

More than playing around



INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT MEG CLANCY OF GADENS

Anthony Malkoun: How long have you been a playwright?

Meg Clancy: I've been writing for performance for as long as I can remember, starting with pretty melodramatic efforts which I forced my three younger brothers to perform.

What inspired you to become a playwright?

I enjoy the immediacy of theatre, of being able to sit in a room and see people on stage bringing a play to life before an audience.

Have you always intended to pursue a career in both the law and as a playwright?

My family has a long association with the law (my grandfather was a judge, one uncle is a QC, another uncle and aunt are lawyers, as are my father and two of my brothers) and I followed family tradition by studying law. It has long been a family saying that "it's a good degree to fall back on".

Ideally, I would like to be able to write full-time, however I am very grateful that I am able to practise law, as it is so hard to make anything, let alone a living, out of writing.

What themes do you write about?

I am inspired by the storytelling style of writers like David Malouf and Andrew O'Hagan, and am interested in "real life" stories and events which could happen to anyone, whether it be within a family, in a relationship or at work.

Have you integrated any clients or co-workers into any of your plays?

Ah, now, that would be telling!

Do work themes find their way into your plays, or is playwriting your way of expressing yourself completely outside of the law?

Work themes definitely appear in my writing, as the work environment is a space in which sometimes very different types of people relate to each other.

How did you become involved in writing plays?

I just started writing and, starting with the aforementioned brothers, persuaded other people to help me stage them.

Is it merely a hobby or are you remunerated?

As I would one day like my proceeds from my writing to be my primary source of income, I'd say writing is more than a hobby. I am remunerated, but could not survive without the income my legal career currently provides.

How do you balance your work obligations with being a playwright?

I work "part-time" (which is 32.5 hours a week), which leaves three afternoons a week to write, and I try to make the most of this time. The partners to whom I report are very supportive and I find that I rarely have to work more than my contract hours.

Was it difficult to find a legal employer sympathetic to such pursuits?

No. I completed articles at the firm at which I am now practising, was admitted to practice and left to live and travel overseas for 12 months.

When I returned I contacted my previous employer to let them know I was back and that my references may be checked, because I was looking for part-time work to support myself while writing. To my surprise they offered me a part-time position working in the banking and finance team. I was not expecting to be able to find work in the law, but was very pleased, because I am a terrible waitress.

Do you apply your legal skills to the writing, and vice versa? If so, how?

I have never really considered this. I do know, however, that Gadens' Sydney office supports the Griffin Theatre Company and, as part of its support, has a "wright in residence" program, where playwrights spend a couple of days at Gadens conducting workshops to liven up legal writing.

Meg Clancy was interviewed by Anthony Malkoun of Vadarlis & Associates. ■