

## ***“Dramaturg – What’s That?”***

by Roxanne Ray, Ph.D.

Dramaturg – that strange-looking word in a show’s list of credits, somewhere between the Lighting Designer and the Stage Manager. The other job titles seem obvious, but what does a Dramaturg do? What did this person contribute to the show you’re about to watch?

The word “Dramaturg” comes from the German *dramaturgie*, a word used by the German dramatist and critic Gotthold Lessing, in a collection of essays written in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Lessing borrowed his term from the Greek *dramatourgía*, “a dramatic composition” or “action of a play.” But it wasn’t until the role of the Dramaturg was championed in the 1960’s by Robert Brustein that the craft of the Dramaturg found its place in American theatres.

The role of the Dramaturg often seems confusing to audience members and theatre artists alike, because a Dramaturg’s role encompasses so many different possible tasks. To start with, Dramaturgs love plays of all kinds – especially new plays! Dramaturgs work with playwrights in new-play development, serving as an advocate for playwrights and helping them meet their own stated goals for a new work through research and play analysis. Dramaturgs also launch, develop, and support dramaturgy-driven new projects in theatre, dance, and multi-media arts and cultural projects.

Dramaturgs also have a deep love for history of all kinds. They collaborate with directors on mainstage productions, helping select play seasons, and providing

each show’s cast and production team with contextual and conceptual research (sometimes including field trips), and occasionally preparing translations, as well as providing information to the PR staff.

A Dramaturg’s goal in all this is to reach out to that other group so necessary to theatre: the audience. In working to bring “the page to the stage,” a Dramaturg may contribute program notes and newsletter articles, host post-show talkbacks, or provide study guides – all with an aim of inspiring an audience’s greater appreciation of the play.

And there’s more: Dramaturgs often serve institutions, engaging in secondary and university teaching, as well as maintaining archives. They may also organize Artist-in-Residence programs, or curate and introduce play anthologies. Occasionally, Dramaturgs also the role of Literary Manager, the theatre staffer who receives and evaluates incoming script submissions, and serves as a liaison between playwrights and a theatre’s Artistic Director.

Just from the one word in the play’s list of credits – Dramaturg – it’s impossible to know which tasks your show’s Dramaturg undertook. But if you’re curious, most Dramaturgs are happy to hear from you, and will gladly tell you more about their exciting and multi-faceted profession.

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