New & Noteworthy, June 2019

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Hello, Everyone!

I am so happy to recap the LMDA 2019 conference in Chicago! I want to take a few minutes and thank our amazing conference team of Amy Brooks, Maren Robinson, Yasmin Zacaria Mikhail,
Karen Jean Martinson, and Lindsey Barr for all of their hard work to curate this year’s conference. In addition, I want to thank the volunteers at the conference. They all helped to make sure everything ran smoothly and we could not have done any of the amazing things that happened without them!

We had many partners this year who also helped us pull off the conference. These include: Columbia College (and Pete Dully) for opening their space and giving of their time and resources for our gathering; The Goodman Theatre and Tanya Palmer for also providing space and resources; Tanuja Jagernauth and Lucas Garcia for starting the conference in a way that asked us to open our ears, minds, and, most importantly, our hearts; The New Play Exchange, TimeLine Theatre Company (side note- I adore watching a performance with other dramaturgs); The University of Chicago - Masters of Arts Program in the Humanities; Chicago Shakespeare Theatre (the pre-show talk was fun); The Theatre School at DePaul; SUNY New Paltz; and our Lessing Circle Patrons (who helped bring a colleague from Mexico City to this conference).

One of the highlights for me was the keynote performance by Free Street Theatre. Their performance of PARCHED provided a lot of great ideas to ponder and really primed us for the conversations that were to follow. On that note, the panels this year were fun and thought provoking.

One of the things I will treasure the most about this conference was how the Chicago theatre community was integrated into the sessions. I feel it is important for us to embrace any city that we gather in and make sure that we are not using the places, spaces, and artists without including them in the conversation. If you did not have the opportunity to see some of the panels or attend the conference, please check out the archived panels on HowlRound once they are posted. On that train of thought, Dillon Yruegas - thank you (and HowlRound) for live-streaming the conference. We appreciate you!

There is so much to be thankful for in this past conference. The family-style banquet and the opportunity to gather and fellowship was a fantastic way to close the conference. As much as I would love the opportunity to keep basking in the way we dove into questions about the way literary managers and dramaturgs think about using our influence to create moments of action — we are on to planning the next conference in Mexico City! Stayed tuned - we will reveal the title soon.

Martine Kei Green-Rogers
LMDA President
Daniela Atiencia

My first engagements with the concept of Dramaturgy was during my bachelor’s degree over 10 years ago. My context teacher encouraged us all to become LMDA members. I of course signed up more to reflect that I was being a good student - little did I understand I was becoming part of a legacy. Over a decade has gone by and my theatrical journey has faced honeymoon phases, heart-wrenching breakups and peaceful reconciliations. Through it all, my deep admiration for the dramaturgical cosmos never left me. Those of us who practice it in our fields and our lives understand that once you grasp what dramaturgy is, your whole world view transforms – it is almost impossible to observe anything without wanting to dissect it dramaturgically. What an experience to be in a room for three days with others who do the same! I felt like I was in Dramaturgy Disneyland.

Three things I would like to highlight:

1. Don Kugler not only introduced me to dramaturgy during my undergraduate program but saw the dramaturg in me and fostered my development. Seeing him at the conference and realizing I was there because of his influence, brought a profound sense of emotion, pride, gratitude to be part of a generation that he champions.

2. If you haven’t become familiar with TimeLine theatre company’s work in Chicago, DO! I was massively inspired by their fervent commitment to prioritizing the work of the dramaturg not only on the production level but throughout their company as a whole. Dramaturgy exists at the core of everything they do from the marketing to audience engagement to play fruition. They are doing groundbreaking work and paving the way for dramaturgy to be at the forefront of theatrical practice.

3. I am not alone. I am not alone. I am not alone. What a relief! Thank you LMDA members for the work you do and the paths you set - my dramaturgical batteries are fully recharged.

Thank you LMDA for making these grants accessible to early career dramaturgs. This opportunity was unforgettable and a definite steppingstone in my career.

Sabine Decatur
As I reflect on my experiences at last week’s conference, I am reminded how much I like dramaturgs. Where else could I, over the course of one day, talk through strategies for activism in theater, critically engage with the ethics of community-centered work, and dance with a plant (Thomas Choinacky’s “Weedy Nomad” session was lit!). To borrow Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s phrasing, we should all be dramaturgs.

Because I’m a dramaturg, this conference’s theme—“Crossing Borders, Pt. 2: Action in a Time of Division”—brought up more questions than answers. What are these borders? Why are we crossing them? How did they get there? And how can dramaturgy translate to action? I’m so grateful for the opportunity to explore these questions with some of the best thinkers of the theater industry last weekend.

Still, over the course of the conference, I began to see more and more of the ways in which, even as we work to cross borders, we inadvertently end up upholding them. As someone who did not go to school for theater, who has never read Lessing, and who cannot quote any Shakespeare, I was the clear minority. The sessions that aligned most with my interests, like the Unsettling Dramaturgy Panel, felt framed as an offshoot, with less time, less space, and less support.

I’m grateful that LMDA is committed to engaging in EDI conversations, and I want to raise up some moments from the conference that stuck with me as I think about how we move forward: When Arti Ishak said that inclusion is not radical but is simply a right. When Theresa May affirmed that decolonization is not a metaphor. When the Free Street Youth Ensemble let us know that “seeing this play is not the work.” When Iris Lau proved that bodies can often communicate better than words. When Martine Kei Green-Rogers proved that GIFs can often communicate better than words. When Shelley Orr observed that sometimes the best dramaturgy requires acknowledging one’s own limits. When Amrita Ramanan pointed out that “we have definitely promoted white supremacy and we have to now dismantle it and be held accountable for it.” I’m glad to be included in these conversations, and I look forward to moving past inclusion and starting this work of dismantling and decolonizing the oppressive systems upon which our theater industry (including our construction of dramaturgy) is built, even when that means decentralizing ourselves as the ultimate experts and decentralizing “theater” as the ultimate art form.

Inspired by Geoff Proehl’s Hot Topic, I’ve been thinking about what it might mean to include texts that don’t self-describe as dramaturgy in LMDA’s bibliography. Texts that have shaped my artistic practice like adrienne maree brown’s Emergent Strategy or Aimee Cox’s Shapeshifters. Crucial non-texts like Alison Bechdel’s comic strip that inspired the now iconic Bechdel test or Hannah Gadsby’s nuanced deconstruction of comedy in Netflix’s Nanette. And surely we can all learn
from the dramaturgical intervention that was Lena Waithe’s Met Gala outfit this year.

I’m left activated, inspired to consider the power we have as dramaturgs to fundamentally shift the field, mobilize our brainpower, always keep questioning ourselves, and not just cross but dissolve our borders.

Jihye Kim

What happens if a room full of dramaturgs encounters a problem? Or a set of pressing questions? How would dramaturgs solve the problem? What would the energy in the room feel like?

I had the pleasure of witnessing a variety of answers to these questions this 2019 LMDA conference in Chicago; perceptive yet calm eyes with swift hands and feet, inquisitive smiles in the eyes with ready-to-dive torsos, a settling realization of the urgency of the problem and hands moving busy on the notepad dissecting, digesting the problem, to mention a few. Seeing different dramaturgical processes from a diverse group of dramaturgs itself was a great learning opportunity.

2019 LMDA Conference: Crossing Borders, Pt. 2: Action in a Time of Division was my first ever conference attendance. I fully plunged myself into the conference via volunteering and participating in two sessions as a presenter, dancing in and out of the boundaries my multiple roles has enabled me. It was nerve-breaking to be a visible part of such a big event that attracts hundreds of not only dramaturgs and literary managers but also playwrights, directors, producers and artistic directors of theater companies across physical borders via HowlRound.

As a volunteer, I was happy to have a reason to meet and help people out, loosening tense shoulders together, creating and crafting a communal experience. At the same time, I was thankful to HowlRound for live-streaming and archiving selected sessions, so when my body called me up for some rest, I was able to actively utilize Quiet + Opt-out Room to calm my jet-lagged mind.

As a presenter, I was glad my first-time presentation was done at LMDA. In Playwrights under the Radar session where I introduced Haejung Hwang, a calm and attentive energy in the Courtyard theatre supported my groundedness for that ever-lasting five minutes. It was also intriguing to get a taste of the relationship between each dramaturg and their playwright in relation to the style and story of the plays introduced. In the session where I presented Mothers to Storytellers: Devising Self in the Wake of Korea’s #MeToo, I was thankful to have an opportunity to share the story itself. Due to the confidential nature of the subject matter, the story itself can only be shared in the form of verbal story-telling in an environment where the sensitive
nature of the project was fully understood. And I was glad to have chosen LMDA to be the place to share what I witnessed. Not only the amount of respectfulness I sensed in the room, but also all the bursting encouragement I’ve received post-presentation reassured me to continue supporting these storytellers in the best of my capacity.

As a conference attendee, I was excited to be a part of nation-wide dramaturgical conversations. Particularly In Practice: Dramaturging New Work—I found it inspirational that an intra-collaborator conflict could be resolved by sharing a meal together, rebuilding a communal space where everyone’s voice is heard. Furthermore, I feel very fortunate to have witnessed the Chicago Theater Artists, Activists and Advocates on Crafting Change session and to have meet a group of courageous pioneers who are pushing the limit of hetero-masculine-normativity and white supremacy. To hear all the pressing questions related to the subject of race, power and gender encouraged me to not be afraid of asking sharp questions.

It has been a blessing to be a part of LMDA’s conference this year. I am a newly joined member of LMDA, and I am proud to be a part of the community. No matter where I end up residing next year, I hope to meet everyone back in Mexico City. Until then, hope you all have a peaceful and productive year!

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LMDA Review

Summer 2019 edition is out! Check it out HERE!

- Breaks in the Common Good: Dramaturging MayDay within the Heart of the Beast by Sonja Arsham Kufinec
- Fight With My Blood // Battle With My Tongue: A Dramaturgy of Survival in the Southwest by Lizbett Benge
- The Impact of Involvement: Peoplmovr’s Creative Director Geoffrey Jackson Scott
- Three Confessions of a Dramaturg: Staging Marguerite Duras’s India Song by Shelley Orr

Review is the journal of dramaturgy published annually by Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. The mission of the journal is to provide a venue for exploration of dramaturgy, and for ongoing conversation about the work of the dramaturg and the literary manager and their relationship to all stages of theatre-making. Review publishes peer-reviewed scholarly articles, along with work in other formats, including expanded essays and interviews from the LMDA Newsletter, manifestos, book reviews, and an assortment of other types of submissions, which align with and expand the current mission of Review. Review welcomes submissions by all writers regardless of professional affiliation, as well as submissions on topics at some remove from the primary mission. Inquiries to the editor are encouraged in advance of all submissions.
If you're in the Chicago area, and curious to learn more about the work of Black Lives Black Words International Project (whose Founder and Managing Curating Producer Reginald Edmund spoke at our #LMDA19 Saturday morning plenary “Chicago Theatre Artists, Activists and Advocates on Crafting Change”), please check out this event -- IGNITE: Raising the Consciousness in New Play Development.

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We’re reserving this high-value newsletter real estate for our Institutional Members. Do you have a job posting you want our readers to see, an M.F.A. program looking for a well-qualified applicant pool, or a festival you want to make sure smart dramaturgs have on their radar? This is the place for it! Institutional Memberships are only $200, and they come with four individual member profiles for your organization to divvy out as you see fit.

Let your organizational leadership know that we’d love them to join the LMDA party!

CALL FOR TRANSLATORS

As we look ahead to #LMDA20 (in Mexico City!), we could use help with a few things - 1) LMDA members who can translate the call for the 2019 and 2020 conference into Spanish/Portuguese, 2) Names/contact information for translators in Mexico City 3) Leads on potential artists to connect with in Mexico and the surrounding area.

Please send any leads to Martine (president@lmda.org).

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