

Is Queer Playwrighting an Oxymoron?

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If one looks at percentages, number of people working in the field and the general exoticism of writing for the theatre when compared to writing for most other disciplines, I suspect there could be an argument made that playwrights occupy a very similar space among writers as the queer populace does among the majority; and serves a similar role, that of the outsider looking in.

One could also argue that the immediacy and intrinsically living nature of theatre, its malleable nature and ability for it to have a profound emotional and intellectual impact on a group of people in a live setting might be comparable to intensity and vividness of much queer life when compared to the experience of a much straighter lifestyle.

A playwright never writes something that is intended to be best realized on the page, unlike much other writing. It is meant to be shared, explored, examined and experienced, generally in a communal manner. The playwright demands that the two dimensional be made to exist in immediate time and space, and brings into existence a living, moving construct that somehow distills and comments on much of what we think of as real-life. Again, this might reflect the experience and feeling of a number of queer people among the larger society.

Queers themes, characters and concerns have been the focus of my work throughout my career. I have, in every case, attempted to queer the form as well as the content; sometimes radically as in the shattered structure of *Love and Human Remains*, and sometimes more subtly in plays like *True Love Lies* that subverts the expectations of archetypal characters in a conventional setting.

After recently doing my Masters at the University of Toronto, and facing many questions about what constitutes live performance, theatre and “a play”, I have become obsessed with the question of how we keep theatre in the present tense, and what the writer’s role might be in doing that. The present tense being defined as those moments when a person is so immersed in what they are experiencing that they lose all sense of themselves beyond the event they are

involved in. Art, exercise, sex and many other activities, when we are lucky, do this. The theatre's most unique attribute is the fact it is live and shared.

Feeling the same frustration with traditional playwrighting conventions others are feeling, I find myself looking for new ways to have an audience experience a script, while shattering linearity and traditional narrative, even traditional acting styles and presentation spaces, in hopes of finding new ways of inducing that state of the present tense in everyone present, witnesses and participants. I find myself shying away from the word play these days and labelling what I'm writing a construction of an experience. This does not mean I've abandoned narrative or character, but that I'm trying to find new ways to supply the same emotional/intellectual charges we traditionally receive from those elements.

Challenging the conventional has always been part of the queer force in society just as theatre has often been the first place to challenge conventional ideas and forms and both have been closely linked throughout history. I don't think they're terms that contradict one another; I think they're terms that enhance one another.