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# **Article about the Internship at the LTT – Interview with Dr Richter-Nilsson and Student Report**

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## Dramaturgy: A Scholarly Profession in an Artistic Environment

The *Landestheater Württemberg-Hohenzollern Tübingen Reutlingen*, LTT in short, is a regional theatre in Tübingen. It consists of two different parts, the general Landestheater LTT and the Junge LTT, which primarily caters to a younger audience. The history of the LTT begins in 1945, but it did not find its final venue until 1975, located close to the heart of Tübingen's city centre. Apart from staging plays in Tübingen, the ensemble also travels through the region, performing its plays in many other venues. Naturally, a large production team is in place, making all of this possible. One essential part of this team is the production dramaturg, who will be the focus of the following interview conducted with Dr Richter-Nilsson. This is followed by an experience report about an internship as a dramaturgy assistant at the LTT.

### **Talking to a Professional Dramaturg: An Interview with Dr Christine Richter-Nilsson**

*L:* What is the function of a dramaturg?

*C:* The dramaturg works at the intersection between the artistic team – consisting of the director, musician, set and costume designer – and the administration and direction of the whole theatre. The dramaturg is part of the Artistic Director's team that conceptualises and manages the theatre and its productions. For example, dramaturgs are in charge of the ensemble, and they hire actors. At LTT, 21 actors are fully employed. Dramaturgs decide what's on the schedule, which plays and adaptations will be produced, who is playing in it and who is directing it, and who is designing the set and the costumes. The dramaturg is a literary and casting agent as well as a producer in one person.

*L:* That's quite a broad profession. What kind of interests and skills should one have for this job?

*C:* You should have an interest in literature and theatre in general and in reading and research in particular. I would definitely suggest an academic education; studying the humanities, literature, politics, history, or cultural science is a very good start because a dramaturg is always working both scholarly and artistically. The dramaturg needs to have a feeling for academic resources to inform the artistic team about the background of a particular play, its historical context and social setting, and its reception. The dramaturg needs to come up with an interpretation of what a play could mean today, how it could be adapted, actualised, or modernised in order to place it in actual discourses on, for example, race, gender, class, climate change, war, etc. Actually, I would study to learn how to close read, analyse, interpret and also criticise literature and drama. A dramaturg is like the theatre's philosopher, the go-to-person to put a play into the broader context of history, society and politics.

*L:* What does your everyday workday look like?

*C:* Dramaturgs have different areas of work: There is the planning and conception of the whole season from the beginning in September until the end of the season in July. We play all year long, and there is only one long break; normally, it's the same time as the school summer break.

We schedule around 10 to 12 productions parallelly, so we have to think about what play goes on our big stage in the LTT-“Saal” with more than 300 seats, which one will be presented in

the smaller venue, the “LTT-Werkstatt” with 140 seats and in the smallest venue, the LTT-Oben with only 50 seats. We try to create a mix of classics, modern classics, contemporary new drama, translation, adaptation of novels, films or musicals. After that, we determine the casts. The other field of my work is the production dramaturgy, *Produktionsdramaturgie*. As the production dramaturg, I am both the facilitator and the internal critic of the production, giving all the background information and context, providing some research and interpretations of the text at hand; I am also catering to the director and his or her team in order to nurture and support their vision of a visual interpretation. As the dramaturg, I provide the literary analysis and interpretation, whereas the theatre director, the stage designer, the musician and the costume designer create a visual and musical interpretation of the play. In theatre, we are always working both with a literary and an audiovisual text. The last area is the *Vermittlung*, transmission, communication to the city, region, and audiences giving introductions and writing texts about the production for the program leaflet, calendar and website.

*L:* How would you generally rate the future job perspectives in this area?

*C:* In Germany, there are the most positions for dramaturgs in the whole world. The job description began with G. E. Lessing, who wrote “Hamburgische Dramaturgie”. In his book, he defined dramaturgy as a profession, the dramaturg as a position who organises, reflects and also criticises theatre. We have many positions at the theatre. The LTT has 116 employees. And if you really want to work in a theatre, you can always find a job. But you have to follow a traditional itinerary: first, you intern in one production without being paid, then you could go on to a bigger theatre as a dramaturgy assistant or start as a junior dramaturg. In the beginning, you are not well paid, but you can get up over the years and with a certain age and experience, you will get a decent pay. Dramaturg is one of the only professions where you can work with artists & the arts and get paid on a regular basis, and you are employed and get all the benefits the unions have already achieved, such as raises, 13<sup>th</sup> salary, free days, and 44 days of summer vacation.

*L:* That’s interesting. You already mentioned that there is a specific way you have to follow if you want to become a dramaturg. Why is that?

*C:* I mean, you cannot “study” dramaturgy, it’s a hands-on job that you learn by doing it. However, there are universities that offer dramaturgy as coursework, at the August-Everding-Theaterakademie in Munich and at the University in Leipzig, I believe.

What the work as a dramaturg includes, how a director works with the actors, how the ensemble works in rehearsals, and how a whole theatre is managed has to be learned in practice. Theatre production is a very disciplined and very scheduled process where every person involved has to be 100% on point, on time, and reliable. You need to be around in rehearsals in order to observe and document the process. You need to learn and practice describing what happens in a scene when you put a text on stage, how an actor is expressing himself, what acting style is promoted, what kind of set and costume design is created, and how it informs the space and movement. I would say you have to learn how to analyse a theatre production. And that’s only possible when you go through productions and watch the people who do the staging and acting.

*L:* So basically, the internship is the first step into a career as a dramaturg.

*C:* There is no other way. Everybody who has an employment at the theatre, for example, the production assistants and all the dramaturgs, everybody has done several internships before they got a job.

*L:* What would you say the LTT offers for interns specifically?

*C:* The LTT is like a big family. I know it's a cliché, but since it's only 100+ employees, we know each other. It's a small place, we hang out together and we work very closely.

*L:* So, with the LTT being relatively small, is there a fixed oeuvre the theatre follows?

*C:* What we try to do is a little bit like a "Gemischtwarenhandel", a general store. We try to have a classic on the schedule every year. Also, we talk to the schools about what is on their schedule. We also present translations of international works – to bring the world's stage to Tübingen, such as Camus' "Caligula" for example. We also offer musical productions and novel adaptations, such as "Frankenstein" and "Pride and Prejudice (\*\*\*)", and even film adaptations. We try to cater to what people like and what they read nowadays.

*L:* Then, is there anything you would like to add that might be important for future interns to know?

*C:* If you are interested in going into film or TV production, then you should start with an internship at a local theatre. Every actor that you see on Netflix or in international TV shows started at some local theatre. So sometimes you meet people who will be very famous in a few years.

## The LTT from the Perspective of an Intern: Many Tasks and Lots to Learn

Most rehearsals started the same way. We all come in around 10 am and sit at a long table amidst a sound station and a provisional stage. While it might not seem like it, there are rules for who sits where. On the side facing the wall, you will find the regisseur, dramaturg and all the assistants. The side towards the stage is reserved for the actors. Once everyone arrives, the rehearsal begins.



*Franziska Beyer, Martin Bringmann, Insa Jebens. Foto: Martin Sigmund.<sup>1</sup>*

The first rehearsals consisted of reading the play together and taking notes, similar to how students prepare for a term paper. In the case of Jean Genet's "The Maids", this did not take too long as the play is relatively short. However, it does compensate for its length with complexity, meaning the play is filled with numerous motifs, all entangled and intertwined, creating a complex web of meaning. It is then up to dramaturgy to untangle all of this.

With this complex web of meaning, it is necessary to find a point of access, a way to make sense of Genet's play while keeping all the different motifs in mind. This was primarily achieved through research, beginning with the most fundamental aspects. Thus, the following questions set off the research process: Who is Jean Genet? What has his life been like? In what context did he write "The Maids"? And what socio-cultural nuances might also come into play? Finally, we composed a relatively lengthy list of crucial nuances, such as the relationship between the maids and the house lady, but also more abstract aspects, such as hierarchies between the social classes, gender issues, impersonation and play, anger, violence, surrealist atmospheres and (emotional) manipulation, to name just a few. Undoubtedly, studying Anglistik and being well-versed in the area of research made the task feel like preparing for a term paper. In the end, however, there was no single research question that guided us during this process. Instead, we aimed to foster a diverse understanding of the play and its contexts, which was then utilised to support its production during rehearsals.

This support was partially supplied by creating a collection of texts for the people involved in the production. These collections comprised a wide range of texts. Some covered bibliographical information, while others provided a scholarly, in-depth reading of the play. However, as already mentioned, the text was somewhat challenging. So, even after reading the collection, some questions remained open, which evolved into full-scale discussions during the

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.landestheater-tuebingen.de/spielplan/die-zofen-6278/press>. Accessed 06.05.2025.

rehearsals, much like how we discuss literary texts in our seminars. However, it also introduced new nuances that we do not necessarily cover in our studies, such as how the audience perceives certain aspects and how we need to adjust the play to portray motifs correctly when seeing it instead of reading it. So, on the one hand, the regisseur asked questions about specific phrases or scenes to create a coherent version of the play, with an ongoing red thread. On the other hand, actors sometimes need to gather more information about the scenes to understand the atmosphere, adjust their method of impersonating these characters, and ensure that nothing is lost in the visual portrayal of a written text.



*Taking over the task of the prompter.*

Working this closely with the text did not stop there. Instead, the dramaturg is responsible for adjusting the text's version according to the changes discussed during the rehearsals. Thus, sometimes, a line did not work or created a false impression of the scene. These phrases and expressions were then officially taken out, and once several changes had been implemented, a revised version of the document became necessary. As an intern, you also have to take over the task of the prompter occasionally and help the actors with their lines during the rehearsals.

However, the dramaturg is not only involved in the production itself. They are also responsible for working with the text to develop catchy advertisements for social media and creating a leaflet that summarises the play and provides small insights into the current production. For example, for the play's premiere, the social media account of the LTT published several pictures of the latest rehearsal in combination with direct quotes from Genet's "The Maids". Although this task is relatively small, creating the leaflet is quite complex. It is up to the dramaturg to explain the play briefly. However, they also must contextualise said knowledge with the production at hand to create a coherent depiction of the original text versus the theatre production. This is accompanied by pictures of the rehearsal and quotes from Genet's text. Thus, the dramaturg must be able to break down the text and the theatre adaptation to the bare minimum in order to create a summary for the possible audience.



*Leaflets and postcards were specially made for the production of “Die Zofen” at the LTT.*

With all of this in mind, the internship at the LTT was a challenging but great experience. The work at the LTT allowed me to put my academic skills to use and experience a profession that most students probably do not think about. Additionally, while assisting the lead dramaturg, I gained insights into the general production and learned about the different departments involved in creating a theatre play. With that, I can only recommend applying for an internship at the LTT and learning more about Tübingen’s cultural sphere.

*If you are interested in an internship at the LTT, please feel free to contact Dr Christine Richter-Nilsson using the following email:  
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