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LMDA Canada: Canadian Caucus Newsletter, November 2000

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CANADIAN CAUCUS NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2000

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Negotiating Contracts – Vanessa Porteous

Dear fellow LMDA members,

This summer, when Alberta Theatre Projects and I re-negotiated the terms of my employment, we based our discussions on a version of LMDA's "Proposed Guidelines for Employment, category A", as discussed at the June 2000 conference and distributed to all LMDA members this fall.

In our case, traditional production dramaturgy (generating a protocol, etc) is an "exceptional service", while many hours of developmental dramaturgy are routine. Working with the writer for more than two months before opening is normal. So we modified the guidelines to suit our needs. Our version of the guidelines became an attachment to my letter of employment, and both ATP and I have agreed to abide by it.

Through this process, the LMDA guidelines made it easier to prioritize responsibilities, to discuss released time (a new phrase for us) and to make the point in writing that when time permits, gigging or training elsewhere while working for ATP is of benefit to the company.

I've since found that the guidelines also have a salutary psychological effect. I know exactly what I'm here to do, I've agreed to do it, and I'm proud to do it. When extra demands arise, or more commonly, when I'm tempted to take on another labour-intensive, admin-heavy new activity, I can pause and review in my mind what I'm hired to do. Is it more important that I sit in my office all afternoon and wordsmith a blurb for our corporate sponsors, or should I go home and actually read some of those plays that have come in?

With my shiny new letter of agreement, it seems easier somehow to figure out what's really important for the company and the art, and to feel secure that when I'm dramaturging, or assisting in the development of new plays, or Managing Literature I guess you could call it, I'm actually doing my job.

I'd like to thank the Advocacy Caucus, the Friendly Amenders, and the LMDA membership as a whole for these guidelines. I'd like to applaud my boss, Artistic Director Bob White, also a member of the LMDA, for initiating their use at ATP. I'd like to commend Gie Roberts, Managing Director of ATP, for incorporating them officially into the terms of my employment.

I encourage others in Canada and the USA to follow suit. Try it – you won't regret it.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Porteous
Dramaturg
Alberta Theatre Projects
<VPorteous@atplive.com>

Note...

Vanessa has graciously provided on the following pages parts of her Letter of Agreement and Job Description to demonstrate how she and ATP utilized the LMDA's Guidelines for Employment.

Letter of Agreement of an “Institutional Dramaturg” – Vanessa Porteous, ATP

The letter of agreement contains the terms of employment, including salary, duration of the terms, conditions for termination, etc etc. Of interest are the following clauses:

“ATP is committed to the principle that, when possible, freelance work and/or training on your part enriches and renews your contribution to the company. Therefore, it is agreed that you will be granted two months ‘released time’ over the course of this agreement.... You will receive no compensation for the released time.”

“While it may not be possible to provide an intern or assistant on a full-time basis over the course of this agreement, ATP recognizes that without such resources fulfilling all of the duties assigned to you will be onerous. ATP commits itself to providing dedicated support in the foreseeable future.”

The letter is followed by a series of guidelines for the position, slightly modifying the LMDA guidelines.

The guidelines were wordsmithed in a meeting between the dramaturg and her employer. The order of the guidelines was considered particularly important, as it reflects the relative importance of each of the tasks.

Guidelines for the position of Dramaturg at Alberta Theatre Projects

1. Job description

The position of Dramaturg at Alberta Theatre Projects includes, but is not limited to, the following tasks.

- a) Administering the literary management office, including soliciting and reading scripts; maintaining a system for reading and recommending scripts to the artistic director; establishing and maintaining relationships with playwrights; maintaining a general knowledge of contemporary plays both in Canada and abroad; and maintaining and developing relationships with new play development centres in Canada and abroad.
- b) In conjunction with the Artistic Director, administer and oversee all activities attached to the PanCanadian playRites Festival.
- c) Assist the Artistic Director with season planning, including play selection and casting.
- d) When involved with production dramaturgy on a new script, the following tasks shall be considered standard: work with the playwright begins at least two months before rehearsal and continues near daily through rehearsal; text will be substantially altered during the process as a result of the ongoing playwright-director-dramaturg dialogue; the dramaturg attends a significant number of rehearsals and participates in post-preview discussions with the playwright, director and artistic director. Should the dramaturg be of the opinion that his/her work moves beyond the understanding of “standard tasks” as described above, he/she should seek additional compensation or released time.

- e) When involved with production dramaturgy on an already-produced play, the following tasks shall be considered standard: research and preparation of a dramaturgical protocol to assist members of the creative team; discussion with members of the creative team before rehearsals; attendance at two/three rehearsals per week; attendance at run-throughs and previews; notes to director and/or artistic director. Should the dramaturg be of the opinion that his/her work moves beyond the understanding of “standard tasks” as described above, he/she should seek additional compensation or released time.
- f) Create “fact sheets” on all productions for board and staff.
- g) Write articles for the company newsletter.
- h) Assist marketing and development teams by writing, as time permits, articles on the theatre and/or particular productions.
- i) Conduct pre-show chats and participate in other audience development activities as time allows.
- j) Write program notes from time to time.
- k) Participate in educational, outreach and professional development programs developed by the theatre.

2. Credit

- a) The Dramaturg shall be listed, in alphabetical order, along with other staff members in programs and all other materials where the full staff of the theatre is credited.
- b) When serving as production dramaturg on a new play or an already produced play, the Dramaturg will be billed on the title page of the program as “Production Dramaturg”. The Dramaturg’s credit will be of equal size and placement to that of the show’s designers.
- c) If the theatre receives credit in the published version of the script, the theatre shall endeavour to ensure that the dramaturg receives credit as part of the original production of the play.

.....

Fees and Salaries

LMDA Canada is conducting a survey of its membership this fall regarding fees for a variety of common services with the goal of being able to provide, as an addendum to the Guidelines for Employment, an information sheet outlining suggested salaries and fees in Canada.

If you’ve been contacted for this survey, which is entirely confidential, please respond as fully and as accurately as possible. Our goal is to get a clear picture of what dramaturgs are charging for their services, partly to begin a process of standardizing fees when appropriate and also so as to be able to provide assistance to new dramaturgs as they enter the field and inevitably have questions about contracts and fees.

.....

WHAT IS DRAMATURGY

(a few possibilities)

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Help create the mission
Help plan the season
Help look for scripts

NEW PLAYS

Solicit scripts from writers and agents
Recruit, select and supervise script readers
Evaluate and organize the reports of script readers
Read and evaluate new scripts
Develop a system to track, file and respond to submissions
Write kindly letters to writers whose scripts we won't be producing
Maintain friendly relations with writers whose scripts we've rejected
Cultivate writers whose scripts we love but can't produce
Negotiate with agents
Work with writers, directors and designers in the development of new work
Prepare adaptations and translations • Commission new work
Organize in-house play reading programs
Organize new play reading programs for subscribers and other audiences

PRODUCTION DRAMATURGY

Locate drafts and versions of scripts
Collate, cut, track, edit, write, adapt, construct and/or arrange working scripts
Secure permissions to use copyrighted material
Find songs, pictures, stories, videos
Help the designer do the research • Help the director do the casting
Help the marketing and development office
Seek and present pathways into the world of the play
Gather and present given circumstances for the company
Help create given circumstances for the actors
Maintain an even strain in the face of artistic temperaments
(our own included)
Gather and arrange images, sounds and ideas for rehearsal
Explore and present the world of the play
Explore and present the author of the script
Explore and present the script's production history
Explore and present the relevant criticism
Be a memory
Conceive the form of the script as a play
Conceive the forms of the play as it grows

Stay on course when all goes well
Maintain some calm when all goes ill
(as it will)
Create the lobby display
Love the work

ARTS IN EDUCATION

Establish relationships with local educators
Help them use theatre to support their curricula
Prepare study guides • Develop production web sites
Write and develop program materials
Organize and lead pre- and post show discussions
Plan and lead seminars and symposia

PROFESSIONAL

Affirm the function • Explore the practice
And promote the professions of literary management and dramaturgy

LITERARY MANAGERS AND DRAMATURGS OF THE AMERICAS

Writers, Scripts and Community – Mary Blackstone

Historians like Peter Arnott tell us that theatre in ancient Greece was regarded as a mechanism for constructing and reinforcing a sense of community. Citizens were expected not only to attend Athens' theatre festivals but also to participate in theatrical productions either as patrons or performers. Similar arguments have been made for theatre in numerous places and periods, and a recent publication by Holly Crumpton and Maureen Hawkins on the importance of drama in University curriculum suggests that postmodern perceptions continue to link theatre and community. Dramatic writing they suggest is an antidote to the currently dominant "individualist ethos" and its resulting social problems. Philip Auslander has recently argued that communality is not exclusively "a function of liveness" (56) and that depending on the specific audience situation dramatic writing for film and video may also have a similar if not greater effect.

Others, however, have questioned the extent to which theatre or film actually promote the construction of communities. Were slaves and women included in or excluded from the "community" of playgoers in ancient Greece? In the present day, are scholars like Robert Wallace correct in arguing that our fragmented communities and individual identities mitigate against the communality of the geographically-based, regional theatre experience in favour of niche theatres for particular audiences and widely dispersed "imagined communities?" Do contemporary audiences connect writers with local or "imagined" communities, and do the writers perceive themselves to be writing out of or for particular communities? Whatever the answer to these questions, it is clear that a simple vision of the community experience as placid celebration is neither realistic nor desirable in drama given its dependence on conflict. Writers like the native playwright Drew Hayden Taylor have demonstrated clearly their understanding of the important role drama has to play in the ongoing negotiation of a society's values and beliefs, its borders, and margins, and the concepts of belonging, and otherness, which are inextricably linked with notions of community.

Working as a dramaturg in the province of Saskatchewan, I have become increasingly conscious of the importance of mechanisms for building and strengthening communities as well as the substantial gap that can develop between the theory of dramatic writing as a means for uniting communities and the realities of audience response and the position of dramatic writers within not only the film and theatre communities but also the community at large. In the face of globalization and increasing urbanization, many Saskatchewan communities have regarded deterioration of the province's social, economic and cultural fabric as a palpable threat. These communities, along with many artists, feel alienated and fear the loss of their cultural identity. At the same time, the technology of globalization offers arguably the best opportunities ever for wider promotion of the province's culture both within and outside the province. Driven by global demand and its strong connections with new, electronic media, the film industry is one of the province's fastest growing industries. Rising from \$6 million in 1991 to \$50 million in 1998, the industry is expected to be worth \$90 million to the province's economy by the end of 2000.

Under these circumstances, it has become essential for us to create institutions to foster expressions of our own cultures and to look for ways in which such a thriving industry can participate in and contribute to this effort. To this end the University of Regina, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College and five other community organizations have come together in a partnership to establish the Centre for the Study of Script Development. In conjunction with university-based film and theatre practitioners and other researchers, the proposed Centre will draw together several thousand constituents from the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre, the Saskatchewan Drama Association, the Saskatchewan Writers Guild, the Saskatchewan Motion Picture Association and SaskFILM. The objective is to create a laboratory for research and development of dramatic writing. Writers, other theatre and film professionals, as well as youth and a broad representation from Saskatchewan communities will be able to examine dramatic writing as a mechanism for the exploration and construction of cultural identity.

Writers, Scripts and Community...continued

With substantial commitments in kind and cash from the partner organizations, additional funding is being sought for the Centre, including \$200,000/year from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Having been one of 34 out of 100-plus applicants to be successful in the first round of the SSHRC competition, we are hopeful that this funding could make the Centre a reality and enable our writers to go beyond developmental opportunities currently available through the partner organizations.

Although based at the University of Regina and enjoying access to new state-of-the-art theatre facilities and film and video equipment, the Centre will have a mandate to also provide support for writer-driven development of new work in communities elsewhere the province. Sample proposals already solicited from around the province reveal considerable enthusiasm and interest in taking a wide range of developmental approaches. Playwrights wishing to develop a new work beyond a conventional workshop stage within the context of full production will be able to do so (possibly in conjunction with a co-production with a professional theatre inside or outside the province).

The Centre will also serve other playwrights wishing to work with a group of actors from the very beginning of the writing process and at regular intervals, and it will as well be open to proposals for adaptations, translations or major revisions of already performed work. Screenwriters (with or without committed producers) wishing to work not only with story editors but also with actors and directors in the context of readings, improvisation, workshops, staged readings, demos and/or mini-pilots will be able to apply to work at the Centre. Organizations wishing to develop community plays, collective or popular dramatic pieces will also be welcome to apply.

The Centre will facilitate other professional development opportunities as well as educational opportunities for K-12 students and teachers (in whose curriculum Arts Education is a core element), undergraduate and graduate students in University. Another important component of the Centre's research will be the dissemination in print and via its web site of scripts, production notebooks, information about its writers and articles regarding its experimental work. These efforts in the areas of education and dissemination are only part of the Centre's much broader goal to connect the writers and their work with both specific and more general communities. While helping the public to better understand developmental processes, we will be exploring ways of strengthening communities, connections with and interest in writers and new work. More specifically, though, the Centre will also actively seek out opportunities for the showcasing of Centre work, assist in finding additional sources of funding leading to production and promote the work with potential theatres and producers.

With this in mind, we would very much like to hear from developmental centres, producers, theatres or other organizations who might have an interest in exchanges of new work, co-productions or other types of partnerships. We would also welcome advice or information from other developmental centres with a similar mandate for production-based developmental work involving both film and theatre and/or a strong record of cultivating audiences for new work. Although the Centre's efforts will focus on the work of Saskatchewan writers and the creation of more varied developmental opportunities for them in the province, we want to establish a community of individuals and organizations from outside the province who are engaged in related research and who might be interested in visiting the province to work with our writers and their scripts.

– contact Mary Blackstone at <blackstm@uregina.ca>
Department of Theatre, University of Regina
Regina, Saskatchewan, S4S 0A2

A Case Study in Dramaturgical Allegiance – Henry Bakker

I thought it would be a good idea to pick up on DD Kugler's questions about allegiance in July's newsletter as a way of reflecting on a project which I was involved in last year. I was hired by a very small company to work on two new scripts, a workshop, and rehearsal for production over a period of ten months. My role on script A was that of development dramaturg, fine-tuning a collaborative script which had already seen a workshop and preparing it for production. My role on Script B was more nebulous, although it was initially defined as production dramaturg. Script B was a brand new script which had been commissioned by the company from a playwright, although the concept and broad outline of the story was that of the company's artistic director. It is the process on Script B which I'm addressing here.

My first mistake was the contract. This being my first professional freelance gig I was impressed that the company provided a very detailed and apparently exhaustive list of potential legal concerns. What I failed to note was that the contract did not articulate the specific roles of each member of the creative team in the development process. At the time this did not concern me as I (somewhat glibly) adopted the "Hey, it's a process..." approach and went to work. The contract later proved to be of no use at all when direction was needed in terms of where my allegiance should be.

The AD had approached the playwright early on and asked if she was interested in working with a dramaturg. The playwright indicated that she was more comfortable working directly with the AD as there was already a relationship there. The first stage of the work on script B, leading up to the workshop, involved the AD and the playwright collaborating closely on a number of drafts which I read and commented on to the AD from a pre-production point of view. I'm not exactly sure how this differed from development work, except that I felt very distant from the process and I hadn't met the playwright. My allegiance was clearly to the company and the work.

In the workshop things began to blur a little. I was asked by the AD to observe parts of the workshop. I gave feedback to the AD, chatted with the playwright, and after the workshop I met with the playwright and the AD to go over what we had learned. Suddenly I was heavily involved in the creative process. The playwright would e-mail new drafts to both the AD and myself, and the two of us would copy our notes to each other and the playwright. My role had shifted and it hadn't been articulated by anyone, but everything seemed all right because everyone's allegiance was still clearly with making the work the best it could be, and the work was moving forward.

As the date for the final draft drew closer there was a flurry of e-mail activity as the playwright tried to polish scenes and incorporate requests from the AD which gradually became more prescriptive. Drafts were being rewritten faster than we could provide feedback and I became aware that as I was not "officially" a part of the process, I was not sure how to proceed. After the "final" draft was delivered, the AD communicated to me that the script was not rehearsal-ready, but that as the piece was co-owned by the company and the playwright, the AD had the playwright's permission to "fix" the play as necessary and would communicate changes to the playwright. The playwright was out of the loop, I became the production dramaturg again and proceeded to provide feedback on the script, while the AD made changes with, as I understood it, the playwright's knowledge and approval.

In the first week of rehearsal problems developed. The playwright and the AD entered into a dispute regarding ownership of and changes to the script. The playwright involved me as I had been a part

Dramaturgical Allegiance...continued

of the creative process, but the AD informed her that I was “officially” the production dramaturg and I took no part in the settlement of the dispute.

Where was my allegiance? I had no idea. I sympathized with the playwright, but didn't know the terms of her contract which the AD and playwright seemed to interpret very differently. Part of me felt I should resign, but I had a great deal invested in the work with script A and the director of that piece; contractually I had production obligations to fulfill with script B; financially I had car payments to make; but mostly I wasn't sure where I had gone wrong to end up in such an uncomfortable position. After conferring with some colleagues outside of the situation I decided to stick with the project. In the end the legal dispute was settled and the show went up, but I felt the process had been compromised and my enthusiasm was low.

The fact was that the terms of my contract were vague enough to be able to be interpreted in any number of different ways. I don't think that contracts are the ultimate solution, or even a good solution, to the question of allegiance. In this case I think the contract provided a false sense of security which kept both the playwright and myself from closely examining the nature of our relationship with the company and with each other. That was fine as long as we all got along and agreed as to our common goal. But when push came to shove and allegiances shifted, I felt I had been manipulated. I had very little to guide me, because very little had been articulated.

- contact Henry Bakker at <hbakker@theatreandcompany.org>

L.A. in L.A. – Lise Ann Johnson reports from Los Angeles

Greetings to all my LMDA Canada colleagues! For the next six months, I will be working as an intern in the literary management office of the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. I hope to learn about American playwriting and practices of play development in the United States. Brian Quirt has asked me to report on my experiences at the Taper over the coming months in the LMDA newsletter.

The Mark Taper Forum is a large regional theatre that produces a six-play subscription season. Although their programming is eclectic, they are noted for their development of new voices and new work. They are probably best known as the company that fostered such large-scale plays as *Angels in America*, *The Kentucky Cycle*, and *Jelly's Last Jam*. The Taper has also invested a great deal of resources into developing smaller-scale plays and work from diverse communities. Their "Taper, Too" programmes include an Asian Theatre Workshop, the Blacksmiths Playwrights Lab, The Latino Theatre Initiative, and The Other Voices Project (which is the only professional programme for playwrights with disabilities in North America). Issues of diversity are central to American theatre. I believe we have a lot to learn from our American counterparts, particularly in how plays from minority cultures can find their way onto the mainstages of regional theatres. I will profile each of these labs in a future newsletter report.

The Taper also runs an annual new works festival. Fifteen plays by writers from across the United States will be workshopped and publicly read between November 18 and December 16. The Taper received over two hundred submissions for this year's festival. The plays were read and discussed by a committee composed mainly of Taper artistic staff.

Of the fifteen chosen plays, three pieces in advanced stages of development have been earmarked for extensive workshops: *The Lalo Project* by Diane Rodriguez and Jose Delgado; *Dog Mouth* by John Stepling; and *Will He Bop, Will He Drop* by Robert Alexander. These plays will be workshopped over a longer period of time and will culminate in more elaborately staged readings. The artists involved in these readings will be offered greater technical resources, along with the assistance and support of a designer.

The remaining twelve plays receive six days of workshop time broken into two 3-day sessions. Where possible, the schedule allows writers ample writing time between sessions. For example, the writers who live in the Los Angeles area often have a full month between the two workshop sessions to reflect and rewrite.

These shorter workshops emphasize the writing process. Writers and directors are encouraged to stay away from fully staged readings. In fact, the readings are not called "readings," but rather "open public rehearsals". Directors have access to a simple lighting plot, but no other design elements can be incorporated.

Each playwright is assigned both a director and a dramaturg. I am curious to see how these roles are distinguished, and how the relationships among playwright, director and dramaturg are negotiated. In Canada, the roles of director and dramaturg are often rolled into one. Some companies employ separate dramaturgs for workshops, but more often than not, the director is charged with the primary dramaturgical responsibilities. Why? Is this due to financial constraints? Is there a lack of qualified dramaturgs? Do most Canadian dramaturgs also work as directors of new work? Or is it simply more efficient for a playwright to receive feedback from one, rather than two, sources? It's an important question: what are the advantages and disadvantages of separating the dramaturg and director roles in the play development process?

L.A. in L.A...continued

I have been assigned to work as a dramaturg on two new plays included in the festival: *Border Ballad* by Ruben Martinez and *Middle Passage* by Lynn Manning. Both of these pieces represent an opportunity for me to discover voices and stories that are very specific to Los Angeles. Martinez is a Latino writer and performer. His play, *Border Ballad*, is based on his soon-to-be-released book about the Mexican-American border. Martinez spent several years investigating the experience of migrants who cross the border illegally in search of seasonal work. The "migrant road" has become an extremely dangerous one. Tighter borders and tougher patrols have forced migrants to cross in treacherous conditions. Last year alone, 369 people died trying to cross illegally from Mexico to the United States. *Border Ballad* is a one-man play that incorporates storytelling, personal testimony, and some fabulous live music. Our first workshop session examined how to incorporate the migrant stories with the narrator's journey. Ruben has gone off to write a new draft that we will workshop at the end of November.

The second play I've been assigned to work on is *Middle Passage* by Lynn Manning. We haven't started yet, but I've spoken to Lynn on the phone. Lynn is an African-American writer who was born and raised in Los Angeles. He was shot in the head at the age of 23 and is now subsequently blind. His first play, *Weights*, was produced by the "Taper, Too" last year. It told the story of how his life was transformed by blindness. I have never read such powerful autobiographical writing. His new play, *Middle Passage*, looks at his experience of growing up in a series of foster homes. I'm looking forward to our first script meeting.

That's it for now. I'll report on the results of the festival in the next LMDA newsletter. Bye from sunny California!

p.s.: My apartment overlooks two avocado trees and I can harvest Meyer lemons from the balcony.

– contact Lise Ann at <LAjohnexpo@aol.com>

Hello Friends,

Below is a condensed version of a paper I recently completed on Theatre Network's: Syncrude NeXt Generation Arts Festival. NeXtFest has been in existence since 1996 and I have been a dramaturg with the festival since 1997. It was within this festival that I first had the opportunity to work with director/playwright Glenda Stirling. Over the years Glenda and I have finessed our director/dramaturg relationship and have come to realize how influential this relationship has been upon our development as female theatre artists. This past year we decided to inspect our working relationship more closely. This resulted in several discoveries, which are presented in condensed version below, as well as a brief description of NeXtFest's dramaturgical development. If anyone is interested in reading the much, much, longer version (full of in-depth context) feel free to email me and I will send it off to you.

*Deirdre Murphy, MA
dmurphy@ualberta.ca*

Development of Dramaturgy in NeXtFest: NeXtFest has undergone numerous changes throughout its five year existence but perhaps the most "dramatic" change has been the growth of the dramaturgical component of the festival. When NeXtFest began in 1996 the Artistic Director took it upon himself to dramaturg all four main stage productions. Obviously the level of dramaturgical involvement was limited due to this choice. Bradley Moss, the festival director, decided to change this the following year by initiating a dramaturgical position for each main stage show. With a very limited budget the dramaturgs, of which I was one, were unsure if we would even be paid for our contributions; thankfully we were. The success of the dramaturgical component that year lead Brad to feel it could be built upon in future years. In 1998 myself and Joanna Falck were asked to dramaturg main stage productions but also to work with Brad on a selection committee in order to assist him in the choice of scripts and alignment of production teams. This involvement has been maintained in the continuing years.

In NeXtFest 1999 Bradley Moss appointed Glenda Stirling the Festival Director and myself the Festival Dramaturg. We chose the main stage shows as well as the workshop productions, and put together the artistic teams for all of the plays. As Glenda relates, **"We also gave a lot of thought to the role of dramaturg – who should dramaturg what production, given the strengths, weaknesses and experience of all the artists involved on a given project. Experienced dramaturgs were paired with inexperienced playwrights or directors, baby dramaturgs were paired with experienced playwrights or directors. We pushed back the dates for script submission, in an attempt to give more time to the developmental process."** Myself, Glenda and dramaturg Kyna Hamill, made it a priority to respond to each of the plays submitted for consideration. As Glenda recalls, **"The three of us read and dramaturged every submission, chose our main stage and workshop line-up, and I used the dramaturgical analysis sheets completed by all of us to compose rejection/dramaturgical feedback to all who submitted. This was the first time that a dramaturgical response was provided for every submission."** We felt responding to the writers who submitted work was a crucial dramaturgical exercise, to highlight the value of their work. This also served to establish a relationship with writers from year to year. Writers were given a means to contact the theatre and dramaturgs an opportunity to work with writers in the development of a script. At the end of NeXtFest 1999 the dramaturgical component was certainly a key element to the process but Glenda and I felt that not every production had fully utilized their dramaturg. Glenda shares her conclusions on 1999, **"In hindsight, we felt that we had not done enough to "baby-sit" the dramaturgical component of the festival, even though it was more extensively supported than ever before. Not enough time was spent on dramaturgy prior to rehearsals, so some scripts were not as rehearsal ready as they could have been, and not many of the baby dramaturgs, directors and playwrights and actors clearly understood one another's roles, job descriptions, and how to work together. We had a long mental list of 'To Do's' and 'Never Do's' for NeXtFest 2000."**

In preparation for NeXtFest 2000 Glenda and I worked on various documents describing the work expected of all in the production process (such as a "Dramaturgical Checklist"). We also set meeting dates with the dramaturgs prior to the development process in order to share our dramaturgical feedback on the chosen scripts. This was done to ensure that expectations for scripts were clear to all involved. After this initial meeting we met with the directors and playwrights to introduce the production teams and discuss the logistics of the process. Along with these meetings

Glenda and I informed everyone that we would have a set dramaturgical session every Friday afternoon for anyone who needed to stop by to discuss a query, get feedback, or just to hear how other plays were developing. Glenda and I felt this constant communication was key in order to have a successful festival.

So we found ourselves at NeXtFest 2000 with eight mainstage shows and ten workshop productions! Glenda was the Festival Director again this year and I the Festival Dramaturg as well as the Coordinator of the Mentorship Program, integrating eight eager high school students into the festival. Added to our team this year was dramaturg/director Wjotek Kozlinski who assisted in the reading of all of the submissions and in the choosing of plays and production teams. Glenda comments, **“This year we have stepped up the dramaturgical component, pushing back submission and selection dates in order to allot approximately six weeks for dramaturgy and play development of the main stage shows, BEFORE they go into rehearsal. As well, each director, dramaturg, playwright and designer received a detailed package outlining their duties and responsibilities, time lines and budgets. We had a big old meeting of minds, bringing together dramaturgs, playwrights and directors to get them started on the developmental process, to ensure they understood what was expected of them in terms of new play development. One week away from rehearsals beginning, this has already paid off – all of the plays have been further refined, cut and developed, and are already at a much more rehearsal-ready place than ever before. As well, I believe that the artistic teams have had a much more instructive and fruitful ride – weekly dramaturgy meetings with Deirdre, Wjotek and I have ensured that the dramaturgs are getting feedback and support, and ensuring that we know what is going on with each production.”**

True Collaboration: Discoveries: I gained the bulk of my initial dramaturgical experience while completing my Masters at the University of Alberta. As part of my Masters Degree I took a dramaturgy class with dramaturg-extraordinaire Don Kugler. Don gave me a very wide range of experiences and needless to say the training was invaluable. He assisted me in uncovering some of the mystical aspects of dramaturgy while other aspects became even more mystical. I gained experience in the new play process as well as in the production dramaturgy aspect of an “established” play. I graduated from Don’s class with a wider understanding of just how far reaching dramaturgy is.

From Don’s class I plunged myself into one play after another: *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare), *The Hostage* (Brendan Behan), *The Real World* (Michel Tremblay), *The Devil’s Disciple* (Shaw), *The Grapes of Wrath* (Frank Galati), *Henry IV* (Shakespeare), *Spokesong* (Stewart Parker). As a dramaturg on each of these productions I found every process was different and that continues to be one of elements of dramaturgy I both love and loathe. Just when it feels like its working...the process is over. I had found quite often I went into a partnership feeling I had to prove myself as a dramaturg, rather than experiencing automatic acceptance. Now as I look back I realize that a great deal of my frustration with any given process came from the feeling of starting from scratch. As I was usually working with a new director on each production, it took a certain period of time for me to get a sense of their style and to fit myself into that style. I look back now and realize how invaluable a repeated partnership can be, recognizing too that a new process can also be invigorating. Now however, I go into a new process with a much clearer agenda, having found what works best for me as a dramaturg.

At this time in her career Glenda was also fine tuning her approach and area of choice as she describes. **“I graduated with a BA in Drama from the U of A in 1996, and began working in alternative and movement-based theatre. At the time that Deirdre and I began working together I had been out of school for two years, and had worked on various co-ops and fringe shows, at Northern Light Theatre as their Corporate Campaign and Marketing Manager, assistant directing with One Yellow Rabbit, and had begun writing my first play. Since then, I have branched into movement coaching and dramaturgy, had my plays produced at The Globe (*Dark Isle*) and Alberta Theatre Projects (Brief New Works 1999/2000) worked almost exclusively in directing / dramaturging new plays, plays almost exclusively written and performed by women, and taken over as Festival Director of NeXtFest. In nearly every one of those projects, Deirdre has been involved as a dramaturg, sounding board and outside eye. It has been quite a learning curve the two of us have undertaken.”**

In 1998 Glenda and I first worked with one another on Rosemary Rowe’s play: *No One Showed Up For The Anarchist Rally*. Glenda recalls, **“It was in this production that Deirdre and I began to develop a dramaturg / director relationship. We could not improve the structure of the play in rewrites, as the playwright was**

unavailable in Toronto; we had spent much of our time in rehearsal solving script problems through blocking and design. As a result, Deirdre was in the rehearsal hall often, acting much like an assistant director." This caused me to step back for a brief moment wondering if I had lost my objectiveness in the process but found what I had gained was a deeper understanding of the play. This was my first discovery in the study of the creative partnership between myself and Glenda.

- *The more integrated I am in the rehearsal process the more constructive my relationship with the director is and consequently the greater my understanding of the play is.*

I can't fully explain how empowering it felt to be in that rehearsal room surrounded by women. This certainly is not meant to sound anti-male, but the all-female element of the process greatly contributed to the success of the play. I found it to be extremely liberating as a fledgling female dramaturg since most of the women in the rehearsal hall were also in the first few years of their professional career. Thus, the traditional "proving" of oneself went out the window and the predominant feeling was support and learning.

In 1999 Glenda and I united again, "*Stale Mate*, by Kate Connell Banigan, was a watershed for our director / dramaturg relationship in many ways. We further developed and defined our working relationship, and began to gain a reputation as a good team to lead emerging female playwrights through development and production. This play was unusual in the sense that we both got on board before the first draft was completed, so we got to have a much stronger hand in the development of the piece as a whole." We started rehearsals with a discussion of my role as dramaturg. This up front disclosure of roles is the second discovered element of mine and Glenda's working relationship.

- *We have always started a rehearsal process with a straightforward explanation of what is to be expected of ourselves and others and I think this direct dealing assists in focusing our work in the rehearsal room.*

Once again the rehearsal hall was a place of free give and take and support. One of the actors, Caroline Cave, commented on a unique aspect of this collaborative process that I feel is a third discovery about mine and Glenda's director/dramaturg relationship. Caroline remarked on our ability to simply say "I don't know." It had been Caroline's experience that directors and dramaturgs entered a process seemingly with all the answers. She appreciated that Glenda and I entered the rehearsal process with some questions that could only be discovered through the process.

- *Upon reflection I realize that being able to say "I don't know" represents the confidence Glenda and I have in finding answers in the process.*

This allows for the contribution and thus, commitment of everyone to the process, since we may decide to go with an offering suggested in the rehearsal room.

A fourth discovery we have made revolves around the necessity of repeated partnership. It focuses our energy on the play, as opposed to ourselves.

- *When a dramaturg and director are open and easy with one another there is considerably less strain on the playwright since we can devote our energies to fulfilling the playwright's vision (as opposed to spending time figuring one another out).*

NeXtFest 2000 found Glenda and myself working on a one woman show, *The Dirt on Mo*, written by Beth Graham. After an initial rehearsal I made a comment to Glenda about our "luck" of working with playwrights who are flexible and she made an interesting observation. Glenda felt that perhaps it was not all down to the playwright but to us as well.

- *She spoke about our previous and current experiences as being those where we presented a "united front" of sorts and since the director and dramaturg "had their act together" before the playwright even entered the process, the effect was powerful.*

This fifth discovery maintains the importance of having a constructive working relationship before the rehearsal process begins.

Our sixth discovery takes into account our roles in the festival and how they seem to influence the professional nature of our rehearsal process.

- *Glenda, as the Festival Director and myself as the Festival Dramaturg, read all of the submissions and hand-pick the play we wish to work on every year. The playwright we work with realizes this, and this realization has an effect on them. A preliminary effect seems to be that they walk into the process fully prepared to work with us.*

One may surmise that Glenda and myself wield some sort of power due to our responsibility for the festival, but also due to our commitment to our own working partnership.

At about three weeks into the rehearsal process a discussion occurring on the LMDA on-line discussion group prompted me to further inspect mine and Glenda's working relationship on this play. The email deals with giving notes to directors and contains several key questions. The email reads, "When you are the dramaturg on [a] show, when and how do you give notes? Is it better to risk being 'too early in the process' than giving a note too late? How do you give a dramaturgical note that doesn't somehow comment on acting and directing? Do you only ask questions when you don't understand a choice on stage, or do you also comment on choices which seem less supportive of the text? (LMDA Discussion Group, Gwen Orel, Mon., May 15, 2000)."

- *Discovery number seven in this partnership has been that I give my notes according the current situation, as opposed to a fixed mode.*

This is a good example of the dramaturgical freedom I have experienced working with Glenda.

Indeed, I usually find myself "reading" a moment to determine if it is crucial that I speak up right then or make a note of my comment and share it later with Glenda. I do this mostly because I do not want to split the actor's focus towards her director nor do I wish to interrupt Glenda's relationship with her actor, instead I usually speak up when I feel I have a comment crucial to assist their moment, or if I need to pose a question to ensure the through-line is maintained.

- *This eighth discovery means I recognize the importance of maintaining a focused relationship between the director and the actor. The dramaturg compliments this relationship as opposed to fracturing it.*

The ninth discovery made deals with trust. Trust is a given in this process and it is crucial as it seems to strengthen the "team approach" in the rehearsal hall.

- *Glenda knows that I will never offer up a note that will undermine her directorial authority, but rather she appreciates the candor of my notes.*

I try to make my comments as constructive as possible and I do not comment on a problem that experience has told me will alleviate itself over time without any comment.

- *Thus, I use my comments judiciously as opposed to flagrantly.*

This tenth discovery revolves around the form and content of my notes. Usually my notes are on elements that Glenda hasn't yet covered. I may confirm a suspicion she has but I do not feel it's necessary to note something that my past experience of working with Glenda has shown me will be dealt with.

In our last week of rehearsals I made a final discovery. While training with Kugler I had several discussions with him regarding the amount of time a dramaturg should spend in the rehearsal hall. It was Don's educated opinion that a dramaturg should be very judicious with their presence in the rehearsal room in order to maintain some objectivity. It seemed the processes in which I frequently attended rehearsals were the processes that both I and the director found most satisfying. This constant presence in the rehearsal room is certainly the manner in which Glenda and I have always worked together. My consistent presence in *The Dirt On Mo* assisted me in developing the whole play but I also recognize the importance of addressing the play objectively.

- *Thus, I have discovered that in those processes where I am a constant presence it is necessary from time to time to bring in an outside observer and to pose pertinent questions to them in order to ensure the play is fully achieving its communicative goal.*

Working with Glenda has provided me the great opportunity of compiling my personal philosophy as a dramaturg and this philosophy revolves around collaboration. As a dramaturg it is crucial that I embody the necessary tools for a successful collaboration: understanding, trust, and artistic introspection. This, along with all the others, is a discovery I will take into future processes.

Report from the Chair – Brian Quirt

DATES TO REMEMBER:

- LMDA Canada Annual Meeting:
Friday March 2, 2001, 1pm
Alberta Theatre Projects, Calgary, during the ATP playRites Festival Blitz Weekend
- LMDA Annual Conference:
June 7 - 10, 2001
Denver, Colorado
- Canadian Dramaturgy Conference:
July 2001
Toronto, Ontario, during the Toronto Fringe Festival
- LMDA Annual Conference:
2002
Vancouver, British Columbia

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As noted earlier in this newsletter, LMDA Canada will be compiling a guide to suggested fees to accompany the LMDA's Guidelines for Employment. That document will be distributed to all members and to relevant organizations and institutions. If you have any suggestions or questions about the Guidelines, please contact me, Stuart Scadron-Wattles (Theatre & Company) at <stuartsw@theatreandcompany.org> or Vanessa Porteous (ATP) at <VPorteous@atplive.com>.

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Toronto members of LMDA Canada resumed their occasional meetings on October 17 at the C'est What Restaurant on Front Street. This informal conversational get-together will continue approximately monthly during the theatre season. If coming to Toronto, please contact me in the hope you might be able to join us.

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Here are the citations from Mary Blackstone's article, which refused to fit at the bottom of the page:

Arnott, Peter D. *An Introduction to the Greek Theatre*. London: MacMillan, 1961.
Auslander, Philip. *Liveness*. London: Routledge, 1999.
Crumpton, Holly and Maureen S. G. Hawkins. "Pandering to the Dominant Ethos Means Death to Drama Studies," CAUT Bulletin, 47.3 (March 2000): 24.
Taylor, Drew Hayden. "The Stoic Whiteman Meets Native Drama," New West Review, 25.2 [2000]: 5-8.
Wallace, Robert. *Producing Marginality*. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1990.>

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