– **Kathryn Kelly** is a walkabout dramaturg: Australian born but with a practice that spans Canada and Australasia. Contact her at <kathkel90@hotmail.com>.

# SOME THOUGHTS ON THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GERMAN AND CANADIAN DRAMATURGY

– Birgit Schreyer

As a German graduate in dramaturgy and theatre science, attending the LMDA's conference on dramaturgy this summer in Toronto was particularly valuable for me. It's been about 2 years I became interested in Canadian theatre and since I first had the pleasure of gaining practical experience in various productions in Canada. Finally, after writing my thesis paper on Self-Identity in Canadian Drama, a scholarship program enabled me to come back to Canada for further research. Participating in the conference gave me the opportunity to meet passionate, wellknown theatre artists from all over the country. Discussing the concept, function and reputation of dramaturgy in Canada made me reflect on the similarities and differences between the dramaturg's job here and in my home country Germany.

It may be surprising to you but it can also happen in Germany that people consider being a dramaturg as working in some kind of medical profession: "Dramaturg - is that to do with trauma?" Or "Dramaturg, really! But you never seemed like a sad person to me!" (That's when people associate the word 'drama' with its more general notion of something being 'dramatic')

These are only two out of some interesting reactions I experience when talking about my education and activity in the theatre. So don't think it's only a Canadian phenomenon when you have to explain the word dramaturgy, and its function, over and over again. Apparently, it still sounds rather exotic to most people in Germany, where the profession has a much longer tradition than in Canada. In fact, you might be able to tell by the term itself that 'dramaturgie', as a permanent element in the theatrical process, was originally established in Germany, and eventually used in other languages, such as English.

Among the first theatre professionals who worked distinctively in the position of a dramaturg, and also defined it as such, was Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. One of the leading figures fighting for the ideals of Enlightenment, Lessing is now considered the most influential dramatist, philosopher and literary critic in Germany during the second half of the 18th century. One of his most ambitious attempts was to help establish Germany's first National Theatre in Hamburg, but even more importantly, he discussed the principles of Ancient Greek theatre such as the Aristotelian catharsis and reinforced the rules for a contemporary German dramaturgy. After being dominated by French dramatic forms for so long, German drama finally began to take shape. The 'Classical era' was about to begin, along with Lessing's famous book of criticism, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*.

Even after more than 200 years the dramaturg is still a fairly unknown phenomenon in Germany – at least among people not involved in theatre or film. Generally speaking, only the larger professional theatre companies can afford an "extra" person to be hired as a dramaturg, instead of having the director or the artistic director fulfill some of his/her tasks. If there is a dramaturg hired, they mostly fulfill a permanent or at least 2-year-contract position, similar to what might be called a 'dramaturg-in-residence' here. However, more and more of the smaller and private companies are now working regularly with a dramaturg as well. As opposed to the so-called 'feste Dramaturg' (permanent), temporary co-operation with a so-called 'production-dramaturg' is becoming increasingly popular in the German theatre business. Even some established state theatres prefer this kind of collaboration, for it gives the company more flexibility and the option to react more spontaneously to current artistic or marketing trends. So in big theatre houses it happens that there

might be several dramaturgs working in one theatre on different shows.

While the general acceptance and acknowledgement of this profession is apparently increasing, in Germany the exact definition of its field of activity is still vague – in fact, in this I hardly see any difference from the situation in Canadian theatres! The range of responsibilities of a dramaturg seems endless and certainly varies from case to case, depending also on the nature of his/her relation to the company.

One of the dramaturg's most important jobs is reading scripts – and not only newly submitted ones. He is supposed to refer back regularly to earlier plays and classics to ensure that he can pick the right script at the right time. Ideally, the artistic director and the dramaturg are equally in charge of creating a season and its casting. Maybe even more importantly, they collaborate in developing the 'image' of their theatre. If the company has a marketing department, the dramaturg's job is to interpret the creative team's ideas to the public relations staff. Together, they create an outline of the company's mandate, and its role in their particular community such as its target audience and its major focus on dramatic works: does the theatre want to concentrate on the classical repertoire, or specialize in new plays, or be a forum for international works, or does it want to offer as balanced a variety of styles as possible? In public, regarding the media and the audience, before, during or after the run of a show, the dramaturg is expected not only to represent the theatre's image but also to defend the choice of plays. In other words: Why did they decide to stage this particular drama, at this particular time, in this particular city?

Therefore, it is considered of great importance for the dramaturg to be aware of the political, social, or economic relevance of the production. Above all he/she should prove that there is relevance at all! Which brings me to another aspect of the role of dramaturgy in German theatres: it is not accidental that our approach to theatre may sometimes be perceived as pretty serious and theoretical. A show put on just for fun is often viewed skeptically by critics and competing theatre artists – why show a play without an urgent reason or current reference to contemporary life? Even if the performance is conceived as 'art for art's sake', people often wish to recognize some sort of artistic foundation or outline in what they see. This is what the dramaturg is supposed to provide in case the director has lost his objective view over the intense rehearsal period. While keeping an eye on the process on stage from a distance, the dramaturg is also in charge of backing up the production's theoretical substructure in the form of a program book. In the best case, this supplements the show with information on the issues dealt with in the play, as well as being a coherent work that can spark the audience's interest in itself. If appropriate, even the concept and design of the program book may convey some elements of the production's ideas. In fact, this is often considered the dramaturg's most important task in German theatres, certainly also due to the fact that the program itself is the only concrete part of dramaturgical work that can be seen as such by the audience. Of course, this is pretty much what the dramaturg doesn't like to hear!

Since – generally speaking – German stages are relatively open to producing international works, comparing different translations of the play in question is certainly essential in the dramaturg's contribution to the show. His/her role is to be aware that every decision on which translation to select already implies some degree of interpretation. Thus, not rarely he may have to correct the translation according to his and the director's idea of the show. Another thing that struck me when comparing our job in Canada and in Germany, is how hesitant many Canadian theatre people are about cutting scripts. It seems to me that the respect for the text here is much higher in general and adaptations and cuts are often considered a major interference with the playwright's authority, whether or not he is a contemporary. Is it possible that this is somehow related to an overall politeness in Canada, as opposed to a greater straight-forwardness in German theatres?

An increased awareness of other media, and interest in other art forms, is also expected from the dramaturg. Comparing the drama's themes with the way they are dealt with in medias like film, fiction, poetry or even fine arts can help develop a greater comprehension of the work's contents.

For instance, the dramaturg's task therefore might as well include movie analysis related to the drama, its playwright, or its time of origin. It can facilitate any relevant connections between different media accessible to actors, director or audience. This may take the form of an additional film screening for the public, an introductory evening or a note in the program.

As a basis for this job, the ability to comprehend and evaluate texts and a relatively wide general education are needed. Until recently, the majority of people working in a dramaturgical function came to this position with a wide variety of educational backgrounds: German literary history, theatre science, history, social or political sciences, art history, comparative international literary history, English literature, philosophy, etc. Although certainly not every dramaturg in German theatres has academic training, the overall tendency is towards considering dramaturgy a profession on its own, that can also be taught as such. It is more and more acknowledged as a job that requires a person who is generally well educated and at the same time particularly trained for the tasks mentioned above. Only recently, dramaturgy programs have been established in cooperation with the drama departments of two German universities. The Bavarian Theatre Academy in Munich offers this program along with other theatre professions that are taught within one academic institution. Having students from the acting, directing, dramaturgy, lighting and musical classes work on productions together, should prepare them for future collaboration in their theatre careers.

Another remarkable difference from Canada's conception of theatre structures is its freedom from the relatively strict hierarchy still existent in many German theatre companies. This also seems to affect the nature of the cooperation among several areas within the theatre. In Canada it is only natural that a playwright might have acting and directing experience, the director might be his own dramaturg, and the collective creation is a popular and often successful form of production. In German theatres people are much more restricted to their particular profession. Switching from one field of interest to another is not as easy and as common as in Canada, even for multi-talented artists. Thus, the dramaturg's function is also seen as a very specific occupation, which can hardly be learned by practice alone. One compulsory subject through all undergraduate studies in the dramaturgy program therefore is theatre history, which includes different theories and theatre models from the ancient Greeks until today. Script and production analysis, adaptation techniques, literary criticism, history of set and costume design, acting and voice workshops, marketing, and program writing are only a few more fields that are covered in the course of studies in dramaturgy. The choice of two additional minor subjects are obligatory as complementary training. This is to provide a profound education that allows the dramaturg to be more open to disciplines other than the theatre.

Within the academy itself, dramaturgy students therefore are often considered the "sophisticated" ones in the crowd, or even as the scholars who have no clue about theatre practice but can serve perfectly as a living dictionary or history book. Only slowly is the acknowledgement of dramaturgical help increasing and the reputation of the students within the school is finally improving. Interestingly, another capability that is very highly regarded in productions in academia or in 'real life', is the psychological function of the dramaturg: a therapist for cast and crew, ally of the playwright and as the only person remaining optimistic in the face of a nervous breakdown before opening night. Unfortunately, these are the tasks that you won't learn from academic training.

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# Report from the Chair – Brian Quirt

The Mini-Conference on Dramaturgy presented in Toronto by LMDA Canada and the Theatre Centre was a great success with attendance of more than sixty artists and administrators from across the country. I want to thank the Toronto Arts Council and its theatre officer Camilla Holland for their generous financial support for the conference, and David Duclos and Rick Sherman at the Theatre Centre for continuing their commitment to this important event.

As well, I extend thanks to Gwen Bartleman at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre for the wonderful space and Joanna Falck for her organizational assistance. We look forward to another conference next July – please feel free to contact me if you are interested in participating.

Congratulations are very much due to LMDA member Judith Rudakoff who received the LMDA's Elliott Hayes Award this year at the conference in Denver. The award recognizes outstanding work in the field of dramaturgy and Judith certainly deserves this acclaim for her work as dramaturg and writer on *Revealed by Fire*. I urge all of you to nominate your colleagues for this award as a way of defining for all of us the highest standards by which our work should be judged.

LMDA Canada will be distributing the LMDA's Guidelines for Employment later this season once the final version is published. A number of Canadian artists, including Vanessa Porteous at ATP, Rachel Ditor at Touchstone and myself at Factory, have found the guidelines to be extremely useful in determining job descriptions and contract details. We will be asking for your support in the coming months to disseminate this document. It can only serve to further develop an appreciation for the range of work tackled by dramaturgs; we hope that it will also improve the conditions under which we all work. If you have experiences using this document – good or bad – please let me know.

With the guidelines in mind, we conducted a survey last winter of some Canadian dramaturgs regarding salaries and fees. The preliminary results, while not conclusive, begin to indicate the range of fees currently being received and will assist us in preparing a follow-up survey this season. Any comments regarding fee structure or contract issues are most welcome.

The survey addressed the following topics:

- Fee to read and report on a script;
- Fee for a one day play reading;
- Fee for a one week workshop;
- Fee for production dramaturgy;
- Salary as resident dramaturg;
- We also asked "Do you alter fees depending on size or location of theatre company, and if so, what would be the percentage range of alteration?"
- How many plays do you estimate you read each year?

**Thank you** to all who answered the survey. I didn't send it to the entire membership, but please be aware that you may be asked over the course of this season to respond to a similar survey, or be asked to respond to a follow-up survey. Your assistance and information (all confidential, of course) is gratefully received.

Have a great season...I look forward to seeing you at one of our upcoming events.

