Review
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LMDA LITERARY MANAGERS & DRAMATURGS OF THE AMERICAS

Review

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The LMDA HQ

PO Box 586
New York, NY 10108
917.740.8701

Editors' Note:

This issue of *Review* captures the evolving landscape of dramaturgical practice. The topography of the field of dramaturgy is dynamic, and our work requires the ability to consider the terrain. From a high enough vantage point, the landscape reveals its past, present, and future. Examined in detail, the nuances of specific elements come into focus, highlighting the stories of dramaturgy across time, cultures, and geography. Featuring work from dramaturgs in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, *Review*'s 2026 issue exhibits the transnational reach of LMDA and the vital work of its members.

We start with the detail, examining case studies of dramaturgy in practice. Thomas Underdal explores the lobby as a transitional site for audiences using a practice-as-research methodology, investigating the lobby display he created as a case study to argue for the impact of collaborative meaning-making possible in lobbies. Khristián Méndez Aguirre articulates ecodramaturgical practice through analysis of two ecoplays and their new play development process, using new dramaturgy theory to reflexively analyze dramaturgical methodology in the specific context of ecotheatre. In her article, Martha Herrera-Lasso González explores the dramaturgical sensibility in the work and initiatives of Theatre Hace Teatro, a company dedicated to meeting the theatre-related needs of its community and fostering arts engagement across an array of demographics. In "What here did miss?" Stephen Drover reflects on his process for staging *Romeo and Juliet* in reverse assembly and astutely shares the experiment's resulting dramaturgical and pedagogical insights.

We also look at the landscape more broadly, reflexively applying dramaturgical thinking to the field as a whole. Lynde Rosario, former LMDA president and winner of the Leon Katz Award for Teaching & Mentoring, asks us to contemplate the ways in which we value creative work in her inspiring dramaturgical invitation to consider the impact of the language we use as working artists. First delivered at LMDA's 2025 bi-national conference, Simón Franco Suárez's "To Find a Genealogy" / "Para encontrar une genealogia" recounts the emergence and state of dramaturgy in Mexico, and Franco Suárez's own personal journey to the field.

This issue of *Review* also includes our first "Pathfinders in Dramaturgy" feature. In this new section of *Review*, Mark Bly curates conversations with foundational North American dramaturgs and early-mid career dramaturgs. Brian Quirt, Jenna Rodgers, and Sierra Haynes present us with a compelling intergenerational dialogue rife with wisdom, joy, and personal history that reads as a love letter to our field.

Allison Backus & Sarah Johnson

Pathways to Dramaturgy: Mentors, Magpies, and Misfits

Brian Quirt in conversation with Jenna Rodgers & Sierra Haynes

INTRODUCTION

LMDA is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, and I proposed to Allison Backus and Sarah Johnson that we should celebrate the work of those foundational artists in the field of North American Dramaturgy from the early 1970s to the early 2000s. We felt one way this could be achieved was through a series of intergenerational conversations and interviews. The *Pathfinders in Dramaturgy* series is eager to address how pathfinders entered the field of dramaturgy, their contribution to the field, their diverse practices, and how they sense the field of dramaturgy has changed since they entered it.

I felt Brian Quirt would be a natural choice for the *Pathfinders* series, as 2026 is the 30th anniversary of Nightswimming, a unique dramaturgical research center in Toronto that has had major international reach and influence. As founder and artistic director, Brian has created and traveled down invisible tracks that would not be laid or followed by others for years. Brian has also had a significant impact as the director of the Banff Playwrights Lab, as founder of LMDA Canada, and as a former president and board chair of LMDA.

In the three-way conversation below, Jenna Rodgers and Sierra Haynes, who have worked with Brian, acknowledge his continued impact as a mentor. Brian, an artist and friend I have known for over thirty years, demonstrates his uncommon humility and humanity by reflecting on the impact Jenna and Sierra have had on him through their collaborations at venues such as the Playwrights Lab and Nightswimming.

The *Pathfinders in Dramaturgy* series is not designed to be a linear history lesson on dramaturgy prior to the 21st century. To the contrary, what follows demonstrates an intergenerational fluidity of time; each artist, regardless of age and experience, has had an impact on the others over the years. When I first read this unique, oxygenating exchange, I thought about one of my favorite films, *Arrival*, based on Ted

Figure I: *Sierra Haynes, Brian Quirt, and Jenna Rodgers conversing over Zoom.*

Chiang's time-shifting novella *Story of Your Life*. I do not want to untwist the plot for anyone encountering either art form, but the Quirt/Rodgers/Haynes conversation "behaves" with an understanding of past, present, and future that opens up time for us, revealing what it means to mentor in unexpected, healing ways.

MARK BLY,
Creator and Curator of *Pathfinders in Dramaturgy*

BRIAN QUIRT:

When Mark Bly and Allison Backus asked me about being part of *Review's* Pathfinders series, I said I'd love to make this less an interview, and more of a conversation, a conversation with two dramaturgs that I've worked with a lot over the last decade, who have seen a lot of my work, that I've collaborated with in different ways, in different places around Canada. I'm really looking forward to having an intergenerational conversation about dramaturgy, in the hope that this will offer something to readers who follow us in this illustrious pastime.

I'm going to start by introducing Jenna Rodgers, who is currently in Edmonton, at the offices of Concrete Theatre, where she's the artistic director (though by the time this is published, Jenna will be the artistic director of Edmonton's Theatre Network). Jenna and I first met in China, at a theatre conference in Xiamen. Some years later, when I was looking for an assistant dramaturg at the Banff Centre Playwrights Lab, playwright Mieko Ouchi recommended Jenna, and I invited her to join the Lab. Jenna became the dramaturg of that program, and I was the director. For a decade, we had an extraordinary collaboration, dramaturgically and administratively, and have remained colleagues and friends.

Part of what I love about these relationships is that we often start as mentors, then become colleagues, and then become friends and collaborators. That pathway with Jenna has been one of the most satisfying that I've experienced. So, Jenna, thank you for being part of this conversation with Sierra and me today.

JENNA RODGERS:

It's my absolute pleasure. My job is to introduce the wonderful Sierra Haynes, whom Brian and I also met through the Playwrights Lab. Sierra applied to our posting for an apprentice dramaturg, and we were floored by this accomplished young artist, who not only had an interest and passion for dramaturgy but was also a skilled composer and fiddler, as well as a performer for both the stage and screen. Sierra is also delightful, quirky, and charming in all the wonderful, nerdy ways that dramaturgs are, eager to dive into questions and research, and it truly just felt like she would be a perfect addition to our team. I know she and Brian have continued to collaborate through Nightswimming which I'll let the two of them discuss.

SIERRA HAYNES:

Well, thank you, Jenna, that's so kind. Being invited out to the Banff Playwrights Lab was a really special experience, so thank you for asking me to work and learn with you. Now I get to circle around and introduce my mentor, Brian! I first encountered Brian's work in my last year of theatre school. We went to see *Broken Tailbone* by Carmen Aguirre, which was a Nightswimming project. It was the last play that my class went to before the pandemic shut everything down. It was the most fun I had had in a theatre in a really long time, and it was certainly necessary just

before we all had to leave each other for months and sit in our homes. That show has everyone up and dancing while listening to Carmen's *insane* stories.

When I left theatre school, I applied to be an apprentice dramaturg at the Playwrights Lab. Brian and Jenna said yes, and Brian and I have kept working together since I became the Metcalf Foundation Dramaturgy and Producing intern at Nightswimming.

BRIAN QUIRT:
One of the joys of my career is being able to make these opportunities reveal themselves at the various organizations that I've worked at. To be able to provide and then benefit enormously from these collaborations has been one of the great parts of my work as a dramaturg over many, many years. So, thank you both for being part of this conversation.

JENNA RODGERS:
Thinking about the metaphor of pathfinding—so much in our industry is tied to relationship building. Starting from this little circle of humans, we've seen so many paths emerge. Without Brian gently suggesting it, I would never have been involved with LMDA.

Additionally, LMDA Canada wouldn't exist if it weren't for Brian. Canadian dramaturgy has its own sense of identity because our practices and our ecology are different from our colleagues across the border. LMDA Canada has affected the paths of so many people.

I also continue to collaborate with Brian through Nightswimming. We are working on a long-term publication project, looking towards the company's 35th anniversary in 2030, which is a really rich opportunity to examine all of the dramaturgical paths that have been forged by this company Brian leads.

Sierra, I'm sure you also have moments of how your pathway has been affected by this circle; ways in which we leave and come back and enrich this relationship that we all have together.

SIERRA HAYNES:
It's a constellation of artists, I think. We're all in relation to each other in certain ways, and I've learned that as I've been able to move forward in my career.

Brian, my first question when I started interning with you was, "How did Nightswimming become what Nightswimming is?" Because it's so… unusual. I think how you started it is the most interesting thing to me, as someone who is dreaming about what she wants to do. How did you come up with this dramaturgical company?

BRIAN QUIRT:
The short-form version is that I was working as a dramaturg on a play written by Don Druick. At that point in my career, I had not yet become a director; I was not a playwright or a playmaker; I was a dramaturg. And I realized, as I worked on the play, that if it moved on to production somewhere, I would probably not go with it, as often happens for dramaturgs early in their careers. Plays move on, and sometimes the dramaturg doesn't.

I could see that happening with Don's play, and I decided that I wanted to be there when it was ultimately performed and premiered. Talking about paths—I wanted to be there for the full pathway of that piece, including fully staged productions and audiences. I realized that the only way that would be possible is if I directed it myself and somehow formed an entity to make it happen. So, I called my friend Naomi Campbell, a producer here in Toronto, and asked whether she would produce a workshop and then the show, if we could raise the money to do it independently. And we did over the course of a year and a half, eventually producing it at Toronto's Theatre Centre in 1995. It was a beautiful play called *Through the Eyes*. But we left the success of that production, going, "We never want to do that again."

Two things: We wanted to collaborate together, and we still do. But we didn't want to live on the treadmill of a small, tiny, independent theatre company that has to raise the money to do a show every two or three years. That didn't interest us, and Toronto didn't need yet another company like that.

So rather than just fold the company, we went away and made it a dramaturgical project to rethink what this company, if it chose to exist, might be.

We reframed it through a series of dramaturgical questions. Basically, we decided that if we didn't want to be part of the producing treadmill, what if we just didn't produce? What do you do if you don't produce?

I tried to make it an easier question by saying, "What if, instead of it being about what I don't want to do, it only did things that I loved doing? And what if it only did things that

I couldn't do anywhere else?" Those became the critical, foundational premises for Nightswimming.

> **"What I couldn't do anywhere else, at least at the time, was to start projects from scratch, not to join in progress, as dramaturgs so often do.."**

One of the things that I loved doing was working with playwrights and artists on the creation of new work. What I couldn't do anywhere else, at least at the time, was to start projects from scratch, not to join in progress, as dramaturgs so often do. I wanted to be there before the beginning. For example, you mentioned Carmen Aguirre's *Broken Tailbone*, which Nightswimming commissioned many years later. It came out of a previous show we did with Carmen called *Blue Box*.

There was a moment in the middle of *Blue Box* when a song came on, and Carmen danced, and she invited members of the audience to salsa on stage with her, and sometimes people did, and sometimes people didn't. This was in lieu of an intermission. One time I watched a group of young women join her, and they clearly didn't know how to salsa. I loved that they went up, and then I watched Carmen teach them the basic steps.

So, our then-producer, Rupal Shah, and I went to her, and we had dinner and said, "Carmen, what about a new show that is about you teaching the audience to salsa because you're really good at it, and you do it in a very beautiful, practical way. People pick it up very swiftly. We saw it in action. What about that as the starting point of the show?" This is an example of Nightswimming saying we want to be there at the beginning, to be there before it exists, and to commit to it, to commission it, as we did with Carmen and what became *Broken Tailbone*. We had no idea what the show would be, the form it would take, what the stories would be, what the music would be. But there was a commitment to make a show together. That's what Nightswimming wanted to be, a place where the dramaturgy begins at the very conception of the show. Our collaboration begins there, too. That's what Naomi and I started to do after that first show with Don.

In the 1990s, when we created Nightswimming, often shows had to fit into play development boxes at various theatres or developmental organizations, and you kind of had to work within the structure. And some shows don't fit the structures that are offered to them. This is still true today, thirty-plus years later.

We decided we would invent a company where there were no boxes. The pieces of theatre, dance, and music that we wished to commission, we would design the pathway for each of those, tailored to each show, rather than asking the show to fit into a developmental box.

So, for *Broken Tailbone*, we designed a process with Carmen to create that show over a couple of years that was unique to that show. That felt like a better and more fun way to work dramaturgically.

So that's what Nightswimming became, and with variations over the years—I can't quite believe we're in the middle of our 30th year—we've stuck to that premise. The company shifts from year to year or decade to decade because the shows change, and the artists we work with change. That's as it should be for a company that we wanted to be uniquely shaped by the artists that we collaborated with.

That's the pathway that we took to reimagine not just the company, but how we wanted to work and how we wanted to be in a relationship with the artists that we wanted to work with.

SIERRA HAYNES:
I love that vision. Because it's so fresh, even though it's obvious. But it's not obvious. Like you said, you had to dramaturgically go back and think about what you wanted to do, and how to accomplish it.

BRIAN QUIRT:
Sparking off something Jenna said about me nudging her towards LMDA—I, too, was nudged into LMDA. I wanted to bring this up because DD Kugler, a dramaturg, director, artistic director, and teacher, was the person who nudged me into LMDA a long time ago. He was among the first Canadians to join LMDA in the late 1980s. I knew him when I worked at Canadian Stage, and every once in a while, he would mention LMDA and whisper, "You should

come to the conference; you should join if you can." And I didn't, as one does.

And then finally, I did. I went to the 1993 conference in Montreal. I didn't know any of the US members, but I knew some of the Canadians. DD was there, and he introduced me to people. I ended up at a baseball game with Don Druick, DD, the literary manager from the National Theatre in England, and Shelley Tepperman, who is an amazing translator in Montreal. Immediately, my connections and my network started to expand. DD's nudging was a total success in that it led me to the thing I hadn't realized I sought. LMDA is one of the places that provided connections to like-minded people that helped me think creatively about what Nightswimming might be a couple of years later, when its origin story started in '95 and '96.

So, thank you, DD.

JENNA RODGERS:
A question I have for you, Brian, is about choosing to become a dramaturg. When in your career as an artist did you realize that dramaturgy was the pathway for you?

BRIAN QUIRT:
When I was doing my MA at the University of Toronto, I took a post-war British drama course taught by Ronald Bryden, the director of the graduate program. Ron lived and worked in England as a critic for the *New Statesman* and *The Observer* in the late 60s, where he encountered the work of Tom Stoppard, John Arden, John Osborne, and Harold Pinter, among many others. In the 70s, he worked for the Royal Shakespeare Company, where he did the work of what we would now think of as a literary manager. I gravitated to dramaturgy because of the conversations Ron casually shared with us.

It was the stories he told about collaborating with those playwrights that landed somewhere in me. *What were those conversations? How did they talk with one another? What was the impact?* That felt like a place where I might fit into the theatre, because I was not a writer, I didn't study to be an actor, and I didn't train as a director.

Those conversations are the things I loved, that I wanted to pursue, that keep me going, that are constantly fresh and new. Ron's stories about them, way back at the end of that degree, were the spark that told me there was an entry point for someone like me. This idea that you could collaborate with creators to foster and nurture their work—that was an entry point, that was a doorway. Those conversations have been the substance of my career for forty years now.

When I graduated, I knocked on a lot of doors. I wrote to the Tarragon Theatre and eventually met with Urjo Kareda, the then-artistic director, and a number of other theatres. Some of them were very positive about dramaturgs, and some of them were super negative about dramaturgs. I had one interview with an artistic director who hated the idea of dramaturgs and thought dramaturgs were leeches and parasites. My meeting with Urjo was very positive, but they all said there were no jobs for dramaturgs in Toronto at that time, and they were correct. A lot of doors were closed, but I persevered and eventually found doors that did open for me. Initially, at what is now Toronto's Canadian Stage.

I love being asked this question because it took me years to realize what the answer was and why this pathway that I have been on for so long has been so important, and wonderful, and beautiful.

SIERRA HAYNES:
I have a question for both of you about your time working together at the Playwrights Lab. You would have seen so much work in that decade together. What's changed for you in your practice as dramaturgs? Or what did you come to realize about the practice of dramaturgy, having seen such a breadth of work at the Lab?

JENNA RODGERS:
I think that, as a dramaturg, I'm drawn to trying to observe, build, replicate, or improve systems. Calling back to the way that Brian talks about the creation of Nightswimming and the idea that new Canadian theatre has to fit into a "box," and that I think he has a bit of an aversion to that.

BRIAN QUIRT:
(*laughs*) Maybe.

JENNA RODGERS:
It was quite fun to have ten years of working together, thinking, *What's he doing?* Or *What is this pattern?* Or *Oh, I see how this was adapted differently*, or *Oh, I see how this tactic from three years ago is being reused in this moment, and I understand why.*

I think some people do practice dramaturgy in a relatively formulaic way. In our time together, I feel like my practice could be categorized as a growth or evolution, but it doesn't feel quite as linear as that suggests. My understanding of dramaturgy and dramaturgical practice over ten years has expanded. There is a circular nature to it, where I can reach into my accumulated toolbox to grab the appropriate tool for the situation. I think that sort of nimbleness or flexibility is a trait that I emulate from Brian.

I still like systems, and as much as I say all of these things about Brian, I will divulge that if you've ever had the pleasure of peeking into his notebook, he's quite organized. He puts a lot of thought into how he designs and sets up a space, and how he hosts and cares for that creative process. It is particularly special that he always resists the temptation to create a repeatable box around process.

BRIAN QUIRT:
My response to that picks up a word that you just mentioned, Jenna, which is "care."

We didn't use that word in Nightswimming's early years, but the way we work on the shows is with the artists, for the artists, in the context of their work, and their lives. Rather than their lives being an impediment to the way we work, we work with them as they manage their lives, and sometimes that means you speed up, and sometimes it means you slow down.

I think I found ways to amplify that at the Lab. But that evolved in a hugely important way when Jenna joined the Lab, and we started talking about how best to collaborate with the large range and number of artists that we were working with—up to fifty each Lab by the peak—including actors, directors, playwrights, designers, and collaborators from all sorts of disparate fields. "Manage" seems like the wrong word, and "care" feels sort of cliché sometimes, but it's both. You are managing a very large group of people, their ideas, and their time, but you're also caring for them literally by hosting them. Some of them are vulnerable, some are scared, some are aggressive and bold in their ideas, and some are not. Some come from other places in the world with different approaches, interests, habits, and ways of working. Communities connect and intersect, and there's tension and friction, and collaboration and discovery.

I continued to learn how to care and manage, dramaturgically speaking, over those years of our collaboration, because we thought about it even more carefully and overtly than I had before. I think it was instinctual before, and Jenna made it conscious in a way that was joyous and thoughtful. That has become part of the dramaturgical practice that I carried back with me to Nightswimming and the other places that I've worked since.

The other thing, when I think about the Playwrights Lab, is that—despite all the planning I did and do—my notebook doesn't feel organized to me. It feels like a mess, so it's interesting to hear that, Jenna. But I do plan a lot. I even have notes for this conversation.

Despite all my planning, I felt the Lab gave me a lot of license to be spontaneous dramaturgically, because you're responding to people in the moment and you're living with them to a certain degree over those couple of weeks in Banff. Responding in the moment to what they need and how their play has shifted, regressed, gone sideways, or moved forward during their time in Banff is different from our day-to-day urban city lives, where we don't see the people we collaborate with on the same regular basis.

I realized that my approaches to dramaturgy can and could be adapted and spontaneously utilized in the moment. To throw away the plan if there was one. That dramaturgy is a creative act. And to trust what one has built up in oneself and has built up through the people that you surround the process with. And in many cases, that was in collaboration with Jenna. Then, as we were able to hire assistant dramaturgs and apprentice dramaturgs, to have them, too, become part of that unbelievably stable, yet spontaneous dramaturgical entity was a very powerful thing to both work within while we were there, and for me, at least, to continue to see how that can live in my other work more recently.

Sierra, I know you do lots of other things in the theatre world, so what was it about dramaturgy that hooked you?

SIERRA HAYNES:
It was already one of my favorite things about making theatre. I just didn't realize that it was an actual job.

I'd grown up doing devised theatre, creating and writing my own shows as a kid. The whole time I was doing that, I was always pretty critical of what the audience understood versus what our ensembles had in our minds. I could see that we weren't always bridging the gap. And I still have strong memories of cut creation moments from rehearsals that I felt were huge missed opportunities! … Lots of opinions, haha.

As a younger person, I wasn't always in a position to be the one who says, "Actually, I don't think that's gonna work," or "I think we should do this," but it just meant that as I got older, I collected more tools to understand what the audience was looking for when we were building shows from scratch.

So, as I continued through theatre school, people would bring me their stories, and I'd share my notes and thoughts with them. I especially loved that about playwriting class—any opportunity where we were hashing out the details of a narrative.

Then, when I saw that you were both looking for an apprentice dramaturg in 2023 for the next year's Playwrights Lab, I was like, "Oh my god, wait! This is a job that people can do?!" Dramaturgy wasn't just something that I could *enjoy,* but something I could study, and people could specifically come to me and ask me about my thoughts on their work

I love listening to other people tell me about what they're creating, and helping them make it sparklier—figuring out what gems they have inside the initial mess that they bring me, you know?

BRIAN QUIRT:
Absolutely. Thanks. So, you're saying it's our fault, basically.

SIERRA HAYNES:
Yeah, it's your fault. I didn't know dramaturgy was real until it became real and possible thanks to both of you. Jenna, how did you get into dramaturgy?

JENNA RODGERS:
I think I just wanted to be in the room for anything and everything! Like many folks, the siren song of acting drew me towards the theatre, but when I was in school, I received a lot of messaging about how the theatre might not be a good place for me. I think this mostly had to do with my race—but it may have also had to do with being more academically inclined and not particularly skilled as an actor.

I ended up getting a master's degree at the Universiteit van Amsterdam, which really opened my eyes to the breadth of what dramaturgy could be. There, the dramaturg often functioned like an assistant to the director, or a really rigorous sort of story handler, and I thought that that was quite compelling.

Post-graduation, I landed in Toronto to work with fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company. This was at a time when a re-granting program called the Theatre Creator's Reserve existed, in which a company would be granted funds, and then they'd use that money to pick a number of writers or projects that they would be able to support.

I was adjudicating these grants with fu-GEN, and having a great time. The leadership at the time (David Yee and Nina Lee Aquino) saw that I enjoyed the work, and they were like, "Why don't we get you into a new play development room?"

That's always what I wanted to hear! Yes, get me in the room. fu-GEN had a playwright's unit, which really existed because we wanted to do something with plays that grew out of the support of that granting program. I just remember a really rich culture of new play development happening at a micro level in Toronto, and I really benefitted from that. These programs and writer's units helped me understand how to formulate good questions, how to be a better listener, and just how much work goes into writing a new play.

I feel like Brian saw this raw interest that I had in dramaturgy, that I was someone who kept dipping my toe in the pool, and he asked me to take the plunge with the Playwrights Lab and eventually LMDA. Spending time with Brian really honed and sharpened my instincts, and spending time with exceptional playwrights each year really helped me understand the breadth of what dramaturgical practice can be. Being at Banff always felt quite electric, and since then, it's just felt like dramaturgy is part of who I am.

I have a two-part question for both of you. Because LMDA is the reason that we're all together today, I'm curious, Sierra: What do you know about LMDA, LMDA Canada, and what are your current sentiments about this organization? Brian: I know you've been working on this LMDA history project, so I'm curious: Have you had any recent revelations about the time that you've spent with LMDA and the various roles that you've held?

SIERRA HAYNES:
I'm still learning a lot about LMDA, but something that I've been appreciating over my last year with the internship is just how connected everybody is inside the organization. For example, Nightswimming had the opportunity to go out to do this cool workshop project in Banff last summer (Anosh Irani's *We Go By Many Names*, in association with the National Arts Centre English Theatre). There were some

artists and dramaturgs there who are also part of LMDA that I got to sit down and speak with.

I could see the influence that this organization has inside our practice as theater-makers, and that's really special. It also has lots of resources that I know I can take better advantage of, and I want to learn more about.

Last night, I had one of my friends who's an artistic director over for dinner, and she was talking about all these people, and I think, *Nope, don't know! Nope, don't know!*

That's just sort of where I'm at in my career, and I know that at some point in the future, I'm going to be sitting at that table with somebody younger than me, spouting names of people who are wonderful artists and connections that I've met in my career who have influenced my work, you know? But right now, I'm a sponge. I'm taking in all the information. It's moments like this where I get to sit down with you, Jenna, and Brian, and the artists who have forged the pathway for me to take as an example, to learn from all of you and continue to try to see what those resources are.

Maybe one day I will get to go to an LMDA conference and see what it's all about.

BRIAN QUIRT:
Perhaps when the LMDA conference returns to Canada in 2027.

SIERRA HAYNES:
Exactly!

BRIAN QUIRT:
As LMDA marks its 40th year, its current leadership asked me to go back and look at LMDA's history. Much of which has been carefully cataloged by American dramaturg, friend, and former LMDA President, Geoff Proehl, over many years in the form of a chronology that captures the organization's major events.

I've been updating it, and completing the last eight or nine years of the chronology and also creating a new document that captures key moments in LMDA's story for the LMDA website and for a publication about the 40th year.

A group of dramaturgs in New York City in the mid-to-late 1980s started having lunch together so that they could talk about their work as dramaturgs, because, as we all know, dramaturgy and dramaturgical work can be invisible to those who see the shows that are generated through this labor. Also, dramaturgs rarely work together; we work in parallel at other organizations or on other projects, and our paths don't necessarily cross in the rooms that we work in.

Those conversations initiated a desire to connect with dramaturgs working across the United States, to broaden the conversation from that super-local level to something with more scope, from which LMDA was born.

LMDA Canada also started because of a local conversation. At the end of the 1996 LMDA conference in Toronto, Canadian dramaturgs from across Canada who were attending the conference got together on the final day and said, "All of us coming together here has been very powerful and effective. What can we do to continue this conversation? Would anyone say, put together a newsletter or a mailing list or something?" I put up my hand and said, "I'll put together that mailing list and figure out what a newsletter might be for LMDA members in Canada."

LMDA Canada came out of people wanting to continue that conversation with just a little more shape and structure. It became a way to encourage dramaturgs spread across our thinly populated land, have them meet each other, talk, share, and do all the things that help ground our profession.

Once LMDA started including Canada, it became international. Delegations to Mexico made it trinational, if that's the word. Then, over the last ten years, it has become increasingly international. The Dramaturg's Network in the UK is now marking its 25th anniversary. Liz Engelman and I made several trips early in its evolution to help them formulate—to dramaturg what a dramaturg's organization might be in the UK. It's been fantastic the way that dramaturgs have come together in Mexico City as part of this conversation with LMDA and LMDA Canada. A dramaturg from Center 42 in Singapore came to our conference in Kansas City and recently invited me to do an online seminar for Singapore dramaturgs. Those sorts of connections are starting to tumble forward with increasing impact.

That increasingly global conversation about dramaturgy is exemplified for me by the International Dramaturgy Lab of a couple of years ago. During the pandemic, LMDA reached out far beyond our continent to set up this laboratory of conversations among eighty-four dramaturgs from eighteen nations who set up projects to ensure they would have reasons to communicate and collaborate.

I still keep in touch with the dramaturgs I connected with during that International Dramaturgy Lab every two months. This shift from local to global has been *so* rewarding to watch and be part of—a pathway now laid out so clearly in the organization's updated chronology.

JENNA RODGERS:
I think that was a very beautiful and complex bid for your membership, Sierra.

SIERRA HAYNES:
Haha!

So, is that how you see dramaturgy being more connected internationally?

BRIAN QUIRT:
The ease with which one is able to do that today, compared to when LMDA or LMDA Canada were launched, is a night-and-day difference in terms of our capacity to reach out to people anywhere in the world—and to connect and collaborate with them, and maybe even meet them and spend time with them. That obviously involves funds and funding, and those are challenges that are no less real today, but the conversations can happen, and if you commit to them and figure out how to sustain them—the returns are substantial.

I've made a commitment to do that, knowing that it ensures that I'm consistently engaged with people working well outside my own sphere, dramaturgically and theatrically. That forces me to check my own assumptions about how to work and what I'm interested in.

I said that with Nightswimming, I wanted to only do things I love doing. And to do things you can't do anywhere else, or to do things you don't know how to do, and to not repeat oneself unless one chooses to. One of the ways I have chosen to do that is to consistently sustain relationships with artists working in other places, other fields, in other ways. So, if I do choose to do something that I have done before, or in a way that I know how to do, that's a conscious choice.

If you're able to incorporate ways of working from those you meet elsewhere, great. But often it isn't about that, necessarily. It isn't always about being a magpie. Although I think dramaturgs *are* magpies. We do pick up things that are shiny from elsewhere and add them to our toolkit.

That isn't, to me, the purpose of these broad networks and conversations. It's to remain inspired and to remain articulate about what we are doing, how we want to work, and why we're working. It's to remain fluid, flexible, spontaneous, charged. That's what I think the conversations, whether they're local, national, or global, can pay back into your own working landscape.

That's a path that I've pursued through all of these organizations. These conversations require nurturing. You have to consciously feed them. If you do, and you can make use of organizations like LMDA to put those conversations within reach, then I think there are huge benefits to be harvested.

JENNA RODGERS:
Brian, reflecting on all the experience you've gained throughout your career, I think both Sierra and I are curious to hear your perspective on the future of dramaturgy. Can you offer us some comments on where you think dramaturgy might be going? How do you perceive the field to be developing?

BRIAN QUIRT:
Sure, I will try to…read the entrails, as it were. Um, I may change that in the transcript.

I would say that despite the cutbacks in the arts that have been happening in North America, England, and other places in the world, particularly in the play development, literary management, and dramaturgy fields, I would absolutely say that dramaturgy is more accepted and more understood, if perhaps not fully, than ever before. Certainly far, far more than when I started. It's not just that the positions and the people undertaking them have expanded—I believe the understanding of dramaturgy has expanded in the theatre, in the performance world, and beyond it.

That's because it's such a powerful idea. A person, whether they use the word dramaturg or not, whose multifaceted role is to help make the thing you're working on stronger, more effective, and more of what it wants to be. Someone devoted to invention, communication, and care, someone focused on the strategies of effective storytelling. Whatever the story is, and whatever the field is.

It's just a good idea and a great role to play. Lots of people play that role, and increasingly, some of them are being acknowledged as dramaturgs, not only in our world but in other worlds, too.

We've seen over the past thirty years the idea of dramaturgy seep into those other worlds, whether they know it or not, and make huge contributions in those landscapes. We had a great conference in Washington many years ago, and one of the speakers was an exhibition designer at the Smithsonian. They didn't think of themselves as a dramaturg, but it was clear that's the role they played in that institution, because they were mediating between museum displays and how to display them to the audience; how the audience receives the objects in their world.

My favorite example, as I've watched how dramaturgy has become entwined and integrated into other fields and professions, is Hallmark Cards. There's a great book by an artist named Gordon Mackenzie, who became one of the senior designers at Hallmark, a huge multi-billion-dollar corporation that's very conservative in many ways. Mackenzie wrote a book called *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*, about how to survive as a creative in a huge bureaucratic organization, which he calls "the giant hairball." It's also a book about dramaturgy because it's about invention, creation, audiences, institutions, and strategies for telling stories well and effectively. I love recommending that book.

Two other things before I finish. First, I would say that, for all the reasons we've discussed in this conversation, dramaturgy has become global. It's always happened in other places in the world, and now there's a name for it, for better or worse. We're collaborating with people in other countries on how they support people telling stories, and those conversations are so rich.

The last thing I want to say—and it came out of the conversations the three of us have had to build this interview—is that, most importantly for us, and for those who will follow us in this pathway, dramaturgy will continue to be an entry point for the misfits, the people like us who can do a lot of things, but aren't sure where the doorway is, perhaps, into the theatre world. At least that's true for me. For the folks looking for a way into this magical and potent world we work in, dramaturgy will be one of those pathways. A less common pathway, and perhaps a slightly mysterious one, but less mysterious than it used to be.

That pathway connects to other pathways, as it has for each of us, into a whole range of opportunities in the theatre.

And that, looking back, and also looking ahead, makes me really happy. ◆

BRIAN QUIRT (he/him) is the founding Artistic Director of Nightswimming, a dramaturgical company based in Toronto since 1995. He was the Director of the Banff Centre Playwrights Lab from 2012-24. With Nightswimming he has commissioned and developed 35 new works, toured 10 shows nationally, and directed the premieres of many Nightswimming commissions including Carmen Aguirre's *Broken Tailbone*, Anita Majumdar's *The Fish Eyes Trilogy*, and *Bombay Black* by Anosh Irani.

He has created and toured eight of his own plays. *The Wolf in the Voice* (with Martin Julien) premiered at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre in 2025. His other plays include *These Are The Songs That I Sing When I'm Sad* (with Jane Miller), *Why We Are Here* (with Martin Julien) and the Iranian play *Aurash* (with Soheil Parsa/Modern Times Theatre).

Brian has held senior artistic positions at Factory Theatre, The Theatre Centre, Canadian Stage Company and the Great Canadian Theatre Company.

Brian is the past Board Chair and a past-President of the Literary Managers & Dramaturgs of the Americas. He established LMDA Canada and was its President from 1996-2006. He is a two-time recipient of LMDA's Elliott Hayes Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dramaturgy, and in 2023 received LMDA's Lessing Award for Lifetime Achievement in Dramaturgy.

JENNA RODGERS (she/her) is a Director and Dramaturg of Chinese and Welsh descent from amiskwaciy-wâskahikan (Edmonton). She is an Artistic Director who strives to blend community-based ethos with professional practice. Currently, she's the Outgoing Artistic Director of Concrete Theatre, the Incoming Artistic Director of Theatre Network, and a Board Member with LMDA. She is the founding Artistic Director of Chromatic Theatre – a company dedicated to developing and supporting work by racialized artists.

Jenna values the intersection of art and education, especially as she learns to raise small

responsible humans while maintaining a career in the arts. She is a passionate advocate for anti-racism in the arts, and is a fierce supporter of new play development. She volunteers with a number of arts organizations locally and internationally, and is the proud recipient of the "Artist, Scholar, Activist" award from Performance Studies International.

SIERRA HAYNES (she/her) is a Dora Mavor Moore Award winning, multi-disciplinary artist from Treaty 4 (Regina, SK), now establishing herself in Toronto, ON. Working primarily in theatre across the country, some of her recent credits include: *Arsenic and Old Lace* (Globe Theatre); *Bad Hats Narnia* (Bad Hats Theatre/ Soulpepper Theatre/ Crow's Theatre); directing & devising *The Raft* (Studio 58); *Miss Caledonia* as Peggy Ann Douglas and music director (Globe Theatre); *A Tonic for Desperate Times* (Theatre Gargantua); *The Drowning Girls* as Asst. Director and Composer/Sound Designer (Guild Festival Theatre).

Sierra released a podcast commissioned by the Globe Theatre, STAGE WRITE: The Playwright's Podcast, where she facilitated conversations between some of Canada's most exciting playwrights in discussion about their craft. She was the Apprentice Dramaturg at the Banff Centre's 2024 Playwrights Lab. Sierra was the 2025 dramaturgy and producing intern through the Metcalf Foundation with Nightswimming, mentored by Brian Quirt and Gloria Mok. Since then, Sierra was a dramaturg for Vancouver's 2026 Fates Festival, presented by Promethean Theatre. Sierra is a series writer on AMI-tv network's Canadian Screen Award nominated scripted comedy series, *The Squeaky Wheel: Canada*.

Sierra is a proud graduate of Studio 58. Keep up with her online on instagram: @thesinkingcanoe

MARK BLY (he/him/him) is Co-founder and Director of the Kennedy Center Dramaturgy Intensive and a recipient of the KCACTF Medallion for Lifetime Achievement in Dramaturgy. Bly has worked as a dramaturg/associate artistic director at resident theaters and on Broadway since the late 1970's with such artists as Lee Breuer, Moises Kaufman, Garland Wright, Emily Mann, Rajiv Joseph, Sarah Ruhl, Suzan Lori Parks, JoAnne Akalaitis, Doug Hughes, Molly Smith, Gregg Henry, Jane Fonda. He has helped to expand the idea of American Dramaturgy to being an active collaborative artist in the rehearsal process. He is a co-founder of LMDA, past Board President 2001-2006, recipient of the LMDA G. E. Lessing Lifetime Achievement Award, co-led and created the first ever LMDA Mexico dramaturgy workshops and events at the Puerta de la Americas Festival (2006), as a philanthropist he developed and funded the LMDA Creative Capacity Grants Program, as well as creating and editing "The Production Notebooks: Theatre in Process" Project, Volumes 1 (1996) and 2 (2001) both still in print. His latest book featuring many of his former playwriting students "New Dramaturgies: Strategies and Exercises for 21st Century Playwriting" was published by Routledge/Focus in 2020. In 2023 Bly was inducted into The College of Fellows of American Theater a membership including Edward Albee, August Wilson, Ming Cho Lee, and Molly Smith, Andre de Shields among others.

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