Past finding out| Learning about theater history through performance

Arika Dumas-Beals

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Past Finding Out:
Learning about Theater History through Performance

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Past Finding Out: Learning about Theater History through Performance

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Past Finding Out details my experience of researching, writing, and performing in a production titled A Woman Cloaked with the Sun. The purpose of the performance was to generate a method for learning about Theater History through performance that could be duplicated in a structured and concise manner in the classroom.

The methods described were developed out of my dissatisfaction with a popular Theater History text History of the Theater, authored by Oscar Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy. I offer the performance and teaching methods as a supplement to the text.
Past Finding Out:
Learning about Theater History through Performance

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Introduction

This paper began as a performance experiment in which I chose a little-known figure from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Joanna Southcott, to represent the culture and give a fuller perspective to the drama of the Industrial Revolution. The performance is titled *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun*. The script appears in its entirety as Appendix I, and a video recording of the performance accompanies the paper. In England, during the tumultuous years of and after the French Revolution, Southcott attracted a sizable following of dedicated ‘friends’ who believed that she was a prophet come to prepare the English for the second coming of Christ. The purpose of creating and realizing *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun* was to generate a method to teach Theater History through performance that could be duplicated in a structured and concise manner for use in the Theater History classroom. I have carried out this experiment, and continue to reflect on it in this paper as a student of Theater History, as well as an aspiring teacher of the theories of performance, and theater history.

The problem, which this project seeks to amend, is that the method often used to study Theater History is too narrow. By taking a teleological approach, it excludes any artist or innovation, which does not contribute, first to the golden age of Greek Drama, then to the dramas of Shakespeare, and finally to the ‘important’ dramas of our time. This approach uses history to justify the present. Such is the primary bias of Theater History as it is often taught. The method I propose to supplement common teaching practices concedes the point that no study of the past is without bias. The foundation of this method is that Theater History is the study of the culture that generates the artist’s
work. Rather than exhaustively identify a problem, or prove that one method is less susceptible to bias than another, my objective with this project has been to experiment with a solution.

A viable solution must meet three criteria. It will:

- Through performance, offer students an effective understanding of the need that artists are filling in their culture, and the culture artists reflect;
- Give students the tools and enthusiasm to research history both academically and artistically;
- And, teach students something about the nature and study of history without merely presenting them with a monolithic canon of Theater History.

Suggestions for the use of this method in a Theater History classroom are based on the experience of researching, writing, producing, and reflecting upon the performance of *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun*. Its classroom application would look like group work. During a given unit, Medieval Drama, for example, Theater History students would first learn about the general arc of the period and read some canonical texts such as *Second Shepherd's Play*, and some less familiar texts such as Hrotsvitha's *Abraham*. Students would then form small groups and decide, with the guidance of their instructor, in what way to delve into the culture. Students would be given the opportunity to choose the figures and/or events that represent their own standpoint to research, write, and perform.

One group might choose to research and write a performance about the months of collaboration necessary for a medieval city to produce a morality play. Another group
might create a performance about life in a monastery. Other performances might delve into the crusades, or the life of traveling performers.

The following chapter documents attempts by scholars from various disciplines to accomplish the goal of turning knowledge into understanding through performance. Some of these scholars are true performance theorists, others are teachers, some are playwrights, and one set of scholars in particular, anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner are dedicated to a field seemingly unrelated to the field of theater or performance theory. One of the 'scholars' is not a scholar at all. Augusto Boal is an activist and theorist with a unique and influential idea about the power of theater. Chapter 2 outlines the process of researching, writing, and producing *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun*, while suggesting procedures for recreating similar experiments in a Theater History classroom. Chapter 3 will establish guidelines and evaluate my level of success in generating a method to teach Theater History through performance that can be duplicated in a structured and concise manner for use in the classroom.
CHAPTER ONE

Recognizing the Need

Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Friere 53).

Theater History as it is commonly taught relies on Oscar Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy’s *History of the Theater*. I was introduced to *History of the Theater* as an undergraduate attending the University of Nebraska. It was the principle text for classes in Theater History. I reacquainted myself with the book as a Graduate Teaching Assistant of two Theater History classes at the University of Montana, where it served the same purpose. Before 1968 when the first edition was published, a need was generally recognized by scholars to provide a comprehensive history of theater for use in the classroom. Now in its ninth edition Brockett and Hildy’s history is widely used, and remains a remarkable, if basically flawed, achievement.

In my experiences, *History of the Theater* has been used as a teacher’s guide. It is invaluable in this capacity because it provides a simple, clear progression from the origins of theater through European and American drama after 1964. The success of *History of the Theater* is largely due to its simplicity. It is essentially a catalogue of the developments specific to well defined eras and locations. Chapters are clearly organized with subject headings, which highlight the major innovations and innovators of each
period. For example, Chapter Seven: The Spanish Theater to 1700 begins with a
description of religious drama and progresses to beginnings of secular drama. Major
playwrights Lope de Vega and Calderon as well as their contemporaries are covered
before the chapter moves into sections found in all of the early chapters, titled; *Actors
and Acting, Costumes, and The Stage and Scenery*.

Chapter Nine: The British Theater 1642-1800 deals with drama both before and
after the Restoration. I have chosen to carefully review this chapter because it roughly
coincides with the period in which *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun* takes place. Chapter
Nine covers all of the usual subjects, theater architecture, audiences and acting, and
costumes. It goes into especially great detail in describing the financial policies, and the
patent and licensing systems that spanned the era. Brockett and Hildy are faultless in
their quantitative analysis of these subjects. Their catalogue of important actresses and
actors throughout the 158 years covered is also impressive. In some cases, such as Nell
Gwynn and Charles Macklin, the authors make some attempt to give the reader a picture
of the style of the actor or actress. As a student, I found passages like the one that
follows made grasping the significance of an innovator or innovation much easier.

Macklin’s reputation was based primarily upon a few roles, especially
Shylock and the protagonists of his own comedies...Although he was
more devoted to naturalistic acting than Garrick was, Macklin’s limited
range as an actor and his quarrelsome nature restricted his success. He
specialized in bluff, hearty old men, and eccentric characters (Brockett
260).

With its successes registered, it is important to mention the greatest fault of Chapter Nine,
and of the book as a whole. The text treats political, social, economic and religious
developments cursorily, or not at all. In Chapter Nine, the section *Governmental*
Regulation of the Theater begins appropriately with a brief discussion of the rising power of Parliament under Queen Ann and George II who trusted his power to his chief minister, Sir Robert Walpole (Brockett 243). Walpole is a key figure in the Licensing act of 1737 as he was particularly sensitive to the political satires offered at unlicensed theaters (Brockett 243). The proliferation of unlicensed theaters, however, in response perhaps to the growing influence of the middle class is not mentioned.

Scanning for a social or religious perspective, the student will find handful of references to ‘Puritan Sentiment’, but the effects of Puritanism, and the philosophy driving it are never explained. Most remarkably, Brockett and Hildy never once mention the Industrial Revolution that sweeps through the time period, except to refer in passing to the rise of the middle class.

The authors offer a method to what must have been the overwhelming task of compiling information for the book in Chapter One, “Origins of Theater”. Brockett and Hildy never openly admit it, but the organization of their book indicates that they are adherents of Cultural Darwinism. Their description of the philosophy follows:

First... {Cultural Darwinists} extended Darwin’s theory about the evolution of biological species to include cultural phenomena — and consequently they assumed that human institutions (including theater) evolved through a process in which there was a steady development from the simple to the complex. Second, they assumed that societies that had evolved such autonomous arts as theater were superior to those in which the arts had not been separated from ritual. Third, they believed that, since all societies evolve through the same stages, those still-existing primitive or less advanced societies can serve as valid evidence about how European culture had developed during its prehistorical phase (Brockett 2).

An approach to Theater History, which embraces this theory has many implications, not the least of which being to justify the status quo by asserting that it is, in fact, ‘the fittest’ of all possible outcomes. Darwin’s theory, when applied as intended to
biological species, is free of moral interpretation. The same cannot be said of Cultural Darwinism. After several readings of Brockett and Hildy’s text it is clear to me that the authors’ description of Cultural Darwinism is really a vague declaration of their affinity for the approach.

This is a harsh criticism, and one that may seem undeserved considering that *History of the Theater* has guided my studies in theater history. Consequently, I am indebted to the authors for the respect and enthusiasm I have for the field. This gratitude, however, only reinforces my criticism. The great harm in justifying the status quo is more obvious when studying the prominent victims of Cultural Darwinism: women, and unindustrialized societies and peoples. Validating the way things are ensures that things are, in fact, the way that things ought to be. Applied to theater, the effect is similar; Cultural Darwinism narrows the field of possibilities. Not only does the theory restrict what we study, it restricts the way artists engage with their art form.

The teachers of Theater History with whom I have studied generally accept the flaws of *History of the Theater* because of the benefits it offers, such as its breadth and simplicity. They do, however, supplement their use of the text a variety of ways. One professor I studied under built several book reviews into the curriculum. Students chose several books related to Theater History and had them approved by the professor. The book reports were due at intervals throughout the semester. Another professor incorporated lectures on the nature and study of history as personal narrative, and assigned the class to write personal histories. Yet another professor included performance in the curriculum by assigning small groups the production of a scene from a play of their choosing, fully realized within a toy theater. Students amazed me with
their creativity and ingenuity in constructing sets, costumes, special effects, and even actors in miniature.

Like my mentors I accept that the remarkable achievements of Brockett and Hildy offer more benefits to students than deficiencies. I have also conceded that the discipline of history does not exist without bias, and certainly, bias is inherent in choosing a figure or event to represent or ‘flesh out’ the culture of a given period as in the method I propose. For example, in choosing the Millennialist Joanna Southcott to epitomize the Industrial Revolution I took a negative standpoint on the developments of the era. Joanna represents the hopelessness of the poor and the working class. She stands for both the English culture of the Industrial Revolution during her lifetime, and my standpoint on that culture.

My intention with this project has been to experiment with a solution to the problem of ignoring events and innovations that do not fit into a sequential and narrow view of the way the past justifies the present. Another textbook alone is not a viable solution. First, a new book would only suffer from faults as debilitating as History of the Theater. Second, and I make this assertion as a student and as an aspiring teacher; textbooks alone are an ineffective way to learn. Anthropologists, Victor and Edith Turner describe the problem. “Reading written words kowtows to the cognitive dominance of written matter and relies upon the arbitrariness of the connection between the penned or printed sign and its meaning” (Turner 41). By privileging the individual learner the method I advocate allows the student to develop the tools, and enthusiasm to learn both as academics and as artists.
The creation and realization of *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun* was an energizing, and rare opportunity for me to experience a subject both academically and creatively. The research I performed for *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun* was about a subject that excited me. My research was balanced, methodical, and extensive, everything expected of an academic. Yet, it was within the context of building a performance, so I was not required to corrall my artistic wanderings. The writing and production “phases”, normally the domain of the artist, retained a dual quality. In any production, there is always someone responsible for retaining the original integrity or concept of the performance, usually the director. In this case it was the playwright, and the goal of keeping the original vision included maintaining historical accuracy.

**PERFORMANCE SOLUTIONS**

The Turners solved the dilemma of “the arbitrariness of the connection between the penned or printed sign and its meaning” by incorporating performative experiments into their teaching methods. “What we were trying to do was to put experiential flesh on these cognitive bones” (Turner 41). In other words, The Turners sought to turn knowledge into understanding through performance. They performed rituals from various cultures, some as familiar as a Central Virginian Wedding, others exotic, like the Cannibal (Hamatsa) Dance of the sacred winter ceremonies of the Kwakiutl Indians (Turner 41). The Turner’s concluded eventually that rather than bringing students closer to an understanding of the cultures they studied, the performances of ritual tended to intensify the “‘otherness’ of the other”, except in very specific cases.
I am heartened, rather than discouraged by the 'failure' the Turners recognized in their experiments — that of intensifying the "otherness of the other". Performance can help us recognize that sometimes the other is the other. I am reminded of a story in which one of my professors was invited to come to stand trial for the taking of America at a school on the Flathead Indian Reservation on Columbus Day. As instructed, my professor drove to the reservation, just north of Missoula, Montana, and entered the school, dressed as, and acting the part of Christopher Columbus. What an interesting day that must have been for both my Professor and the students with whom he interacted. Within the familiar context and ritual of a trial, perhaps the participants performed the justifiably indignant Native American, or the haughty European. I imagine that through the performance of these roles both my professor and the young participants were forced to calculate what each role meant in a more meaningful manner than they would after reading about it or a lecture, or discussion.

The Turners determined, instead, to "focus first on what all people share, the social drama form" (Turner 48). The Social Drama is Victor Turner's anthropological formula for social conflict as it follows the structure of drama (Schechner 3). That is, in a given 'strip' of culture or unit of experience; a breach of the norm by an individual or group initiates a conflict and crisis, then resolution through religious or judicial structures, and finally, integration, or, if resolution does not take place, a return to the crisis stage (Bruner 39). Turner describes how he arrived at this formula:

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1 Thanks to Professor Randy Bolton, Co-Chair of the Department of Drama-Dance at the University of Montana for this inspirational anecdote.
In many field situations in markedly different cultures, in my experience of Western social life, and in numerous historical documents, we can clearly discern a community's movement through time as taking a shape to which we can hardly deny the epithet "dramatic" (Bruner 39).

The recognition that the past often takes the shape of drama is hardly a new one. Playwrights, novelists, and moviemakers often exploit history for material that is more dramatic than anything that they could make up. Most of us have had the experience of reading or hearing about some historic drama and thought "someone should write a play about that". Perhaps because they lacked the gifts of a dramatist, because they were uncomfortable with the liberties a dramatic interpretation would have to take in order to impart a learning experience, or because of Victor Turner's untimely death, the Turners never attempted to shape the social dramas they recognized in their studies into performances. Their legacy remains, however, as scholars from many disciplines credit the Turners for inspiring their own experiments in performance.

One such scholar, Sally Harrison-Pepper, has developed several performative methods for teaching complicated theory to undergraduate majors in Interdisciplinary Studies during her tenure at Miami University of Ohio. Harrison-Pepper's "...techniques focus on generating kinetic experiences of the often abstract concepts about which we ask students to think, talk and write" (Harrison-Pepper 142). In her article Dramas of Persuasion: Performance Studies and Interdisciplinary Education she describes her approach to teaching a complicated theory, such as Johan Huizinga's on the nature and significance of play. The class is assigned readings then at their next class meeting instructed to literally play. Popular children's games such as ""Operation" and
“Red Light, Green Light” are set up for the students when they arrive for class
(Harrison-Pepper 144).

The result is that instead of asking students to remember what it is like to play, to
be absorbed in the energy and seriousness of play, which exists outside the sphere of
“real-life”, students are welcomed to experience the exuberance and sincerity of play
within a reflexive environment. Once grounded by Huizinga’s theories, the ‘cognitive
bones’, and a play session, the ‘experiential flesh’, the students reflect on their experience
through discussion. In this way, the abstraction of complex theory is replaced by
experience.

Sally Harrison-Pepper acknowledges her intellectual debt to the educational
theories of Paulo Friere, who insisted that education must be put into the hands of those
being educated. He advocated a learning environment in which the student’s background
or standpoint was integral to the material at hand. Friere was dedicated to eradicating
what he called the ‘banking’ method of education in which it is assumed that the student
is a passive receptacle for the unimpeachable knowledge, or “deposits”, of the teacher.
Friere proposed a method in which the student and teacher interact as equals, bringing
their own experience to bear on the material, therefore asserting their conscious invention
of the world. He called this the ‘problem-posing’ method of education. Its advantage
over the ‘banking’ method is that:

The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they
develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in
the world as transformers of that world (Friere 54).
Augusto Boal uses performance as the medium through which the individual brings his or her needs and experience to bear on the situation at hand. Both Brazilian natives, Boal and Friere did not meet until 1996, shortly before Friere’s death. By then, Boal’s theories on performance, and the transformative power of theater were well developed with a strong foundation in Friere’s educational theories. Boal is concerned with freeing people from oppression, hence the name for his arsenal of theories, the Theater of the Oppressed or TO. According to Theater of the Oppressed, all individuals have the ability to act, and think critically about their place in the world. With this in mind, Boal created the ‘Spectactor’. Not merely a spectator, or an actor, but an audience member invited and expected to participate in the creation and resolution of dramas that TO practitioners write with groups and communities about the issues that they want to act upon.

Though there are various methods for dealing with the issues identified, in every issue or oppression, a practitioner of the Theater of the Oppressed will find a protagonist and an antagonist, or the oppressed and the oppressor, respectively. The individual, group, or community can then deal with the oppression by literally acting it out. The role of the oppressed, oppressor, or both may be traditional characters, or allegories, which are simplifications of an issue that an individual, a group or community has identified.

\[\text{\footnotesize 2 Such a drama, in which the protagonist fails, (or a canonical text like Antigone) is performed, first without interruption then it is presented again. This time, the Spectactors (a regular audience inducted as Spectactors) are expected to yell ‘stop’ or ‘freeze’ at a moment when they believe the protagonist’s failure can be averted. A Spectactor comes onto the stage and takes the place of the actor playing the protagonist and continues the action. This scenario continues until a solution satisfactory to a majority of the Spectactors is found. This is just one technique of The Theater of the Oppressed. Boal calls it Forum Theater.}\]
that they would like to address through performance. Dealing with oppression through performance is "a reflection on reality and a rehearsal for future action" (Boal 9). To this end, the person or people experiencing oppression create characters, dialogue, a plot, blocking (or stage positioning), props and set pieces.

The analogous developments of the English movement Theater in Education or T.I.E. grew almost simultaneously as the Theater of the Oppressed, but quite distinctly in another country. T.I.E. is a unique form of theater for children. Practitioners of T.I.E. address a specific need brought to them by local teachers by building a learning experience, including a lesson plan for the teacher to follow, around performance.

The T.I.E. 'programme' is not a performance in schools of a self-contained play, a 'one-off' event that is here today and gone tomorrow, but a coordinated and carefully structured pattern of activities, usually devised and researched by the company around a topic of relevance both to the school curriculum and to the children's own lives, presented in school by the company and involving the children directly in an experience of the situations and problems that the topic throws up (Jackson 4).

The most important similarity between T.I.E. and the Theater of the Oppressed is the importance of the spectator. In a performance of either method, the spectator is expected to take on a role in order to either solve a problem, or reflect upon the problem from a new perspective.

While T.I.E. productions often address matters of social concern, they also create productions designed to help students learn about history, science, even math and the parts of language. On the other hand, TO performances are based entirely on social issues important to their audience at that time and in that location. Both methods rely on performance to transform abstraction into real experience.
As a graduate teaching assistant of Acting for Non-Drama-Majors at the University of Montana I ask my students to write and perform a play based on the methods of the Theater of the Oppressed as their final project. Each student provides a scenario, then, in small groups decide on one to write into a play and perform. One semester in particular the power of this method truly amazed me. The students of one group wanted to write a play about the legalization of marijuana. After a stern review of the guidelines of the project, and University Policy regarding the possession of drugs and alcohol on campus, I allowed them to do so. The play was set at a rally for the legalization of drugs and cast the audience as rally participants. During a stirring and well-researched speech about the violent and oppressive politics behind the criminalization of drugs, actors dressed as police interfered, and began brutalizing actors in the crowd. The audience had no choice but to react.

As successful as the whole of the play was, I was especially impressed by the experience of one student in particular; his group cast him as a Police Officer. To put it delicately, “David” was not an “A” student. On the day of the performance I watched David prepare. David was completely intent on one thing — keeping the crowd under control. As far as I could see, David was thinking like a cop. He was using his experience of being “oppressed” to oppress, and he seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself and learning simultaneously.

John Dewey, the American Educational theorist said:

...Education in order to accomplish its ends both for the individual learner and for society must be based upon experience — which is always the actual life-experience of some individual (Dewey 89).
All of these methods approach education as an individual experience, and share a reliance on performance to make abstractions relevant. Favoring the individual learner and his or her experience is intended to make learning a creative pursuit, rather than a deadening one.

Though the method I advocate is a collaborative process, it highlights the experience of the individual. I propose that for the purposes of understanding the ambiguities of culture and history, rather than relying on a textbook, students of theater history should distill them into a role. It is implicit in this proposition that the student’s perspective is important to his or her study of history.

The experimentation that I have undertaken was inspired by my respect and dedication to Theater History, but also by my frustration with the field. *History of the Theater* seeks to trace the development of theater in cultures as an autonomous activity. By “autonomous activity”, the text’s authors Brockett and Hildy are referring to the separation of the purposes of art from ritual and ceremony. In order to maximize their book’s limited space, however, their book treats the culture behind major innovations and innovators cursorily.

Certainly, we can understand the dress of the times, the structure of the government, the intellectual output, and facts like agricultural production, and population growth, but history is not a mere collection of facts. The study of theater history begins when the individual synthesizes this information and applies it to an understanding of culture and the generation of art from that culture.
CHAPTER 2

A Method for Learning about Theater History Through Performance

I advocate a performance-based approach to learning about Theater History. The foundation of this approach is that Theater History is the study of the culture that generates the artist’s work — a philosophy easily stated, but arduously applied. The first line of business in creating a method to teach Theater History through performance was to build a performance. Each step of the experiment had to be monitored thoroughly for its ability to be reproduced. To that end, I’ve broken the process into five phases: Inspiration, Research, Writing, Production, and Gathering Results.

STEP ONE: THE INSPIRATION

The choice of subject should not necessarily be directly related to theater, or even the arts at large. For example, Joanna Southcott was not chosen to represent the Industrial Revolution because of her immediate connection to the aesthetic expressions of her time. Rather, I chose to explore her life and works through performance because of the way that she represents the culture of the Industrial Revolution. Much of the research and scholarship about Southcott focuses on the authenticity of her claim to be a prophet, to have actually spoken for God. My interest was between the two polarities that this inquiry establishes. Regardless of whether we find her claims to be true, Joanna’s response to the events of her time is compelling. Joanna was horrified by the poverty and inequity that accompanied industrialization. She did not, however, roll up her sleeves and take direct social action. Joanna retreated into her mind. She managed a world
spinning out of control by declaring that the Lord would soon come to avenge the suffering of the poor, and that the Lord would speak through her. Developing a working understanding of the culture she was chosen to represent is more important in the context of this method than understanding Joanna Southcott's influence on the aesthetic expression of her time.

More than merely the subject of the performance, the inspiration includes the seed of the standpoint that the performance will advocate. For example, in the classroom, if a group is especially interested in the role of women in medieval society, they might choose to research and dramatize the daily life of women in a monastery, or to hypothesize about the major events in the life of medieval playwright Hrotsvitha.

The inspiration is the sustaining factor of the process. As students become more familiar with their subject throughout the research phase their perceptions of the subject will change. Using an example from above, students may begin with the intention of showing the austerity of life for women who made their homes in a monastery. Through their research, the students would, no doubt, encounter evidence to that effect, but might be more intrigued by the existence of Monasteries as refuges of spirituality, philosophy, and the arts. No matter which direction their research takes them, the inspiration is meant to sustain the project. It is the force that aids the students in taking mere words on a page, and turning them into a performance.

**STEP TWO: THE RESEARCH**

To generate this type of performance the text must be produced by studying first hand evidence: the journal entries, and publications of the subjects of the play. The
research that went into developing *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun* uncovered a wealth of such evidence, and the exhaustive process was only slightly mitigated by the selection of quotes and evidence that contributed to my standpoint or the thesis of the play: that Joanna Southcott’s reaction to the events of her time epitomizes the hopelessness of the poor and the working class.

After deciding on their inspiration, i.e. the subject and the standpoint, students in a group, with a very specific deadline will carry out the research. Students will research individually. For example, if a group chose to research a performance about the austerity of life for medieval women in a monastery, one student might research the alternatives life held for women if they did not enter a monastery, another student might choose to research the possibilities life held for mediaeval men, yet another student might choose to research the location, size, function, and inner workings (if possible) of a specific monastery. This freedom allows for each student to select and interpret evidence according to their own thesis before returning to the group to present his or her findings.

**STEP THREE: THE WRITING**

I relied on a simple concept, or thesis, a plot built on the principles of dramatic action, and characters with a single strong objective. Using this method, I have guided students of introductory acting classes to generate plays of their own for the past two years.

I begin by creating an experience in which students can’t think too much. In other words, I don’t want students to become overwhelmed with writing a great play; I just
want them to get their ideas onto paper. The class divides into timed think tanks in which they are under the gun to produce anything within a short amount of time. Someone in each group takes notes, as the others work together quickly and creatively. Generally, a very simple improvised performance is the culmination of the group’s efforts. For example, returning to our group of Medievalists, the group would be given class-time to present their research to one another. Each individual might be allowed to take five minutes. With a grasp on the findings of each member, the group would then be directed to brainstorm between three and five possible theses for their play in five minutes. The group would then improvisationally develop a scenario from one of the theses, or a combination of two or more, over the next fifteen minutes. The scenario would then be performed for the class.

From there the group’s playwright(s) would take over. Armed with documentation from the entire group’s research, the theses the group generated in class, and the energy of the improvised scenario, the playwright(s) would create, first a ‘storyline’, then a play. In this type of ‘research play’, the storyline is imperative to the overall continuity of the end product. A storyline is a brief description of each scene including the setting, the characters, and the actions. An example of the storyline for *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun* is included as Appendix II.

The playwrights would then write the play and present it, unfinished, to the group. Class time might be set aside for a read-through when the rest of the group can try on characters, add or remove dialogue, and make suggestions.
STEP FOUR: PRODUCTION

Once the script for *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun* was complete my next step was to find a director, then actors, and a stage manager. Because of the scale of *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun*, artists with technical expertise in costuming, lighting, and scenic design were indispensable. The time and space constraints in the classroom will require smaller technical elements, such as props and costumes. At the bare minimum, any performance requires a director, a stage manager, and actors, even if some students do double-duty. It goes without saying that at this phase students should be assigned their task by interest.

Also at this phase, students should formulate and plan for a component of the project that relates their topic directly to more traditional theater history. Traditional theater history texts such as *History of the Theater*, and well-used play anthologies are indispensable here. For *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun*, this element was met through a performative exhibit the audience experienced in the lobby of the theater before they entered the main performance. *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun* deals with subject matter that is virtually un-represented in the drama of the time, that is the poor and the working class. This made the challenge of relating the subject of the play to the dramatic tradition of the Industrial Revolution especially exciting.

Joanna Southcott (1750-1814) shares almost the same dates with Richard Brinsley Sheridan, 1751-1816, in the same country, and yet there are not two people whose experience of life was more different. Sheridan is perhaps the most famous playwright of the period, and is credited with bringing back the golden age of English
theater with comedies of wit like *School for Scandal*, and *The Rivals*. Georg Büchner (1813-1837) a German was more sympathetic to the working class. He authored *Woyzeck*, a famously dark play, a year before his death, just as he was beginning a position in Zurich as a medical researcher and teacher.

The exhibit was made up of performances of scenes from these plays, and informational displays on the playwrights, and the background of each play. The scenes and displays were directed at familiarizing the audience with the major dramatic works generated during or around the span of Joanna Southcott's lifetime. They were meant to function as a bridge from the subject matter of *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun* to more traditional Theater History. Although neither of the scenes deals directly with the causes of Joanna's millennialism; the French Revolution, and the sweeping changes brought by Industrialization, they provide an interesting look at the concerns of artists during the period.

**STEP FIVE: GATHERING RESULTS**

The value of a project like this appreciates considerably with reflection. A project that culminates in a performance is bound to be hectic, and rushed at times. Corners are bound to be cut, temper's tweaked, and in the moment it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the process was initiated to tell a story about real people and events. For *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun* this paper constitutes that reflection. Analyzing the process that began the better part of a year ago has helped me to view my work with a bit more generosity than is customary, and to recognize what exactly I have learned.
In a classroom, the gathering results phase might mean individual reflections on each group’s performance in the form of a paper. It might take the form of a more intensive research paper. Perhaps students could grade themselves and their group, or evaluate the work of another group altogether. Whatever shape Step Four takes it is vital to the process.

Despite the valuable insight and experience I gained from the process of researching, writing, producing and acting in *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun*, the experiment did not take place in a traditional classroom. This leaves the question, how exactly would a project of this kind fit into the Theater History curriculum?

First, the ideal way to introduce the project to a class is an introduction to research skills and methods, including documentation. Next, within the first four weeks of classes students would be assigned their first research play. The play should be about 5-7 pages in length. Step One through Step Four should take about five weeks with at least two weeks for research, and at least one week for out-of-class rehearsals. After the project is introduced, less than one class day/week could be devoted to time for students to catch up with their groups. Other class time could be devoted to continuing with lectures, discussion, and other activities that further the lesson plan in a more traditional way.

Step Five is not included in this time frame, because upon completion of their performance, students would be assigned a research paper, based on the subject, or a related subject, of their group’s performance.

Each semester would also culminate in the creation and realization of “research plays” as a final project. This time, performances would be completed in about three
weeks, allowing two weeks for the inspiration, research, and writing, and one week for out of class rehearsals and production.
CHAPTER 3

Evaluating Success

The first step in evaluating the success of this project is to establish criteria to assess its accomplishments and disappointments. The question at hand is; has this experiment produced a method which:

1. Offers students an effective understanding of the need that artists are filling in their culture, and the culture artists reflect, through performance;
2. Gives students the tools, and enthusiasm to research history, both academically and artistically;
3. And, teaches students something about the nature and study of history without merely presenting them with a monolithic canon of Theater History?

A survey was administered to both the cast of *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun*, and to the audience immediately after the performance. In the case of the audience most surveys were hurriedly completed with uncomfortable writing surfaces and inferior writing utensils. The cast was given a full day to complete their surveys, but might have allowed their relationship with the author (friend, teacher, fellow-actor, producer/writer) to interfere with objective consideration of their answers. With all of its weaknesses, however, the survey still stands as my best method of gauging the project’s success in the eyes of its participants and audience. An analysis of the survey results is included in this paper as Appendix III.
Overall, the surveys lead me to surmise that the cast and audiences’ understanding of the Industrial Revolution grew through their participation with the project. An increase in knowledge and understanding helps to put the artistic output of the period better into context. Additionally, comments about the performance like:

- “It gave a human perspective on a historic change…”
- “It showed life.”
- “It did so by giving highly dramatic and concrete examples…”

Encourage me that something about the nature and study of history has been learned.

The experience of getting to know Joanna Southcott and writing a story about her life assures me that the method I propose does teach something about the nature and study of history without merely presenting a monolithic cannon of Theater History. Throughout the initial phases of building and realizing A Woman Cloaked with the Sun I naturally had doubts about this method’s viability. I wasn’t “finding out” what I expected to find out. I relied on my initial inspiration to sustain me throughout the research, but Scene 5 was especially problematic.

I wanted to convey the facts. Joanna found a seal bearing the initials I.C. in the home of one of her employers. Years later, the seals, as they were known, became an important part of her movement. They allowed her to ensure devotion from her followers, and track their numbers. They also opened the movement up to scandal. Joanna was accused of selling the seals, and leading purchasers to believe that they carried supernatural powers, such as immortality.

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3 The seals were hand cut squares of paper secured with the monogrammed seal. They read “The Sealed of the Lord, the Elect and Precious, Man’s Redemption to Inherit the Tree of Life, to be made Heirs of God and Joint Heirs with Jesus Christ (Balliene 41).
I wanted to relate ‘the facts’ impartially. I like Joanna. I wanted the audience to view her with compassion, to see her as she saw herself. The problem with the scene was that no matter how I presented them, it appeared that Joanna had something to gain from the distribution of the seals. She kept sounding like an 'infomercial', or a sales woman. Finally, I strung together some effective quotes into the manuscript:

Years ago, I found a seal that bore the monogram I.C. and two stars. I put it away and thought nothing about it until one night after months of apocalyptic dreams I heard a voice. It said, “The Lord is awakened out of sleep. He will terribly shake the Earth”. These words were so dreadful that they made me tremble (Balleine 10). Shortly after I began to wonder if the seal, which bore the initials of Jesus Christ was sent to me for some purpose? This is the seal that I offer to you without money or price, and the only thing to give it full efficacy is faith.

Like many of you I am alarmed to see the events of the book of Revelation coming to pass. Does it not say in the book of Revelation “Hurt not the Earth till we have sealed the servants of our God” (Balleine 41)?

After I read the quotes in context of the scenes around them I experienced a moment of recognition; a rare instance in which I felt that I shared a perception, in the moment, with the people I was studying. Joanna was selling something. Regardless of whether she received money for them, she had something to gain from the distribution of her seals, a reality that neither Joanna, nor her followers, or her enemies could deny.

That recognition assured me of the value of research within the context of performance. I was reminded that history is made up of individuals who have faults, and doubts; who select their course of action from a sea of possibilities. The process of writing about a character, and of interpreting her motivations through her actions was much like having the chance to speak with Joanna Southcott one to one.

The presentation of Scene 5 reflects my familiarity with Joanna. It was one of the strongest, and most difficult choices that the Director of A Woman Cloaked with the Sun
and I made. We chose to film Joanna in an infomercial setting in modern dress, and project the scene rather than perform it live. The choice was made for two reasons. First, the appearance of a character from the early 19th century in a modern setting is jarring to the viewer. It prompts the audience to deconstruct what they know already about the performance and its subject. Second, it encourages the viewer to consider what impact Joanna might have had were she a contemporary, to look at her actions without the deadening cloak of 'history', but with the fresh eyes of the present.

Despite my efforts to establish specific guidelines for the realization and evaluation of this project, it is clear to me that assessing this project's success is not an objective process. An increase in enthusiasm, independent thinking, and an understanding of self as a conscious participant in both making sense of the past, and creating the future are the difficult to measure benchmarks for success.

I was both the teacher and the student of this project, and so it falls on me to evaluate the project's success. Never has the twin role of teacher/student been a more difficult one than my own evaluation. My discomfort is alleviated, however, by my certainty that the project has been successful; I have created a viable method for learning about Theater History through performance.

I experienced an increase in enthusiasm for the study of history. Furthermore, the task of writing a play about a character I so admire forced me provide the fullest biographical context for the play, and to implement my independent thinking skills. Most of all, this project furthered my awareness that the characters of the past, and the present, myself included, are conscious participants in the creation of history.
Conclusion

This project was initiated nearly a year ago to resolve my dissatisfaction with traditional methods of teaching Theater History. Methods that rely on Oscar Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy's text *History of the Theater* as a teaching guide have the effect of separating the artist, innovator, or innovation from his or her culture. The benefit of *History of the Theater* is that it conveys information to students in an efficient and streamlined manner. The detriment is that it achieves its straightforwardness with the exclusion of information about the political, social, economic and religious atmosphere in which artists generate their work. This selection of material necessary to produce a text of such magnitude creates a curriculum, which does not study history so much as it uses it to justify the present. By creating a method that relies upon the individual student's interests and ideas to build a learning experience, I have tried to avoid this basic flaw.

Performance takes place within a reflexive environment, reading a textbook is not a reflexive process. While researching, writing, and performing the role of Joanna Southcott in *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun* it was necessary for me to walk in the shoes of the characters I studied. As the playwright and actor I had to find out, if only for myself, why Joanna, Ann, her assistant and confidant, Mr. James and his congregation did what they did.

*Past Finding Out: Learning about Theater History through Performance* was a success because it began with the premise that the past, like the present is a matter of perspective, and set out to exploit the possibilities that proposition offered. The method I advocate gives students the power of choosing their perspective, but it does not do so
lightly. The student is responsible for thorough research, both academic; the kind of outward research associated with books, and articles, and artistic; internal research that ask the student to step into the shoes of the character(s) under study.

In closing, I must acknowledge the inspiration I have derived from the teachers of Theater History with whom I studied as an undergraduate and a graduate student. They first planted the seed that a solution was at hand. The answer, so obvious, was performance. Through the fulfillment of this project, I have found performance to be a natural and effective way to learn about Theater History.
APPENDIX 1

A Woman Cloaked with the Sun

by Arika Dumas-Beals

PROJECTION: Industrial Revolution Montage with audio introduction.

AUDIO:

The substitution of machines — rapid, regular, precise, tireless — for human skill and effort; the substitution of inanimate for animate sources of power, in particular, the introduction of engines for converting heat into work, thereby opening to man a new and almost unlimited supply of energy; the use of new, and far more abundant raw materials. These developments, together, constitute the industrial revolution (Landes 41). A shift that had a devastating impact on social, political, and economic structures.

The worker, and the environment endured the greatest transformations. To their aid came a host of self-proclaimed prophets who predicted that Christ would soon arrive to ease the suffering of the humble. Joanna Southcott, a pious farmer’s daughter from Devonshire was among them (Balleine 1-2).

SCENE 1

JOANNA: dictating to Ann I, Joanna Southcott, have been more than twelve years publicly warning the nation of what the lord hath revealed unto me he will do upon the earth; and the events have been daily fulfilling abroad and at home, which causes me to believe the visitation to be from the Lord; while others with the most infamous abuse and
falsehood, have publicly declared me to be an impostor; and others with the same
ignorance and folly say that my writings are from the devil, full of bl (Southcott, Copies
2) —

*Ann pulls out a letter and sets it on the desk.*

JOANNA: Full of blasphemy and wondered —.

ANN: *gives Joanna the letter* It arrived this morning.

JOANNA: It’s from Reverend Pomeroy. After all these years... Of course, my spirit
told me it would be so, but even I began to doubt...

*Joanna opens the letter, then gives it to Ann*

ANN: *reading* Dear Ms. Southcott, I find that your senses are deranged and that your
writings are blasphemy (Southcott, Copies 29). Your ceaseless letters are nothing but a
bother to me. I ask that you please desist correspondence.

*Joanna takes the letter. Ann helps her into her bed.*

**SCENE 2**

Methodist Meeting Hall

Mr. James, Mr. Brown, Mr. Delaney, Ms. Fulton

*PROJECTION: Workers pictures montage of churchgoers ends with a picture of a
church spire. Fade.*

*AUDIO: A Methodist hymn written by John Wesley.*

*An aisle segregates men and women.*

MR. JAMES: Lord, we all desire to overcome the temptations that Satan places in front
of us. We know that before you can justify us freely, you must wither our gourd, blast
the flower of proud hope, take away the prop of self-dependence, strip us of the gaudy covering of Christ-less righteousness, stop the boasting of pharisaical self-sufficience, and bring the guilty, abased, ashamed, blushing, self-despairing sinner, to the foot of the cross (qtd. in Thompson 367).

I found myself in the position to do some good among the lord’s poor today, but I am afraid that after all, he has found me wanting as I stand before you today. Mr. Brown, how do you find the state of your soul today?

MR. BROWN: The state of my soul is poor, Mr. James, very poor. Every day since Monday I have worked day and night at the loom. I’m expected to have 30 pieces ready by Sunday! A man shouldn’t need to work so much, Mr. James. He needs time with his family. My hands, I can barely manage to bend my fingers.

MR. JAMES: These times can get the best of anyone, Mr. Brown. Ms. Fulton, How do you find the state of your soul today?

MS. FULTON: I am so close to the lord. His power is almost more than I can stand, and he takes away all of my sorrows. I walked four miles each way to clean my father’s house on my day off last week. He’s an ungrateful old man, but I did my work and remembered the strength of the lord throbbing inside me, and it was a joy, Mr. James.

MR. JAMES: Mr. Delaney, how do you find the state of your soul this evening?

MR. DELANEY: Sir, the woman Joanna Southcott, who speaks for the lord. She’s prophesied a poor harvest again this year. She says the lord is revenging her; that until we take note the blight won’t end. Last year my father passed away... I fear my mother won’t survive another year like the last, yet the church won’t hear her —
MR. JAMES: Mr. Delaney! That woman’s prophecy comes straight from the devil.
True the events she prophesies often come to pass, but would you have the church take
note of an untutored female. Mr. Delaney, you will find salvation through your suffering,
not through Christ’s supposed second coming.
MR. DELANEY: What harm would it do to merely have a look at her writings to see
what...?
MR. BROWN. Mr. James I have studied the writings of Southcott and there is nothing
but truth and scripture in them. It’s true; Joanna Southcott is a woman of mean
background. Such a woman could not possibly write so much complicated verse without
divine help.
MR. JAMES: Mr. Brown, Joanna Southcott is nothing but a delusional woman whose
insane ramblings have been bolstered to prophesy by a stupid and illiterate public!

General arguing

SCENE 3
Joanna’s bedroom
Joanna Southcott, Ann Underwood

PROJECTION: Joanna lies on her bed, delirious, mumbling, as Ann kneels beside her,
writing.

AUDIO JOANNA:

— Know then a wife for him was found,
To bring the Heirs I said I’d bless,
And so on Jacob it should rest.
These are but shadows past and gone;
For, like the autumn, all became
To have these leaves to fly away
The trees stripped bare, you all do see (Southcott, *Copies* 64).

**SCENE 4**

Methodist Meeting Hall

Class Leader – Mr. James, Mr. Brown, Mr. Delaney, Ms. Fulton

*The arguing continues*

MS. FULTON: Mrs. Brown, that woman is a liar! Her followers are nothing but a bunch of enthusiasts, I am sorry that you have been so deceived —

*Arguing continues*

**SCENE 5**

*PROJECTION: Joanna in modern dress speaking to a small crowd as in an*

*"infomercial"*

*AUDIO JOANNA:

Years ago, I found a seal that bore the monogram I.C. and two stars. I put it away and thought nothing about it until one night after months of apocalyptic dreams I heard a voice. It said, "The Lord is awakened out of sleep. He will terribly shake the Earth". These words were so dreadful that they made me tremble. Shortly after I began to wonder if the seal, which bore the initials of Jesus Christ was sent to me for some purpose? This is the seal that I offer to you without money or price, and the only thing to give it full efficacy is faith (Balleine 10).
Like many of you I am alarmed to see the events of the book of Revelation coming to pass. Does it not say in the book of Revelation "Hurt not the Earth till we have sealed the servants of our God" (Balleine 41)?

SCENE 6

Methodist Meeting Hall

Mr. James, Mr. Brown, Mr. Delaney, Ms. Fulton

Arguing continues

MR. JAMES: May we please get some order!

MS. FULTON: If she was just delusional... but she’s a calculating bitch. She and those men who are always with her are getting rich off those books and the...

MR. BROWN: How can she ensure the devotion of her flock if they are not held to account for their knowledge of her works ...

MS. FULTON: At a guinea a book, she certainly is ensuring their devotion —

Ms. Fulton turns and leaves. The group disperses.

SCENE 7

Center stage

AUDIO CONGREGATION:

May I drink deep into the spirit of Christ?

And may his blood cleanse me from all sin (Hopkins 110)!

JOANNA: As we all have drank in one cup, may we drink into one faith, and may that faith be in Christ. My friends, the high must be brought down, and the humble exalted,
until we meet in a pleasant plane of equality. What a neighboring nation hath been grasping at in shadow, we shall have in substance. We may see by the French Revolution that it has given no happiness to mankind. It has only deluged Europe with blood: and were Bonaparte and his followers to be destroyed tomorrow, sin and sorrow would remain the same. No revolution against men can bring in this glorious and happy period, which is promised in the scriptures of truth. Satan is the cause of your sorrows, the cause of your sins, the cause of your misery. It is Satan who must be destroyed. This is the revolution we must have in our hearts, against his power and his devices, and plea the promises of god (Hopkins 196).

AUDIO CONGREGATION:

The will of the lord be done

Come lord Jesus o come quickly (Hopkins 111).

Joanna Exit

SCENE 8

Joanna’s bedroom and sitting room

Joanna Southcott, Dr. Miller, Dr. Little, Ann Underwood

Joanna is seated; Dr Miller packs his things and walks into her sitting room where he meets Dr Little.

DR. MILLER: I never would have believed it —

DR. LITTLE: Did you ever think you’d see such a thing?

DR. MILLER: — if I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes.

DR. LITTLE: But she is?
DR. MILLER: She’s pregnant.

DR. LITTLE: *laughing* At 64?

DR. MILLER: —but she refuses an internal exam.

DR. LITTLE: At 64, so would I! But then, someone’s braved the venture!

DR MILLER: She claims the conception was immaculate!

*Ann has been listening off to one side.*

ANN: Excuse me! Excuse me, but I can’t allow this to continue. For the last 24 years Joanna Southcott has given her heart to Christ alone —

*Joanna drops the bible she has been holding, and stands. As she bends to retrieve it she looks very weak, disheveled, and pregnant.*

DR. MILLER: Ms. Underwood —

ANN: — and what has she received in return? Nothing but ridicule from skeptics like you who mistake your intellect for —

DR. MILLER: Ms. Underwood —

JOANNA: *Stands* Ann?

ANN: You should be ashamed

*Ann goes to Joanna*

*Doctors exit*

**SCENE 9**

Joanna’s bedroom

Joanna Southcott, Ann Underwood

*Ann takes Joanna’s bible*
ANN: Reading O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence (Psalm.23: 1-7)?

_Ann cares for Joanna_

_PROJECTION:_ 'Delusional' movie plays.

_AUDIO JOANNA:_ I am not afraid to appear before my God, as I have done nothing but what I believed to be in true obedience to my lord (Hopkins 209).

**SCENE 10**

Joanna Southcott, Ann Underwood, Dr. Miller

*Joanna is dead. Her abdomen looks very pregnant. Ann sits at the foot of her bed.*

ANN: Reading If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reigns: Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well (Psalm.23: 1-14).

*Dr. Miller enters and covers Joanna. He comforts Ann, then leaves. Ann kneels next to the bed and rests her head next to Joanna's feet*

_AUDIO:_ From 1792, until her death in 1814 Joanna's daily prophesies were sealed in a box. For over two decades, Joanna appealed to the Church of England to come and look through the boxes to prove her visitations to be either from God or Satan. During her
lifetime, Joanna asked that, first six, then twelve bishops come to preside over the examination.

Before she died, Joanna insisted that 24 bishops of the Church of England must agree to be present for the length of a full week before the box could be opened, and the contents examined. After her death, the box was kept by a string of loyal followers in their homes. In the early 20th Century, a descendant group of followers, the Panacea Society located in Bedford, England, took possession of the box where it remains, unopened, to this day (Balleine 132-137).
APPENDIX II

A Woman Cloaked with the Sun

Storyline

By Arika Dumas-Beals

The performance begins with a reading or a projection of a passage from *The Rights of Men* by Thomas Paine

SCENE 1

Joanna’s bedroom

Joanna Southcott, Ann Underwood

Joanna is dictating a letter when Ann rushes in with a letter from Reverend Pomeroy. Joanna is excited, believing that Pomeroy has finally realized that she is a true prophet. Ann reads the insulting letter to Joanna. Joanna is devastated and Ann helps her into bed.

SCENE 2

Methodist Meeting Hall

Class Leader – Mr. James, Mr. Brown, Mr. Delaney, Ms. Fulton

The scene is a Methodist Class Meeting. Mr. James begins the meeting with a hymn, then a self-analysis in which he finds himself faulty. One by one he asks the group how they find the state of their soul, and each expounds on their poverty, and love of the Lord, especially Ms. Fulton. Mr. Delaney is last. He asks the class leader about Joanna
Southcott, and why the church refuses to recognize her as a true prophet. An argument ensues, in which Joanna is first defended by Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown attests to the truth of Joanna’s writings, which he has studied. He insists that a woman of Joanna’s mean background and education could not possibly write so much complicated verse without divine help.

SCENE 3

Joanna’s bedroom

Joanna Southcott, Ann Underwood

Joanna lies on her bed, delirious, mumbling, as Ann kneels next to her, writing.

SCENE 4

Methodist Meeting Hall

Class Leader – Mr. James, Mr. Brown, Mr. Delaney, Ms. Fulton

The arguing continues. Ms. Fulton attacks Mr. Brown and Mr. Delaney.

SCENE 5

Outside

Joanna, a small crowd, and Carpenter with another “Friend”

Joanna is shouting her prophecy concerning the seals. Carpenter hands out seals to the crowd as the friend takes down names. Joanna begins to read the saying on the seal, the crowd chants with her. The whole scene is very ‘enthusiastic’.

SCENE 6

Methodist Meeting Hall

Class Leader – Mr. James, Mr. Brown, Mr. Delaney, Ms. Fulton
The argument continues. Ms. Fulton says above the crowd that Joanna is not delusional, but a calculating bitch, she and the group of men who surround her are getting rich off her books and the price of seals. As the argument escalates, Mr. Delaney quietly gathers his things and leaves. The group disperses.

SCENE 7
Center Stage
Joanna, a Congregation of ‘Friends’

Joanna preaches to her congregation.

SCENE 9
Center Stage
Group of Doctors

One joins the rest laughing and shaking his head. He reluctantly agrees that Joanna is indeed pregnant despite the fact that she is sixty-four years old. Ann enters and admonishes the doctors for their incredulous attitude. She explains how hard Joanna has been working all these years to warn of Christ’s coming and how she has met with nothing but ridicule. She tells them that two years ago, Joanna prophesied her pregnancy, but didn’t believe it herself until a few weeks ago. Joanna enters, the doctors disperse, and Ann leads her back to bed.

SCENE 10
Joanna’s bedroom

Joanna Southcott, Ann Underwood,

Possible projection/audio: I am not afraid to appear before my God, as I have done nothing but what I believed to be in true obedience to my lord.
Joanna is lifeless in her bed. Her abdomen looks very pregnant. Ann reads from scripture as the doctor wraps Joanna in blankets.

SCENE 11

Center Stage

All players in more modern dress, Joanna Southcott

The crowd waits expectantly, gathered loosely around a box. Joanna enters, opens the box and scatters the papers inside.
APPENDIX III
ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS

To assess an increase in knowledge, the cast and audience answered questions like:

- With 5 being extremely knowledgeable and 1 being no knowledge at all
  how would you characterize your knowledge of the Industrial Revolution
  before you viewed this performance, including the pre-show exhibit in the
  lobby?

And

- Has your participation/Has viewing this performance, including the pre-
  show exhibit in the lobby, improved your knowledge of the industrial
  revolution?

About one-quarter answered “no”, one-quarter answered “not sure”, and one half
answered, “yes” to the second question. Judging by the surveys, the cast and audiences’
knowledge was increased, but assessing an increase in understanding — to achieve a
grasp of the nature, significance, or explanation of something, with an emphasis on the
act of interpretation — is a much more challenging task. Two questions in the survey
were aimed at assessing an increase in understanding. First, I looked for a change in
thinking, and provided an open-ended question:

- Before your participation with this project/Before viewing this
  performance including the pre-show exhibit in the lobby, did you think of the
changes brought by the Industrial Revolution as (circle one) a good thing/a bad thing/indifferent/don’t know? Why or why not?

And

- Has your participation with this project/Has viewing this performance, including the pre-show exhibit in the lobby, changed the way that you think of the changes brought by the Industrial Revolution? Why or why not?

Most of the survey participants either did not experience a change in thinking, or were not sure if they did. Only a little less than one-third answered “yes” to the second question. Whereas the majority of participants answered, “yes” to the following:

- The exhibit in the lobby, in conjunction with the performance of *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun*, was intended to give a fuller perspective to the culture behind the dramatic tradition of the Industrial Revolution. In your opinion did the exhibit achieve this?

Participants who answered “yes” followed up with comments like:

- “It gave a human perspective on a historic change…”
- “It showed life.”
- “It did so by giving highly dramatic and concrete examples…”

In the majority of the responses of “no” or “not sure” to this question most participants followed up that they did not see the exhibit in the lobby. Of the negative responses, those who did view the exhibit noted that it was very different in mood, theme and aesthetic from *A Woman Cloaked with the Sun*. This confused those responders.
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