



Issue 1

International Centre for Women Playwrights

July 2010

EDITOR'S NOTE

*"That's our skill as creatives - we can adapt to anything. We can make solutions.",
Brian Heydenrych*

It was during a difficult negotiation when my colleague and friend made the above observation. It struck a nerve with me, and stuck in my brain for days. We always talk about how our creative skills can impact on other aspects of life - well this is a clear example. We are adaptable. We are not set in stone. We work every day with living, breathing changeable things, and humanity, and life, and we know how to adapt.

The voices in this anthology are voices of adaptation. Of creation, recreation, ownership, the giving of life. They describe how art touches us and inspires us, as creatives. They describe the often torturous hours of wrangling with material. They describe the unique approaches to challenges, they describe the coming together of ideas.

Inspiration has come from novels, from history, from myth, from real life, from other plays, from a myriad different sources and always from a spark within, that part of you which says "this means something to me", the part which urges you to tackle yet another script.

Adaptation is a creative compromise - it is bringing together two ideas or identities to create a third, something new, something bigger than the two individuals. It is a conversation; a dialogue.

I hope these words will inspire you in the daily adapting you do, both in your writing and in your life.

Karen Jeynes, South Africa

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

It has been a great pleasure to witness the resurrection of the International Centre for Women Playwrights Seasons publication. In its previous guise as a newsletter it was last published in 2007. Problems incorporating it into the new website design in 2007 meant rethinking how it could be delivered. Now, with a new name, format and Chief Editor we look forward to more issues of thought provoking and informative articles about playwriting from around the globe.

Thanks go to Karen Jeynes from South Africa as Chief Editor and all the contributors: Andrea Sloan Pink (USA), Jessica Kaahwa (Uganda), Deborah Magid (USA), Jewel Seehaus-Fisher (USA), Sandra Hosking (USA), Paula Cizmar and Laura Shamas (USA), Farzana Moon (USA), Carolyn Gage (USA), Ann C. Hall (USA), Carol Givner (USA), Lucia Verona (Romania), Lynda Martens (Canada), Lauren Bies (USA), Maureen Brady Johnson (USA), Rivka Solomon (USA), Diane Grant (USA), Jenni Munday (Australia).

Margaret McSeveney, Scotland

COOKING WITH SARTRE

Andrea Sloan Pink, USA

Adaptation. The word evokes Darwin's theory of evolution. In adapting, we evolve.

Likewise, in the process of adapting another's work, we evolve as writers. Where is the line between research and adaptation? In undertaking work on my new play, "Cooking with Sartre," I struggled with this question. Ultimately, the answer does not matter. The value is gained in the process of adaptation itself.

The creation of the play, "Cooking with Sartre" started, as many do, at the moment where the randomness of the universe rises to meet the preparation of ground that represents a writer's entire life. I found Jean Paul Sartre's autobiography, *The Words*, on the "free rack" at the Friends of the Library bookstore. No one valued it.

For three months, it sat on the bookstore's shelves; not a soul paid even 50 cents for it. Then, it was placed outside for the dear price of a quarter. Still, no one could bring themselves to part with the change. It could have been stolen during the night if anyone cared to take it. Finally, on a Sunday morning, an old woman ignominiously shoved it outside. There is no universal opinion of value.

I picked it up. I had always been interested in Sartre's philosophical work. What could I learn from reading his life story, his formation, in his own words? At one moment, I am having breakfast with Sartre on the Rue le Goff, the next I am being stifled along with him against the breast of a German lady-novelist in Sartre's grandfather's library.

Those night-time readings, maybe ten minutes at a stretch during that brief interval when the three children have been put to bed and I am still awake, revealed scenes, and more importantly, the very childhood feelings that gave way to his important architecture of existentialism. Many of my plays, in fact, have dealt with themes of existentialism, our human search for meaning. Thus, it was a natural extension of this deep interest in the creation of meaning that led me to read the book at all.

At what point did it become clear to me that I would adapt this work, or better yet, this experience of reading it, into a play? The inkling started early. At some moment, a tipping point is reached and compulsion sets in. Scenes and dialogue appear and beg to be written. There is the inevitable lag between the beginning of this process and the moment at which I set myself to the keyboard to take down what has been swirling in my head. It is not strictly an adaptation. I am not merely reforming scenes into a series of theatrical moments; rather I am ingesting Sartre's work and melding it with my own experience. We are having a relationship, Sartre and I, through the page, through time, through his language meeting with mine. That is magic, no?

The danger, of course, is that everything I read becomes an opportunity for adaptation. Much material in life does not merit it, the dross, the flotsam and jetsam of the information age. Yet, there is sufficient worthy material that the list is long. I often feel like the young maid in *Rumplestiltskin*, set before a spinning wheel, facing room after room of straw. And yet, this is the work that is before me. For the remainder of my life, at an increasing pace, I will spin straw into gold. And the point is not that anyone else sees it as gold, or cares. As Sartre said, "I've given up the office but not the frock: I still write. What else can I do?" The point is, writing allows a deepening relationship with this vast universe, with important thinkers and ideas, as I carry out my own dialogues and relationships with them, whether living or dead. It is a profound gift to evolve in this way, and to adapt.

There is no universal opinion of value.

DISMANTLING TRANSFERABLE GUILT IN THE IMAGES OF GONERIL AND REGAN IN KING LEAR: A STAGE ADAPTATION OF KING LEAR

Jessica A. Kaahwa, Uganda

In February 1996 I adapted and staged Shakespeare's *King Lear* at Pride Theatre, Kampala, as fitting the socio-cultural and political landscape of Uganda. *King Lear* as a text has a great capacity and potential for heightening the local aspects of gender discourse. I started with designing of directorial concept based indigenous Yoruba Mask performance technique. In this case the mask was an illustrated poster: a fierce-looking lion head with a waning mane, flanked on either side by unsexed beautiful looking cubs. This image of seeming harmony between father lion and the cubs highlights a scenario of a general and his lieutenants: The true breeds are as cunning as the breeder himself. They put to practice the Machiavellian principle with synchronic precision of the rule of the jungle and the palace is that jungle except, it is filled with the male presence to the suffocation of the females.

Working from this metaphoric illustration I began to experience new insights into the narrative of gender and the power relations between sexes. I crafted my blockings in accordance with this reality.

The actors and actresses were able to connect with the nature of lions and lionesses in their co-ordinated group actions in which

they would stalk and bring down their prey (King Lear) successfully.

Just as the lionesses have sharp teeth, but kill their prey by strangulation, so is King Lear strangled by his daughters and left whimpering and panting for physical and emotional sustenance. Eventually, he is driven into sanity and finally he dies a helpless man.

It is against nature's backdrop that I chose not to defend the character image of Goneril and Regan. What I did was to heighten their lion-like breeding and socialization. The performance led to a fundamental question: "Can't women be just as ambitious and strong as men? Or aren't they just as human, and thereby capable of reflecting back the mother-daughter experienced oppression to their oppressors?"

In blocking Goneril and Regan were coached to be as ruthless, while King Lear was blocked as a whimpering, middle aged man. I alienated the king's actions from senility, based on Uganda's reality of aging males. Males between 55 and 70 years blunder quite a lot and exert their socio-political and economic influences with impunity. At the back of my mind, my intent was to show the general audience the excesses of power; hoping that the misplaced moral blame on Goneril and Regan could be revisited and a new reality permitted to emerge.

*"Can't women be just as ambitious
and strong as men?"*

ADAPTATION, INSPIRATION, OR SOMETHING IN-BETWEEN?

Deborah Magid, USA

What if you found an overgrown garden, reclaimed it, restored it, and then built a much more streamlined one to that layout? What if one bed or grouping or element made its way into a different garden, or it inspired you to devise something unique?

For Jane Austen's "Sense & Sensibility," I hacked, slashed, shaped topiary, and re-situated three 'plants'; "Being Earnest" lifted an element – a character – to another time, place, and genre (musical); and "Descent of a Diva" found inspiration in two other works, one of which is itself an adaptation. I'll address the Austen primarily, because my desire to be faithful to her book provided the most concrete adaptation-related questions and problems.

My first priority was to choose the protagonist in a novel originally titled "Elinor and Marianne." Next, which 'scenes' to include, which to excise, which to manipulate so that the overall

story is told with efficiency but without violating the source? Which characters to keep, and which characteristics to fertilize or weed out? Austen paints such detailed psychological portraits that some pruning is required, but if one abbreviates or icon-izes them for the sake of expediency, how many facets or quirks, those things that endear a character to an audience, are lost?

Another question was how to end it. You'd think that the ending would mirror the book – you'd think – but in the multiple chapters that follow the climax, Austen's novel lumps and bumps up and down a series of slopes. How do you reconcile that into half-a-page that ties up all the loose ends? And how much subterfuge is permissible? To confine the story to a discernable shape, I changed one minor timeline and reassigned responsibility for two events, one so that Elinor, that most circumspect of characters, would have a way of communicating her very rich inner life.

Did I change too much? Will I have shot myself in the foot with my target audience? This raises another question: do we adapt other artists' works primarily because we are inspired by them, or is there also always the desire to ease a play's path to production?

"Sense & Sensibility" was a reasoned choice, and no less beloved for that. "Earnest" was a volunteer that germinated quickly and grew like a weed. And "Diva"? I had been considering writing a one-person, multi-character work because it could be easier and cheaper to produce and travel with, but the inspiration floated up from the left field of my subconscious, took a circuitous route, and fostered the most inherently creative process I've experienced thus far as a playwright.

To adapt? Hybridize? Springboard? Ultimately, the type of adaptation one chooses – or is chosen by – is simply another tool in the woodshed. Happy gardening!

MAXIMUM INTENSITY: ADAPTING STORIES INTO PERFORMANCE

Jewel Seehaus-Fisher, USA

Fifteen women in "Max" (Maximum Security at the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women in Clinton, NJ) signed up for Workshop: Dramatic Writing. The words the women wrote, and the stories related orally were to be adapted into a performance script over the course of the workshop. The women themselves would perform their words before an audience of administrators, security guards and other women in "Max". "Max" is distinct from "Grounds," minimum security, in which prisoners run newspapers, put on plays, take exercise and dance classes. The Workshop was to be a first for "Max." The women in "Max" had more violent convictions than in "Grounds," and less connection with the outside. As one of the women, Pamela, told me, she heard that her daughter asked: What's it like to have a mother?

The teaching team was (1) Jewel Seehaus-Fisher, playwright and adjunct in Playwriting at Rutgers, (2) Julia Ritter, dancer, choreographer, professor of Dance at Mason Gross College of the Arts and (3) Deborah Glenn, single mother, streetwise rapper. Julia and I are white and middle-class; Deborah is black and struggling. Usually class and racial distinctions would scarcely be worth a mention, but in the Workshop, they were a crucial part of the experience.

The students were cell-block leaders who came to a first meeting to check out the Workshop for other prisoners, but elected to take the course themselves. Most of the women were black, with the exception of one Indian, two Hispanics and one Caucasian. Our streetwise Deborah connected easily with the women, which encouraged them to speak freely to all of us. Deborah herself had once been on drugs; she still had quite a temper which she channeled into her fierce raps. She had a background of abuse, as did most of the women prisoners. To the most hair-raising of stories, Deborah could respond, "I might have done that. I might have killed."

At the first session, I put a tape recorder on the table and told them that I would record each session to help me know them quickly, but no one else would ever hear the tapes. At home, after each session, I listened to them over and over and then finally erased them.

The first topic I suggested was: "How Did I Get Here?" and suggested it could describe the prison bus that brought you, the action that led to your arrest, or the place in which your life was set in motion. Sort of like a turning point. Could be a bad turning point, a hurt, a bad choice, or even a good turn that would lead to a better life. One of the women responded: You mean we'll turn shit into performance! She said her turning point happened years before, when she dropped out of school.

Time... time to be served... was all-important in "Max". It came up in every conversation, dialogue, monologue, so that it had to be the first scene in the script. Words and movement came together and the opening of the performance became this:

(two minutes of "line-up" with women rushing from corner to corner. Women in line take turns coming to center stage.)

WOMEN SHOUT: When you get to the gate, they make you wait.

FIRST WOMEN IN LINE: Time's gonna make you, or time's gonna break you.

SECOND WOMAN: I committed a crime, and I'm doing the time

(one by one, the women come to the mike, while the others remain in a circle, arms about each other, responding, sometimes in moans, sometimes stamping their feet)

FOURTH WOMAN: I was doing the wrong thing at the wrong time, freebasing with my boyfriend. After my money was gone, I did some mad thinking. Outside I spotted a man at the ATM. I ran to him, snatched his money, the man chased me into the street, got hit by a car; and was DOA at the hospital. I was guilty of felony murder: Death that occurs in the commission of a crime.

FIFTH WOMAN: Every day I wish I could turn back time. Being incarcerated is not just a punishment for me, it's for the rest of my family and my children.

From there, the script moved into scenes of visiting days, and life and sex in "Max". One of the women, in for thirty years for murdering her mother, had become deeply religious in time. A talented singer, at the finale of the play, she sang "Amazing Grace."

BRINGING HISTORICAL CHARACTERS TO LIFE

Sandra Hosking, USA

There are hundreds of plays and films in which historical characters and events are dramatized, from Frost/Nixon to The Unsinkable Molly Brown to Invictus. How close the screen and stage presentations are to the truth is often debatable. And for good reason. Drama is not meant to mirror life. It should paint, skew, or even lampoon it.

The danger of adapting an event or historical persona for the stage is that the story becomes too didactic. Plot is substituted by a history lesson that would better suit a textbook. The key is to find a happy medium.

Two years ago, one of my former professors, published children's author Claire Rudolf Murphy, asked me to write a play to mark the centennial of women's gaining the right to vote in Washington state, U.S.A. Many women were involved in the state's suffrage fight, but two stood out—Emma Smith DeVoe and May Arkwright Hutton.

"I started this idea rolling because I was so frustrated that so little is known by young people about the fight for women's suffrage in (the U.S.). It has been pretty much left out of the history books," Rudolf Murphy says.

DeVoe was a proper lady, known for being a super organizer and a captivating singer. She lived on the West side of the state in Tacoma, while Hutton persuaded her supporters "parlor by parlor" on the east side in Spokane. Hutton was a large, outspoken mining millionaire who was not above bribing people for their votes. She

was rumored to run a brothel, which was one reason DeVoe booted her from her organization.

The personal conflicts between the two women hindered the suffrage fight. The story was brimming with character and conflict—the two things necessary for a compelling play.

One thing that made this project successful was collaboration. I served as writer and director. Rudolf Murphy provided research and played Hutton, while Emalee Gruss Gillis also provided research, wrote a grant to get us going, and played our original DeVoe.

Gruss Gillis was a freelance writer who had written an article about Hutton. “The beginnings of Big Noise can be traced to the day I opened a local paper and read a long article about a male historical figure and thought it should be balanced with an article about a local woman important in history,” she says. A museum librarian suggested she write about Hutton.

The librarian pulled out a box filled with Hutton’s original scrapbooks. Hutton had clipped excerpts of her speeches and pasted them in her scrapbooks. “I could listen to May in her own words and I found that I could see beyond her rough edges. Reading through long-yellowed clippings, I began to realize that to understand May, you have to look into her heart. Her heart was filled with a passion for what she thought was right and a readiness to help anyone suffering around her,” Gruss Gillis says.

Once everyone had their tasks assigned, I wrote the play, a one-act interactive piece, called “That Woman & Big Noise,” for two actresses that moved from Hutton and DeVoe’s first meeting to election day. I scoured the research for the main events or any that seemed interesting. One account said that Hutton had once hung her bloomers outside a hotel window. Scandalous! While the event actually happened after the time of the play in another location, I used it because it was such a good illustration of Hutton’s disregard for what people thought of her.

I also read Hutton and DeVoe’s letters and journals, which were in the public domain and available online, and tried to incorporate some of their actual words. During the rehearsal process, however, we discovered that direct quotes don’t always translate well to an audience, so some had to be paraphrased.

We tested a ten-minute version of the play at the museum and in a couple schools and asked students and teachers to fill out a feedback form. From that, we determined we were hitting our target audience and expanded the play.

Finally, we brought in veteran actress Penny Lucas to play DeVoe. “It wasn’t until I was cast in ‘That Woman’ that I learned of my grandmother’s active role as a suffragist in Oregon. This, in part, gave the play a ‘closer to home’ meaning for me,” Lucas says.

For the past year, “That Woman & Big Noise” has been performed at schools, community centers, and retirement homes throughout Eastern Washington.

Says Rudolf Murphy, “It has been an honor to bring this dramatic chapter of women’s history to life. Especially gratifying has been the response of women and girls in school who can’t believe there was a time that women couldn’t vote. Use it, I say, as some women almost died to get you this right.”

Sandra Hosking’s plays have been produced in New York City, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Canada, and elsewhere. She is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America.

VENUS IN ORANGE: CHALLENGES OF ADAPTING MYTH FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Paula Cizmar and Laura Shamas, USA

In 2005, Venus in Orange by Paula Cizmar and Laura Shamas was performed June – July at the Victory Theatre Center in Burbank, California. This play was originally commissioned by Cypress College in Orange, California, in 2004, as a performance piece to feature female student actors, performed in November 2004.

When we received our commission to create a performance piece for an ensemble of female student actors, we also received a deadline—in fact, a tight deadline. It was a fairly open commission; we were charged with taking a look at issues of gender and sexuality in the lives of young twenty first-century women. And, we were told, it would be nice if the text was somewhat tailor-made for our cast. But beyond that, nothing else was required. Except that the piece be ready to go into rehearsals in two and a half short months.

How to attack our project was the first challenge: Just doing a series of monologues seemed somewhat static to us. And we didn’t want to be bound by only telling the tales of the women who would be performing. We wanted something beyond simple reality or presentational storytelling. Fortunately, in a burst of inspiration, a thought occurred: Why not go to the source of sexuality, beauty, and love? Why not adapt the myth of Venus for the 21st century and mine her ancient stories for insights that could relate to women today?

Like many projects, Venus in Orange started from a mere concept in which we had to place our trust and then leap into in a state of active imagining. The final product, which was a performance piece combining real-life stories, myth, movement, and poetry was only a faint vision at the outset. We didn’t know its shape, its

content, even its tone, when we began. When we began we knew only:

- There is a question: “What does love, beauty and sexuality mean in the 21st century from a young female gaze?” We want to explore it.
- We have tools.
- We will take risks.
- Along the way there will be discoveries.
- Somewhere in the work, we must make transformation.

We began by researching all aspects of the Aphrodite/Venus myth, especially the central seven myth fragments which are known to us today (not lost). We categorized the Goddess of Love stories, planning to fit them into the piece in a collage approach with modern resonance, such as the play’s beginning with the famous birth of Venus, performed by the entire cast as Venus (to show the archetype’s relationship to all women).

As we went along, with the deadline always looming, we also wanted to combine real-life stories with the myths. We found ourselves using elements of creating a documentary to construct our play, which was clearly a hybrid; it was neither a strict adaptation nor a strict documentary. And it was being assembled like a collage. This transformed from a challenge into an advantage, providing us with many ways to generate material. Taking a semi-journalistic approach allowed us to get started more quickly—we could do interviews with our young female actors; we could ask questions of people—and to gather and sustain momentum. But no matter what way we created specific parts of the play, having the myth in mind provided us with a touchstone—there was always something to use as a reference point for creating or finding text to use in our project. Using myth, whether loosely, as a metaphor, or as an actual scene in the play, always gave us a unifying principle.

Adapting myths, whether dramatizing them in their original form, or updating them, or using them as a frame or as inspiration provides a way to begin a project and a way to think about it. The myth of Venus informed our work at every turn, either consciously or unconsciously. Did we engage the myth or did Venus engage us?

Paula Cizmar is an award-winning Los Angeles-based playwright whose work has been produced all over the world, most recently as part of “Seven.” Laura Shamas is an L.A. playwright and a mythologist.



IREM OF THE CRIMSON DESERT

Farzana Moon, USA

Irem of the Crimson Desert is the book I wrote which is accepted to be published by ATTM Press.

In this book Garden of Irem is the replica of Muslim Paradise on earth built by King Shedad. Destroyed by God’s wrath, it vanished, leaving behind one dark hole inside the heart of the Arabian Desert. Lawrence of Arabia called it the Lost Atlantis of the Arabian Desert.

Dost thou not consider how thy Lord dealt with many-columned Irem? The like of which was not created in the lands. And with the tribe of Thamud, who clove the rocks in the Valley. Quran 89: 6-9

As mentioned in the Quran, Irem is the city of lofty towers, many-columned palaces and exquisite gardens. Archeologists have discovered that *black hole* and are still making more discoveries amidst the city of Ubar where the fabulous garden of Irem once sparkled like a Zodiac splendor. Since the inception of this book I have been thinking of adapting it into a play. With its allure of magic and mystery, in my estimation, this piece is perfect for stage. The subterranean Garden of Irem is the abode of action where lovers meet and are separated with the promise of eternal union in Paradise. A succession of cataclysmic changes is easy to be custom-made for acts in a full-length play. Ibrahim, the old magician and architect of this sacred Garden is the main protagonist.

Three pairs of lovers in this sacred Garden float over the waters of conflict in between the mists of reality and delusion in conformity with the beginning and ending of scenes. Sophia the goddess of wisdom falls in love with Jamshed the fourth king of the world inside the bubble of timelessness. Takhti-Jamshed is the throne of Jamshed, while he holds on to his famous cup, Jam-e-Jam, through which he can view the entire cosmos. Jamshed is in love with Aleena—the beautiful Gothic princess whom Ibrahim also loves and whom he holds prisoner inside the Garden of Irem.

Chaviva, the daughter of king Shedad, caught inside the whirlwind of timelessness enters the arena of the sacred Garden, followed by her long lost lover Kilabah. The rites of purification churn flashbacks of the gods of the Greeks and the Romans till transformation, not transgression, becomes the law of love in each paradise of all religions. Love, the highest of all virtues and beauty the most precious of all gifts would sparkle in this play within the cycles of birth and death. Sophia is wisdom. Jamshed the lover incarnate! Chaviva is the flower of innocence! Kilabah the archetype of faith and fidelity! Aleena is love supreme. Ibrahim is the guardian of the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden is Irem, coming alive with ancient legends, and then diving deep into the dark hole for further exploration or resurrection.

Irem indeed is gone with all its rose

*“And Jamshed’s sev’n ringed cup
where no one knows
But sill the wine her ancient ruby
yields
And still a garden by the water
blows”*

Omar Khayyam

ADAPTING HISTORICAL MATERIAL

Carolyn Gage, USA

There are two things to keep in mind when adapting historical material for the stage: 1) Tell the truth. 2) Entertain. These are not as easy as they sound. Real life is often incoherent and boring. It does not follow a neat dramatic arc, and few of us ever gain closure for the big tragedies in our lives. Misfortune is arbitrary, injustices are seldom redressed, and very few of us end up with what we think we deserve. The bad guys do appear to win, and all kinds of folks get away with murder.

Theatre, as playwrights know, cannot make allowances for the disorderliness of real life, because it has its hands full with a reality of its own: real people in real (often uncomfortable) seats, observing performances with real actors that are taking place in real, contemporaneous time. For this reason, a play must do certain very specific things, and it must do them within relatively rigid time frames. For example, within the first few minutes, the audience must have a very clear understanding of what they are watching and why. If, after ten minutes, they are still struggling for context, they are likely to become frustrated or bored—unable to invest themselves in the game of “let’s pretend,” which is what puts the “live” in “live theatre.”

Ideally, at the halfway mark, something should occur to substantially raise the stakes. After all, the audience’s investment in terms of time and attention is mounting, and the playwright has an obligation to up the ante. If the audience engagement is everything it should be, they should be needing some kind of “seventh-inning stretch” about three-quarters of the way through. And then, of course, there are those last three minutes, for a definitive resolution or a definitive commitment to non-resolution. (“Game called on account of rain...”)

In fact, thinking about theatre in terms of a spectator sport might be more useful than storytelling. A good play should keep the audience literally on the edge of their seats, like a football game that’s gone into overtime.

So there is this issue of craft. The historical truth must be bent to fit the framework. A tight play that plays fast and loose with historical facts will work far better than a poorly structured play with rigid adherence to biographical chronology. The playwright must be willing and able to take liberties. These are separate issues. The willingness means being able to step away from the research, to lose the sense of reverence for the literal, biographical truth. The playwright needs to make the character live, and she can only do this by breathing her own life force into the character.

This dramaturgical CPR is a process. The playwright probably has a passion for the historical subject, and it can feel blasphemous and presumptuous to appropriate the facts. Sometimes I have to remind myself that a poorly written play will not be much of a tribute to my subject... or myself!

The first few drafts are usually hybrids, lumbering awkwardly down the runway of my imagination, still encumbered by weighty historical detail. The prototypes become lighter, more streamlined, and somewhere around the fourth draft, there is usually dramaturgical lift-off.

Outside permission may also be required, because adapting history can raise legal issues of libel, privacy, or copyright violation. Is the adaptation going to involve text from letters, journals, or other documents? Who owns the rights for these materials? Is the playwright intending to adapt a book? The Dramatists Guild is a great resource for contracts, as well as information about using historical characters. Their website has publications that address a number of pertinent questions.

Adapting does involve special circumstances, but the bottom line is still the same: high stakes and uncertain outcome.

Sample adaptation:

From Calamity Jane Sends a Message to Her Daughter

CALAMITY JANE: I met Bill when I was still wet behind the ears. Just a kid. See I was orphaned when I was fourteen, and I learned to hustle pretty good... (*To herself.*) Had to. (*After a pause, she turns back to the audience.*) First time we met, we was in a poker game together, an’ I beat him. I beat him real bad. Bill don’t like to lose, ‘specially with folks watchin,’ so he rears up an’ calls me a cheater. So I says... (*Slowly, savoring the moment.*) “Hickok, you play cards so dumb I’d have to cheat to lose!” (*Smiling.*) Well... everybody’s laughin’ at that one, so he pulls out his gun, an’ then Molly behind the bar yells out... (*Imitating a shrill female voice.*) “Put that back, Bill! That there’s a gal!” (*Smiling.*) Well, that done it! He just stands there lookin’ at me like a hog starin’ at a wristwatch. An’ then all of a sudden he throws his gun on the table an’ hollers, “Drinks for the house...!” (*Hoisting the bottle.*) “... I want all of ya’ll to drink to this here gal—the finest poker player in the Territories!”

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ADAPTATIONS AS ART

Ann C. Hall, USA

The most successful adaptations transform one work of art into another work of art. The least successful ones merely reproduce scenes from the original in a way that one might tell a friend about a film, play, performance: these adaptations just highlight the important bits. Like the creative process itself, we may be able to make comments about adaptation, discuss the process (from idea to end product, for instance), suggest various methods that have worked in the past for particular authors, but no one has yet been able to codify it. But some of the most successful adaptations are ones that respect and understand the purpose and theme of the original but also afford the adaptor an opportunity to develop his or her own theme or purpose.

Perhaps one of the most interesting modern adaptations transforms an Ernest Hemingway short story, “The Killers,” which is just pages long to a full-length 1946 film noir classic, starring Burt Lancaster and Ava Gardner. Though screenplay credit goes to Anthony Veiller, others including great John Huston also participated in the adaptation. The short story is about a hood on the run. When someone spots him, two hit men arrive in his small town determined to kill him. The story ends with the hood waiting for the hit men.

He has given up running, and there is a certain nobility in his decision to face his fate. We never know what he did, why the men want him dead, or much about any of the characters. Such ambiguity offered film makers a creative opening.

In the film, we learn that the hood, the Swede, has been played not only by powerful criminals but by a wonderful femme fatale, Kitty Collins. As in the short story, we see a life destroyed, but in the film’s case, there’s a reason--she done him wrong. But, given the Hollywood censorship of the day, crime does not pay, and Kitty gets hers in the end.

Harold Pinter’s *The Comfort of Strangers* (1990), closely follows Ian MacEwan’s 1981 novel of the same name. A couple vacation in Venice, only to meet an unusual pair, played by Helen Mirren and Christopher Walken, whose sado-masochistic relationship repels and excites the young British couple. Pinter offers a close adaptation, but adds one remarkable speech. Walken’s macho character discusses his father and an incident from his youth during which his sisters, who are jealous of the favoritism their father shows their brother, play a trick on him and embarrass him in front of his father. The speech prickles psychologically, and the film punctuates certain moments with Walken repeating the story to various listeners. Without the speech, the character is an interesting patriarchal sadist. With the addition of the speech, the ambivalent homoeroticism that lurks throughout the text is underscored and highlighted, giving many of the scenes the sense of menace Pinter is known for and making the Walken character

much more complex. In both cases, the original work of art is respected, but it must also be changed in some way to become a new work of art in a different medium, and in both cases, the adaptors brought something of their own vision and purpose to this process which made for successful results.

MANUSCRIPT IN THE WINGS FIVE STEPS TO ADAPTING A BOOK FOR THE STAGE

Carol Givner, USA

“Where did all of these words come from?”

Bleary-eyed over coffee and the remnants of last night’s take-out, you face the 60,000 word literary manuscript—again. How to tackle the adaptation? Here are five steps to help you take the icy plunge. After you type ACT I:

1. Become the Actor Instead of the Writer

Point of view is a delicate matter. As a novelist, the goal is to bring the reader into the head of the main character—and stay there. Everything that happens must be seen through the eyes of the star of the book. On stage, that control is just as important, or the actors will wander forever lost in third-person omniscient. Focus on one actor’s viewpoint unless that actor is offstage.

2. Reduce the Scope of the Setting to One Key Scene for Act I

The curtain goes up, and the set beckons you into the action of the play. Think of the set as a character: inviting you, enticing you. Choose your props carefully with their purpose in mind, and remember this: If there is a gun hanging over the fireplace in Act I, it needs to fire in Act III.

3. Create an Emotional Thread

Show instead of tell is crucial in a script. Even during the dialogue, if you tell the audience, you’ll bore them silly. If you show them, they’ll give you an ovation. To do that, assign each character a dominant emotion, and let them live it out interacting with the other characters, the set, the lighting, and most importantly, when they are reacting with the ego as they learn and grow. You won’t have pages and pages of text to explain the emotions—sometimes only a word, frequently only a gesture.

4. Allow the Characters to Grow

Not all change is positive, but all characters must change or they’ve wasted their breath.

5. Stay in Character with Your Characters

Never let them forget who they really are, and who you want them to be.

For example, on the bookshelf:

Lorna never wanted to see the worthless ingrate again. Paul had a heart of wandering shoe leather, and a soul filled with broken promises. Should she care that he'd just kissed her, in front of their old, oversized bed, with the same desperation she'd felt last year when she found him in the arms of that floozy from Des Moines? She'd spent months alone in that bed since he'd left, and she knew she'd cried about him for the last time.

Lots of information here. I'll go first. How about something like this?

For the stage:

Lorna ducks away from Paul's overdone embrace as he clutches at her. She stops in front of her neatly made bed and turns to face him as an independent woman at last.

PAUL

(Confused, angry)

B-Baby, didn't you hear me? I'm back.

LORNA blocks his way to the bed.

LORNA

(Shrugging one shoulder, staring him down)

Pity.

Now it's your turn. You be Lorna. Take this same short scene in manuscript form and adapt it for the stage—and throw that worthless bum Paul out on his arrogant presumptions. And do it like a lady.

AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY FROM A WOULD-BE NOVEL TO AN AWARD/WINNING PLAY AND THEN TO ANOTHER NOVEL

Lucia Verona, Romania

It was in 2000 or 2001; I was searching the Internet in quest of fellow-writers. One day, or, more probably, one night, because at the time I had a dial-up connection and it was cheaper at night, I found a group of writers, all of them British. They were very nice people, we shared our success stories - or lack of - and discussed literature and somehow the idea was born to write a novel together, through e-mail. There were five of us - three women

writers (besides me) and one man. But what kind of novel to write?

There were voices in favor of romance, others wanted a psychological novel. In the end, they agreed with me that a thriller would be more fun. Of course, romance and psychological issues were not to be excluded. We decided then that it had to be a character-driven book. Each of us had to create a character. That's how I created the Diva - a world-famous Romanian coloratura soprano (we have quite a number of them) who comes as a guest star to a birthday party in a manor house converted into a hotel in some secluded spot in England. When her host is killed, the Diva assumes the role of the detective till the arrival of the police and, of course, solves the mystery and finds the killer.

It was good while it lasted, but soon after creating the characters (the victim was a psychiatrist and the other guests at the party her patients), somehow we lost interest and gave up the project.

So there it was, hidden in my computer, a very flamboyant character who fitted nowhere in the things I was writing at the time. Years passed and it was only in 2008 that I unearthed my Diva for a play I was writing for the FestCO - The Romanian Comedy Contest organized by the Comedy Theatre in Bucharest. Of course, I only took from the old project what was mine - the character of the Diva - and invented new characters, a new setting and a new plot to suit the Romanian public. I must mention that, as, originally, I wrote the "Diva" in English, now I had to translate it into Romanian!

And my play "Holiday of a Diva" - a detective comedy - was awarded the second prize of the competition! This meant quite a good sum of money, publication of the play by a specialized publishing house and also a wonderful reading with the best actors of the Comedy Theatre.

And now I must finish this because I am busy transforming the play into a novel which is to appear in October next. It is not so easy, because I have to write a lot. The play is quite short, 40 pages, and the novel must have at least 120. That means adding descriptions, sub-plots and maybe more characters. Also, I have to "move" the action in various locations, because one cannot have one setting only in a novel. So, as I said, it's not easy. But it's fun to write and I have a wonderful feeling of freedom with so much space on my hands.

GOING BEYOND POPSICLE STICK BUNGALOWS

Lynda Martens, Canada

“Doris^{*}, this is Lynda”, said the social work student who was my guide. “She’s going to tell you about a play she’s writing”.

Doris remained solidly focused on the solitaire game she had going on her bed in the long-term care facility I was visiting, doing research for a commissioned play.

The cards featured erotic photos of robust, nude young men. This caught my attention.

I was thrilled when Doris agreed to do some drumming for the production, and I was suspicious that her cards might even sneak their way into my script. I also knew right away that I wanted to incorporate Mike, the fiddle player in his eighties who learned to play in his sixties and had just bought a brand new nine thousand dollar fiddle that was collecting dust in a drawer.

When he turned away from the television to play for me, he absolutely came alive. Other residents quickly found their way into the Pied Piper’s room to listen and dance to his lively long-lost jigs.

Also a part of the production would be all the hymn singers (“no solos please but I’ll sing in a group”), who would be recruited as a kind of Greek chorus, and Joan, the elegant and perfectly coiffed and accessorized woman who, after a debilitating depression that kept her completely silent for ten years, agreed to perform a monologue for me.

*But the pieces came together
beautifully and a story took form.*

For someone who had never set foot in a retirement facility, the task of writing an interactive musical comedy that uses the talents and stories of the residents was as daunting as it was thrilling. But the pieces came together beautifully and a story took form. I learned that one of the big issues was the residents’ belongings getting lost in the laundry, out of which grew the following dialogue in the script:

OSCAR: What’s wrong? You’re asking me what’s wrong? I’ll tell you what’s wrong... they keep losing my stuff in the laundry!

MONA: I know what you mean.

TOM: Oscar, socks go missing everywhere, not just at (the facility name).

OSCAR: Oh it’s not just socks...it’s everything. Shirts, pants, you name it. They would lose the titanic if you put it in the laundry. It’s like the Bermuda Triangle! Everything just gets sucked right in.

MONA: Oh Dear.

“These are my boys”, Doris boasted without raising her head.

“They’re very... impressive”, I said as I squatted beside the bed to chat.

Doris’ memory had a lot of holes, but she told me about her very first love... a handsome young man who seemed quite chivalrous until she eventually discovered that he just wanted “the other thing”. I hypothesized that her “boys” might be her way of reclaiming ownership and control of her sexuality.

OSCAR: And what I want to know is what the heck do they do with it? Do they eat it? Or sell it? Is there a black market somewhere for moth-eaten grey cardigans and pilled pink flannel nightgowns?

TOM: They have to be somewhere.

OSCAR: Nope. They’re nowhere. Apparently they’re just “lost”.

The actors, the director, even the stage manager...are all seniors. It’s a musical play within a play about seniors putting on a play in their retirement home. This innovative project has evolved into something exciting, and was born from a global grass roots push to address an issue we all might care about... preserving creativity through the arts as a vital part of aging.

When I retire...perhaps to a facility such as this one, I do want opportunities to create... and not just doilies and popsicle stick bungalows. I want a theatre *right there* when I am less than mobile. And I don’t just want to sit and watch.



^{*} The names of all persons have been changed to protect their privacy

GRASSLAND PASSAGE INTO THE NETHER WORLD

Lauren Bies, USA

The Epic *Gilgamesh* of Mesopotamia, in the ancient city- state of Uruk, is the historical story of the all-powerful King Gilgamesh. The God Aruru creates the human Enkidu from earth clay and moistened spittle as a companion for King Gilgamesh. Enkidu is a beast man who lives among the creatures of the forest upsetting the traps of the hunters of the grasslands. One particular hunter approaches his father for counsel as to this contention and is told to receive a *kar.kid*, or harlot so that she may copulate with Enkidu for six days and seven nights and afterwards return him to Uruk as a civilized man and companion to King Gilgamesh.

The epic *Gilgamesh* is encompassed upon eleven tablets with a fragmentary appendix on a twelfth. One incomplete passage lies between the Hunter and the Harlot as they begin a journey into the woods searching for the beast-man. Throughout history, many have contemplated the reader to suppose what interaction may have occurred between the Hunter and Harlot during their time together. This is one adaptation of what may have possibly occurred as they journeyed in searched for Enkidu, in the famous historical epic *Gilgamesh*.

Grassland Passage into the Nether World

A circular platform set with three levels. THE NARRATOR stands at the top level shadowed a mere figure. THE HUNTER to his left next level down and THE HARLOT to his right next level down. THE HUNTER stands tall, a confident man, knowing no other life than the grasslands that he hunts. THE HARLOT a tall woman is covered in the traditional garments of the Sumerian Uruk women.

NARRATOR

The Hunter stands before the grasslands of his homeland; one day, two. The Hunter awaits the Power, to restore peace to what was once his; to make him who he once was, The Hunter.

THE HUNTER

I, The Hunter, called upon The Terror, The Perfect, The All-Knowing King Gilgamesh for counsel. My plea was heard. Soon, she comes.

NARRATOR

She is here. Her beauty, her tremendous power, are one.

THE HUNTER

No, *nin*, nor daughter of a King is she, mere *kar.kid*, chosen to torment, tame, to dominate, and destroy.

NARRATOR

Not so this one. An innocent, called from the sheltered walls of the temple of Anu and the goddess Ishtar. Blind in this journey, for but the light she emits.

THE HUNTER

Innocence? I have walked many leagues to know such beauty before. Does she dare to imagine I am one more to tame? The Hunter cannot be caught.

NARRATOR

The Hunters instincts have paled since the beast man ravages your grasslands. You speak not from what you know. Not, of what is.

THE HUNTER

Once a loom weaved a rug so intricate in my youth, I could not see an imperfection. This one, I will see. Ah, yes, for in the hunting of my grasslands I will admit, my instincts have waned. As for looms? This *kar.kid* will never blind me so, ever again. The all-powerful King Gilgamesh promises restoration. I wait no longer. Now, we begin.

THE HUNTER looks over to THE HARLOT speaking directly to her for the first time. With, sarcasm.

“*Priestess*, we begin our journey now. Time does not wait. Only a fool cheats its passage.”

THE NARRATOR

The Hunter and The Harlot walk two leagues, then one more. The Harlot sighs and abruptly stops. One so delicate a flower not meant for harsh terrain.

THE HARLOT

I must rest.

THE HUNTER

No. No rest. We continue on.

THE HARLOT

What has hardened you from one of soft skin, full breasts and silky long hair?

THE HUNTER

I have known one such as you. A shadow cannot deceive its image from itself. Pity the cursed man as your wiles condemn him to the Nether World. The grasslands from the Nether World are a long way back. (pause) Come. Here we rest for the night

THE HARLOT

The Goddess Ishtar will greatly bless you. Allow me to wash and anoint you my Hunter.

THE HUNTER

looks upon her with irritation

Have you no idea what is to be asked of you upon joining the beast man?

THE HARLOT

One glance upon my beauty and civilized he will be.

THE HUNTER

You are to be sacrificed. Your very beauty, your very soul.

THE HARLOT

I do not understand my Hunter

THE NARRATOR

The Hunter confronts the bitterness of what he had thought her to be, and frays a Hunters instinct to protect what is innocent and natural, yet mindful to destroy what threatens.

THE HUNTER

You have been chosen to be sacrificed for the King; to tame the beast man. I am to bring you to him and you will show him your breasts and lie with him and show him the things a woman knows how to do. Once the creatures can sense he has been with woman, they will no longer wish to roam with him and will flee. No longer will he unset my traps and free the creatures.

The grassland once again will be mine to hunt, and the King will have his civilized companion. He will be named Enkidu.

He turns to see her response. THE HARLOT is fast asleep.

It is best. Soon she meets her fate.

THE NARRATOR

The third day approaches and soon they are to find the hairy-bodied, beast man of the grasslands; as powerful as the God of War, Ninurta.

THE HARLOT

Have I harmed you, my Hunter? A harsh word, gesture?

THE HUNTER

Stand back

THE HARLOT

Not a step have I advanced, and yet you feel me near?

THE HUNTER

My only cares are for my grasslands and my prey.

THE HARLOT

Your kindness my Hunter, I wish to extend to you my gratitude during this our journey.

THE HUNTER

I do not want it.

THE HARLOT

Ah, yet my powers reveal to me what you do want; to deny your need.

THE HUNTER

Yes, I suddenly see your powers to know. Turn from me now. I am strained. Stand away.

THE HARLOT

You are not the hunter you thought yourself to be; a hunter, to be trapped by his own hand?

THE HUNTER

The beast man took my land. Clearly I see the one who weaved so beautiful a rug before in youth stands before me yet once again. I have become the prey.

THE HARLOT

I stand before you as teacher, guide. By the Goddess Ishtar, I bare myself to you in my given name Shahmat, the prostitute. All can be yours. I know your want.

THE NARRATOR

The Harlot showed him her breasts and laid down with him and began to show him all the things a woman knows how to do. The Harlot tamed The Hunter.

THE HUNTER

I, The Hunter of cold flowing streams and of warmed hearths on cold eves, see all that I am in you. Stay with me. I seek nothing ever more than you, and never anything less.

The beast man appears in the distance. He is magnificent. THE HARLOT'S eyes feast upon him.

THE HARLOT

He lives?! Animal and man. He lives!

HARLOT rises, and takes leave of THE HUNTER

THE HUNTER

You metamorphose before me. No. No! Do not look his way. Look mine!

THE HARLOT

How foolish you are Hunter. Could you not see who I am? I am called now to my destiny. *kar.kid*, no daughter of a King am I. Bring him to me Hunter.

THE HUNTER

No. He will come to you. Spread your cloak upon the ground and show him your breasts and body and do all the things a woman

knows how to do. Save the grasslands Shamhat; present to King Gilgamesh a companion. Go forth to civilize the beast man and call him Enkidu.

THE HARLOT

The King's companion will soon be presented to court as civilized. I will tell the entire kingdom of your great hunter's instincts.

THE HUNTER

No, Shamhat. Not I. Only you. To trail a man from the grasslands to the depths of the Nether World and leave him to want for more... ? May it be to your credit Shamhat.

THE HARLOT

Mere, *kar.kid*?

THE HUNTER

Never that, Shamhat. Rather for whom you truly are; that of woman.

HUNTER turns left and darkened lights cast a shadow over his still form. THE HARLOT walks over to ENKIDU as she lays her cloak down on the ground. THE HARLOT and ENKIDU both kneel upon it. Lights dim upon their still forms.

THE NARRATOR

The Hunter of cold streams that flow and warmed hearths on cold winters eves, has experienced all that a woman knows how to do and trails his days and nights in the Nether World. A Nether World that he once thought was very far away from the grasslands that he now hunts, and from loss of *kar.kid*, priestess, innocent, woman, and love.

THE HUNTER

A cold sweat covers me, trembling seizes my body, and I am greener than grass. Lacking but little of death do I.

Sappho~31~

BLACKOUT

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INCOMING AND OUTGOING: THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH ABOUT TEACHING THEATRE FROM A BUNCH OF VETERANS TO THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK.

Maureen Brady Johnson, USA

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Incoming: Teaching theatre is becoming a rare occurrence in the schools of the United States of America. Courses in drama are being relegated to after school programs. Playwriting as a senior high writing elective has almost disappeared and technical theatre courses are now extra-curricular activities.

Here you are, fresh out of college or grad school and in your hand is a contract to teach theatre... for an entire year. You are young, enthusiastic and know that you have to prove yourself and invent a program that will knock their socks off. The outgoing theatre teacher, who gave 25 years of her life to this program wants to meet with you.

Outgoing: After years and years and YEARS, after (what seems like) millions of shows, after all the endless production meetings, you have decided to retire. With T-shirt phrases like "I don't want to. I don't have to. You can't make me – I'm retired" and "Growing Old is Mandatory. Growing Up is Optional" swirling around in your head, you take a moment to introduce yourself to the new kid that's taking over the best drama program in the city... YOURS. The meeting is awkward. You want to give the new kid advice to help avoid the problems and pitfalls of teaching drama. The newbie wants to erase everything and begin again with a revolution of new ideas and programs.

How can you both find the balance that such an evolution will demand? And how can you telegraph stability alongside of change to the most important people to consider in this transition of power, the students. I asked a handful of veteran teachers what kind of advice they

received when they were fresh and new and, with a healthy dose of my “wisdom” from 30 plus years in the classroom, here are some of their answers.

ONE: You are not alone. Ask for help.

“As far as a veteran theater teacher goes, I'm afraid I haven't worked with very many. Since my first year of teaching, I've either been the only theater teacher on campus, or worked with people younger/less experienced than myself. It wasn't until I read your request for comments on this subject that I realized that I had missed out on having a theater-teaching mentor. No wonder I feel like I'm on an island sometimes.”

James Venhaus, Saint Mary's Hall San Antonio, Texas

The first time I realized I was part of a greater community of theatre teachers was when I attended the EDTA conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the early 1980's. It changed my life. I met teachers from all over the country, struggling with the same problems I had, telling stories about productions and discussing strategies for keeping budget cuts to a minimum.

My advice is to join one of these educational theatre organizations as soon as the ink dries on your diploma. Scrape your money together and make it a yearly priority to attend the national conferences. Collect email addresses of fellow attendees and make sure you write, establishing an online friendship with these drama teachers. They will be your lifeline when problems crop up and they will celebrate your victories.

TWO: Play well with others. Theatre is a collaborative art.

“I think the best advice I ever got was to make sure that any show (or your drama club, for that matter) had a good, workable structure and that you give the kids genuine responsibility - with older, more experienced kids passing on their knowledge to the younger/ less experienced ones - without micro-managing or you would burn out fast. Great advice and I still use it every single show!!”

Patricia Santanello Director of Theatre Dublin Scioto High School, Dublin, Ohio

When I began directing shows, I walked into a situation that was as close to drama nirvana as I could get. I was hired to direct a show at a huge all-boys high school. There was an adult staff in place. I was merely a plug in director. I could have brought all new people along with me but I realized that I was the newbie and, for the first year, I went along with the structure. Those adults taught me so much, gave so freely of their time, and trained students to take over the jobs of stage manager, make-up, costuming, props, and tech. The upperclassmen modeled the behavior of the adults and shared their knowledge with the younger students. The shows ran like clockwork and a new community of committed theatre kids was created with every performance. I still hear from students that worked on those productions. Many of them are in theatre related fields. All of them realize that working on those productions changed their lives. The structure of shared knowledge, passed from adults to students worked like a charm.

Another directing position, years later, had us producing a show in a space shared with the PE teachers. We had to build, block and design everything without an actual space. We blocked in a room, the set was constructed in a pole barn and a portable stage was set up on the Friday before opening night. Then, in the final week before opening, we moved into the gymnasium. It was pure chaos. Lights had to be strung on poles, set pieces didn't always fit, blocking had to be changed over and over again. The gym was open to the school and props were taken, sets were broken and basketballs were routinely found backstage.

After the first year, we called a meeting with the PE teachers and calmly discussed what both sides needed. During that conversation, we came to an understanding of what had to happen. Every year after that, we locked the gym the week before the show. Breakage stopped and the staff worked around a PE class schedule to get some work done in advance. We communicated with the PE teachers in a constant flow of disagreements and discussions that led to a greater appreciation on both sides. From that time on, the PE teachers came to every show and the drama staff began showing up to support the sports teams. It was incredible training for our students, not only to see that adults could compromise and succeed but when we took a show abroad to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, our kids knew how to adapt to anything and put on an outstanding production.

During my first year of teaching drama, I learned to listen and really hear what people were saying. And then I tried to find a common ground and compromise.

THREE: Remember ALL the players: the performers, technicians, playwrights, parents, audience, AND custodians, secretaries and administrators.

“The best advice I got as a teacher of theatre was to get to know the head secretary and custodians really well, become good friends. This proved to be valuable when I needed cash out of our account immediately and the secretary could get it for me without having to go through all of the paperwork hoops. And, one night during a performance when a circuit breaker kicked out all of our lights, I knew exactly where the custodian was taking a nap so I could get him and the keys we needed to get the lights back on.”

Connie Schindewolf Bradenton, Florida

From my first production to the very last curtain call, I went out of my way to show my appreciation for all the people behind the scenes. Every program honored their service with a listing of names in the acknowledgement section. Small gifts after a show closed were placed on people's desks and special seats were reserved for administrators. Parents got thank you notes for the meals they provided during the weeks before performance, and piano tuners were paid promptly. Students straightened and cleaned up after themselves and each night, play programs were picked up off the floor and recycled. I've always tried to be the first to say thanks to everyone who gives their time to make the drama program successful. These unsung heroes really understand the importance of a theatre program is what it does for the students.

FOUR: Try Something New

“I was working with Gerald Chapman, who started the Young Playwrights Workshop through The Dramatists Guild. Stephen Sondheim was president then and he knew of Gerald's success in the UK with a young playwrights program and he convinced Gerald to replicate it in New York. It was a major thrill for me to be able to be trained by him and cover a number of workshops with him.

We were on a site with teenagers that, to my eye, had met with a lot of resistance, giggles, denials, and bumps in the road during their young lives. This took place in the seventies, before it was okay to talk about being gay. I was frustrated because I felt we weren't going anywhere. There was no scene taking form. No real development, just kids being quiet or taking potshots at one another, questioning the situation and the casting and why it felt wrong. Gerald let them ramble or get angry, listened, made the occasional suggestion, and uncovered the hidden gender fears and biases that were stumbling blocks for the kids in exploring their characters. We tried the "scene" numerous times, stopping more than starting...but suddenly something magically came together. It wasn't a work of art... it was a work of honesty.

Later, Gerald commented to me--just as casually as he had patiently worked with the kids--that at this age gender confusion was almost always a problem, especially since it wasn't acceptable to talk about it, particularly with adults. You couldn't bring it up and lay it out for them; you had to let it surface naturally through whatever means or whichever students provided conduit. The elephant in the room couldn't be addressed when everyone was blindfolded. Someone had to touch it first and make hesitant observations safely.

The lesson has stayed with me--in several forms. First, even in today's era of openness, it's wise to remember that kids are still kids... confused, fearful, and caught up with questions of morality, acceptability, peer pressure, angst, curiosity, and desire. They need to know they are in a safe environment for exploration, that they won't be judged. They need time to experiment with ideas.”

Maureen Martin Sarasota, Florida

When I was a newbie and asked to develop a theatre program as a brand new academic offering, I had the support of an administration that wanted to give the students choices. They believed that having a choice in a K through 12 arts program would fuel a particular passion and commitment in the student body. They were right.

In addition to what my students called, “the REAL play” my students worked on a wide variety of performance opportunities. They produced a night of student-directed scenes. It was the most popular evening of theatre with a full house of cheering theatre enthusiasts, grade nine through 12. Prizes were awarded for best director and performers. But the real success was the genial competition and support the students gave to one another.

We produced an evening of ten minute plays where the audience moved from space to space to see the performances. We also collected the writing from our elementary school students and wove productions out of them, and then invited the young authors to see the improvised productions. I gave my classes three random songs and they wrote a story uniting them and performed their mini-musicals. We had original play readings at lunch time in the Black Box theatre, an improvisational theatre company called “Sporks and Foons” and shared memory plays using old photos as a projected set.

In middle school, they wrote puppet shows, created music movement pieces and performed an original rock and roll musical. T-shirt drama had us writing phrases like, “Fashion Police” or “Duct tape holds the world together” on to T-shirts and the phrase as a theme for a short play. Wearing the T-shirts as costumes was the bonus.

It’s not always about doing a big lavish production, especially with budget constraints these days. Trying something new may be met with some resistance by parents who want to see their child in the lead role. But some of the easiest, most student-friendly productions have been the most successful in my career because the students were invested in them and everyone had a chance to shine. We weren’t afraid to try something different, something new.

“I jumped in with little training, no advice and winged it. I connected with the students immediately (young teens) and eventually got pretty good. I did rely on the curriculum - That curriculum never steered me wrong.”

Claudia Haas, co-director Lakeshore Players Summer Youth Project, White Bear Lake, MN.

FIVE: See Theatre. Meet theatre where it lives

“Just last fall I was teaching Introduction to Theatre.

The first day of class I could tell I had several students who thought they knew everything about theatre because they were fans of musicals like Phantom, Rent, and Into the Woods.

I started off the class with an oral quiz but made a game of it. I asked basic questions (What's down stage?) and esoterica (What play is known as The Scottish Play?) The results got everyone to realize that theatre encompassed a lot more than Andrew Lloyd Weber and to be open to more possibilities than they previously imagined.”

Benjamin V. Marshall, Associate Professor of English Middlesex County College, Edison, NJ

I had as my mentor, Mary Bill, who was my drama director before she became the managing director of the Great Lakes Theatre in Cleveland, Ohio. She was one of the driving forces to save the old theatres in the downtown area. When I became a theatre teacher and director she would say to me, “Maureen, make sure your students see good theatre. Take them on field trips. Give them a chance to develop a love for the art form outside of a school setting. Educating students in theatre builds the audiences of the future.”

We began by supporting our school’s productions, then attended some college and community theatre. Trips to New York City and LA gave them a more worldly view and by the time we took the trip to the Fringe Festival in Scotland, the theatre kids were becoming the attentive, supportive audience of the future. It’s difficult today when budgets are being cut but it is not impossible. There are some excellent videos preserving Broadway productions that are available at the library for free.

SIX: Challenge your students.

“When I studied acting, I sometimes learned as much from watching the other actors as I did from my own (which may explain why I'm a playwright). I remember one evening when an actor was resisting an instruction the teacher gave her, and she said: "Is that Method? Is that a Method technique?"

The teacher (whose name, by the way, is John Strasberg) said: “When you do anything by someone else's method, then you are in their mold. Then he told the actor that everything she needed to know about the part was in the words of the play.”

That struck a chord of truth in me that night and afterward. Get there however you can and must, but get there your own way.”

Kathleen Warnock, Playwrights' Company Manager for Emerging Artists Theatre, New York City

A friend of mine ran a children’s theatre in Burbank, California. I thought that the program was rigorous and demanding. Every member of the company helped out with every aspect of theatre. Actresses swept floors and ran off programs. Actors held book offstage and built scenery. Likewise, the tech people had parts both big and small in the year’s productions. Of course it was difficult but by the end of a year’s time, everyone had a visceral empathy for the work and a healthy respect for the worker.

SEVEN: Don’t be afraid to make the hard choices

This comment is from American playwright, Christopher Durang:

“Weirdly, I can't think of too much advice I got from teachers, though I definitely had teachers I valued.

I recall William Alfred at Harvard (who wrote "Hogan's Goat" and was a wonderful teacher) quoted William Faulkner as giving advice to a young writer in a heavy Southern accent saying "Don't tell any lies." The way Alfred said it made me laugh, but it's also good advice. Say what's actually true to you, don't dodge or don't be unaware of who you are and what you think...I tell

young playwrights that when they write plays they should write about topics (or feelings) they feel really strongly about...something they have a strong reaction to in life."

Trying to discover what is true, developing a drama program while remaining true to your pedagogy, true to what you believe is right for your students and their training is tougher than you can ever imagine.

With each production, I had to deal with spoilers. These pessimistic individuals threatened to ruin the spirit of community we were trying to establish for the run of the show. From the time we announced what show we were doing, to the posting of the cast list, to the final cast party, nothing would satisfy these individuals. I learned to live with it. But I also learned I needed to keep communicating my vision, over and over and OVER again....using the calmest tone of voice.

Most of the time I had administrators that supported my decisions. Keeping the lines of communication open with school officials before an angry parent called them was absolutely essential. I did learn that when casting a show, the best time to post your choices is right before the last bell rings on a Friday. That way, the cast has a chance to see who has what part. Then they leave the school, have the weekend to rant or rave and come back on Monday ready to accept the challenge or quit the show.

There is a delicate balance between compromising and standing your ground, especially when it comes to the shows you choose. Some audiences won't support a High School production of "HAIR" but will flock to see an evening of original plays filled with teenage angst written by their kids. It's a journey in which you need the support of the adults involved in the program and your administration.

"I went to grad school to get my M.A. in Performing Arts Ed, thinking I wanted to teach acting & drama to high school kids. I kept thinking while doing my observing in the classroom, "These kids are going to see right through me - they're going to think she doesn't know any more than WE do!!!"

At the same time, countless teachers in my family kept telling me, "OF COURSE you know more than a kid in high school!" I had spent more than fifteen years studying and practicing acting, in New York City and California and had earned my SAG and Equity memberships.

(It turns out that) the most useful advice I got was - not to be afraid."
Martha Patterson, playwright, Boston, Mass.

EIGHT: There will be days when you ask yourself, why? Find a mentor.

From Gary Garrison, Executive Director of Creative Affairs of the Dramatists Guild

*"No one asked you to be a playwright. It was your choice."
I live by it daily.*

There will be really bad days when you ask yourself the ultimate question, "Why am I doing this?" You chose it. You must love it. Just like the retiring teacher chose it. Sharing the stories is the way an "Outgoing" helps an "Incoming". A mentor can help simply by listening and commiserating. They might even offer some really good advice. Theatre is a collaborative art but teaching theatre without collaboration, without support, without a guide, is headed for the worst case of burn out.

"I think one of the best pieces of advice is just say yes. Say yes to what comes. Don't overanalyze. You can always fix it later. When I am stuck I simply begin.

All that said, the quality I look for in a mentor is, of course, insights and suggestions, but also faith--faith in me. There will be enough people out there criticizing and tearing down. Mentoring offers a safe place, a soft place to land, to regroup, and to recommit to the task of writing, creating theatre, reaching whatever goal you set for yourself."

Ann C. Hall Ph. D., Professor of English, Ohio Dominican University Columbus, Ohio.

Perhaps a meeting like the one described at the start of this piece is in your future. I've been the outgoing at least four or five times during my lifetime. I've also been an Incoming. I am eternally grateful for every bit of wisdom shared by the outgoings in my life. Seek them out. And then, simply begin.

Maureen Brady Johnson recently retired from teaching theatre after 30 years.

*Her latest book is **Namely Me: a collection of monologues based on the ancient meaning of a name** Smith & Kraus*

KEEPING THE BALL (OVARY!) ROLLING: FROM A BOOK TO A PLAY TO A WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE

Rivka Solomon, USA

At the start of every performance of our play, we ask the audience, "When have you ever been gutsy? Have you ever been bold?" The rest of the play, the next 75 minutes, the 3+ actresses depict on stage the 20+ true stories of women and girls' courage found in our script. Ruchira shows us how she stepped through her fear to enter the mafia-controlled brothels of Bombay, India, to make an Emmy-winning documentary on the lives of girl sex slaves. Alison relays how she started a playful "pee protest" to demand wheelchair accessible toilets on her campus. And Joani tells us how she opened the first women's sex toy store in the country, Good Vibrations. Each estrogen-powered deed in our play, *That Takes Ovaries: Bold Women, Brazen Acts*, was adapted from my book of the same name. Each deed is a woman or girl declaring, "Hey, look what I just did!"

When the book I edited, a compilation of 64 true tales, was published by Random House I felt I had to do more with these amazing stories. So Bobbi Ausubel, long-time feminist playwright and theater director, and I decided to adapt the stories for the stage. But even that wasn't enough: The way we saw it, the stories in the book and play were just the starting point: Women everywhere -- in every town in every country -- have courageous acts they can brag about. These stories deserved to be shouted from the rooftops! So now, wherever the play is performed, we encourage directors to hold an open mike with the audience after the show. And, separately, additionally, we hold *That Takes Ovaries* (TTO) stand-alone, one night "events."

There, the full play is not performed, but rather excerpts from the play or book are read or dramatized by local "everyday" women from the community -- then, again, audiences are invited to spontaneously share during an open mike. (These one-night events are either lead by our TTO staff, or, as part of our grassroots initiative, by local women's organizations, without our staff present. Regarding the play, we also invite directors to swap out some stories in our script for local women's true stories, giving the play a local feel.) The open mikes make each night a brand new experience. In New York City a woman told how she biked through Europe alone. In Kolkata, India, a woman talked about living with HIV. Men and boys are invited to brag about the ovaries in their lives -- mothers, sisters, friends. After the play in Toronto, Canada, a South Asian man shared how his wife bravely stood up for a stranger being harassed on the bus.

In Boston, U.S.A., a Native American young man cried while describing how his mom had protected him from his violent alcoholic father. We often hear, "This is the first time I have ever told anyone this -- and it feels good!" Audience members who

share get a chocolate egg wrapped up in gold foil -- a Golden Ovary Award. Small and symbolic, but the cheering and clapping that come with it feed the soul and act as an impetus: Each shared story motivates audience members to live their own lives more boldly. Our tagline is "Courage is contagious" because hearing about someone else's courage inspires the listener to take more risks in her own life.

Over 600 *That Takes Ovaries* performances and open mikes have been held, from the play's production in Thailand (a fundraiser for grandmothers raising AIDS orphans) to the event in Australia (a fundraiser for the local YWCA) to the event hosted by the US Consulate in India to BroadStreet Theatre's production in Omaha, Nebraska, U.S.A., directed by ICWP's own member Roxanne Wach.

What started as a small 250 page book has turned into a play and a women's empowerment initiative. We hope to keep the ball (ovary!) rolling and the women's empowerment flourishing.

EXTRACTS FROM DIANE GRANT'S BLOG FOR LA FPI

USA

A few years ago, a composer named Bill Elliott, asked me to adapt the classic 1908 children's book, *Wind in the Willows*, by Kenneth Grahame. The book tells the stories of several creatures, Mole, Ratty, Badger, Otter, Toad, and friends, who live by a riverbank in the English countryside. Bill had written some beautiful music for it.

The book is full of rich, gorgeous prose but without a clear dramatic structure. I struggled with the loosely connected stories and found a strong through line by making Mole the protagonist. An underground creature, she leaves her home to visit the world above. Impetuous but shy, she learns about the four seasons, makes friends, and proves an intrepid and imaginative adventurer. I added characters, Wiley the Weasel and his punk cohorts, the Hedgehog family and Wilmer Otter, the not too swift guard in the dungeon, but concentrated on Mole's story.

Then, Bill decided that he wanted a play about Alastair Grahame, Kenneth Grahame's son, instead.

So, there I was with a play in the drawer, one of dozens of other *Wind in the Willows* plays, until I teamed up with director Dorothy Dillingham Blue and composer Michael Reilly to produce it this summer at Theatre Palisades.

What is most exciting about the project is that Dorothy loved my idea of changing the main characters from male to female. So often in youth plays, when characters are called "gender neutral," girls lower their voices and stomp around. We wanted characters

that all the jillions of girls who turn up to audition would want to play and could make their own.

I was encouraged by the recent sale of a first edition of the book, dedicated to the daughter of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, who was thought to have been the model for the character of Ratty.

Now our version features Miss Mole, her mentor and soon to be best friend, Miss Ratty, the rather severe widow Badger, and the garrulous gossip, Miss Otter. (Isn't public domain fabulous?) Should Wiley the Weasel be a girl as well? Or even Toad, renowned as the feckless gentleman of Toad Hall?

The audition process would let us know.

Audition for *Wind in The Willows*

I've never written for kids before, so the audition process was a revelation. Dorothy, Michael and I had three days to accommodate everybody.

Kids smiled for photos, holding nametags under their chins. They sang *a cappella*, just stood on the edge of the stage and sang. The songs linger. I can see *the happy little bluebirds fly* and I know that *the sun'll come out, tomorrow*. I might not want to run into *raindrops and kittens* for a while.

Some came in soft jazz shoes and gave us a little shuffle. One girl had tapped since birth. Some were gymnasts, performing bendovers and cartwheels.

They took direction well. Dorothy would say, "These are her favorite things, not her almost favorite or her maybe favorite but her *favorite!*" The change in delivery was immediate.

The greatest thrill for me was hearing them tear into the dialogue. It's easier to sing, I think, than read. Often voices that belt out a song disappear when faced with words, but all of the kids read with intelligence.

Then we counted. Nineteen girls and three boys (count them, three!) had signed up.

Why more boys don't show up is a mystery. There's the summer lure of soccer, boy scout camp, and swim teams, but hey, girls like soccer, girl scout camp, and swimming, too. Perhaps, kids segregate themselves into gender groups when they are eight to twelve years old. I don't know. I do know that making the male characters female was a pretty good move.

Nineteen girls meant more changes. Wiley is now Wilhemina (call me Willy) Weasel. The weasels pride themselves as being the "mean girls."

However, thanks to the three extraordinarily talented boys, Toad is still a boastful and none too bright gentleman, and his lawyer, who gave us a spirited rendition of *Return to Sender*, is male, too. Wilmer is still Wilmer, played by a young man who let us know

that the finish to his song was going "to be amazing," which it was.

By the fourth day, one girl's vacation plans took her out of the show. More rewrites to do and I suspect there will be more throughout the summer.

So much of writing is sitting in front of the computer, all alone, without hearing the words aloud, making changes and hoping that they're the right ones, hoping that a reader or producer will like the finished project *Somehow, Someday, Somewhere!*

This is more fun.

Collaborative Writing

Working on *Wind in the Willows* made me think about collaborative writing. During what is called the Second Wave of the Women's Movement, I worked with a cast to write a play about the Canadian suffragists, during what was called the First Wave of the Women's Movement.

I researched, decided on the characters, wrote an outline, and sketched out the scenes. Then, I joined a cast of five actors and we improvised. The dialogue and eventually *Nellie! How The Women Won The Vote* grew out of that work.

It was often really fun, sometimes very frustrating, in the end, truly rewarding. We learned a lot about Canadian history of that period, beginning with this: No woman, idiot, lunatic, or criminal shall vote.

We also learned something about our own assumptions and prejudices about gender roles. In 1915, the suffragists held a burlesque of Parliament in which the roles of men and women were reversed. We wanted to recreate that but I couldn't find a copy of the piece. Nobody seemed to have written it down. (Nothing changes in experimental theatre.)

The Polish

I didn't blog yesterday because I was polishing *Wind in the Willows* like mad. It's to be given to the cast on Saturday, ready to go. I should have been looking for typos, misspellings, and incorrect indentations, but couldn't stop myself from tweaking. I tightened a line, took out a word, added a word, then took out the line, etc. At one point, cross-eyed, I thought, "I'm changing the ending. Why am I changing the ending!?" A small voice said, "Because this ending is better."

Maybe.

I could find out. One of the amazing and wonderful things about living in L.A. is that actors are everywhere. They fall out of trees and into the arms of aspiring playwrights and if lured with wine and cheese and crackers, they will read their plays for them. They will read in Starbucks, in living rooms, in church basements, in recreation centers, and they help the play to change and grow.

I am grateful to all those kind people who have read first, second, and third drafts of my plays. Actors always bring something to the table and just to hear the words is so instructive. You can hear where the holes and missteps are, can hear what is overwritten, can smell the filler and the false sentiment.

The theatres that offer staged readings are invaluable. The Blank Theatre's Living Room Series, Seedlings at Theatricum Botanicum, New Works labs, ALAP's In Our Own Voices, Live@the Libe, to mention only a few, are worth submitting to and offer great staged readings for works in progress.

Q & A's are always bracing. My play, *The Last Of The Daytons*, was read several times. At one reading, an audience member,

another playwright, said after a long silence, "I think you're missing a scene." The light went on. That one comment transformed the writing for me. I added the scene and learned a lot that was new about the characters and the play took a different turn. Beautiful.

Not everybody is helpful, of course. I can always spot *The Spoiler*, the man or woman who comes to all the readings for the joy of cutting the playwright down.

Next week, the kids will start studying their parts in *Wind in the Willows*. Rehearsals begin after school ends and I hope to be back to share what comes next.

ADAPTING THE NOVEL FOR LIVE PERFORMANCE

Jenni Munday, Australia

Adapting the novel for live performance is the title of my doctoral study, which has been going on way too long, but I hope is almost there. As you can imagine it is a 'tome' and weighs in as a nice doorstop. (One of my colleagues skites that his thesis is the perfect height for his laptop to sit on.) For Seasons I thought it might be nice to reflect on a very enjoyable part of the data collection, which happened way back in 2004

I interviewed quite a number of theatre artists for the study about their process of adapting novels for performance. To add to my Australian interviews I took up an invitation to visit with American Place Theatre in New York City and talked with and watched the Artistic Director, Wynn Handman, as he worked on two projects.

The first project was something that had fired Wynn's imagination and he felt internally pushed to work on it : an adaptation of letters of Dorothy Thompson and Vincent Sheean with the working title Dorothy and Red. The second was an adaptation of a best-selling novel, *The Kiterunner*, American Place Theatre were using to launch their yearly fund-raiser celebration, and the adaptation of the text had reached its rehearsal draft, before I got there.

Even though Dorothy and Red was not the adaptation of a novel, I'll quickly cover the points my witnessing of the adaptation revealed. Many of them were indicative of the way Wynn Handman generally worked on the adaptations of novels and influenced the way I ultimately worked on my own adaptation of a novel:

- **The need to find a basic premise, idea or theme other than the writer's stated theme:** The letters of Dorothy Thompson and Vincent Sheean did chronicle what was happening in their lives and in Europe in 1927, but as Wynn Handman set about his research for the project he determined he would create a piece about the inner life of women, using Thompson's experiences to illuminate this topic.
- **The need to play around with ideas and images during the rehearsal process:** Wynn Handman took advantage of the discussion periods within rehearsals to discuss his research and emphasise images and key words he was interested in conveying to the audience;
- **The need to cut characters and sub-plots:** In this particular case Wynn had toyed with the idea of including the character of Vincent Sheean's lover who was instrumental in key events leading up to ones that would be included in the adaptation. At the end of my time at the APT Wynn was still not sure whether the character of Sinclair Lewis would make an appearance.
- **The need to stay true to the novel:** Wynn Handman's professed way of staying true to the novel was the determination to use only the novelist's or writer's words for the bulk of the text. The only words added by him, or the actors, were ones of convenience—where the audience needed to know something quickly due to a change in scene, or information that would help set the time and place.
- **The need to create an entirely new work—apart from the new form:** The adaptation that Wynn Handman was working on was derived from writings predominantly from one source, but also from other journalists and writers involved with Dorothy Thompson. Therefore, the live performance was going to be very different from the literature.

- **The need to deal with features of novels that are difficult to translate to the stage:** In *Dorothy and Red* the letters of Dorothy Thompson were written in a journal-style where she explored her innermost thoughts. They were not meant for a wide public audience when she wrote them. One of the difficulties the director and actor worked with was how to communicate these intimately personal words to the audience in an appropriate way. Wynn Handman also drew out of the literature sections that described the time and place so that the actors would be placed in the minds of the audience—other information that was needed quickly was added to the text.
- **The need to use the first person and present tense in the new work:** The writing selected to be included in the performance *Dorothy and Red* started out in the third person. Both Thompson and Sheean in the reporting and journal writing were telling about events that had occurred and so were talking in past tense. Wynn Handman thought the writing had such potential as performance material that he converted it into first person. Some sections he needed to experiment with to see if it would benefit from staying in the past.
- **The need to not put all the material in—“less is more”:** The letters used for the production *Dorothy and Red* were carefully chosen to illustrate the theme Wynn Handman wanted to illumine. There was a great deal of material to choose from so Handman needed to consider carefully not only the content of the letters chosen to perform, but how many or few other characters would be portrayed or talked about.
- **The need to develop characters in a different way to novels:** On the page the reader can take time to absorb many details and use their imagination to flesh out characters. In a performance the actor needs to ‘inhabit’ the character and the audience member learns about them by the way they act, what they say, and implications that allow them to use their imagination to complete the picture. The time period for the stage is condensed, it is impossible for the audience to absorb the amount of information leisurely reading a book can provide. In *Dorothy and Red* the actors needed to convey information about the characters very quickly in order for the audience to understand who they were and what they were doing in their lives.
- **The need to use exciting language and compose an appropriate performance structure:** At the end my time with APT half of *Dorothy and Red* had been created. All through the rehearsal period Wynn Handman emphasised the musicality of words and the images words created in the minds of the audience members. The balance of the types of words and the manner in which they were delivered had great bearing on the way Handman structured the work for performance.

When undertaking such a long drawn-out study like a doctorate it’s important to be able to sustain interest in the subject matter. Even though so much of my life has been immersed in this topic for many years, I remain intensely interested, and it was really fun to revisit a very enjoyable part of it for this article.



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The next issue of *Seasons* - We will be inviting Guest Editors to co-ordinate future issues. If you would like to volunteer as a Guest Editor, please contact Chief Editor Karen Jeynes at seasonseditor@womenplaywrights.org

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