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LMDA Monthly Newsletter, February 2022

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[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▼](#)**February 2022****Vol. 7, No. 5****Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas**

Q&A: Anne Cattaneo

Interview by Victoria Abrash



Anne Cattaneo is arguably the most impactful American dramaturg - ever. Correction: That may not be arguable. In honoring her with its lifetime achievement award, CUNY's Martin Segel Center cited the hugely influential Directors Lab that she founded and led for 27 years, her 30+ years as dramaturg of Lincoln Center Theater, and her recently published book *The Art of Dramaturgy* from Yale University Press. At the outset of her career, she forged new ground as dramaturg of the Phoenix

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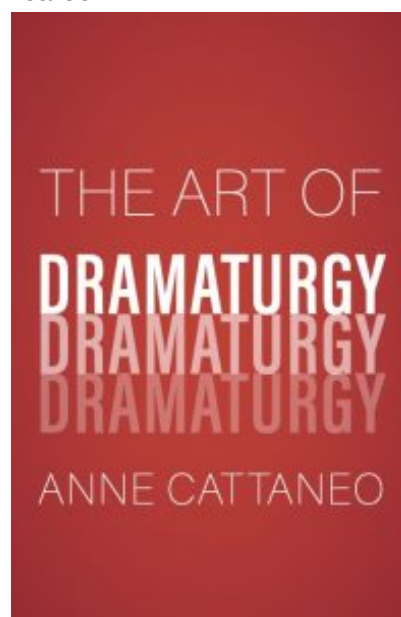
Here are her reflections on her life's work as a dramaturg, which is more fully covered in her book:

VA: What's next?

AC: If I were 30 years younger, I would devote myself now to rethinking the whole theater model. On one hand, I pray that the theater will change, so both its form and content will reflect the times we are in. But at bottom, my model is old fashioned: it's about collaboration; it's about love; about sharing; about knowing what you're doing; about being trained. All those characteristics can be applied to our new age of Zoom and constant connectiveness as we move forward, and the theater, I hope, continues to evolve.

VA: The book is about dramaturgy, but it also sums up your career.

AC: An element of biography appeared as I wrote the book. I didn't plan it, I didn't really want it, but I could not figure out how to leave behind everything that I knew how to do, that I learned from other people who knew how to do it, other than by actually demonstrating different aspects of the job: how do you work on a classical play, how do you work on a play that doesn't have words, how do you do theater of images – the Robert Wilson chapter - how do you work on plays from other cultures, how do you work in archives – like Jane Bowles' *In the Summer House*, a play I had to completely redo by finding different versions of it. There are so many aspects of our job. How do you negotiate the audience relationship; how do you keep a dramaturgy office going, how do you respectfully respond to writers.



I made a list of everything a dramaturg is responsible for, and then I picked productions that reflected where I used those skills. It ended up being more me than I wanted or meant it to, but I couldn't figure out another way to do it.

I also wanted to go deeply into my great love: how to work on a very difficult, complex classical text, in the way that Mnouschkine would have done it, or Peter Stein, JoAnn Akalaitis, or Liviu Ciulei or any great director. So, I did a chapter on trying it and failing – that was my opening chapter. And I later did a chapter on a classic where I think we did succeed. And for my last chapter.... there are plays that are so great that you can interpret them in a way that makes them relevant for your time, and then 20 years later you can go back and do them in a completely different way. So, I end the book talking about *The Life of Galileo*, which is a play that I translated and did with Bob Falls when he took over the Goodman. We did it in one way, and I now see it in a completely different way. I'm fully aware of Brecht's current unpopularity and that ties into my thoughts on finding unsupported writers and standing with them, rather than joining a long line behind the

I like to make things more complicated; I want to add nuance. When I prepare a production, I try to give my collaborators so many possibilities to work with. That's why in my book I added the appendixes as examples. I always come to shows with a lot of information. Some people are interested in that information and some people are definitely not interested in that information, and that's perfectly fine. But if they are, and many are, I've got it. And that information is not 3 interesting things about *The Coast of Utopia* or 3 interesting things about *The Orphan of Zhao*, or about a Shakespeare, it's 100 interesting things, to keep the bar high. My model is actors who come into rehearsals with a hundred line-readings to try and aren't upset when 99 are rejected. Something is always learned from each one.

Yale wants to use the book as a textbook. It has a syllabus, and advice about starting a career in dramaturgy and you can use it as a textbook easily, and that's probably where it's greatest use will be. There's a little history about the profession. But there is nothing theoretical in this book. It's all how to do it. It's all very practical. It's not a prescription about how to do it, it's a description of the tasks, of what is required of the job. Everyone will bring their own gifts to contribute to material I've never dreamed of. Experienced dramaturgs know it's not about having opinions, it's about having information, and knowing how to get information and convey it to actors, directors and designers in a way they can use. Scholars know the information, but they don't know how to pass it to artists because they're not theater people. You can widen the repertory, you can say, "Why not do this play that no one's ever heard of?" That's the fun part.



VA: Does "widening the repertory" relate to the Directors Lab as well as your production work?

AC: I see the Directors Lab and the production work as related. I've continued doing production work this whole time. I've also edited, with John Guare, the Lincoln Center Theater Review, which is a literary publication. John's idea was that theater had become ghettoized into entertainment and great plays should function in the world of civic discourse. We didn't hire journalists; we went to thinkers. We did *Ivanov*. Is that an anti-semitic play? John called Cynthia Ozick. "Is *Ivanov* an anti-semitic play?" "I've never read it." We sent it to her. George Packer wrote about class in America. The list of people who

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entertainment. It's a dramaturgical way to connect to a specific New York audience. <https://www.lct.org/explore/magazine/>

The Directors Lab was dramaturgical thinking about what else we could do for the field. Even though we're in a grand building, we are actually quite limited in what we can do. We have 3 theaters, with long runs required for our 43,000 members, few artists outside the shows were in the building. The Directors Lab was a way to bring in more artists. Every theater had a playwrights program, but not a directors program. It was a need.

The Lab was founded in 1995. It started with me, as I always do, reaching out to everyone and asking, "What should we do?" It was designer John Conklin who said, "You can't have 100 directors in the basement and not have designers there too." When you think of great directors, design is the key to the interpretation. So, we pay young designers to be part of the lab, to be in the room – to participate as thinkers. I hope those experiences stay with the directors, so they know that that's how designers can be used. Not just "I've made all the decisions, I'm setting the play in the wild west in 1890, you go find the guns." The concept, how it should be staged, the relationships, that's what great designers can bring to the collaboration.

Andre [Bishop, LCT's artistic director] thought there might be 100 young directors in America and then it would be over. 25 years later, I have 1500 children, it seems like. I always accepted directors who never went to college, who directed in churches, on cruise ships, in theme parks, and most definitely from all across the US, where there is so much theater that is ignored in NYC. There is good theater happening all over.

If you go to on the Lab website and see who has been in the lab, many are people now running American theaters, and if you look at where they come from, it's incredible. I got a transgender woman into the U.S. from Myanmar. I got a Kuwaiti to the Lab who was descended from an outcast group denied passports, healthcare, or education. She was flying on a UN passport, and we brought her through Doha. There have been lots of adventures. And the Lab has been enormously popular in South America, that's another interesting thing.

The bulk of the Lab were Americans, and very regionally representative. But there were a couple of directors the first year who weren't American, I don't know how they heard about it, but people started applying from the strangest places. The applications were sometimes extraordinary, and I would just have to get them here. I spent months finding their airfare. A Mormon Lab director on her mission was at the Harare Arts Festival in Uganda and mentioned the Directors Lab to a local director who submitted an amazing application on the similarities between African dance and Greek choruses. How could I not take this guy? I asked how he heard about the Lab, and he told me, and said, "I just shot an arrow and hoped it landed in someone's heart." And it did. Mine. And I got him here. Later I had to get him out of jail. He wrote a play about Mugabe, and got thrown in jail, which I only found out from the Directors Lab Facebook group. I had to get the U.S. embassy person, bless her, to drive up and get him out.

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you can't see a play from abroad here. Imagine what our lives would be like if we'd never seen Mnoushkine or Tadeusz Kantor in their day. But there is no Lincoln Center Festival bringing in international work anymore. BAM is now doing primarily American work. Look at film; it's international from the get-go. Look at music; it's unbelievably international. American theater is so provincial. When I was president of LMDA we started The National Theater Translation Fund to address that, but we failed. We couldn't get it off the ground.

I say each year at the beginning of the Lab, you're going to climb over a mountain of experience. Some of it you'll find life changing and inspirational, and some of it you'll find ridiculous and embarrassing. And you will find others who agree with you, and they will become your friends. I wasn't organizing the Lab so that everyone would love everything, but so that it was wide enough to expose participants to all kinds of things. So that two people with shared interests would go out and have a beer and then would stay in touch. And that's what happened. Now they know each other. When you know each other, things happen.

The Lab was an incredibly loving thing. I hope that that experience of collaboration and of friendship and of sharing will stay with them.

A lot of groups were formed, a lot of worldwide Labs; we have 5 offshoots. We have a Lab in LA, a Mediterranean Lab in Beirut, Barcelona this year and next summer in Greece. We had one in Australia. The Directors Lab North was successful right from the beginning because it was welcomed instantly by Richard Rose, a great Canadian director who runs the Tarragon Theatre. They connected with The Luminato Festival in Toronto, which is run by a woman I met in Australia. That Lab has funding from the Canadian government, and they've even published a book.

VA: The Directors Lab seems to embody themes outlined in your book for production work: opening up the canon, collaboration, depth, internationalism, multi-regionalism, bringing in voices you don't hear otherwise.

AC: AMEN.

That is exactly what I was doing. That's dramaturgy. It's all holistic. It's all connected. Once you start thinking like this, you can apply it to a production of a contemporary play, to a classic play, to something that is theater related but isn't necessarily a production: perceiving what needs to be done and perceiving what the structures are that will allow you to do it. What our gift is, what is so needed in the world today, is that we know how to collaborate. We love each other. Theater people are the only people in the world who know how to do this. That's why we've been around for 2,500 years. And I use the metaphor in my book of sports. It's a team theme. Everyone knows everybody else's jobs. You do yours, but you understand what other people need.

VA: Your thoughts for the future?

My career began in a bad, bad time for Manhattan. Times Square was dangerous, and New York was in terrible shape. And the city was saved by the theater. Cora Cahan,

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convinced him to renovate and re-open a theater at 7th Ave and 42nd Street. That corner was Midnight Cowboy territory then, really scary. So, Michael Eisner renovated the New Amsterdam Theater, and his first show happily turned out to be *The Lion King*. And then Cora restored the New Victory as a beautiful jewel for children's theater (x-rated movies be gone!) and built the first light-filled rehearsal studio in the history of the theater right down the street. Everyone came in to go to the shows, create new productions and that helped turn the city around. I hope we can rise to that occasion again now.

My first job was at A.C.T. in San Francisco, and I absorbed a wealth of theatrical lore. I just absorbed it by watching. So many theaters used to have conservatories, with young actors as extras and working there also, which was valuable training. That model helps the theater by providing labor, but it also passes down the tradition of theater from practicing theater artists. I'm hoping that tradition comes back.

VA: That was another function of the Lab, wasn't it?

AC: Yes. Simon McBurney invited the whole lab to his tech at the Lincoln Center Festival. It was interesting to see how he teched his shows. Uta Hagen came in and in the hallway asked me, "Can I just tell them everything they really need to know?" "Be my guest!"

I hope this passing on of knowledge went back into the directors' theaters. Its also a model of what we know - friendship and collaboration - which we have to teach the rest of the world right now.

VA: The last thing I'd like to ask you about is the Legacy Playwrights Initiative

AC: The Legacy Playwrights Initiative came about because a friend of mine was inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame, which is a very big deal, and did not have the money to train up to the ceremony. I was having lunch, by random coincidence, which is how theater works, with a woman who told me how the music industry came to set up a fund to sustain the many Motown artists who were never paid in the 1960's. I talked to the Dramatists Guild Foundation and Todd London and others, and we made a webpage <https://www.legacyplaywrightsinitiative.org/> raised money and set the award up carefully. It was not billed as a monetary award; it was billed as a legacy award. These are writers whose work is artistically distinct, outstanding, and also *popular* – people want to see it. These are playwrights who have won Tony Awards, have had major regional productions. There are so many writers of such brilliance who have just been forgotten. LPI is another dramaturgical idea.

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VA: Any last words for LMDA members?

I was president of LMDA for 3 terms. My last conference was in Philadelphia, and I'll be back in Philadelphia this summer. I give LMDA a big shout out in my book and say that every dramaturg should be a member.

I'll see you in Philadelphia.

#LMDA2022 Update

From Conference Chair Jacqueline Goldfinger

After 14 months of planning, 1,001 coffees, 27 fights with Google Docs, and selling my soul to Yards Brewery - It. Is. Here.

Well, almost. In March, we will post Conference Registration fees and forms on our [website](#). Once you have registered and we have finished building the app, we will send you a log-in code and the Conference app will be at your fingertips! Events, shows, networking, photo sharing, maps, and more will be available directly through the App on your phone, computer, or pad. You can begin connecting with friends and colleagues months before the Conference even begins. I cannot wait to begin registration and share the app with you. Until then, we're giving you a sneak peek at our Conference Packages.

I look forward to seeing you either in-person or digitally this summer!

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Conference Package Comparison

Activity	LMDA Membership	Digital Package	Digital & In-Person Package	Saturday One Day Pass	Sunday One Day Pass
Async Online Content		✓	✓	✓	✓
7/21 Sync Online Content	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7/22 In-Person Content*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7/23 In-Person Content			✓	✓	
7/24 In-Person Content			✓		✓
7/24 One Gala Ticket			✓		
Option to Purchase Gala Ticket(s)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7/24 Annual General Meeting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Except UPenn Professional Development Workshop which will be purchased directly through Penn later this year.

Dramaturging the Phoenix 2.0

A Renewed Challenge for LMDA Members

Call: To amplify the collection of essays inaugurated at the beginning of the pandemic, LMDA seeks further dramaturgical responses – videos, creative works, and social media threads, other essays, among other formats – that boldly inspire, provoke, and explore theatre’s potential to transform through global crisis.

Eligibility: Current LMDA members (to renew or join, click [here](#))

Prompt: QUARTER 1 Prompt (January 1 - March 31, 2022): 2022 has begun and the pandemic continues to rage on. Over the past years, what have been the waves of your dramaturgical work? How is your dramaturgical perspective mutating? How is your theatrical practice shifting?

Convocatoria del TRIMESTRE 1 (1 de enero al 31 de marzo de 2022): El 2022 empezó y la pandemia continúa haciendo furor a nuestro alrededor. A lo largo de los últimos dos años, ¿cuáles han sido las olas de tu trabajo como dramaturgista. Como esto cambiando tu perspectiva dramaturgista? Como esto cambiando tu práctica teatral?

Target: LMDA wants to put its members’ incomparable brains and innovative impulses to work for the benefit of our community and the many others we touch, to showcase dramaturgy’s vital capacity to contextualize and articulate the possibilities of where we go from here and what it might mean. Our goal is to get **every member of LMDA** to contribute a response, whether individually or in collaboration (cuz that’s what we do best!).

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▼](#)**Engage the present.****Shape the future.**

Don't hesitate to reach out if we can support you in any way!

Best wishes,

DTP 2.0 Team: Ken Cerniglia, David John Chávez, Russ Dembin, Lourdes Guzmán González, Heather Helinsky, Liana Irvine, Finn Lefevre, Linda Lombardi, Anne G. Morgan, Brenda Muñoz, David Quang Pham, Martha Wade Stekettee

DTP 1.0 Founding Members: Jess Applebaum, Ken Cerniglia, Heather Helinsky, Finn Lefevre, Anne G. Morgan, Lynde Rosario



Elliott Hayes Award

LMDA Grant

Named in honor of Elliott Hayes, the former dramaturg and literary manager at The Stratford Festival and a dual citizen of Canada and the USA, this award recognizes excellence in dramaturgical work on a specific project over the past two years. Eligible projects may include, but are not limited to, production, season planning and implementation, educational programming, or advocacy for the profession.

The recipient of the 2022 Elliott Hayes Award, presented at the annual LMDA conference, will receive \$1000 US and a travel stipend to the following LMDA conference.

Applications will be accepted from February 15 at 12:00 AM PST through April 5, 2022, at 11:59 PM PST. All applicants will be notified of the panel decision and the winner will be notified by May 15, 2022. However, the public announcement will be kept private until the presentation of the award at the LMDA Conference in Summer 2022.

For more details and how to apply, check out our [website!](#)

LMDA Membership - Renew Today!

Please visit [our website](#) to select one of the following memberships, all of which include full [member benefits](#), voting rights, and eligibility for office:

- Institutional: \$200 – for theatres, universities, agencies, and other organizations; includes up to four individual memberships with individual member profiles
- Individual: \$80 – regular ol' professional membership!
- Early Career: \$40 – discounted individual membership for students, interns, and those within five years of graduation

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- Pay What You Can: \$5 - \$75 – a new option this year to lower the barrier for becoming a member of LMDA in light of the ongoing financial impact of the pandemic

Please log in to www.lmda.org to renew your membership and update your profile for 2022 now. Should you have questions or concerns about the renewal process or the remainder of your existing rolling membership, please contact LMDA Administrative Director Lindsey R. Barr at lmdanyc@gmail.com.

We are gearing up for our conference in Philadelphia this summer, which will continue to feature both in person, and online, asynchronous content. This is an adventure in post-pandemic scaling for us, and your membership dollars really make a difference. It's not just our conference that you support - you're supporting services for dramaturgs across the sector as we continue our journey towards increasing accessibility, expanding our operations to reach dramaturgs across the whole of North America, and running ongoing programs across several regions.

Don't miss the chance to be a part of it – [renew your membership](#) today!

LMDA Monthly Member Check-In

Noah Ezell (they/them/theirs)

Project: EXERCISE YOUR DEMONS: A PLAY ON THE TRAUMA OF A GAY MALE BODY

What I've Learned: I've learned exciting new ways of peering into nontraditional dramaturgies to help a playwright unlock more of the world they're creating to express their intention more deeply!

Learn more [here](#).

Toby Malone (he/him/his)

Project: "Cutting Plays for Performance: A Practical and Accessible Guide" Book

Learn more [here](#).

Moein Mohebalian

Project: "Practical Sides of Dramaturgy" Book

What I've Learned: The process of writing this book was thrilling and hugely beneficial: we interviewed 20 experts in text cutting from around the world, and used our experience as dramaturgs to support the first-ever full-length book on this vital piece of the dramaturg's toolkit.

Learn more: A channel in Telegram called "dramaturgy as a vision"

Martha Wade Steketee

Project: Counting Together initiative

What I've Learned: I have worked since 2013 on a database initiated by colleague Judith

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employing categories for each production: playwright, director, set designer, lighting designer, costume designer, sound designer, projection/video designer, choreographer, composer/original music, lyricist, conductor/music director, production stage manager, and stage manager/assistant stage manager. [all reports available [here](#)] In 2019, the Women Count project was a founding member of the Counting Together initiative comprised of national and regional data projects assembled first by Todd London (Dramatists Guild) and Luis Castro (American Theatre Wing). Beginning in 2022, I have assumed coordination duties with Castro while London continues as a collaborative team member. As we state on our landing page, "By telling the stories of our findings, we aspire to identify and forge pathways to greater equity and inclusion."

Learn more [here](#).

We're Hiring!

The Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA) seeks a collaborative and skilled part-time, contract-based **Grants Coordinator** to maintain and expand its current grant application portfolio.

LMDA is largely a volunteer-based organization, with committee and board members working in collaboration to ideate new programming and initiatives.

The Grants Coordinator position was implemented in 2018, with the intention that the person serving in this role would help develop cohesive, clear, and comprehensive grant applications to support LMDA's major programs. Previous grants secured include the National Endowment for the Arts ArtsWork grant, and funds from the Dreyfuss Foundation, among others.

We envision that the person taking over this role would continue to support this work, while taking part in conversations about the future of institutional funding at LMDA.

More details can be found [here](#)!

Region Facebook Groups

[Canada](#)

[Mountain West](#) (Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado)

[Greater Midwest](#) (IL, IN, IA, western KY, MI, MN, OH, WI)

[Metro Bay Area](#)

[Metro Chicago](#)

[Metro NYC](#)

[Metro Boston](#)

[Central Appalachia](#) (WV, VA, eastern KY, northern TN, and western NC)

[Florida](#)

[Metro Philadelphia](#)

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[Northeast](#) (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York State, Rhode Island, Vermont, Pennsylvania)

[Northwest](#) (Idaho, Oregon, Washington)

[Southern California](#)

[Plains](#) (Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska)

[Southeast](#) (Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, eastern North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, southern Tennessee, western NC)

[Southwest](#) (Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, California)

[Third Coast](#) (Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas)

If you want to get more involved with dramaturgs in your region, please email regional@lmda.org

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- 4) Select 'Get Started' and click through the instructions
- 5) Add LMDA as your charity

Thanks for your continued support!

Interested in contributing to the next newsletter? Have content ideas?

E-mail communications@lmda.org.

Want to keep up with the conversation about the latest in dramaturgical activity?

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