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## LMDA Review, volume 12, issue 1

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## Conference Edition

- \*\*Re-Viewing Denver: Conference Sights 2001
- \*\*The Conference in Detail
- \*\*Elliot Hayes Winner 2001: Judith Rudakoff

## Featured Articles & Announcements

- \*\*Attention Regional Vice Presidents!
- \*\* Conference 2002: Vancouver

# the lmda review

The Newsletter of  
Literary Managers and  
Dramaturgs of the  
Americas  
Vol. 12, Issue 1  
Fall, 2001

literary  
managers  
& dramaturgs  
of the Americas

The kookaburras, pressed against the edge of their cage,  
asked me to open the door.  
Years later I remember how I didn't do it,  
how instead I walked away.  
They had the brown eyes of soft-hearted dogs.  
They didn't want to do anything so extraordinary, only to fly  
home to their river.

-Mary Oliver (from *The Kookaburras*)

## Section I: Re-Viewing Denver

The *Review* was supposed to have gone out nearly a month ago now. I had an entire introductory article written for this space, summarizing the events that occurred in Denver in June and inciting continuing action along the themes of the conference. But the *Review* did not go out and instead, I find myself with an entirely different audience than the one I imagined a month ago, and as a result, an entirely different kind of article to write. The events of September 11, 2001 have already inspired conversation about theatre's relevance on the LMDA discussion list. We wonder theatre's role in such a world, and we try to imagine any narrative that could help make sense of the tragedy that has played out (and continues to play out) in our daily lives.

From my perspective, the recent events only underscore the themes of Denver's conference. A dialogue and relationship with our immediate and global communities has never been more necessary. Why shouldn't a theatre be the site of a blood drive? Why shouldn't a theatre host a town meeting? Why shouldn't a theatre offer educational enactments of Afghan history? These things are central to the current moment in many of our communities' lives. If there is any hope that theatre can be relevant at any moment in our lives, it must be relevant at this time.

In planning the Denver conference, our primary goal was to engage the conference participants (and, hopefully, their respective theatres) in a conversation about building and maintaining a healthy theatre ecology. In other words, we wanted to talk about the relationship between the theatre and its surrounding community, the relationship among various theatres within a given community and the importance of working with each other and supporting each other. Also, I wanted everyone who attended the conference to leave with a plan of action. A number of "to-dos" they could take back with them to their home bases and get going on. My image for this was that we should start figuring out who we need to have on speed-dial, who in our community should we have regular calls to, who should we keep in touch with, even as our day planners increasingly fill up and weigh down our already busy lives.

I brought these topics to a *dramaturgy* conference because I believe that fundamentally, dramaturgs are dreamers *and* we are hard workers. We are practical *and* we are hopeful. We have large hearts *and* we have great imaginations. It will take such a person to lead such a conversation, to engage our communities and to engage our institutions. It is not easy work, but it is our work.

Finally, I would like to make a few announcements: please find enclosed the announcement asking for applications for the 2002 Elliot Hayes Award. Apply! If we expect anyone to value our work, we must start by valuing it ourselves. Second, I would like to thank all of the people who contributed to the Denver Conference, participants, group leaders, organizers, all. The annual conference is vital to the health of the organization. For all of you unable to attend, we look forward to your participation at future conferences and LMDA events.

-GRETCHEN HALEY  
SEPTEMBER 2001

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# The Conference in Detail

## A. UNIVERSITY & STUDENT CAUCUS

The Denver conference marked the beginnings of the newly created Student Caucus' involvement in LMDA. The pre-conference sessions, hosted with the University Caucus, examined the diversity of dramaturgical projects and focused on the current state of the academic theatre—professional theatre relationship.

The Student Caucus' goal for the coming academic year is (1) to develop an understanding of LMDA's current relationship with our student members and (2) to discover ways in which we can continue to build a stronger relationship. Within the next few months, we are planning to send a survey to our student members attempting to get a general feel for where they see themselves within LMDA. A second, more ambitious, project will involve the continual development and fostering of a mutually beneficial internship program.

--JONATHAN HAMMOND

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Geoff Proehl leads his break out group on the topic of audience diversity in a corner of the library's second floor.

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## B. KEYNOTE: ASHARA EKUNDAYO

Ashara Ekundayo's speech, "Waiting to be Invited" was a challenge for dramaturgs to invite more people to what she termed 'the temple of the arts.'" The film short she presented showed the story of two coworkers who were attracted to each other; each waited for the other to act, and when neither did, they assumed that there was no reason to and almost gave up on each other. Ashara's application of this to the arts, specifically in regards to dramaturgy, was that dramaturgs have not

actively sought to involve/represent their diverse community, and until specific people are invited to participate, they will not feel welcome and perhaps they will not be welcome. Her point, however, was this doesn't have to be the case, that community and art can and do combine. As a role model, she cited a series of popular open mike café performances in Denver that create a welcoming and socially aware environment.

While some LMDA members followed her audience participation a little too doggedly (WORD!), there seemed to be a general acceptance of her criticism. And there was also application of it: as dramaturgs are interested in the world surrounding the arts—the people, the happenings, the questions, and the issues of it—it stands to reason that dramaturgs should help that world represent all those that live in it.

--AMY JENSEN

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## C. DENVER THEATRE ARTISTS ON LOCAL THEATRE ECOLOGY

For this panel, several local theatre artists came together to discuss the landscape of Denver theatre. The goal was to examine under a microscope the ecology at hand, with the hope of illuminating a bigger picture. The organisms under scrutiny provided in and of themselves, a sense of theatre in Denver (and perhaps beyond).

The panel included: Bret Aune, the Artistic Director of the Horsechart Theatre Company (a small theatre catering to a broad audience); Brian Freeland, founder and AD of the LIDA Project (a small company focusing on "edgy" material); Jeffrey Nickelson, founder and AD of the Shadow Theatre (also a small theatre, presenting mainly African-American work for a diverse audience); Tanya Mote, Development Director of El Centro Su Teatro (a small company focusing on Latino work since the 70's); Chip Walton, Executive Director of the Acoma Center and AD of the Curious Theatre Company (Acoma Center houses several smaller companies including Curious theatre which aims to become Denver's second LORT company); Gully Stanford, Director of Public Affairs for the Denver Center for the Performing Arts (which includes the Denver Center Theatre Company, Denver's only LORT theatre, as well as touring showcases and other performance events);

and the panel moderator, Lisa Lusero, a local performance artist. This quick summary doesn't do any of these artists or organizations justice. But as a way of looking into the question of how theatre as a human endeavor is working today, the surface suggests the greater depths.

As the moderator, I specifically wanted to avoid diving right into the tedium of, "who is your audience?" or "do you compete with or support other theatres?" though such issues inevitably emerged. Instead, we began our conversation by talking about how we came to be making theatre in Denver. For most, it was to some degree an accident. Almost everyone was moved by the landscape itself to make Denver home. Reasons to do theatre followed: to build community, fill a gap, seize an opportunity, make a change. The nuances of the organism started to come forth.

Talk turned to audience development, education, and the value of art. Chip and Jeffrey discussed their collaboration on a production of *Fences* as an example of theatres working together to build a theatre-going audience. Bret contemplated the wisdom of trying to be everything to everybody. Brian and Tanya infused points about how a vital theatre community benefits from vital edges. Everyone agreed that art was valuable and should be regarded as such with cultural and economic support.

At one point Gully challenged the panelists to create another LORT caliber theatre in Denver to strengthen the overall theatre ecology. Several responded with frustration, questioning the DCPA's relative wealth (in funding, audience base and resources).

Denver Theatre Artists Panel (From left: Lisa Lusero, Tanya Mote, Jeffrey Nickelson, Brett Aune, Brian Freeland, Chip Walton and Gully Stanford)

Did this challenge lack an understanding of small theatre realities? Some insisted it was just a matter of time. Others wondered if it was a necessary direction for them. We wrestled with questions of resources and values.

I asked everyone, “who do you want in your audience, but isn’t?” Everyone agreed about the benefit of each theatre encouraging its audience to support the other theatres, but that didn’t address the question of non-theatre-goers. To bring the question home I used myself as an example. I’m someone who understands the value of art, and yet I don’t see theatre in my own community. Is this a healthy ecology? Many suggested that it is just a matter of making theatre a budgetary priority. Others insisted on industry discounts or pay-what-you-can previews. We wrestled with questions of resources and values.

As the panel ended, conversations spiraled into intense huddles. Artists from Winnipeg, Philadelphia, and Louisville recognized themselves under that microscope. We all walked away wrestling with resources, values and home.

--LISA LUSERO

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Carri Ratazzi (Conference Site Chair) Don Kugler (LMDA President) and Gretchen Haley (Conference Chair) at Saturday’s banquet.

**D. WORKSHOP SESSIONS ROUND 1:  
DRAMATURGY &  
ARCHITECTURE**

It is sort of amazing to me that the 2001 Conference was only in June – just 4 short months ago. I hope that everyone is experiencing the same thing that I am, which is both knowing that the conference was profoundly productive and richly

rewarding on a number of levels, but also a little fuzzy on the specifics.

I’ll attempt to recap what happened at the dramaturgy and architecture session as best as I can.

Megan Monaghan (formerly of the Playwrights Center, late of the Alliance) and Bruce Sevy (of Denver Center Theatre Company) both shared their experiences of working in their theaters as a way of starting. What began to emerge from these two, along with several others, is that the session should actually have been titled “dramaturgy in the community.” I mention this because we talked very little about the physical life of our respective theaters and instead about the notion that “theater” is also an idea. Our theaters may be very large and sometimes daunting places, and sometimes small and rented (therefore, changing) spaces. But we must never lose sight of the crucial component – the audience. We want our theaters to be meeting places, discussion sites, hotspots of activity and receptacles of ideas. This is, it was determined, wildly possible if a theater holds true to its mission. An audience will travel, an audience will become undaunted, if you make “the theater” inviting.

As the session moved forward, we shifted focus just a bit to examine the role of the dramaturg in the creation of this inviting place. How can lobby displays, marketing materials and contextual items assist in bringing an audience along with you? How can the invitation of artists to the table be extended to the audience? And most importantly, how can we be mindful, always, of the things that theater can do that other mediums cannot? The changing face of our society demands inclusion – and theater can be, as several participants suggested, leading the charge, by presenting the stories of the community in which it resides and calls home.

We more than likely strayed off course (it wouldn’t be the first time), but clearly, this session delved into the heart of what the Denver conference was setting out to achieve – the hopeful and possible harmony between theater, theater-maker and audience.

--MICHELE VOLANSKY

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**E. DRAMATURGICAL VOICES  
INSIDE THE THEATRE**

The first of this two part breakout session focused on the primary relationships that dramaturgs and literary managers had within their institutions. What arose from this discussion was the acknowledgement of the importance of other staff members in fellow departments such as marketing, development, PR and management.

Interestingly, many people spoke of relating with their staff of other dramaturgs, associate artists and associate artistic directors more so than having the primary artistic relationship be with the artistic director her/himself. Discussion revolved around the fact that when there is little face-time between dramaturgs and the artistic director, the answer is often that the artistic department examines ways of working as a unit itself.

This discussion around the availability and working habits of artistic directors led to the idea of focusing a session around the dramaturg/artistic director relationship specifically. In the end, we realized that in negotiating within our institution, it takes a lot more words to be heard in our positions and also to relay the importance of the art. Still, we concluded, this is an essential part of our roles in the theatre.

--LIZ ENGELMAN

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**F. DRAMATURGY/MAKING A LIFE**

This conversation was, to be honest, the last to come together. Up until a few days before, we weren’t sure what we were going to discuss during this time and we weren’t sure who was going to discuss it.

Much like life, actually. Which was, finally, what this conversation covered: making a life as a self-identified dramaturg. This is a topic that is very close to me as I have (relatively) recently chosen to make a life outside of the theatre. Or rather, I have chosen not to rely on the theatre to pay for my life. Which of course, potentially means the former.

I told my story, as did Rachel Shtier and Nichole Gantshar, each revealing an alternative path for those of us who define ourselves as dramaturgs. In each of our

experiences, it was clear that there are options for dramaturgs, but each option has a potential effect that might, in the end, bring you out of the rehearsal room and instead, perhaps, into the board room. We admitted, with some regret, how much basic quality of life factors played into the paths we choose: this means finding a work environment that allows for reasonable hours, a living wage for ourselves and our families, and fundamentally respects our contribution to the larger picture. All three of us had found that "traditional" paths in the theatre did not necessarily provide these basic ideals.

Nichole spoke on her experiences working with a community theatre in her area, Syracuse Stage, while making her living as a sports writer; Rachel spoke of moving outside institutional work into more concentrated free-lancing; I spoke on how I fell into a job running an in-home personal care service and realized, in the middle of it all, that I was still, a dramaturg.

The conversation was at once funny and heartbreaking: we who are passionate dramaturgs often slowly move out of a career in dramaturgy in order to actually make a life. Mark Bly ended the session by calling for an entire conference focusing on these issues, the choices and the possibilities, as well as the ways in which we can become advocates for a field that better sustains and thus retains its members.

**--GRETCHEN HALEY**

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Playwrights speaking on relationships with dramaturgs during our lunchtime meeting Saturday afternoon at the Denver Center Theatre.

## **G. WORKSHOP SESSIONS ROUND 2: NEW PLAY FESTIVALS**

What purpose does your festival serve in its community? It seems to me that in many cases festivals either aren't focused at their birth or lose focus as the theatre ecology changes around them, and they become very difficult to realign and re-envision. It also strikes me that most people who run festivals are convinced that their own festival is effective and necessary. I'm not sure that that is always the case.

I recently workshoped and directed concert readings of two new plays at a new play festival in Canada. It was well-funded in that it was able to bring artists in from across the country), well-intentioned (in that it had articulated a focus on plays which were judged to be just about ready for production) and well-organized. But I'm still not sure that it had a strong reason to exist. As a visiting artist, it certainly helped the two playwrights I was working with, and perhaps that is sufficient. Audiences came to the readings and good work was accomplished. Yet I left with a residual feeling that it all didn't amount to very much in the end.

This may be an isolated example, but as festivals proliferate (it appears at times that every theatre must have its own festival of new plays) I am forced to question the generic need for such events, and to insist upon rigour in their definition and action.

One of the dramaturg's many responsibilities is 'process design': what is the most effective process at this moment and in the future of this play and playwright? Festivals by their nature have a set structure into which many plays must fit. That can offer a great opportunity but it can and does place limitations on the process of individual projects. The short rehearsal/workshop periods almost always favour text-based plays, for example.

I'm interested in festivals which can customize the working process for the needs of individual plays. Where the play is the point, not the event.

Some questions that arise from this thinking:

-- Are new play festivals often about promoting the good deeds of the theatre

rather than really promoting the work of the writers?

-- How many "showcase" festivals can we sustain (let alone attend)?

-- Do we have too many festivals?

-- What is the best format for a showcase festival?...readings, staged readings, workshop productions?

-- Do showcases give people a chance to say "no" rather than "yes"?

-- We've all seen staged readings that were more satisfying than the eventual production: how do we offer readings which demonstrate the potential of the script but do not become surrogate productions?

-- How can independent artists and producers use existing festivals as developmental opportunities for their work?

A survey of just some of those attending the session made very clear the enormous range of festivals in existence. Megan Monahan (The Playwrights' Centre, Minneapolis) spoke about her company's success in establishing a festival in which the writer is truly able to design, in collaboration with the Centre, a development process which is unique to the needs of the play. Clearly, this is a successful example of a context in which the writer's needs come first. I wonder aloud if this is more easily achieved in a context that is not production-driven?

Larry Loebell at InterAct Theatre Company in Philadelphia described a fascinating festival to be held in 2002 in which the plays are selected by theatre companies from across the U.S. and Canada. This strikes me as a great idea for a showcase festival in which the play is developed by the company closest to it, and go with the play to the festival in Philadelphia. Larry also offered a very honest assessment of his company's reading series and noted that one important goal of the series is to bring a wider range of artists into the theatre.

Bruce Sevy of the Denver Centre described their reading series of 9 readings each with 30 hours of rehearsal. He noted that the public readings are held, unusually, in the daytime rather than as evening events. He articulated a very clear mandate: the festival is for the writer, not the artistic

director or the audience, although of course both are invited to see the results.

Amy Wegener and Tonya Palmer spoke of the Humana Festival's current re-assessment of its goals and its process. It is a production festival with many ancillary events. Stay tuned for their report.

Mark Bly concluded the discussion by asking us to consider the idea of the "festival." He argued that the word has become diluted by careless over-use. It now applies to events of infinite forms and goals, but what, asked Mark, are we celebrating at each of these festivals? Where is the Dionysiac impulse underlying your festival? A bold and provocative question to wrap up a debate that is just beginning.

--BRIAN QUIRT

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## H. DRAMATURGICAL VOICES OUTSIDE THE THEATRE

why Outreach?

At this year's LMDA conference in Denver, one of the breakout sessions I attended focused on the outreach efforts of our various organizations and the purposes behind those efforts. While the session began with several of us describing our initiatives, the conversation soon took a turn. Outreach was quickly equated solely with diversification of the audience.

The question was posed and discussion ensued about why performing organizations are making these efforts and whether or not it is a reasonable goal to hope to achieve a more diverse audience. The opinion was voiced that if a theatre's audience is made up primarily of one social group or another, why is that deemed unsatisfactory? Why are these organizations even attempting to change those demographics? Is it reasonable to expect to be everything to everyone? If a theatre's given audience is, as in our case at Florida Stage, primarily white and Jewish, why should we be concerned with trying to widen our audience base? Perhaps we should allow "gay" theatres cater to the gay community, "black" theatres to the black community, and so on.

The question was then asked: "Is outreach about diversity alone?" Discussion

continued, with the consensus being that while it encompasses audience diversity, outreach is also about audience development, community service, public relations, and marketing, to mention just a few possibilities. Which brought us full circle back to where the dialogue had started.

I had already described Florida Stage's various outreach programs, which include our Young Playwrights Festival, our tudent Critics program, and a project in which our Artistic Associate for Education works with severely handicapped children.

Mary Resing had spoken about Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company's community play building project, in which plays were performed by adults from Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind, middle-schoolers from Calvary Bilingual Multi-Cultural Learning Center, and high school soccer players from Sarah House.

Lee Devin had talked of re-conceiving and re-defining working partnerships with area businesses and possibly using the results to serve as a model for other organizations.

And Paul Kosidowski had discussed Milwaukee Repertory Theatre's outreach efforts and projects, focusing particularly on *Sounding the River*, a retelling of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The Rep organized a day-long community discussion focusing on the racial implications of the play. The panelists included scholars, community leaders, and theater artists.

It was recognized that various outreach initiatives serve many purposes and that diversity is but a part of outreach, albeit an important part. If we truly want to matter to and be an integral part of our communities, we as arts organizations should reflect the diversity of those communities. The experiences of our local population need to be reflected on our stages and meaningful efforts should be made to enable our audiences to reflect the demographics of our communities.

Outreach is important, as it is a significant way for arts organizations to keep a finger on the pulse of the community and to avoid becoming too insular and self-involved.

--DES GALLANT

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Des Gallant and Judith Rudakoff at Saturday night's banquet.

## I. EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

Early in the planning of the conference, there was a great interest in the ways in which dramaturgs have become involved with educational programs within their theatres. This panel originally looked to explore the ways that self-identified dramaturgs moved in and out of educational programming. As the discussion shaped up, however, there seemed to be a more general interest in discussing strategies and goals within educational theatre.

Two dramaturg-identified artists in particular, Dick Devin of the Colorado Shakespeare Festival and Kamella Tate of the East LA Classic Theatre Company spoke about their involvement in educational-driven theatre. They each described a number of their educational programs and challenges, including:

- \*\*Bringing in children from other cities
- \*\*Academic Booster clubs
- \*\*Classroom productions
- \*\* "Careers in the Performing Arts" Series
- \*\*3-week acting workshops
- \*\*Non-acting theatre workshops
- \*\*Working with English Teachers
- \*\*Shakespeare Family Feud
- \*\*Playwrighting programs pre-high school
- \*\*Parent Involvement
- \*\*After School programs
- \*\*Working in schools where there is an element of danger
- \*\*Teacher Training Programs

Out of their experiences and others', important questions arose:

\*\*How can educational programming involve new communities in theatre-making and theatre-going?

\*\*What does it mean to have a theatre's mission statement centered around educational goals?

\*\*How is educational theatre inherently dramaturgical?

\*\*How do we effectively interact with our local schools?

We had a lively conversation around these and other questions and we left with tangible examples of educational theatre at work.

—GRETCHEN HALEY

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Bruce Sevy (far right) leads the DCTC TheatreFest Playwrights Panel

## J. THEATREFEST PLAYWRIGHTS

On Saturday afternoon, we had the privilege to have lunch with four playwrights participating in Denver Center's TheatreFest. TheatreFest is held annually in the Ricketson Theatre. Eight plays are given readings by company members in an informal setting over a four-day period. These readings are offered free to the public and try to provide the best working situation for the playwright to hear, polish, or re-think a script.

Since the festival fell at the same time as our conference, we decided that we should sit down with the visiting playwrights for a meal. We walked over to the Denver Center for the Performing Arts and ate lunch in a rehearsal room. Towards the end of our visit, the playwrights shared their perspective on their work and the new play festival process.

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## K. ADVOCACY

This year's Advocacy Session was a lively, nearly three-hour discussion about Proposed Resolutions: To Improve Working Conditions, the set of evolving guidelines that has been circulated to the entire membership this past year. The meeting began with an overview of the history of the Advocacy Caucus, which Lynn Thomson formed in 1996. At that time, conversations about working conditions were happening informally, but there was a need to address the immediate problems in the profession—to formally connect with what was happening in the field and make things better. In 1999, a conference session focused on oral histories, giving participants the opportunity to share the difficulties we were facing in our work—to begin to collectively solve problems by examining the common ground we share. That year, it was also decided that something should be put on paper. In 1999-2000, then, the Advocacy Caucus drafted a document and began a nationwide conversation about the guidelines, which were presented at the 2000 LMDA Conference and approved unanimously. By September 2000, the draft had been amended, and was sent out to the membership—who voted to pass it on Election Night, 2000.

During the next part of the meeting, Lynn and Mark opened the floor for everyone present to share their experiences in actually using the document, in order to gauge how it has been working thus far. Some members had successfully utilized the guidelines in order to gain salary increases, to talk about job descriptions and appropriate compensation, and to think about the division of labor in their workplaces. Others expressed reservations, such as discomfort with the idea of having to present the document to an employer, or the feeling that the \$35,000 salary yardstick may be too far out of reach in some contexts. In response to these concerns, Lynn, Mark and others stressed the importance of having some kind of "bottom line" of acceptability, as well as the possibility that there may be other kinds of compensation and negotiation available, such as time off or decreased workload. Lynn mentioned that she hopes

to continue hearing from the membership about how we are using the document.

We then read Resolution Two of the document, which outlines LMDA's plans for the dissemination and discussion of the guidelines with employers (and potential employers) of literary managers/dramaturgs, and TCG theaters. In the conversation that followed, many questions and ideas emerged: Does LMDA want to open up, to start dealing with people in other disciplines in the arts? Is there a way to collaborate with theatre people who are doing creative consulting or other work in the business world (for example), so that we're not just doing work that's only for us? Can we initiate a buzz among theatres, to create the sense that the guidelines are being talked about? How can advocacy at colleges and universities help to validate the practice of dramaturgy? Might we be able to get someone like Ben Cameron of TCG (a former dramaturg) on board? The need to make the document clearer and more user-friendly via re-formatting was discussed, as well as the question of how the guidelines should be "packaged." It was suggested that LMDA might ask someone of note to write a letter to go with the document. Also, if we could get some theatres on board, those organizations could be mentioned in a cover letter—so that the institutions that haven't yet complied would begin to feel like they're behind the curve.

Mark then gave an update on Resolution Three, which deals with seeking out an attorney who can advise dramaturgs on contracts and fashion sample contracts from the guidelines. He stressed the importance of inviting people who have backgrounds in law and the arts to come on board. Since legal issues may require different approaches in Canada, some members also pointed out the need to make sure that LMDA consults with both Canadian and American attorneys.

The issue of early-career dramaturgs and internships—and how they fit into these guidelines—was raised, and this comment sparked a lengthy discussion about how we treat and compensate interns, as well as the current models through which dramaturgs gain experience and entry into the profession. Although most of us find the "early industrial" unpaid-labor system that

exists at many theatres troubling, concern was expressed about whether we can realistically mandate compensation for interns in the guidelines. Several early-career dramaturgs at the meeting expressed their fear of being excluded, and Lynn explained that since the guidelines have been ratified at this point, any language addressing internships would have to be added to the already-existing document. The discussion then moved to the spectrum of different kinds of internships in existence, and the need to make sure that internships are truly educational, rewarding experiences for each individual. Several Canadian dramaturgs pointed out that the early-career ecology is completely different up North: there's really no model to follow, and university programs and funding are different—basically, the American internship “system” does not exist. Finally, Lynn wrapped up this discussion by saying that there are multiple internship models in practice, and more research needs to be done before we can talk about change.

--AMY WEGENER

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## L. ELLIOTT HAYES AWARD WINNER 2001: JUDITH RUDAKOFF

One of the highlights of each LMDA conference is always the evening of the banquet and the presentation of the Elliott Hayes Award. This was especially true for me this year as it was my great honor not only to have been on the selection panel along with Gavin Witt and Mary Resing, but also to have shared with Mary the pleasure of presenting the award to Judith Rudakoff.

All of the proposals were exceptionally strong and the decision was by no means an easy one to make; we were completely impressed by the caliber and scope of each project. It was unanimously felt, however, after careful review of each application and extensive discussion, that there was no one more deserving than Judith. Her work with Sampradaya Dance Creations on their project *Revealed by Fire* was outstanding and demonstrated tremendous creativity, courage, and sensitivity. She has just completed an article on her involvement in the making of the work that will appear in TheatreForum's Winter Issue.

The submissions were as varied as the field of dramaturgy itself and included:

- A cyberspace cooperative that wrote and developed a play over the internet;
- A study of dramaturgy published in *American Theatre*;
- A couple of examples of extensive research dramaturgy for specific productions;
- A body of work demonstrating a full season of dramaturgical creativity, which in turn served as an example of the history of dramaturgy at one specific institution;
- A couple of projects that involved the re-conceptualization and redevelopment of classical texts for a contemporary audience and a contemporary aesthetic;
- A couple of examples of script development;
- The development of a New Play Festival;
- A couple of examples of script development for other performance disciplines including dance and performance art.

Contained in the project materials were various quotes addressing and examining the purpose and practice of dramaturgy. One proposal stated that dramaturgy's purpose was to “bridg[e] the gap between artists and audiences,” while another declared, “Any help we can give the audience in understanding the world of the play will deepen their appreciation of the play and, most importantly, make them a better audience.” Yet another said: “What [was] created has transcended the theatrical form [and] developed a mechanism for the entire community to come together using theater as a vehicle.”

Judith Rudakoff, in her proposal, said, “Dramaturgs work organically to help shape form out of content. As full participants at all stages of the artistic process we offer everything from research assistance to constructive criticism. Dramaturgy is a full service profession. We are the carriers, the interpreters, the cheerleaders, the chroniclers, the researchers, the muses, the second set of eyes and ears at the level of the process. We are responsible for the process, while maintaining the respect and distance

necessary to allow the artist to own their creative product.”

In working with Lata Prada, the choreographer of *Revealed by Fire*, Judith lived up to her words, and with all of her skill, dedication, and effort was intimately involved in the creation of a magnificent work of art. Not only did she dramaturg a story told primarily through dance, but she also wrote the text that accompanied the dance to more fully convey the artist's vision.

It was with great pride that I was able to participate in the selection and presentation of the Elliott Hayes award. It was an experience and honor to have had the opportunity to become acquainted with all of the great work being done in our field today. I strongly urge and encourage everyone and anyone involved in a dramaturgical project to participate in the future.

Submit your projects -- great work deserves to be acknowledged.

--DES GALLANT

Being this year's recipient of The Elliott Hayes Award for my work on Lata Prada's *Revealed by Fire* is all about honour and honouring.

First of all, Elliott Hayes was a friend of mine. And a respected colleague. His untimely death at the hands of a drunk driver, operating a vehicle without a license, came as a shock to all who knew and loved him. His career as a playwright was taking off. His work as Literary Manager at Canada's Stratford Festival was exemplary. His personal and professional life were in sync and we all expected greatness from Elliott. Not a week goes by when I don't wonder when the phone will ring and Elliott and I will dish the dirt about a play that we loved or loathed. To win an award named in honour of Elliott Hayes means more to me than I can express in words.

I have been in the fortunate position of winning awards before. But this one comes from my community, my community of peers. I don't have to explain to this constituency what a dramaturg is, does or why we exist, though the ongoing

discussions of those very subjects are a source of inspiration for constant reappraisal, reconfiguration and reinvention. To be recognized for excellence by my species is indeed a great honour.

The work for which I have been awarded The Elliott Hayes Award is different from any other project I've worked on before. Revealed by Fire is a multimedia production that combines classical Indian and contemporary western dance, video and slides, eastern and western music and playscript

It was initiated by Lata Pada, who lost her husband and both daughters aboard the Air India flight that was bombed by terrorists on June 23rd, 1985, somewhere over the Irish Sea. All 329 passengers and crew aboard the plane perished in the tragedy. Lata wanted to create a work that began

with this historical and personal tragedy, but then became a journey of the recovering, uncovering and discovering of personal identity and place in the world. Working as dramaturg and also as the playwright on this work was an extraordinary experience.

I suppose what I'm trying to say is that in receiving this award, I feel as if I'm standing at an intersection of many paths. This is an award that honours excellence in our profession. It honours Elliott Hayes' memory, the memory of the 329, and the courage and generosity of Lata Pada. I feel fortunate to be standing here, at that point of intersection, with connections to all of them.

--JUDITH RUDAKOFF



Judith Rudakoff, Elliot Hayes Award Recipient 2001

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## Section II: Articles & Announcements

*We will resume Peer-Reviewed pieces with the next issue. Deadline for Submissions for Peer Review pieces: December 1, 2001; send 3 hard copies without your name and a cover note with your name and address to Gretchen Haley/LMDA Review, 1443A Quitman, Denver, CO 80204.*

### A. REGIONAL VP UPDATE

Once again the plates have shifted! Based on input at the conference regions have once more been rearranged. So look closely to see if you are in a New Territory. Your regional VPs may have changed as well. We encourage you to contact your regional VP if you have not done so, and talk with them about any idea you have for strengthening communication in your region. They will be contacting you as well in the upcoming weeks and months as well (we hope) to begin to set up your next regional meeting.

Regional VPs are encouraged to contact the lapsed members in their regions as well to get them back on board.

Also note that we encourage everyone to apply for the Elliot Hayes Prize in Dramaturgy; regional VPs please try

to have at least one member from you region to submit a proposal.

--LIZ ENGELMAN

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### C. CONFERENCE 2002: VANCOUVER

**Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas:  
Board of Directors**

**Victoria Abrash, Arnold Aronson, Mark Bly (chair), Jeremy Gerard, Christopher Gould,  
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Brian Quirt (VP, Canada), Michele Volansky (VP, Development)**

**Literary Managers And Dramaturgs Of The Americas**

**REMINDER: OUR OFFICE HAS MOVED . . .**

Here is the how to stay in touch. Our phone number is **718-437-5462**. Our email address is **LMDA2000@aol.com**. Our web address is **www.lmda.org**. Our mailing address PO Box 728, Village Station, New York, NY 10014.

The current user name and password for member only sections of the LMDA web page (www.lmda.org) is "LMDA."

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*Gretchen Haley*  
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