

## Reproduction and Meaning: A Dramaturgy Manifesto

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*CMLIT 400Y Final*

### **Prologue: What is dramaturgy? And why should we care?**

A *dramaturg* is a member of the artistic or production team on a theatrical production, like a stage manager or director. A dramaturg's role is sometimes compared to that of the design team, like lighting, sound, costume, and scenic designers. The way that a lighting designer works on lighting, and the costume designer works on costumes, a dramaturg works with the text and meaning of a show. A dramaturgy offers analysis of dramatic literature, research to help "transform that inert script into a living piece of theater", and practical application in connecting the work with a live audience in a time and place (Chemers 3).

Materially, a dramaturg may offer to a production a packet of contextual research (as in cultural, historical, literary, theatrical) to aid the cast and production team's understanding of the text, a program note, discussion with the director on the dramaturg's perspective of the evolving piece in rehearsals, and various outreach initiatives to connect the work with its audience (such as lobby displays, outreach events, and pre- and post-show talkbacks.) Philosophically, professional dramaturg Mark Bly says that, "[W]hen pressed for a definition of what it is that I do as a dramaturg, both in a rehearsal hall and in the theater at large, I generally answer 'I question'" (Chemers 9). Michael Mark Chemers, author of *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*, uses the symbol of the ghost light, "a lighting instrument left illuminated in the middle of the stage when no one is working in the theater" to describe the function of the dramaturg (Chemers 9). According to Chemers, "Ghost lights remind me of dramaturgs at their best—venturing, usually alone, into dark places for the benefit of others, to illuminate potential hazards, prevent missteps, and navigate across that most perilous of all terrains, the living stage" (Chemers 10). Dramaturgs may be seen as straddling the scholarly and practical theatrical worlds.

The role of dramaturg, as a specialized position on a theatrical production team, is, as Mark Bly articulates it, "in an embryonic stage not unlike the role of the director nearly two centuries ago" (Chemers 5). Dramaturgy work, as one may gather, is something that every member of a theatrical production does, in some way or another. In Europe and Latin America, dramaturgs are established positions, credited *above* the director in some programs (Chemers 10). In the United States, the field of dramaturgy is an emerging one in the past century, as the work has been formalized and specialized for a single person or a team to complete for a theatrical production. Thus, it is the goal of American dramaturgs to also prove the necessity of this role in the theatrical production process. (It must be noted, that this essay will mainly explore *production dramaturgy*, in which a dramaturg serves to help a production team and cast understand the text of an established work, such as a play or musical. *New work dramaturgy* is another type of dramaturgy, in which dramaturgs work with playwrights who are writing new works.)

Dramaturgy work is often taken for granted in the theatrical production process. In the United States, the position of dramaturg is in the process of being formalized and considered necessary, and Shakespearean dramaturg and director, Andrew James Hartley, author of *The Shakespearean Dramaturg: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*, notes, “While few people make a living as dramaturgs, dramaturgy is a full-time job requiring complete immersion in the texts and contexts of the plays themselves” (Hartley 24). For understanding by comparison, the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA), “the volunteer membership organization for the professions of literary management and dramaturgy” (Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, “About”), advocates for dramaturgs who are seeking employment in commercial theatre to have “credit and compensation commensurate with designers for production dramaturgy, and with directors for new play dramaturgy” (Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, “Pricing”). However, dramaturgs are often working in educational contexts such as universities, or otherwise on a volunteer-basis in non-profit or no-budget theatre. The addition of a dramaturg to a theatrical team is seen as a “luxury”, an additional commodity, as opposed to an essential component, such as designers and the director (Chemers 5).

However, despite the lack of credit and compensation, dramaturgy is an essential part of theatrical production. As opposed to capitalist theatrical production models that focus on creating theatre for the sake of creating theatre, dramaturgy centers meaning at the heart of the production process, ensuring that theatrical artists are creating work that is meaningful and beneficial for the community that the work touches, the audiences and the artists. Without dramaturgical work fueling the intentions of creators, theatre would be created that is irrelevant to the current context and ineffective in moving the audience in any way; audiences would not come back to see theatre that is without meaning or effect.

Thus, dramaturgy may be compared to Silvia Federici’s conception of housework, in how each role works to serve and take care of others (for dramaturgs, the cast and director; for houseworkers, their families and the workers in capitalist production systems), how each is needed for the reproduction of the capitalist system it is a part of (for dramaturgy, the capitalist theatre system; for housework, the capitalist system at large), how each is rendered with invisibility (for dramaturgy, in the overlooking of dramaturgs as necessary; for housework, in the lack of a wage), and in how each role is integral to the system (for dramaturgy, to create meaningful theatre; for housework, to take care of humans’ needs.)

Dramaturgy provides a thought-provoking case study for examining how labor is valued or undervalued—specifically, in the context of theatrical production. In the capitalist model of theatrical production, thought is seen as unproductive, as action that is not true labor that must be compensated. Dramaturgy is also feminized and undervalued as a form of “editing” and “carework”. Dramaturgs give feedback to directors on the ongoing process of their creation, but the fruits of their labor are often invisibilized. For example, in response to an audience member’s question in 2007, “What did you, as dramaturg, actually *do* for this production? What appeared on stage that is a

result of what you did?”, Mark Bly responded, “I can’t point to anything specifically, but if you took a knife to that play, it would bleed me,” echoing Sarah Blackwood’s characterization of editing, “Excellent editing erases itself: it’s mending the dress so well that the fit is perfect, and the holes are invisible” (Sarah Blackwood). Dramaturgy, similar to editing, is seen, as Blackwood articulates it, as a “labor of love,” a form of care work. Thus, the case of the dramaturgy and dramaturgy offers a chance to explore the power dynamics of this feminized labor and its subsequent undervaluing.

### **Scene 1: Exposition: Capitalist Theatre Structures**

Theatre companies employ directors, scenic designers, costume designers, lighting designers, sound designers, choreographers, music directors, dramaturgs, technical directors, stage managers, props masters, master electricians, sound engineers, and many other theatrical career positions (Pennsylvania State University). However, the employment and function of these roles varies depending on the type of theatre company that employs them (Pennsylvania State University). One can largely divide theatre companies into three main models: regional theatre companies, commercial theatre companies, and touring theatre companies (Pennsylvania State University).

According to the Pennsylvania State University, “A regional theatre is perhaps the most common type of theatre, and the one that is most true to the whole production process of theatre” (Pennsylvania State University). Below summarizes the aspects of a theatre.

*An excerpt from the Pennsylvania State University’s Canvas module for the course, “THEA 289: Theatre Production Practicum”. The practicum is a required course for Penn State’s School of Theatre students, who earn credit by working on School of Theatre production in positions such as crew member, assistant director, and dramaturg...*

### **Types of Theatre Companies: Regional Theatre**

*by the Pennsylvania State University*

Below are some of the key characteristics of a regional theatre:

- Theatre is produced from start to finish. Unlike theatre on Broadway or on tour, Productions start from scratch, a play is chosen, a director assigned, designers convened and an Artistic Team is formed. They come up with a concept and drawings of how they want that concept to be realized. The production team then works to make it a reality. The show is then built and installed into a theatre owned by the regional theatre and performed. Typically in this model all aspects of the production process happen within the organization
- All production departments are typically employed by the regional theatre. These departments include: Scene Shop, Paint Shop, Prop Shop, Costume Shop,

Lighting, Sound, and Projections. These employ specialists in each area who are responsible for realizing the designers work.

- The theatre used in a regional theatre is typically owned by the same company that is producing the work.
- When the show is done it is either saved, sent to another theatre to be performed or trashed. Very rarely is it built to go on tour or visit multiple other places.
- Regional theatres are known for doing exciting new works, and shows that aren't as commonly known. Many great actors and designers start work in a regional theatre before they move on to Broadway or the Commercial World.
- Examples of a Regional Theatre would be: Penn State Centre Stage, Centre Theatre Group, Roundabout Theatre, Ford's Theatre, Long Wharf, Glimmerglass Festival, American Repertory Theatre and many more.

By contrast, commercial theatres, such as those found on Broadway, do not produce their own work, but produce work that has been crafted elsewhere and is now touring, “as a complete package, including all costumes, scenery, props, lighting, and sound. The theatre typically just provides a crew and a stage for the touring group to work within” (Pennsylvania State University). Touring theatre groups are the groups that would “present at a commercial theatre” (Pennsylvania State University). Touring theatre groups employ freelancing artists and contract out commercial production departments, such as scenery, costumes, and props (Pennsylvania State University).

A regional theatre company may employ resident theatre artists, including directors, designers, stage management, and technical directors. Designers, stage manager, and the technical director answer to the director. The designers include costume, scenic, sound, and lighting, as well as dramaturgy. Actors answer to stage management. Technicians and shop supervisors (costume, scenic, props) answer to the technical director.

Regional theatre companies function with a division of labor, in which theatre artists work on separate tasks that each individual specializes to be capable of completing. For example, a stage management team might take line notes during rehearsal, noting the lines in which the actors are delivering the wording incorrectly, while a director might take notes in rehearsal to note the incorrect emotional delivery of specific lines. A scenic designer handles all objects on a set, except for the ones which actors interact with, which are handled by the props master. This specialization lends to an efficiency, so that theatrical productions can be produced with the least amount of wasted labor. Each effort and theatre artist is geared toward the production of a work.

## **Scene 2: The Politics of the Dramaturgical Voice**

As mentioned earlier, dramaturgy involves analysis, research, and practical application. Art Borreca, Assistant Professor of Theatre History, Literature, Theory, and Dramaturgy at the University of

Iowa, identifies “the ideal dramaturg [as one that] would be a brilliant critic, a scholar of great breadth, and an empathic facilitator of the creative process” (Borreca 69).

During pre-production, before rehearsals begin for an upcoming work, a dramaturg may prepare a dossier of research to provide to the production team and cast, to aid understanding of the context of the work. During pre-production, a dramaturg also engages in conversations with the director to work on articulating a vision for the meaning of the production. During tablework, a dramaturg sits with the director and cast to advise on understanding the text, both in terms of providing information on understanding meanings and references and in terms of guiding the group’s approach to understanding the text more generally. During rehearsals, a dramaturg may observe the process and provide the director with feedback on how the piece is being perceived by the dramaturg, as an in-house audience member; a director may also call on a dramaturg, during rehearsal, with any questions regarding the text. Outside of rehearsals, a dramaturg works to engage in outreach work, to connect audiences with the upcoming production. This may involve the creation of study guides for students, collaborating with the marketing department, and holding events such as pre- and post-show talkbacks, during which the dramaturg facilitates a conversation with the audience and panelists (potentially with the director, cast members, and scholars) on the work.

The dramaturg functions as both an insider and an outsider in the production model of theatre. As an insider, the dramaturg contributes to the specialization of labor by specializing in meaning. For example, a production dramaturg may specialize in being the sole person to do background research (biographical, historical, cultural, mythological, etc.) for the director and cast. However, a dramaturg is also an outsider in occupying a position outside the realm of production, attempting to occupy an objective position as the in-house audience member.

As a questioning voice within the theatrical production process, the dramaturg works to question dominant power structures. It is a dramaturg’s responsibility to question all that is happening on stage, including underlying assumptions, ethical dilemmas, and the meaning being communicated in different actions. A dramaturg may contribute to sensitivity research, ensuring that the meaning being created in the production is not queer-phobic, racist, sexist, ablelist, classist, anti-Semitic, or ageist. A production might not necessarily see a financial reason to take steps to ensure they are not furthering systems of oppression, but a dramaturg can step in to ensure that the artistic efforts are not prejudiced or bigoted.

Capitalist models of theatrical production are often focused on the production and reproduction of theatrical works. However, dramaturgs are focused on the questions, “Why are we producing this work?” and “What value does this work bring to audiences here and now?”. Dramaturg Mark Bly described an experience, while working as dramaturg for Rajiv Joseph’s *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, explaining that the director was swept up in the hectic, chaotic world of rehearsals in the production process, and that he stepped aside to speak with Bly for a while. The director reportedly spoke of

the experience, comparing it to walking along a moonlight, forest path with Bly, a tranquil moment, and talking with him, only to turn to him and realize he wasn't there. Dramaturgs exist outside the traditional demands of the rehearsal process, and, as Bly articulates it, are able to "step out of time." Thus, the dramaturgical voice exists as a threat to the capitalist theatrical production process, but also as a method for producing anti-capitalist theatre.

### **Scene 3: Federici's Housework and Comparisons to Dramaturgy**

In her book of essays, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, Italian and American scholar and activist, Silvia Federici explores social reproduction and theorizes on alternative models to capitalist production. In her 1975 essay, "Wages Against Housework," Federici explains that housework is an invisibilized form of labor in the capitalist system, labor that is needed for the work to reproduce the system, but not recognized as work in not being given a wage. Federici explains that we must, therefore, demand wages for housework:

"How is wages for housework going to change the attitudes of our husbands toward us? Won't our husbands still expect the same duties as before and even more than before once we are paid for them? But these women do not see that men can expect so much from us precisely because we are not paid for our work, because they assume that it is 'a woman's thing' which does not cost us much effort" (Federici 17).

Federici's goal is not, in effect, to ensure that housework is paid, but that conditions that lead it to be uncompensated are reconfigured, "Wages for housework, then, is a revolutionary demand not because by itself it destroys capital, but because it forces capital to restructure social relations in terms more favorable to us and consequently more favorable to the unity of the class" (Federici 15).

Dramaturgy can be seen as comparable to Federici's illustration of housework, in how the work is invisibilized, a part of the theatrical production process that is assumed to be taken care of. Good dramaturgy leaves no traces of its existence, similar to how housework is invisibilized. Dramaturgs may still be credited and thanked for their work, but in a capitalist system, thought is not seen as productive, as it is not material.

Dramaturgy may also be seen and functioning as a care work, as the dramaturg is often serving the cast and director, teaching them material to ensure that they understand the text and meaning of a production. Dramaturgy might also be comparable to editing, as dramaturgs work to tweak a theatrical production, the way that editors might master drafts or curate collections. Sarah Blackwood explains, in their article, "Editing as Carework: The Gendered Labor of Public Intellectuals," how editing is feminized labor, invisibilized when done well and not appreciated or compensated, "Excellent editing erases itself: it's mending the dress so well that the fit is perfect, and the holes are invisible. Unless an author calls attention to it, a reader should never know it was there" (Blackwood). Blackwood echoes Federici's argument, "Indeed, behind the sudden interest for housework lies the old truth that this work remains invisible only as long as it is done" (Federici 41).

Dramaturgy, like editing, may be seen as “speaking through other people” with a “double or masked voice” (Blackwood).

And as dramaturgy, like editing, becomes “more aligned...with feminized worlds of teaching, service, and care, the less cultural capital such work accrues” (Blackwood). Peter Hay articulates how the role itself is feminized and employs women:

“A great number of dramaturgs (nobody knows how many) are women, especially compared to artistic directors, which arouses at least the suspicion that this reflects the relative ratio of power, as it does in so many other fields. My impression is, however, that male dramaturgs are just as frustrated whether they work under female or male leadership, and that the weakness lies with the job rather than gender. This may mean that there are more women willing to occupy it, while men look to become directors or associate artistic directors” (Hays 11).

While the position of dramaturg is not a role that is only done by women, it, like that of the houseworker, is coded feminine, and is under the oppression of sexism and class-based oppression, through the united cause of reproduction—the production of meaning that is needed to allow the system of theatrical production to be reproduced.

#### **Scene 4: Dramaturgy at Undergraduate Educational Institutions: Penn State as a Case Study**

The two writers of the essay, Frederick Miller and Arushi Grover, are undergraduate students pursuing the Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Studies at the Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), who have served as dramaturgs on theatrical productions within the university’s School of Theatre, including within the mainstage season of the school’s professional theatrical production arm, Penn State Centre Stage. (Penn State Centre Stage is attached to an educational institution, but the company is structured in the model of a regional theatre. The structure largely is similar to the aforementioned explanation on regional theatre, except that none of the positions are resident positions, save for the artistic director. The artist filling a position changes from production to production, and the relationship between positions is replicated for each production.) In order to best illustrate the experiences held by Miller and Grover, one must consider their identities.

Miller (he/him) was one of the first two students admitted into the B.A. Theatre Studies program at Penn State and the first student to serve as a production dramaturg on a Penn State Centre Stage production. His production credits at Penn State include *Caroline, or Change*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *A Little Night Music*, *Angels in America*, and *The Wild Party*. Grover’s (she/her) dramaturgy production credits at Penn State include *The Last Five Years* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and the upcoming *Mountain Language* and *Brigadoon*.

With both of their experiences combined, Miller and Grover have noted that the majority of problems that plague the student dramaturg stem from a fundamental misunderstanding of the role

of the dramaturg and can even open students up to scapegoating in some instances when a production fails.

When working on Christopher Sergel's adaptation of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Miller recalls numerous students of color experiencing profound discomfort with the director's handling of the Black trauma being depicted in the production. In performance, audience members reported their equal discomfort with how the show handled these topics. After the production closed, administration in the School of Theatre pointed to the dramaturgy department for blame. While a dramaturg usually would *and* should facilitate these conversations, space was not allowed for these to take place. The relationship established between the director and the dramaturg was minimal, at the director's request. In fact, no tablework was used during rehearsal to explore the themes of the show.

Another instance for Miller in which a lack of formalized relationship between director and dramaturg resulted in a massive conundrum was when working on Andrew Lippa's *The Wild Party*. The musical, based on the 1928 epic poem of the same name, follows a group of vaudevillians as they engage in excess and lust during the later half of the Roaring 20s. A pivotal moment of the play comes when an unseen "Neighbor" appears, threatening to call the police if the vaudevillians do not tone down their partying. The "Neighbor" ultimately appears in the second act to call the police, unknown to the vaudevillians and so, the audience spends the rest of the show wondering when consequences will finally be dealt for these reckless partygoers. This second appearance of the "Neighbor" however, was cut before opening night without consulting the dramaturg. First, the elimination of the text went directly against the playwright's desire and second, a crucial sense of irony was lost on the audience. There was no running against the clock for the partygoers and the danger was subdued. A cutting of the script without considering its dramaturgical implications left several audience members that Miller spoke with uncertain of the play's ending. In post-mortems, the director spoke of additional uncertainties she had of the script that could have easily been solved with a simple conversation with the dramaturg. Once again, a lack of conversation contributed to much disarray.

When working on William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Grover recalls an incident regarding the colonialist implications of the Indian changeling boy in *Dream*. The subject of a custody battle between the king and queen of the fairies in the story, and the central conflict in the play, the changeling boy and his mother are described in vaguely colonialist and mercantilist terms. Grover communicated these implications to the director via a section in her dramaturgy research packet on post-colonialist interpretations of *Dream*, with the intention of having the director be aware of sensitivities in staging the scenes in question to minimize colonialist connotations. During the first table of tablework for the production, two members of the cast, both artists of color, brought up this issue, having read the packet, and suggested that the script of the production be revised to excise the word "Indian," replacing it with words that maintain the meter of various lines, with words such as "changeling" and "chang'ling", to minimize colonialist connotations. The situation was resolved to propose a more ethical text of the show; however, Grover, in this moment,



realized that she did not know the director was open to editing the text of the play, something that can be done with texts such as Shakespeare's that are out of the public domain. Grover takes responsibility for this oversight and credits a lack of communication with the director on what the ideological role and what the responsibilities of the dramaturg were for the production. Generally, different theatre companies have different approaches to how they work with Shakespeare's text. For example, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival edits texts to make them more comprehensible for audiences, and the American Shakespeare Company works with unedited scripts. There was miscommunication and misunderstanding on what model Penn State Centre Stage was for this production.

Miller and Grover held a roundtable discussion on Thursday, December 9 with the faculty and students of the B.A. in Theatre Studies at Penn State, on the subject of dramaturgy, both at Penn State and beyond. The hour-and-a-half long discussion resulted in numerous discoveries, beginning with the acknowledgement that, while there may be a partial understanding as to what dramaturgy *is*, there is a fundamental ignorance as to what it is that dramaturgs *do*. This ignorance leads to discrepancies in how dramaturgs can function in the production-oriented model that the School of Theatre possesses. One B.A. faculty member, who teaches directing and advises graduate students, remarked that "directors themselves do not know how to work with dramaturgs". This admission reinforced the earlier claims of Miller and Arushi that directors may not be intentionally withholding dramaturgs from the process, but instead do not know themselves how to integrate dramaturgs into the process.

Another B.A. faculty member stated that she considered institutional dramaturgy to be "task-based". In an educational setting, Miller and Grover agreed, this method of work is best when trying to integrate dramaturgs into the production model. However, as was later discussed, it then formulates a specific formulated set of expectations for future dramaturgs working on shows. In reality, each show demands a different set of tasks, there is no "one shoe fits all".

A third and final observation of note came from Grover, Miller, and another B.A. student's collective thinking: because of the production oriented mindset that the School of Theatre instills in its students, thought without tangible results (i.e. this paper) is not seen as "productive". A dramaturg's efficiency is currently being measured in the material goods they turn out for a production (their lobby display, their program note, the actor packet supplied, etc.). Because of their constant presence in the rehearsal room, dramaturgs are constantly stared at for their very state of being. In rehearsal, dramaturgs sit and observe. This subdued style of working doesn't sit well with the stage managers, actors, and directors who are constantly working the room. The irony of this line of thinking is that in reality, the dramaturg *is* working. Their presence is valuable; the observations they make will formulate questions and reactions that can ultimately be used to better the production at the right time.

An additional realization occurred from this conversation as well; perhaps student dramaturgs are

spending *too* much time in the rehearsal room. They are present for every conversation, every blocking note, everything. They become numb to the overall quality of a show through this and can often be rendered useless in their one special power: they are a surrogate audience member in service to the playwright.

## **Epilogue: Anti-Capitalist Theatre: Dramaturgy as the Future**

### *Suggestions & Goals for Theatre Institutions and Dramaturgs*

Thus, for the future, we—as in the writers of this essay and the faculty and students of the B.A. in Theatre Studies program at Penn State—envision dramaturgy for the future, both at Penn State and beyond, as being led with open communication and willing understanding.

For institutions, we recommend that theatre administrators and artists integrate dramaturgs into their artistic and production processes immediately to ensure that we create anti-capitalist, meaning-centered theatre. As theatre artists are not always familiar with dramaturgy or how to work with dramaturgs, we encourage institutions to take steps to educate their scholars, faculty, artists, and students about the theory and praxis of dramaturgy. For educational institutions, we recommend that institutions strongly consider adding a mandatory course in dramaturgy to the curriculum of theatre students—especially, the curriculum for B.A. programs in theatre disciplines. For all theatre artists, and especially for those who will be working with a dramaturg, we recommend Michael Chemers’s book, *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*, as reading to educate oneself on how dramaturgy works. We recommend that theatre institutions encourage artists to think critically about theatre, not simply to produce theatre, but to interrogate *why* we are producing theatre. We recommend that institutions encourage critical thought, and, for educational institutions, we insist on the inclusion of a course on critical theory for all theatre programs, including performing and design programs.

For dramaturgs working on production dramaturgy, we recommend that one proceed with clear communication with the theatre artists that one is working with. When working with a new director or collaborator, it is important to have clear communication on what the expectations are for an upcoming production or project. To encourage the clear communication of expectations, the writers of this essay have designed a “menu” that production dramaturgs can offer to directors when starting work on a new production, to ensure that a director knows what a dramaturg is capable of, and to ensure that both the director and dramaturg are clear on what responsibilities the dramaturg will take care of. This menu is meant to be a starting off point for dramaturgs to initiate conversation with directors on what responsibility the dramaturg will have for the production. We recommend that, as soon as a dramaturg knows they will be working on a production, the dramaturg should send the menu to the director via email correspondence and schedule a meeting to discuss initiating a “contract” of collaboration that is agreed upon by both the dramaturg and the director. At this meeting, we recommend that dramaturgs discuss not only their material contributions to the production, but how they can ideologically or theoretically guide the production. Dramaturgs should be prepared to explain their personal style of dramaturgy, and they should be prepared to explain

how dramaturgy generally works; do not expect that theatre artists know what dramaturgy is or how to work with a dramaturg. We recommend the attached menu for contracts that do not involve financial compensation, such as for dramaturgs in educational contexts. Generally, we also recommend that dramaturgs work on establishing an artistic relationship with artists with whom they are working on a production—especially, a director.

For professional dramaturgs working in theatre, the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA) have many resources for dramaturgs in negotiating employment contracts. To access some resources, one may need to join LMDA and create a membership, which costs a fee. LMDA has resources on:

- LMDA Employment Guidelines: [lmda.org/lmda-employment-guidelines](http://lmda.org/lmda-employment-guidelines)
- LMDA Sample Contracts: [lmda.org/lmda-sample-contracts](http://lmda.org/lmda-sample-contracts)
- Pricing Your Dramaturgical Services: [lmda.org/pricing-your-dramaturgical-services](http://lmda.org/pricing-your-dramaturgical-services)
- Negotiation Checklist: [lmda.org/negotiation-checklist](http://lmda.org/negotiation-checklist)

For dramaturgs, we also recommend that one contribute to the larger mission of dramaturgs, to educate theatre artists and audiences about the art and practice of dramaturgy and to uplift the discipline, to allow others to see the accomplishments and achievements of dramaturgs and the capabilities of dramaturgy. For dramaturgs at institutions that do not have as structured or time-worn an experience with dramaturgy and dramaturgs, we recommend that dramaturgs find ways to highlight the work of each other. For Penn State's School of Theatre, the dramaturgy roundtable participants recommend that dramaturgs initiate regular talks and discussion, like the roundtable, where production dramaturgs can show their work and where dramaturgs can discuss topics pertaining to the discipline, to highlight the presence and importance of dramaturgy work. Additionally, the roundtable concluded that Penn State's B.A. in Theatre Studies program should also initiate an award that recognizes student dramaturg's work on School of Theatre productions. As one member of the B.A. in Theatre Studies faculty pointed out, however, these endeavors to highlight dramaturgy at Penn State would require the effort of dramaturgs, who may not see recompense—it would require uncompensated labor.

At Penn State, the B.A. in Theatre Studies program is producing Harold Pinter's short play, *Mountain Language*, in spring of 2022. Following the dramaturgy roundtable with faculty of the B.A., one of the directors of *Mountain Language*, Dr. Jeanmarie Higgins, is excited to use the production as a test-run for creating a meaning-centered production at Penn State that works with dramaturgs with open-communication on responsibilities and expectations.

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## Dramaturgy Menu

Pennsylvania State University — School of Theatre

### Rehearsal Attendance

- Once each week
- 2-3 days each week
- Most rehearsals
- Every rehearsal
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Dramaturgy Material Efforts

- Dramaturgy Research Packet

A dramaturgy research packet is a document that compiles research that is related to the text, context, or meaning of a production. This research may be cultural, historical, mythological, biographical (in respect to, say, the playwright), or more. The packet is typically provided to the cast and director to inform their work during rehearsals. The packet may also be provided to the design team and production team at large to inform the design of the costumes, scenic design, sound, and lighting of a production. If intended for the cast, the packet can typically be due a day or two before rehearsals begin, allowing time for the director to ask for any sections to be deleted or edited before the actors' see it. If intended for the design team, the packet should be shared with them early in the pre-production process, allowing time for designers to read the packet and *then* create their designs. The dramaturg and director should discuss what contents are required for a research packet; we suggest that the dramaturg prepare a table of contents of what they would suggest for the packet to include before meeting with the director. A table of contents may include: a production history; the playwright's biography and information about their body of work; analysis of the play's themes; a "Why this play now?" statement; cultural, historical, or mythological context; reference visuals; essays; clippings of theory; and/or a "suggested reading" list.

*Deadline for Actors' Packet:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Deadline for Design Team's Packet:* \_\_\_\_\_

- Dramaturg's Program Note

A dramaturg's program note serves to introduce audiences to the production from a textual, contextual, and meaning-based perspective. A dramaturg's program note may include: biographical information about the work's authors; a production history of the work; a brief "Why this play now?" statement; historical context; and/or resources for pursuing more information (Chemers 167). There should be at least two drafts of the program note, an initial draft and a final draft, with some discussion

or communication back-and-forth with the director about edits. The final program note will likely be sent to a theatre company's marketing department.

*Deadline for Rough Draft of Program Note:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Deadline for Final Draft of Program Note:* \_\_\_\_\_

Lobby Display

Lobby displays are an opportunity to cultivate the ideal mindset for an audience. Lobby displays can curate design renderings and models for the production's costumes, scenic design, sound, and lighting. They might also present audience's with further contextual information to understand the work of theatre; lobby displays serve the same function as a program note, but can work for mediums other than a textual one.

*Deadline for Lobby Display :* \_\_\_\_\_

Audience Study Guide

Similar to the Dramaturgy Research Packet for actors and designers, the Audience Study Guide will provide supplemental material to audience members both before and after their theatre going experience. These Study Guides can also include Discussion Questions for audience members to consider. Best for shows that can easily be tied to an educational institution.

*Deadline for Audience Study Guide :* \_\_\_\_\_

Outreach Events (cabarets, readings, etc.)

Special events that can be used to promote the production at hand. Previous outreach events for SoT productions have included a marathon reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* at Webster's Bookstore, a cabaret of Stephen Sondheim/Harold Prince works for *A Little Night Music*, a partnership with the Centre County AIDS Resource Center for *Angels in America*, and a cabaret of Shakespearean monologues and scenes for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

*Deadline for Outreach Events:* \_\_\_\_\_

Pre-Show Talk

A pre-show discussion aiming to orient audience members prior to their theatre going experience. Best if utilizing guest speakers in addition to the director and design team. Facilitated by the production dramaturg (or another qualified speaker). Previous examples include a pre-show discussion on depictions of intimate partner violence in American drama and musical theatre for *The Wild Party*.

*Deadline for Pre-Show Talk :* \_\_\_\_\_

Post-Show Talkback

A post-show discussion aiming to allow audience members to learn more about the process of the theatrical experience they have just witnessed. Best if utilizing the director of production in a community with designers. At all costs, actors should not be included in this post-show forum.

*Deadline for Post-Show Talkback :* \_\_\_\_\_

Journal Article

- A scholarly essay written for publication detailing a distinct quality of the production. Examples include *Reproduction and Meaning: A Dramaturgy Manifesto*, an essay written after Miller and Grover's respective experiences on *The Wild Party* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Fall 2021.

*Deadline for Journal Article* : \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Budgeting

Sources: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Water for panelists at a talkback: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Lobby display supplies: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Printing: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_