

dramaturgs'network

NEWSLETTER

Autumn Issue

Welcome to the Autumn issue of the Dramaturgs' Network's Newsletter! We hope you had a busy autumn, as the Network indeed has (that's why our newsletter is a little belated). You can find out what have some of our members been doing on p2.

The most important Network event of the autumn was the Symposium on new drama development at the Albery Theatre in October, a joint event with the LMDA, America. It was a very interesting day with accounts of different practices from Canada, the United States and Britain. Some excerpts from the debate and other articles inspired by the event will be published in our Winter Issue which is due to be out in January 2005.

In this current newsletter we are leaving London behind to focus on dramaturgical activities outside England. Thus, you can read a personal account from the newly appointed literary manager of the Tinderbox Theatre Company, Belfast, who is the only full-time literary manager in Northern Ireland.

Our second trip is to Scotland, namely to Edinburgh to see what kind of training the Queen Margaret University College offers to those who decide to specialise in dramaturgy.

If you wish to comment on these articles or want to have a debate on other issues concerning dramaturgy, log on to our forum on: www.dramaturgy.co.uk/forum and let us hear from you.

If you would like to contribute with an article to our Newsletter, please send it to: newsletter@dramaturgy.co.uk (If you are writing for us, please note that our article submitting deadline for our Spring Issue is 28th February 2005.)

We look forward to hearing from you!

Katalin Trencsényi and John Keefe
Editors

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NEWS FROM THE NETWORK MEMBERS:

Lyndsay Allison is specialising in devised theatre practice, as well as audience development and marketing and is currently working for a leading fine art charity.

Synne Behrndt's most recent project was working as text and production dramaturg on Danish Company 'Kassandra Productions' on their performance Mit Hjerte er Dit (My Belongs to

You). The performance used Plato's "Symposion" as text material and included Danish and international performers/dancers, live VJ, a musician - and a chef! Performed during the Aarhus International Festival, Denmark. Now Synne is back to teaching at the Winchester University.

Martine Dennewald is now studying towards an MA in Arts Management at City University, London. She is a script-reader for the Gate Theatre and has done some translation work. Academically, her main interest lies in issues of identity in postmodern and postcolonial drama and performance. She is involved in organising the 6th annual International New Drama Festival in Budapest by the ITI, Hungary.

Frauke Franz is dramaturg at Polka Theatre in London. She is currently setting up her own theatre company with Boz Temple-Morris (Co-Artistic Director of Primitive Science).

Andrea Kantor has been assistant director/dramaturg on a touring production of Macbeth, directed by Devlin Mann and Simon Macklin.

John Keefe continues with his teaching (in London and Sussex) and other work. He will be co-authoring two books on 'physical theatres' commissioned by Routledge, for publication in 2007.

Claire Pamment, dramaturg of Context Theatre (UK) is currently Assistant Theatre Professor at Beaconhouse University, Lahore, Pakistan and is researching Pakistani Theatre via an Arts Council England bursary towards a PhD at The University of London. She is Artistic Director of The Sunay'ha Festival, a programme currently running in Pakistan, which explores old and new practice through open dialogue, workshops and performances.

Hanna Slättne has recently taken up the post as literary manager at Tinderbox Theatre in Belfast. She continues with some of her freelance work including working on and adaptation of O Henry's short stories for the stage with Word of Mouth director David Salter and her work developing theatre projects for and with the third sector.

Beccy Smith is currently collaborating with Petra's Pulse, redeveloping their visual performance Drinking the Dawn and writing and reviewing for Total Theatre. She has recently worked with Sleeping Dogs on a clowning reinterpretation of Waiting for Godot and has been promoted to director of the Puppet Centre Trust, a national development agency for the art form of puppetry.

Katalin Trencsényi has finished her work at the National Theatre's Channels '04 project and the Kings Cross Award for New Writing 2004 and is now working as a dramaturg for Deafinitely Theatre Company's new show for the Xposure Festival and Proteus Theatre Company's Sprout!, a new children's play by Phil Smith.

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Belfast Diary by Hanna Slättne

In September 2004 I uprooted my life as a freelance dramaturg in London to take up the challenge of becoming the only fulltime Literary Manager in Northern Ireland at Tinderbox Theatre Co. Tinderbox is the longest established company producing new writing in Northern Ireland. As a dramaturg focusing on new writing I was delighted to take up the role as it

involves supporting writers and new writing in the region and to provide dramaturgical support to the company's productions.

23rd of October

I have been in my new job at Tinderbox Theatre Co. for 5 weeks now but it feels much longer. I have been made to feel so welcome. Belfast already feels like home in an odd unfamiliar kind of way. My fears of not seeing as much theatre as I have been used to in London have so far proved incorrect. In the first week alone we went to two openings: John Bull's Other Island at the Lyric Theatre and physical theatre company Kabosh's Elizabeth a 'tour de force' written by Dario Fo and fantastically performed at the Old Museum Art Centre. We also travelled down to Newry to see a production by Dubbeljoint at the theatre which straddles the border of two counties- the actors enter the stage in County Down and exits across the stage in County Armagh. The 2nd week saw the opening of the Dublin Theatre festival and currently there is a wonderful choice of international theatre in the Belfast Queens University Festival. What is new to me is how fast you need to be to catch the companies touring as they are in Belfast for only a few days.

The first days in the office I was slowly introduced to the pile of scripts awaiting my attention and the systems in place to process them. Most of the scripts we get are from Northern Ireland; however there were others from the USA, Scotland, England and other European countries. The 'Troubles' feature in many, as does the idea of Ireland centred around the family amidst the lush green hills of a never changing countryside which is perpetually just about to face up to change.

It's been a very exciting time for the company as well. They were nominated for 2 TMA awards: Best New Play (for Revenge by Michel Duke our AD) and best supporting actress; hence Barbara Adair arrived home with a new ornament for her mantle piece for her performance in Revenge. Mick has been there for a year only and we are looking for a new General Manger so it is a bit of a fresh start for Tinderbox. Our first production since my arrival takes place on Tuesday 2nd of November; a one-night stand called Swing States Cabaret, a reflection on the US election. Four pieces specially written interlace with music, songs and a vote followed by the first result coming in from the US.

The year ahead looks very busy for me. The theatre has received funding for me for one year and hence we are all keen on me making a mark so that it will be an obvious thing to continue to fund the post. One project coming up is a large dramaturgy project, which goes under the name of The Joint Script Development Project, which aims to encourage collaboration between the different companies developing new works in Northern Ireland. We are looking at workshops where writers can experience different working methodologies, which the different companies have developed. There will also be development workshops for new writers. In addition we are planning readings and are hoping to get funding for two apprentice writers who will be attached to the theatre for a year and see all the aspects of theatre production as well as having their own small educational budget which they can spend as they see fit whether that is to see theatre in another part of the world, enrol on a course or buy lots of plays to read.

The other aspect of my job is of course to get to know who is who and to make links with other organisations. Knowing that I have a terrible memory for names I came prepared with a little yellow book where I religiously wrote down who I met, where and something memorable about them. Having proudly shown Mick this system and the various entries after the first week, I happily set off to Theatre Shop in Dublin where most people in the theatre world of Ireland congregate for an annual meeting. In the bar after a show I met a woman who looked vaguely familiar and as she introduced me to many other people, I deduced that I had met her before. As we left this group of people I whispered to Mick - who was that? I know I have met her before! Mick whispered back - red hat! Immediately I knew who it was as the entry in my little yellow book says Ophelia Byrnes, on the board of Tinderbox, met in office, red hat! I don't

know why people have to upset such a beautiful system by changing clothes! Luckily Belfast being small I am now starting to recognize people and being able to put names to faces without having to consult the little yellow book.

It is small yet frustratingly difficult to get around in. The buses are the oddest things! It took me several attempts to get home before I actually managed to do so without mishaps. I never thought I would miss the London tube but I do! On one of my first encounters with the bus system I realised I did not have the exact money, which is required so a kind man at the bus stop gave me the £1.20 fare. We chatted in a friendly manner as one does in Belfast and that was that until at the opening of an exhibition celebrating the centenary of the Ulster Literary Theatre, another board member of Tinderbox who I had only met once came up to me and said 'I hear you are chatting up strange men at bus stops now Hanna!' That's when I realised how small Belfast is!

Now all I need to do is to learn the language!

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Dramaturgy in Scotland:

A Peculiar Case of
Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh
by Dr Ksenija Horvat, Specialist Tutor in Dramaturgy,
QMUC, Edinburgh

A year ago a fourth year dramaturgy student at QMUC contacted a well-known Scottish arts journalist asking him to comment on the position of dramaturgs in Scotland. The latter was reluctant to give any comment other than that one should not impose upon Scottish theatre what had not grown organically from it. I am reluctant to agree with this point.

To say that dramaturgy as a profession is alien to Scottish theatre is a misconception. A number of talented dramaturgs have worked in Scottish theatre in the past (albeit under different titles), such as Ella Wildridge who has worked extensively with different theatres including Royal Lyceum Theatre and Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh and Cottesloe Theatre in London.

It is similarly a false myth that a dramaturg is somewhat an elusive profession, difficult to define, and even more difficult to pin down. Is s/he a director, an assistant director, a stage manager, or a playwright? The answer is simple. S/he is, and should be, none of the above. A dramaturg's task is to offer another perspective to the theatre production process, and his/her role will depend on the type or style of project, or a stage in the project. It may include the skills of a researcher, an editor, an audience's eye in the rehearsal room, working through and with a director, not necessarily agreeing with them all the time, and always observing, questioning and recording. A good dramaturg is invaluable to a director at any stage of theatre production process, and will represent the playwright's interests in the rehearsal room. An example of such a fruitful union of creative minds is Suzanne Bell's involvement as a dramaturg on producing *The Kindness of Strangers*, written by Tony Green and directed by Gemma Bodinetz, at Liverpool Everyman in October 2004.

John Keefe's recent paper on dramaturgy presented at the Theatre Group meeting of the Directors' Guild of Great Britain on 27 September 2002, and Katalin Trencsényi's subsequent response to it should put suspicious minds to rest. Trencsényi correctly points out that at the time of ever-decreasing rehearsal periods it would be not only more cost effective to include a dramaturg's fee in the budget of a performance, rather than extend rehearsal time and pay extra weeks' salary and rehearsal space for the entire company, but also more beneficial for everyone concerned.

In the past, I had directors complaining to me how overwhelmed they were by rehearsals, and how stressful rehearsals can be. When asked whether they would consider using a dramaturg, they despaired about how they could afford another person in the rehearsal room.

I see this problem as historical rather than budgetary. Of course, there are obvious dangers, as employing an alleged expert would reflect badly upon the field itself and make even the most willing director forsake the idea of ever using dramaturgs. Therefore, there is a need to establish efficient training programmes to ensure that individuals working in dramaturg's profession receive appropriate training.

Queen Margaret University College's School of Drama and Creative Industries in Edinburgh have successfully trained dramaturgs since 1999, within the Literary Management specialism. The specialism was founded as a response to a growing need of new writing theatres such as Edinburgh's Traverse to establish strong literary management departments. Latterly, when I was appointed as specialist tutor, the specialism developed further to include a full hands-on training of production and audience dramaturgs, while still teaching the literary management strand.

The School's B.A. Hons course in Drama and Theatre Arts is a potent ground for training theatre practitioners in general, and dramaturgs in particular. In the first two years of DTA studies, the students gain comprehensive knowledge in different areas of occidental theatre history, theory and practice. By the end of the second year, they have opportunity to choose further training in several competitive fields: playwriting, directing, dramaturgy, community theatre, arts journalism, contemporary performance practice and producing. In the final two years of their studies, they will pursue in-depth study of their specialism, constituting sixty percent of their overall learning.

In their first year of dramaturgy specialism, the students are introduced to historical and practical approaches to dramaturgy, and acquire basic skills such as different methodologies of dramaturgical research in and for theatre, writing textual analyses, writing programme notes, information and educational packs, organising and hosting post-show productions, forums and workshops, budgeting, script-editing, adapting non-dramatic work for stage, interaction and other skills necessary for them to work in theatre industry. At this stage, specialism requires 60% class-based and 40% task-based learning. In their first semester they participate in the project called 'PlayAct', in which fourth year student playwrights work for two weeks with the third year directors, dramaturgs and the second year acting students on developing their original idea into a script. The culmination of this process is a sharing session which may include an enactment of a scene or a presentation of the rehearsal process. The aim of this project is for the students to learn how to work across specialisms, and in the case of dramaturgs, it is the first time that they will apply in practice the knowledge that they have acquired until that point. For many, this is the time when they will fall in love with dramaturgy as a profession, some find it a gruelling task, especially if they have to collaborate with playwrights and/or directors who have not been properly briefed on what the dramaturg's role is and could be in a creative process. 'PlayAct's finish coincides with the end of the first semester of their third year, and it is a preparation for the spring semester, which brings a shift in their learning. From then onwards, class-based work constitutes approximately 40% of their overall time, with the remaining time being spent working on various practical projects.

In the fourth year, students undertake a two-week placement within a professional theatre company. Many students choose to do their placements at the end of the third year, or during summer, between two years, trading in on ample opportunities offered by Edinburgh Fringe. Theatre companies that usually offer placements to QMUC student dramaturgs include Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, Everyman Theatre in Liverpool, It's All Right For Some Productions in London, and, most recently, Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh. Once back from their placements, task-based work will take approximately 70% of the students' time. Their class-based learning also takes another direction; while the first year of their specialism focused on their learning of essential skills to work as dramaturgs and literary managers in theatre, now they are introduced to the skills required to work as dramaturgs, researchers and script editors in film, television and radio. They are further encouraged, in a one-off assessment at the end of the first semester, to experiment with another specialist area, in order to gain deeper understanding of how other theatre professions work. Some students choose to work on a project as actors or directors; the others prefer to write a playscript or to compose a musical score for a theatre piece. In both years assessment is by portfolio. These portfolios represent a variety of practical and theoretical work that they have undertaken throughout their specialist education.

The specialism is not devoid of problems. There is a serious resource issue, as specialism budgets, or the lack of them, depend on current trials and tribulations of HE funding. Furthermore, the dramaturgy as profession is still regarded with suspicion by some Scottish theatre companies, which often results in the students' need to search for placements further afield. Though this may prove costly, it is not necessarily a bad thing, since they can later use their different experiences to enrich the theatre tradition within which they will be working.

Though some of the School's graduates have been employed by various theatre companies on a full-time or project basis, such as Neil Coull who now works as Literary Manager at Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, or Michael Blythe who is a resident dramaturg in the Edinburgh-based Cat in a Cup Theatre Company, and some have chosen to go abroad to continue postgraduate courses in dramaturgy as Rachael Rayment who is currently doing her M.A. degree in dramaturgy at Harvard University, not all of them end up working in the profession. In either case, multiple skills provided by the training are valued by employers in various cultural or commercial fields. These young people are self-starting resourceful researchers and practitioners with a keen eye for detail, and a good sense of diplomacy. It will be interesting to see if the newly founded Scottish National Theatre come to see the School's training programme as something that they can use as a tool for enriching theatre production in Scotland, and these young practising dramaturgs as someone whose creativity and cutting edge vision may help change the face of contemporary Scottish theatre.

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The Dramaturgs' Network is an organisation of professional dramaturgs and literary managers. Its aim is:

- 1, to promote dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg in British theatre and performance arts through practical means.*
- 2, to create a nation-wide network for practicing dramaturgs and a forum for support, shared ideas, knowledge and resources.*

If you would prefer not to receive any further newsletters or mailings from the Dramaturgs' Network please e-mail us on info@dramaturgy.co.uk If you are not yet on our contact list and would like to subscribe to further free issues, please email us on newsletter@dramaturgy.co.uk