

DRAMATURGY AND ITS EFFECT ON THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS AND  
SCRIPTWRITING

by

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I have loved the world of theatre for as long as I can remember. My father first saw my mother when she was acting in a play, so I also sort of owe my life to theatre. However, my love boils down to one thing: I believe it is one of the closest ways we can get to peering into someone's soul and hearing their stories.

Although I started at ECU wanting to be an actor, I discovered a deep passion for producing projects, both my own and for others. I have always wanted a chance to create a work of my own and produce it for the world to see, even before I started college. By combining my Independent Study for my degree and the Signature Honors Project, I was able to get one step closer to achieving that dream.

Last year, I spent a semester working as the dramaturg for one of the ECU/Loessin Playhouse season's shows: *The Visit* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt. Many people, including devoted theatre professionals, are unfamiliar with the practice of dramaturgy. It is the study of dramatic composition and the representation of the main elements of drama on the stage. However, in simpler terms, a dramaturg is someone who helps elevate a story into a grounded production based on the world of the play and the playwright's intentions. Without dramaturgy, a story may

fall flat in terms of representation of what is accurate to the world of the play and the original intent of the playwright.

Depending on the production process, a dramaturg may work with a playwright in the play development process, or directors, designers, cast, and crew in the production process. Although creative professionals will do their own research, a dramaturg can help aid in the research and provide brainstorming tools to allow creativity to thrive in the production process. I was able to take what I learned as the dramaturg in the production, and apply it to create a world both similar to and unlike my own.

For my project, I directed a staged reading of my original work: *Left Unsaid*. After three years of dramaturgical research and practical experience in my degree, I wrote the first draft of an original play. Set in two different time periods, the play follows a group of women who must confront their past in order to heal and move forward with their lives. With a cast of eight, three of the characters have both older and younger counterparts. The older characters live in the present day, while the younger characters live in the past of the early 2000s.

One of the things that sets the play apart is that it is an all-female-identifying cast. Not only did this give more opportunities for female-identifying actors, but it also gave these actors and myself a creative place to grow and work to become the best professionals we can be. Although a lot of progress has been made for female representation, both behind the scenes and on the stage, many women, especially queer women and women of color, still have to fight for their voices to be heard in the world of theatre, and just in society in general.

As for the piece itself, I wanted to give a voice to queer and female voices, two groups of people I did not hear enough from growing up. The play highlights issues such as religious

trauma, queer sexuality awakenings, loss of innocence, depression, etc. Although the play is not entirely based on my real life, there are elements inspired by true events, including my coming out journey and childhood friendships. Overall, it's a love letter to those who feel they have lost that childlike innocence as they grew up and dealt with societal expectations.

With any production, even a smaller-sized staged reading, money is needed in order to get to another level of storytelling. I applied for a URCA (Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Award) grant in late September, and I was approved for my requested amount of 500 dollars. I knew I didn't need much; I just needed enough to help elevate the story I wanted to tell in an easier way for myself, my actors, and the audience.

With a rehearsal period of roughly three weeks, the project included casting, rehearsals, performances, and individual discussions with the cast. After the rehearsal process, we had two staged reading performances on December 3th for a night show and December 4th for a matinee. A staged reading included the actors reading from scripts, but with minimal costumes, props, and scenery. However, as this is the play's first draft, the entire process will allow me to continue developing this story before I go into the next development phase of trying to publish my play for educational and commercial use.

Putting on a project like this — my own slice of storytelling — has been a dream of mine for many years. Through the resources around me, I was finally able to accomplish a lifelong dream of mine, and I enabled myself to continue my own journey of healing from the past. The idea of what comes after graduation is terrifying to me, but I'm happy that this project has allowed me to learn what I want to do in the future and gain first-hand experience of being in the playwright, director, and producer roles.

Works Cited

Chemers, Michael Mark. *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2010.

Mitchell, Katie. *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre*. Routledge, 2010.