ABSTRACT

“What is or can be the record of an actress, however famous?”: Historicizing Women Through Performance in Leigh Fondakowski’s “Casa Cushman”

by Amy Guenther

This thesis offers a methodological framework for reading Leigh Fondakowski’s “Casa Cushman” through Charlotte Canning’s idea of “feminist performance as feminist historiography.” Building upon and moving beyond Canning’s investigation, this thesis argues that to function as performance as historiography, the playwright must act as a historian researching and selecting sources, the dramaturgy must reveal its historiographical constructions, and the play must use performance devices that problematize the representational nature of both sources and history. This approach ultimately has ramifications for the historiography of historical women because it offers a new way to read sources against the grain and fill in the gaps left in the archive.
“WHAT IS OR CAN BE THE RECORD OF AN ACTRESS, HOWEVER FAMOUS?": HISTORICIZING WOMEN THROUGH PERFORMANCE IN LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI’S “CAS A CUSHMAN”

A Thesis

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INTRODUCTION:

Performance is an act of history because it works to negotiate but not to resolve an important contradiction: history is not the past but a narrative about that past, one that comes to stand in for that past.

- Charlotte Canning, “Feminist Performance as Feminist Historiography” (231)

Finally, no one writes history only from facts, whatever they may be.

- Martha Vicinus, “Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory?” (72).

The Genesis of “Casa Cushman”:

The genesis of “Casa Cushman” began when Lisa Merrill sent a copy of her newly published *When Romeo was a Woman: Charlotte Cushman and Her Circle of Female Spectators* to the office of Tectonic Theater Project. Leigh Fondakowski explains, “It was sort of sitting on the table and Moisés handed it to me and said, ‘Take a look at this. This woman sent this to us and do you have any interest in this?’ And I kind of looked at it and you know I was busy doing my other work and I glanced at it” (Personal Interview). Charlotte Cushman was a famous nineteenth-century actress revered for her roles in melodramas and Shakespeare as well as her performance of male Shakespearean roles: Romeo, Hamlet, and Cardinal Wolsey. Bolstering the perception of her chastity because she had no male suitors, Cushman greatly appealed to female spectators and constantly kept a community of women around her during her lifetime. She lived ten years with Matilda Hays and spent the last half of her life living with her wife, sculptor Emma Stebbins, while carrying on an affair with Emma Crow. Cushman’s death coincided with the advent of sexology and later sexuality studies, which read her “masculine” qualities, portrayal of male roles, and female friendships as sexual “deviance.” The perception of this “deviance” diminished the lauding of her performances, inspired the criticism about her lack of “femininity,” and made her a case study of homosexuality.¹

¹ See Merrill 255-266. Merrill identifies specifically that Cushman was a case study in Edward Prime Stevenson’s *The Intersexes*. 
Merrill’s biography explores how Cushman’s contemporaries and the writers of history that followed perceived her performance of gender and sexuality on- and off-stage (xv-xxi). What eventually drew Leigh Fondakowski into the book is largely what has fascinated other scholars about Cushman. Fondakowski explains,

What was interesting to me, that kind of got me hooked on it, was that the image of Cushman as Romeo is not in any way what we think of today as female masculinity. She looks like a buxom woman, clearly a woman and yet people were mistaking her for a man and I became intrigued by this idea of what was it energetically that the viewer could project a masculine soul or a masculine entity onto this clearly female form. And so then I read the book and met with Lisa Merrill to talk to her about getting the rights and she told me about the love letters. (Personal Interview)

Merrill discovered dozens of love letters from Cushman to Emma Crow in the Library of Congress as she researched for her dissertation, which eventually became When Romeo was a Woman. In the letters, Cushman repeatedly asks Crow to “burn these letters” to hide their contents from the rest of the world. Crow, however, saved the letters. Fondakowski explains that Merrill “had been laboriously transcribing them [the letters] and filling in a lot of the blanks of who was writing to who. This was a ten year academic project for her and she intends to publish a book about them but she decided to give me the rights to them” (Personal Interview).

With the rights to When Romeo was a Woman and the transcribed love letters, Fondakowski began a five-year process of constructing “Casa Cushman” using Moment Work, a technique developed at Tectonic Theater Project. Fondakowski completed one of the very first drafts in August 2009. The majority of words came from primary source documents and contained almost no imagined dialogue. Between this version and a draft completed in January 2011, Fondakowski created about twenty to twenty-five drafts and gave over ten staged readings (Personal Interview). In November 2010, she conducted a six-week workshop of the play in Minneapolis in conjunction with the University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts’ Department of Theatre Arts and Dance, the Institute for Advanced Study and The Playwrights'

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3 This is not to say that Merrill was the first to discover the letters in the Library of Congress. She will be the first to publish them, however, if her transcriptions of them get published.
Center ("Playwright"). The play begins early in Cushman’s career and shows her rise to fame as well as her relationship with four of her lovers: Rosalie Sully, Matilda Hays, Emma Stebbins, and Emma Crow. At the publishing of this thesis, the play is not complete and Fondakowski does not expect that it will be until she begins rehearsals for its production.

**Statement of Problem:**

In the article "Feminist Performance as Feminist Historiography," Charlotte Canning argues for the legitimation of performance as a historiographical mode. She uses three examples to support her argument: the documentary *A Midwife’s Tale*, Holly Hughes’s *Preaching to the Perverted*, and Deborah Hamilton-Lynne’s *E Pluribus Unum*. Though the creation of each piece included “research into documents, archives, and (when possible) firsthand accounts from participants,” Canning explains that none “would typically be labeled a ‘history’ of its subject” (228). The history profession instead relegates each to “dramatizations, biographies, or autobiographies” (228). She proposes, however, that each might instead be read as

- historiographical moments that reveal the processes of transforming the past into history
- and that blur the boundaries between historiography and dramaturgy. Taken together they can rethink historiography through a feminist lens. This approach could offer to feminism strategic approaches to history and recognize the ways in which performance, history, and feminism can intersect productively. (228)

Such an approach is important because the history profession has simultaneously excluded women as subjects and/or writers of history and limited historiographical modes to “the lecture, the article, and the book” all of which also generally exclude(d) women (230). Performance, as historiography, could “demonstrate aspects of and ideas about history that are less possible in print” (230). In emphasizing the “gestural, the emotional, the aural, the visual, and the physical in ways beyond print’s ability to evoke or understand them,” performance as historiography could forge “connections between the audience and performer(s)” and “actively place the past in the community context of present time” (230). Thus Canning identifies several problems:

- Women have been left out of the texts of history and the writing of it. Performance has not been seen as a legitimate form of historiography.
- Performance has been an important way for feminists to understand and reveal historiographical constructions of the past and to comment on the present. As Canning argues, thinking of feminist performances as feminist historiography
“might be more provocatively read as historiographical moments…they can rethink historiography through a feminist lens.” That is, performance not only offers the history profession a new historiographical mode, but using the medium of performance as historiography could also change how we think about all historiography.

Canning, however, does not develop these points much beyond what I have summarized here. She quickly analyzes each of the three performances she uses to support her argument in about three or four sentences each. Nor has Canning furthered these ideas in subsequent publications. In many ways, Fondakowski’s “Casa Cushman” fits perfectly as an example of Canning’s idea of performance as historiography; however, while I do examine the ways “Casa Cushman” is performance as historiography using the main points Canning makes, I go beyond Canning’s argument and explain both how it functions as performance as historiography and provide a detailed methodology for how to read “Casa Cushman” as such. Through this thesis, I also move beyond Canning to argue that performance as historiography requires much more than the staging of a historical subject. To function most effectively as performance as historiography, a performance must utilize the tools of both performance—the theatrical vocabularies of lights, set, image, costume, gestures, staging, dialogue, and bodies—and historiography—extensive research, the evaluation of sources, revelation of construction of histories, and the ability to read sources against the grain.

Thus this thesis offers a methodological framework for reading “Casa Cushman” for both performance as historiography and within the larger context of historiographies of Cushman. “Casa Cushman” specifically offers new ways of approaching and thinking about the larger field of historiography in terms of the constructions of history and fact/fiction dichotomies through the problematization of representation within the sources used to construct history. History is an assemblage of representational sources that might stand in for the past, but like history, are not the past themselves. The sources do not offer a one-way time machine ticket to the past because the present-day historian must always mediate them. My thesis then suggests ways that theatre artists and scholars might inform each other’s work in the writing of history.

If history itself is a narrative about the past, then performance as a medium for

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4 This is not to criticize Canning but to explain to the reader that an extended analysis was outside the purview of the article. Canning’s article appears in a special issue of Theatre Survey that asked fifteen leading theatre historians to respond to the question, “What is the single most important thing we can do to bring theatre history into the new millennium?”
historiography not only foregrounds the narrativity of history but problematizes a clear dichotomy between fact and fiction. Even if based on “true” events or primary sources, plays are generally considered fiction. The reason that the plays Canning identifies would not be considered “history” is because the terms “dramatization,” “autobiography,” and “biography” in relation to drama carry the connotation of fiction over fact. If we think of performance as historiography, however, it may change how we understand fact and fiction within the larger history field. That is, thinking in terms of fact and fiction is not a useful analytical tool: it limits the sources available for analysis and discounts the location of sources within wider discourses of gender, sexuality, race, and culture, both within the time period of the historical subject and within the present time of the historian. As the field of history has moved beyond empirical and positivist approaches with the advent of poststructural, feminist, queer, and postcolonial theories, more historians attempt to fill in the gaps in the historical record with theory: the ability to “read” sources against the grain. Performance, while “making physical, gestural, emotional, and agonistic the processes that construct history out of the past” (Canning 230) more often uses story than theory to fill in gaps—to offer what might have been said or what might have happened when the historical record falls silent. Stories engage empathy. With a negotiation between performance devices and dramaturgical devices that reveal the historiographical operations within the history of the subject and the construction of the play, performance as historiography should seek to balance the empathy of story with the didacticism of “legitimate” history. Performance as historiography offers imaginative ways to answer questions that can never be fully answered in the representational sources themselves: What was this person really like? What drew others to them? Any ideas or feelings gleaned from the performance offers only possibilities and not answers, but is that not what any piece of historiography does? History is a representation of representational sources. History is not the past itself nor are the sources the past itself. The past is dead but history is alive, engaged in a continuous process of construction and deconstruction.

“Casa Cushman” centers around two historiographical challenges: the ephemerality of performance and the nature of female desire among white middle to upper class American and British women in the mid-nineteenth century. Through the construction of the play, Fondakowski discovered that the archive, even a performance of the archive, did not adequately address either topic. Instead, Fondakowski used the archive to deconstruct Cushman,
historiographically legitimating her imagining of Cushman by reiterating that we can never know the person, only the ghosts left behind. Ultimately, the deconstruction of Cushman allows the opening of a performative space that juxtaposes Cushman performing her life with Cushman’s life performed. Fondakowski’s departure from only using direct quotations from documents to integrating direct quotations and performance devices only enhances a historiographical reading of the play by juxtaposing a doing and done, opening a performative space to examine history.

**Justification:**

The Tectonic Theater Project has established itself as an important presence in the American theatre community. Not only are they continually producing commercially successful productions, they are contributing to the process of making theatre with their constant search for new theatrical forms. “Casa Cushman” will undoubtedly be an important work for them. It is only the second play with a female protagonist in the Tectonic repertoire and the first with a lesbian protagonist. While Fondakowski was the head writer of *The Laramie Project* and a co-writer of *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, “Casa Cushman” is the first play Fondakowski fully wrote and will direct in the Tectonic repertoire. As the writing of “Casa Cushman” is still in progress and it has not yet been produced, I will be the first to critically analyze the play as performance as historiography and how the technique could apply to the dramaturgy of the play—that is, the processes of constructing the play—and potentially other plays as well. “Casa Cushman” is being created in a collaborative process bringing in multiple viewpoints in the construction of history. It is also being created in a company (Tectonic) that has explored the construction of history in multiple plays. In addition, Cushman, her community of women, and her sexuality are not well-known outside of nineteenth-century American theatre scholars’ and lesbian historians’ work. “Casa Cushman” will bring Cushman’s story to a much wider audience than theatre scholars.

**Limitations of Research:**

In the development of this thesis, I limited “performance” to the performance of a dramatic text within a theatrical framework and did not examine performance as it applies to films, performance art, novels, or the performances of everyday life. I also wanted to look at the

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5 Fondakowski wrote and directed *I Think I Like Girls* and *The People’s Temple* but neither was fully affiliated with Tectonic.
performance of historical women as opposed to women performing history such as Anna Deavere Smith or, to use Canning’s example, Holly Hughes. I chose to use “Casa Cushman” as a case study for feminist performance as feminist historiography largely for two interrelated reasons: it is the newest contemporary play to feature a historical woman and no other scholar has published anything about it yet. Because this thesis analyzes the development of the play as much as the text itself, the analysis of other plays containing historical women is outside of the purview of this thesis though a comparison between “Casa Cushman” and other plays containing historical women is an excellent topic for further research.

“Casa Cushman” condenses approximately the last thirty years of Cushman’s life into a three-hour play. Therefore, the history that I examine has to do with differing forms of life writing. Feminist biographer and biography theorist Liz Stanley explains, “The ‘writing of a life’ is the writing of a history, an account of the past by a particular kind of historian known as an auto/biographer” (Stanley, Auto/Biographical I 101). I limit my examination of performance as historiography to the construction of a historical woman’s life, as opposed to a historical “event.” I specifically examine Cushman in the play and do not examine the construction of the other historical women in the play (Mercer, Stebbins, Crow, Hays, Hosmer) because my focus is on the historiography of Cushman and these women serve the purpose of historicizing Cushman. Cushman occupies a very specific identity position: a white, female, middle-class, nineteenth-century, lesbian, American actress. I am not suggesting that the conclusions I draw apply to all women regardless of race, gender, sexuality, culture, and time period. Instead, I hope to show how performance as historiography functions in “Casa Cushman” and how using performance as historiography provides a medium for revealing the gaps in sources, most especially in the “silencing” of women’s sexuality, and to deconstruct the representational nature of sources and history to reveal portions of what was new and unique about Cushman to her contemporaries for a twenty-first century audience. Charlotte Cushman, however, is a bit of an anomaly in feminist historiography because of the wealth of archival sources she left behind. The sources, however, are problematic in the gaps they leave: mainly Cushman’s sexuality. The methodological framework I lay out for reading “Casa Cushman” does not focus primarily on reviewing and analyzing the variety of archival sources but rather provides a way to read and use the gaps within the sources for a performance as historiography endeavor.
While Cushman has been the subject of several published articles and books in feminist and queer theatre scholarship, my study of Cushman is not meant to contribute as much to the scholarship existing on Cushman, as it is a historiographical analysis of the subject of Cushman within “Casa Cushman.” This study is also not attempting to situate “Casa Cushman” within the Tectonic Theater Project canon or to analyze their play development techniques. I will only define terms specific to techniques developed in Tectonic that are integral to a dramaturgical analysis of “Casa Cushman.” This study is also not a biography of Leigh Fondakowski or an analysis of her body of work.

My analysis of “Casa Cushman” as performance as historiography could have been hindered as the play has not yet been fully performed. Because the play has not been produced, this thesis will not delve into audience reception theories and will leave that as a topic for further research. However, because of the development techniques employed to create the text of the play, the script contains detailed descriptions of performance devices and elements in addition to the text of the play. In my interview with Fondakowski, she explained to me her ideas for staging the play and showed me many pictures from the November 2010 workshop in Minneapolis that clarified the performance descriptions in the script. Finally, I attended a staged reading of the play at the New Georges rehearsal space in New York City in April 2011. Directed by Fondakowski, the staged reading gave me an idea of several acting, vocal, and staging choices that contribute to my understanding of how Fondakowski will interpret the characters in producing the play.

In addition, because the play has not been produced yet, the script is still in progress. While Fondakowski estimates that she has twenty or twenty-five versions of the script, I have only four versions: August 2009, January 2010, December 2010, and January 2011. A close analysis of all twenty-five versions is outside the purview of this thesis. I have chosen instead to specifically analyze the August 2009 version, the first draft of the play, and the January 2011 version. While at the time of writing I know that there is at least one version written after January 2011 version, the constraints of time limit my analysis to the January 2011 version as the latest one. The staged reading I attended in April 2011 featured several changes from the January 2011 version, which I will note only if it significantly changes my analysis of the January 2011 version.
Finally, my study is not necessarily trying to examine history as performance or performance as history. I look specifically at performance as historiography, at how the performance of a dramatic text in a theatre functions as the act of writing/constructing history. Therefore, I am not discussing living history museum performance as Scott Magelssen does in *Living History Museums: Undoing History Through Performance*. While Freddie Rokem provides useful insights in *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*, his analysis lacks a feminist lens and focuses largely on major events in history: the French Revolution and the Holocaust. In focusing on events such as these, Rokem reinforces a patriarchal periodization of history that elides the contributions of women because they did not write or act as much in the history-making events.

**Review of Literature:**

Emma Stebbins published *Charlotte Cushman: Her Letters and Memoirs of Her Life* two years after Cushman’s death. While others also published biographies of Cushman during her lifetime and soon after her death, Stebbins’s memoir rose as the one history remembered and was republished in 1972. The next major biography of Cushman is Joseph Leach’s 1970 *Bright Particular Star: The Life and Times of Charlotte Cushman*. The definitive biography on Charlotte Cushman, however, is Lisa Merrill’s 1999 *When Romeo was a Woman: Charlotte Cushman and Her Circle of Female Spectators*. Merrill pulls largely from Emma Stebbins’s memoir of Cushman and builds upon archived letters to, from, and about Cushman. Though Merrill does not fully discuss her review of literature, she has examined most everything written about Cushman while she was alive, after her death, and through the twenty-first century. *When Romeo was a Woman* is the first written work to fully explore how Cushman constructed herself for others, her sexuality, and how she (and especially her sexuality) were constructed after her death.

Several relatively recent articles consider the construction of Cushman’s gender and sexuality. These articles include Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix’s “Acting Between the Spheres: Charlotte Cushman as Androgyne” and Denise Walen’s “Such a Romeo as We Had Never

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Interestingly, a very similar biography was published around the same time: Julia Markus’s *Across an Untried Sea: Discovering Lives Hidden in the Shadow of Convention and Time*, New York: Knopf, 2000. While Markus does not focus solely on Cushman, the ideas she puts forward on Cushman are similar to Merrill’s but are written in a narrative form and lacks the academic quality of Merrill’s (little to no footnotes, weaves information together without identifying sources).
Ventured to Hope For’: Charlotte Cushman.” They focus largely on qualities of Cushman’s personality and her performance of breeches roles both of which she had to negotiate in relation to standards of femininity in the United States and England in the nineteenth-century. These articles also consider Cushman’s sexuality in her personal life and how her performances onstage and their reception (especially among female audiences) fluidly and contradictorily revealed and hid her sexuality.

Charlotte Cushman appears as a character in two plays: Carolyn Gage’s *The Last Reading of Charlotte Cushman* and Peter Parnell’s *Romance Language*. Set as a public reading in 1875, *The Last Reading of Charlotte Cushman* features Cushman discussing her life, her major roles, and her history of lovers. Based on and imaginatively expanding upon biographical details of Cushman’s life, Gage never cites in the dialogue, stage directions, or notes what historical sources she used to construct Cushman. Gage is not interested in subtly negotiating the terms in which Cushman understood her gender and sexuality during her lifetime. Instead, Gage clearly foregrounds Cushman’s lesbianism in twenty-first century terms. While I do not wish to discount the possibility of reading the play for its historiographical endeavor, its attempt to mimetically recreate Cushman giving Shakespearean readings as a twenty-first century lesbian fails to problematize the representational nature of history and to contextualize Cushman within the discourses of her own time. The play certainly lacks the dramaturgical and performance devices Fondakowski creates to reveal the constructions of the play and of Cushman within the play and history. So while this play stages a historical woman, I do not quite consider it as performance as historiography. The character Charlotte Cushman also appears in Peter Parnell’s *Romance Language*. She is one of twenty-two other real and fictional nineteenth-century characters including Walt Whitman, Huckleberry Finn, Louisa May Alcott, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Parnell fictionalizes a lesbian relationship between Cushman and Emily Dickinson, who never met in real life.

Dissertations written about the Tectonic Theatre Project address Tectonic’s collaborative process, their construction of history, and their plays *Gross Indecency* and *The Laramie Project*. Rich Brown’s *Moisés Kaufman: The Search for New Forms* is the most substantive work on Tectonic right now. Brown discusses Kaufman’s development as a director, the founding of Tectonic, the development of Moment Work, and application of “theoretical questions and rehearsal techniques” from his work at New York University to the development of *Gross Indecency*.
Indecency and The Laramie Project (iv). He writes extensively on Moment Work, its application to both Gross Indecency and The Laramie Project, and the tensions in collaborative work between Kaufman and his collaborators. Lisa Hayes Theatricalizing Oral History: How British and American Theatre Artists Explore Current Events and Contemporary Politics in the Journey from Interview to Performance provides a strong dramaturgical analysis of The Laramie Project and how the collection of oral histories shaped the structure of the play. Terry Stoller’s Staging Local and Oral History in America: Maryat Lee’s EcoTheater, Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble, and Tectonic Theater Project analyzes and problematizes Kaufman’s definitive construction of Laramie, Wyoming in The Laramie Project. Like Brown, she explores the tensions between the collaborative process and the authority of the director, Kaufman. Academic journal articles written about Tectonic Theater Project mostly focus on The Laramie Project and the interplay between form (in a very broad sense, documentary theatre) and content (the conduction and editing of interviews and historical documents).

The dissertations I have examined all include personal interviews with Kaufman and others who have worked on Tectonic productions including Fondakowski. There are currently no journal articles or thesis/dissertations devoted solely to Fondakowski. Moebius, a publication of California Polytechnic State University’s College of Liberal Arts, featured an interview with Fondakowski for their 2010 issue. In the interview she discusses The Laramie Project, Moment Work, The People’s Temple, the role of theatre in society, and her latest work on Charlotte Cushman. Fondakowski has written and directed two plays that are currently unpublished: “I Think I Like Girls” and “The People’s Temple.” She was the head writer of The Laramie Project, the co-screenwriter for its adaptation for HBO, and a co-writer of The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later.

While Charlotte Canning’s article “Feminist Performance as Feminist Historiography” lies at the center of my argument, Canning has not yet written anything else that furthers the ideas in this article. I have not found any other scholarship using Canning’s idea of how the feminist performance of a dramatic text of a historical woman functions as feminist historiography. Ryan Claycomb completed a dissertation examining life-writing and feminist drama entitled, “Playing at Lives: Life Writing and Contemporary Feminist Drama.” He divides his analysis into three types of life-writing feminist drama: autobiography, where the performer
and the performed subject are ostensibly the same;\(^7\) biography, which feature multi-person casts and the playwright is not the subject portrayed; and docudrama, where the playwright collects oral histories and constructs the play using it. Claycomb’s chapter on feminist biographical drama and his article “Playing at Lives: Biography and Contemporary Feminist Drama” have the most relevance for my study. “Casa Cushman” fits within what he understands as feminist biographical drama as it features a multi-person cast and the protagonist is a historical woman. His analysis of feminist biographical dramas, however, focuses largely on how contemporary feminist playwrights use historical women’s lives to advocate contemporary feminist polemic. Unlike my study, he does not attempt to read the plays as historiography or how they might contribute to the historiography of the subject.

Claycomb’s chapter and article on feminist biographical drama is the only study I have found on the performance of historical women that features multi-person casts. While much has been written about the history of print and performed feminist autobiography, less has been written on the construction of feminist biography or feminist biographical performance.\(^8\) What can be agreed upon is that for women, autobiography brings women’s experiences into the public sphere and creates voice and embodiment for women whether in publication or performance. Co-editors of *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women’s Autobiography* Lynn C. Miller and Jacqueline Taylor provide useful definitions to differentiate between “auto/biography” and “autobiography” in performance. They define the term “auto/biography” as “first-person performances of significant historical or literary figures” (5). They call it “auto/biography” because “this kind of historical presentation represents a negotiation between the autobiographical self of the writer-performer and the biographical record of the historical personage” (7). The term “autobiography” denotes simply the “performance of self,” the performance of one’s own life experiences (5). This is an important differentiation because

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\(^7\) Due to space, I am oversimplifying autobiographical performance. As a genre, autobiographical performance problematizes notions of “truth” and “narrative,” meaning that the performer and the performed subject are not the same. For more see Postlewait, “Theatre Autobiographies” 165.

contemporary performances of historical women often take an auto/biographical form as one-woman shows.

Theatrical treatments of historical women often feature elements of auto/biography and autobiography and use autobiographical texts as primary sources in constructing the play. *Voices Made Flesh* includes six essays describing the process of creating and/or scripts of auto/biographical performances of historical women. The historical women include Anaïs Nin, Gertrude Stein, Mary Church Terrell, Calamity Jane, Georgia O’Keeffe, and even Charlotte Cushman. Other theatrical treatments of historical women include Anne Ludlum’s one-woman play *Shame the Devil!: An Audience with Fanny Kemble*, an example of auto/biography about Fanny Kemble drawing upon documents (reviews, letters) and excerpts from some of her roles. Claire Luckham’s *The Dramatic Attitudes of Miss Fanny Kemble* is also about Fanny Kemble but features a cast of eight. The second act originates from Kemble’s own *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation* (an autobiographical text). Edna O’Brien also writes about Virginia Woolf in *Virginia*, which features a cast of three: Woolf, a man who doubles as her father and later her husband, and her lover. Dacia Maraini’s *Mary Stuart* is about Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart and features a cast of two (each actor plays a queen and a servant to the other queen). Denise Stoklos adapted Maraini’s play into the one-woman (auto/biographical) *Denise Stoklos in Mary Stuart*. Of these plays, only the auto/biographies (featuring only one actor) use direct address to the audience. *Shame the Devil*, Elyse Lamm Pineau’s *My Life with Anaïs*, and Catherine Rogers’ *Georgia O’Keefe x Catherine Rogers*, all verbally cite documents used in constructing the dialogue. The other plays, though often based on documents and research, do not.

In the introduction to *Auto/biography and Identity: Women, Theatre and Performance*, editors Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner talk specifically about the importance of autobiography and auto/biography to women in theatre. They identify that though much has been written on

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11 Gale and Gardner use the terms “autobiography” and “auto/biography” interchangeably without explaining what they mean by each term. The essays included deal with examining written women’s autobiographies, women
women and autobiography, it has only been “in recent years that the analysis of autobiography and the autobiographical self, especially in the context of performance, has produced publications which deal more specifically with theatre and the boundaries between gender, theatre and autobiographical form” (1). The autobiographical form has not only been important in revealing and understanding women’s history. It has, more specifically and more recently, become especially important to the history of women in theatre: a place where women transcended gender boundaries in the very act of appearing on the public stage. As Gale and Gardner point out, another reason autobiography is important to women in theatre is that it is an “attempt to re-insert themselves, not as individuals, but as part of a constructed ‘group identity’ or community, into a theatre history, a cultural moment or a performance space, from which they—as women—have been rendered ‘absent’ or ‘disappeared’” (4). Thus history doubly silenced women in theatre: within theatre history itself and history’s general disavowal for a medium that, as Peggy Phelan notes, “becomes itself through disappearance” (146).

Methodology:

This thesis uses a feminist methodological lens. The term “feminist” carries a variety of connotations and denotations, so let me clarify how I use the term. The relationship between queer theory and feminist theory is extremely complex and it is not my purpose here to tease out their historical and theoretical overlaps. I have chosen to use the term “feminist” as opposed to lesbian-feminist because I feel that lesbian-feminist is too limiting a term when examining the sexuality of pre-twentieth century American and British women. I do not wish to search just for lesbians in history but argue for the close examination of historical women’s sexuality in time periods in which women were not considered to be capable of any form of sexual desire. I have not chosen to claim a queer theory lens because in dealing with historical women, being born of the female sex presents very specific challenges in assembling historiography. Elin Diamond explains “perhaps all theories that call themselves ‘feminist’ share a goal; an engaged analysis of sex and gender in material social relations and in discursive and representational structures, especially theater and film, which involve scopic pleasure and the body” (Unmaking Mimesis).
43). It is this goal and this lens that I strive for while using queer theory and lesbian-feminist theories to strengthen my analysis.

**Definition of Terms:**

As I said before, this thesis does not examine the Tectonic canon or the development of their play construction techniques. For the purposes of a dramaturgical analysis, however, it is helpful to briefly define “Moment Work” and “Moments.” A production at Tectonic begins with a “hunch:” “the unformed impulse that pulls you into a rehearsal space where you can unpack it” (Brown 17). The director then takes “his collaborators into a workshop space where they open it up and discover that they are not interested in it—other times they are completely interested” (Brown 18). While the exploration of this hunch might involve Moment Work, once they determine interest, Moment Work fully begins. With interest and the hunch, the director finds the “‘organizing principle,’ which is a tool against which the work is measured to determine whether or not individual Moments fit the scope of the overall work and should be included or excluded” (Brown 18). Moisés Kaufman defines Moment Work in the introduction to *The Laramie Project* as “a method to create and analyze theater from a structuralist (or tectonic) perspective” (xiv). A play is divided into Moments, which are different than scenes. Kaufman continues, “For that reason, there are no scenes in this play [*The Laramie Project*], only moments. A moment does not mean a change of locale or an entrance or exit of actors or characters. It is simply a unit of theatrical time that is then juxtaposed with other units to convey meaning” (xiv). Moment Work is the term used to describe the *process* of creating Moments. The term Moment indicates the structural building blocks of the play. Moment Work demands that all artists, designers, actors, and writers, participate in creating Moments. Kaufman explains,

> We encourage the company members to think about Moments as blocks. And the way that you do that is that you get up on stage, and you say, ‘I begin,’ and you do a Moment. A Moment can be a three hour monologue, the way that you use a prop or a set piece in the theatre, a piece of music, a light cue, anything—anything that explores the vocabulary of the stage. At the end you say, ‘I end.’ So you impose the unit of time. You say, ‘I

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13 I capitalize Moment and Moment Work throughout this thesis to denote these words as concepts specific to the Tectonic Theater Project’s process. The capitalization of these words is inconsistent among academic work on Tectonic.
begin.’ You do it. And you say, ‘I end.’ And that is a Moment” (Kaufman qtd in Brown 70).

While original productions all utilize Moment Work and Moments, “no two Tectonic Theater Project works are created in exactly the same manner,” meaning that each production must be adapted to the subject/material at hand (Brown 71).14

Chapter Overview:

Chapter I argues that to function as performance as historiography, the playwright must act as a historian going into the archive to gather sources, contextualizing the sources, and eventually using them to construct a narrative. Thus, Fondakowski acts as a historian in the construction of “Casa Cushman.” This chapter examines Fondakowski’s journey into the archive and the specific problems she encountered with the predominantly autobiographical sources she found. Using theatre historians Tracy Davis and Thomas Postlewait, I examine the specific problems of assembling sources to historicize actresses and contextualizing these sources within a sociohistorical context when writing the histories of American and British actresses. I then examine the problems of locating Cushman’s sexuality within these documents using historians Jennifer Terry, Martha Vicinus, Robert Schanke, and Kim Marra. I suggest that the problems within these sources began shaping the approach Fondakowski took in constructing the play and greatly influenced the dramaturgical and performances devices that establish the play as performance as historiography.

Chapter II compares the process of constructing “Casa Cushman” to the construction of a written biography or historiography. As performance as historiography, the writing of the performances takes similar approaches to the writing of historiography. I carefully analyze the earliest draft of “Casa Cushman,” the August 2009 version, and identify several dramaturgical devices Fondakowski created to present to the audience how she used documents to construct the play. The August 2009 version contains very little imagined dialogue and predominantly uses dialogue quoted directly from sources. While this version clearly reveals how Fondakowski constructed the text of the play, I explain how this version fails to utilize the theatrical vocabulary available and succeeds more as dramaturgy as historiography than performance as

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14 I will discuss the ongoing construction of “Casa Cushman” using Moments and Moment Work throughout the thesis.
historiography, which limits its ability to critically examine history differently than written forms of historiography and thus provide new insights.

Chapter III provides a close analysis of the dramaturgical and performance devices in the January 2011 version of “Casa Cushman.” Using Elin Diamond’s and Canning’s readings of “doing” and “done,” I argue that performance as historiography creates meanings through problematizing the representation of sources in the interweavings of the “doing/done” of history and the “doing/done” of performance. To be considered performance as historiography, the play must balance dramaturgical devices with performance devices to fully utilize the theatrical vocabulary that differentiates performance as historiography from print historiography. I argue that the replacement of verbal citations from the August 2009 version to visual citations in the January 2011 version largely makes this version succeed more as performance as historiography through problematizing the representational nature of not just history but of the primary sources used to construct it.

The Conclusion synthesizes the discoveries made in each chapter and offers what an analysis of “Casa Cushman” as performance as historiography offers in thinking about the larger field of historiography.
CHAPTER I: The Playwright as Historian

As explained in the Introduction, Fondakowski initially became interested in the “Casa Cushman” project because of the image of the visibly buxom Cushman as Romeo and “what was it energetically that the viewer could project a masculine soul or a masculine entity onto this clearly female form” (Personal Interview). As Fondakowski began Moment Work to see if a project might be possible with the love letters, she discovered a connection between the letters and the contemporary actors working with them.  

She explains that she was not only interested in:

the aspect of gender but with this question of the ephemerality of acting. I was struck when working with actors on this [“Casa Cushman”] and their devotion to a profession that is in many ways becoming an outdated medium as compared to television, and their devotion to the love of the theatre and their almost embracing the ephemerality of that art form. Some of the most moving moments of working on the play was sitting around the table with a group of actresses reading these letters raw and the group contemplation on the meaning of theatre in our lives and our love and our devotion to it as an art form. (Personal Interview)

So in addition to exploring the nature of female desire evidenced in the love letters and Cushman’s performance of gender as Romeo, one of the incipient questions in the construction of the play became Cushman’s own question, “What is or can be the record of an actress however famous?” (Cushman qtd. in Stebbins 11).

Cushman’s question is important for several reasons. At first glance, the answer to the question may seem easy: an actress leaves behind reviews, programs, perhaps an autobiography, photographs, illustrations, portraits, and diaries. Since the late seventeenth century, the archive saved and stored more of the documents of European and American actresses than most other historical women. As we will see in my reading of Tracy Davis’s “Questions for a Feminist Methodology in Theatre History,” this is not to say that actresses necessarily have an abundance of sources in the archive because their itinerant lifestyle made saving documents difficult. My point is simply that they do have more documents in the archive than most historical women.
profession, saved them. There are several problems with these sources, however; the first is that a performance cannot be recreated through reviews, programs, photos, or the memories of those who saw it. These sources also provide a second problem: they have been written in a particular time and place, and thus are subject to hegemonic discourses that marginalize according to sex, gender, sexuality, race, and class. Actresses already disturbed and complicated gender and sexuality norms by entering the public sphere, forcing them to consciously construct and promote formulaic narratives of their lives that deemphasized their transgression into the public sphere.

In an analysis of “Casa Cushman” as performance as historiography, this chapter argues that for performance to function as a historiographical endeavor, the playwright must work as a historian to analyze and fill in the gaps that the archival sources leave. To construct the life of an actress, on- or off-stage, historians must learn to read against the grain in a variety of ways and, as we will see in the following chapters, performance and dramaturgical devices can facilitate this kind of reading. This chapter chronicles Fondakowski’s journey into the archive and her discovery that the primary sources available on Cushman left many gaps, especially in constructing a narrative of Cushman’s sexuality. Using theatre historians Tracy Davis and Thomas Postlewait, I examine the inherent problems with many archival sources of American and British actresses and use their methodologies to unpack Cushman’s sources. The problems Davis and Postlewait point out in the historiography of theatre as a cultural art form and performance, not just as a collection of reviews and dramatic texts, correlates with the problems Fondakowski found in writing the play. Ultimately, though, an analysis of Cushman, and most especially pre-twentieth century women, requires a lens through which to examine presences and silences within the sources that often simultaneously signal and hide her sexuality. The lack of explicit evidences of Cushman’s sexuality and her understanding of the nature of female desire parallel with the problems Jennifer Terry and Martha Vicinus outline in creating lesbian, or “deviant,” historiography.

Ultimately, the questions of the ephemerality of performance, the nature of female desire, and the construction of gender and sexuality enter an inseparable space in the historiography of “Casa Cushman.” Without Cushman’s fame as an actress, her records may not have been saved. Without the descriptions of performances of gender and sexuality onstage in reviews and letters/diaries of those who saw her, perhaps her performances offstage would be even more
difficult to describe or theorize about. Cushman in many ways was an anomaly in her success as an actress who often read as “masculine” onstage and demanded equality with her male counterparts. The unusualness of her career, however, does not negate the possibility of using the historiography of Cushman and specifically “Casa Cushman,” as an example of how to read against the grain for the other, lesser-known women marginalized in history. I propose that “Casa Cushman” is not a work of historical fiction, but is a historiographical endeavor no less historically legitimate because theatre is used as the medium rather than a written biography, essay, or article. There are many stories to be told and Fondakowski, as playwright and historian, is telling one of them in a medium that allows a greater range of sensual/phenomenological knowledge than print alone that reveals aspects not just of Cushman’s life but the lives of women all around her.

Fondakowski knew that she did not simply want to create a staged version of *When Romeo was a Woman* or to stage the love letters from the viewpoint Merrill creates in the biography. She explains,

> But then over the course of time, I realized that I wanted to go to the primary sources. Not just from her [Merrill’s] biography, from her point of view. So I started doing a lot of the primary research myself. My dramaturg, Sarah Lambert, and I spent time in DC and the New York City Public Library and various libraries transcribing material ourselves so that we could have the primary documents. (Personal Interview)

The primary sources Fondakowski uses includes two memoirs: Emma Stebbins’s published *Charlotte Cushman: Her Letters and Memories of her Life* (1879) and Emma Crow Cushman’s unfinished and unpublished “Charlotte Cushman: A Memoir” (1918) located in the Library of Congress. Among the collection at the Library of Congress, Fondakowski also examined a scrapbook of reviews Cushman kept. Fondakowski also used portions of Cushman’s only extant diary that follows her journey across the Atlantic to England in 1844 as well as the transcribed love letters Merrill provided. Other primary sources she examined included Cushman’s promptbooks, out-of-print plays Cushman performed in, photographs, and portraits. Some of the

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19 These letters are also available in the Library of Congress. The process of transcribing them, however, has taken Merrill nearly ten years because of the fading ink, the tiny handwriting, and the nineteenth-century convention of using all of the paper, including the margins. Therefore, Fondakowski chose to use the transcribed letters Merrill provided rather than attempt to transcribe them herself.
primary resources they found in the libraries “were referenced in Lisa Merrill’s but some of them we went out and got on our own” (Personal Interview).

As Fondakowski quickly discovered, however, an empirical or positivist approach to piecing these documents together did not help her understand Cushman. In the previous plays she worked on as a writer (The Laramie Project, The People’s Temple, and Laramie Project: Ten Years Later), she never invented text but instead quoted words directly from archival research and interview transcripts. The Tectonic plays Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde, The Laramie Project, and The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later all use found texts to construct dialogue and do not invent the text of the dialogue. To compare solely using “found text” in these plays to merely a recitation of the words in documents, however, is a gross oversimplification. Each play problematizes through dramaturgical and performance devices the questions: “What is the truth?” What is history and how can theatre construct and reconstruct it? Who is telling whose stories?” (Brown 154). While my purpose is not to closely analyze Tectonic’s process in using found text, I hope to contextualize the close connection Fondakowski felt in initially using only found text and not inventing text for “Casa Cushman.” As Fondakowski explains,

Part of how I work is exhaustively researching the history. And then my first approach was to try to make the play only from the documents...That was the very first one. I didn’t invent text. I didn’t make up words for people. I was trying to write only from the

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20 Theatre critics and historians often associate some of Tectonic Theater Project’s techniques in writing and producing original works with “documentary theatre” or “docudrama.” Kaufman, however, argues against the terms “theatrical journalism” and “documentary theatre” in relation to Tectonic “because he feels they [the terms] are usually presented and understood by most audiences as communicating an objective truth, while he believes that his plays are not necessarily about that single truth” (Brown 154). The genre of documentary theatre, however, is extremely difficult to define. In his dissertation on Moisés Kaufman, Rich Brown uses Melissa Salz-Bernstein’s perhaps oversimplified definition of documentary theatre. Melissa Salz-Bernstein defines it as “a dramatic text or performance that uses primary source material” (81). Gary Fisher Dawson, however, devotes the entirety of his book Documentary Theatre in the United States: An Historical Survey and Analysis of Its Content, Form, and Stagecraft to chronicling the development of documentary theatre in the United States and working towards a definition. Therefore, in order to understand why Kaufman dislikes the term “documentary” in relation to Tectonic, Kaufman needs to explain how he defines the term.

21 Despite the multiple uses of the term documentary theatre, “Casa Cushman” may signal a significant shift in Tectonic’s use of found text and may work towards a new form for Tectonic. For more on the use of found text in Gross Indecency and Laramie Project specifically, see Brown. Indeed, Gross Indecency and “Casa Cushman” parallel each other in many of the ways they present history. As “Casa Cushman” continues to develop, a closer analysis of the two plays will be necessary. I have chosen not to give a closer analysis here because the focus of this thesis is feminist historiography and the performance of historical women.
words that existed. And then I just reached a point where I realized that that just wasn’t going to be dramatic enough and I needed to fill in the blanks. (Personal Interview)

There are several concurring conversations in theatre historiography that I believe situate Fondakowski’s need to “fill in the blanks” well within the field of theatre historiography and not just the need to tell a good (fictionalized) story/compelling historical fiction, or to sacrifice good history for an even better story. Thus, Fondakowski ultimately uses dramaturgy and performance devices as a historiographical tool to construct from and fill in the gaps of the primary sources available on Cushman. Let us then examine the inherent problems within the sources that forced historians (especially those working from feminist and queer theoretical perspectives) to move well beyond empirical historiography.

Davis warns against taking primary sources, including but not limited to autobiography, concerning theatre women’s lives at surface value in the germinal article “Questions for a Feminist Methodology in Theatre History.”22 Davis articulates the inherent problems in specifically creating feminist theatre historiography and suggests some possible solutions. Davis explains that simply “fill[ing] in the ‘female blanks’ of history” is not enough. Theatre women’s lives must also be analyzed in the context of theatre’s and women’s positions in society in a particular place and time (64). Though Postlewait identifies an abundance of actresses’ autobiographies and the problems therein (“Theatre Autobiographies” 159), Davis points out another problem in the historiography of actresses: “Performers’ itinerant, eccentric lives are not conducive to the collection and subsequent deposition of manuscript correspondence, diaries, and professional records (such as contracts and résumés), and this compounds the elitist record of theatre history” (64). Not only that, the collection of such materials often results in a “theatre history that assembles primary sources (textual, visual, and tactile) to describe but not to analyze performance” (65, my emphasis). A description fails to analyze “the meaning of productions”

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22 Though Davis’s text is old, the problems it outlines are still relevant in feminist historiography as well as presciently calling for “different analytical tools and source materials...than in nonart history” (76). Charlotte Canning and Thomas Postlewait in the Introduction to Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography (2010) note the continued importance of Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance, the collection in which Davis’s article originally appeared. Canning and Postlewait explain: “From the beginning we saw the need to clarify the relationship between our new volume and the predecessor, Interpreting the Theatrical Past...Of course, as we understood, Interpreting the Theatrical Past was a product of its time—a transforming moment in the discipline...The genealogy was part of the task, even though we did not wish to rethink, reformulate, or reconstitute Interpreting the Theatrical Past. Despite our apparent echoing of its title by calling our new book Representing the Past, we did not conceive of the new collection as a revision or replacement. We were clear on this basic matter: though the new book might be a companion to Interpreting the Theatrical Past, it was not to be put forward as a supplement” (3).
Fondakowski’s first version of “Casa Cushman” may well have run into this problem, simply piecing sources together. Without feminist theory to read between the gaps left in documents from actresses’ “itinerant, eccentric lives” as well as their social and economic status in society, simply “filling in the gaps” will only perpetuate a system of historiography that erased them in the first place. Davis suggests that theatre history itself requires “different analytical tools and source materials…than in nonart history” (76). Thinking of performance as historiography, and specifically how “Casa Cushman” exemplifies this, might provide some of these “different analytical tools and source materials.” Davis continues to explain that feminist theory could then help create a “new range of sources, broaden the intellectual base, and identify hitherto ignored or undervalued data as well as reexamining the familiar” (76). That is, feminist theory could aid not only in creating historiographies of women in theatre but in the process for creating historiographies of performance.23

Without a theoretical historiographical lens then, the sources used in constructing “Casa Cushman” present many problems. According to Stebbins, Cushman never kept a diary after the 1844 diary. She explains that Cushman’s “life in England very soon became too full to allow the time for any such expression” (39-40). Whether her schedule prevented her from keeping diaries or the need to construct her life narrative in a way that hid her desire for women prevented her from keeping written documentation of her feelings is debatable. While the love letters reveal much about Cushman’s feelings, they are one-sided. Either Cushman destroyed the letters Crow wrote her as she asked Crow to do or they were destroyed through other means. The scrapbook of reviews in the Library of Congress shows that someone clearly marked out portions of the reviews that criticized Cushman’s performance. The marked out reviews, however, do not clearly tell us who did the marking or for what purpose. Neither did Cushman ever pen her own autobiography. Instead, Stebbins published a memoir on Cushman two years after her death. Crow began and never finished a memoir on Cushman nearly forty years after Cushman’s death. Besides providing an inconsistent timeline, these sources are also problematic because the vast majority are autobiographical sources. As Postlewait outlines in “Autobiography and Theatre History” (1989) and “Theatre Autobiographies: Some Preliminary Concerns for the Historian”

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23 Canning’s essay “Feminist Performance as Feminist Historiography” in many ways echoes Davis’s essay. Written nearly fifteen years apart, the presence of Canning’s essay attests to the continued need to implement feminist theories into historiography, to use source materials not always deemed “acceptable” within the larger history profession, and to rethink how performance fits into historiographical endeavors.
autobiographical sources are problematic, but not unusable, largely in the blurring of fact and fiction. Postlewait identifies “diaries, journals, notebooks, and collected letters” as autobiographical material making Cushman’s letters, diary, promptbooks, and to some extent the edited scrapbook autobiographical materials (“Theatre Autobiographies” 166). In addition to these “familiar forms” of autobiography Postlewait names twelve additional types of theatre autobiography. Of these, Stebbins’s and Crow’s memoirs are similar to the fourth category: “An autobiography by a child, wife, husband, mother, father, friend, relative, or close acquaintance of someone famous…the primary purpose, interest, and value of the autobiography resides in its reflections on that other person, whom the writer remembers—and sometimes defends or attacks” (“Theatre Autobiographies” 167). Stebbins and Crow are not, however, writing their own autobiographies. Instead, they focus solely on their memories of Cushman. Stebbins’s work is also similar to Postlewait’s first category of theatre autobiography: “Collections of miscellaneous personal statements, reflections, interviews, reviews, essays, and/or legal documents that are brought together, usually by someone else, often after the death of the theatre person” (166). Stebbins collects her own memories of Cushman, Cushman’s own words, letters written to and from Cushman, and the memories of others who knew Cushman.

While Stebbins’s and Crow’s works might also be called biography, several circumstances place these documents in the theoretical realm of “auto/biography.” As both women were extremely close to Cushman, both had a personal stake in the representations of Cushman, in how they wanted others to remember her, and how they wanted others to remember their relationships to her. Stanley explains that “the notion of auto/biography’ involves the insistence that accounts of other lives influence how we see and understand our own and that our understandings of our own lives will impact upon how we interpret other lives” (Stanley, “Introduction” i). The term “auto/biography” largely signals the subjectivity of the writer of biography (auto), the biographical subject (biography), and the intersubjectivity between the two (/). Stanley discusses this in terms of a biographer and biographical subject who did not know each other. So while Stebbins’s and Crow’s works may not be considered “autobiographical” in the sense that they write the memories of their own lives, they do problematize a strict division
between autobiography and biography. Both fit very near to some of Postlewait’s twelve types of autobiography and within Stanley’s “notion of auto/biography.” Therefore, I identify both works as “auto/biography” and as such, specifically examine how Stebbins’s memoir parallels, if not entirely enacts, many of the historiographical problems Postlewait identifies in theatre autobiographies.

In his 2000 article, Postlewait notes that “little attention has been given to [theatre autobiographies’] numbers, variety, purposes, audiences, and historical significance” (“Theatre Autobiographies” 159). He also notes that “despite the growing interest in such issues as business practices, the careers of women, the nature of audiences, and the cultural status of the theatre, no one to my knowledge has systematically used autobiographies to get at any of these matters” (159). Despite a growth in edited collections concerning autobiography, performance, and women, Gale and Gardner make a similar observation to Postlewait’s in the introduction to their 2004 Auto/Biography and Identity: Women, Theatre and Performance. They note that …very few publications have looked at autobiographical writing in relation to women actors’ or other female theatre workers’ lives, the analysis or representation of self in a professional or national context, and the relationship between autobiography as evidence and historiographic practice. Nor have actresses’ autobiographies been used in more general investigations of gender and autobiography which, considering the relative volume of performers’ autobiographies to non-performer’s works, is perhaps surprising and may reflect the perceived particularity of the actress’ public/private self. (2)

This is not to say that theatre scholarship has not used autobiographies as sources, but that few have provided a methodological framework of how to mine them for social and cultural contexts larger than the autobiographical subject as well as how to account for the interplay of fact and fiction. Part of the problem Fondakowski and other scholars working with autobiographical material faces then is a lack of scholarship and theoretical frameworks through which to read the peculiarities of written autobiographies.

24 Donnell and Polkey point out, “One of the principal points that have been contested within feminist analysis of women’s personal narratives concerns the deployment of key terms: auto/biography, (auto)biography, autography, autbiothanatography, octobiography” (xxii). The feminist analysis of women’s personal narratives seems to occupy a rather fluid space where the strict categorization of terms has not yet been created.

25 See Miller et al, Heddon, and Smith and Watson

26 They list Mary Jean Corbett’s Representing Femininity: Middle Class Subjectivity in Victorian and Edwardian Women’s Autobiographies (1994) as a “notable exception” (2).
Stebbins’s memoir of Cushman, as auto/biography, presents many of the problems Postlewait outlines in theatre autobiography, especially those of actress’s autobiographies, even though Cushman did not write it. Stebbins attempts to organize the book chronologically beginning with the settlement of Cushman’s ancestors in America and ending with how the public remembered Cushman after her death. Stebbins uses her memories of Cushman, close acquaintances’ memories of Cushman, letters and anecdotes Cushman wrote, and letters written to Cushman; however, Stebbins awkwardly pieces her sources together so that there is a jumble of narratives, some of them written during the time period explored and some of them memories of that period written decades later. Stebbins’ also inserts anecdotes and thoughts randomly throughout the book that do not always follow a clear narrative purpose and add to the piecemeal feeling of the overall book. Though not a work of high literary value, it is still of historical value despite its reliance on memories and anecdotes of questionable validity.

Postlewait lays out several factors to consider when interpreting theatre autobiography. He points out that the simultaneous development of the autobiography and the novel, meaning autobiographies also have “narrative qualities” (“Autobiography” 253). Therefore, once any “factual errors and unreliable anecdotes” have been identified, the theatre historian should then analyze “their style, voice, plotting, characterization, typology, themes, and genre—that define them, at least in part, as literary texts” (253). Moreover, the theatre historian should “ask period by period, what are the generic, social, financial, vocational, and moral functions of autobiographies” (257-258). Theatre autobiographies occupy a slippery territory between historical fact and fiction. Many historians and biographers do “attempt to identify cases of falsehood and fraud, to establish criteria of possibility, and to apply rules of probability” yet they often end up “accept[ing] and repeat[ing] many statements that lack credibility” (“Theatre Autobiographies” 160). Literary scholars often have the opposite problem because they “focus attention on those works that satisfy high standards of literary quality” and do not examine the historical accuracy within these works (162, 171-172). Postlewait postulates that the examination of how theatre autobiographies occupy both spaces of historical fact and fiction is the most useful analysis for the theatre historian. Instead of reading them as “straightforward historical documents,” they “require interpretation, not just neat dissection into true and false categories” (“Autobiography” 259). A playwright, acting as historian, can interpret documents
dramaturgically (to tell a story) and performatively (interpreting through a performance medium as opposed to a print medium) to add insight to the historiography of the historicized subject.

While a full analysis of the Stebbins’s memoir of Cushman is not possible here, I will examine the first chapter entitled “Genealogical Sketch of the Cushman Family” to demonstrate some of the inherent problems of autobiography, especially actresses’ autobiographies, and how they apply to Stebbins’s memoir. The first chapter provides a genealogy of Cushman’s family going back to 1580, which functions as a way to position Cushman within a well-established American family and tempers any perceived ambition of Cushman’s to pursue a career in acting. Stebbins explains:

To interpret justly a noble character, it becomes necessary to search out all its springs of action, to follow up and grasp carefully the subtle links which bind it to the past, have swayed it through life, and still stretch onward through influence and example into the illimitable future. The antecedents of such a character as that of Miss Cushman, even as far back as we can trace them, cannot but be of importance and interest, not only to those who loved her as few have ever been loved, but to that large public who knew her only in her work, but over whom she held the sway of a master-spirit, and between whom and herself existed the never-failing attraction of a powerful and magnetic sympathy. (2)

This quotation reveals Stebbins’s awareness of the three audiences Postlewait identifies for which a theatre person writes and shapes an autobiography. The first audience is “members of one’s intimate circles” (“Autobiography” 258). Stebbins speaks to this audience in the line “those who loved her as few have ever been loved.” The next audience is the “the general public” (258), which Stebbins addresses as “that large public who knew her only in her word.” The last audience is “the future” (258). Stebbins references this audience first in noting the “subtle links which bind it to the past…and still stretch onward through influence and example into the illimitable future.”

As Stebbins’s quote also demonstrates, Stebbins uses the chapter to explicitly connect Cushman’s noble and kind personality traits to her ancestors as well as to explain as logically and modestly as possible how she became an actress. Postlewait explains that actresses’ often “report the development of their careers in terms of…recurring general topics” (“Autobiography” 260). This chapter most clearly demonstrates the topics of “ties with and break from family” and “defenses and demonstrations of their role as mothers, wives, sister, or
unmarried women” (“Autobiography” 260). By firmly establishing Cushman’s family line, Stebbins attempts to shape Cushman’s path to becoming an actress as a magnification of traits already present in the family, rather than making Cushman an aberration within the family. For example, Cushman, as quoted by Stebbins, defends her proclivity to imitation by pointing back to her family:

This imitative faculty in especial I inherited from my grandmother Babbit, born Mary Saunders, of Gloucester, Cape Ann; afterward the wife of Erasmus Babbit, a lawyer of Sturbridge, Massachusetts; through whom I am connected with Governor Marcy’s family, the Sargents, the Winthrops, the Saunders, and Saltonstalls of Salem, and other well-known families. (14)

Cushman must carefully trace her grandmother’s heritage to qualify the morality of her “imitative faculty.” She also explains that she “inherited from her [mother] the voice which was at first so remarkable and which was the origin of my introduction to the stage” (Cushman qtd. in Stebbins 15). Her uncle, Augustus Babbit, “who led a seafaring life and was lost at sea,” is the person who “first took [her] to the theatre” (15). He eventually became a stockholder of the Tremont Theatre. Cushman then explains through Stebbins’s careful editing that what truly propelled Cushman towards the stage was the failure of her father’s business: “the necessities of the family obliged us to take early advantage of every opportunity for self-sustainment, and my remarkable voice seemed to point plainly in that direction” (Cushman qtd. Stebbins 19). Such a narrative device reinforces the general trope of actresses’ autobiographies “lack[ing] insistence upon ambition and self-determination” (“Autobiography” 266). The financial instability of Cushman’s family drove her to the theatre rather than “ambition and self-determination.”

Postlewait also describes that most actresses’ autobiographies include a chance, but “crucial meeting—the encounter that provides the opportunity or catalyst for success” (“Autobiography” 260). These meetings often occur “with a grand man of the theatre” (260).

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27 Other topics include “dependency on men, moral honor and rectitude (which mainly means sexual identity, practices, and values)…and alternating moods of hope and discouragement.” (“Autobiography” 260)
28 Cushman associates her “imitative powers” as one of the traits that made her “an awful child! full of irresistible life and impulsive will; living fully in the present, looking neither before nor after; as ready to execute as to conceive; full of imagination,—a faculty too often thwarted and warped by the fears of parents and friends that it means insincerity and falsehood, when it is in reality but the spontaneous exercise of faculties as yet unknown even to the possessor, and misunderstood by those so-called trainers of infancy” (Cushman qtd. in Stebbins 14).
29 Though Postlewait does not specifically identify the financial instability of an actress’s family as a narrative device to explain the catalyst that drove her to a public career, it undoubtedly appears in many actresses’ autobiographies.
The first crucial meeting Stebbins relates is not between Cushman and a “grand man of the theatre” but between Cushman and a man nonetheless. The first anecdote Stebbins writes about chronicles an early childhood incident where Cushman, playing among the wharves of her father’s warehouse, fell into the water. The story goes that a “passer-by leaped in, rescued the child, and went his way” never to be seen again (Stebbins 8). That is until years later when “a very respectable old gentleman” appeared one day and asked to see Cushman. He explained that “he was the fortunate individual who had plucked her out of the water and saved her for all that had followed, and how honored and delighted he felt in having been the instrument, etc.” (9). As Postlewait explains, the crucial meeting narrative device “gives power to men and dependency to women” (“Autobiography” 262). By placing this story first in the memoir, in Cushman’s childhood, and outside of the theatre, Stebbins suggests that Cushman was destined for greatness, rather than ambitiously seeking it. As with the story of Cushman’s father’s business failure, the “crucial meeting” downplays and sometimes erases any morsel that could be perceived as ambition from actresses’ autobiographies.

The anecdote also suggests that Cushman would have perished had a man not saved her. Actresses needed to balance how they presented their public and private selves in their autobiographies because “if they did not discuss their private affairs, the assumption was that they had something (usually sexual) to hide. But to provide details made them vulnerable to attacks, misunderstandings, and demands for more information” (“Autobiography” 263). In addition, actresses paid special attention to how they presented their sexuality, as their crossing into the public sphere of the stage automatically made their morals and sexuality suspect. Postlewait explains that an actress’s “public identity and her private life are affected, qualified, and conditioned by the ways society perceives (that is, imagines) her sexual appeal and sexual behavior. To a great extent, then, she perceives herself, her place in the profession, and her place in society in terms of explicit sexual definitions” (264). Postlewait’s analysis of an actress’s sexuality, however, seems to set up a dichotomy between an actress being a moral (heterosexual) woman emphasized in the anecdotes of goodly wives and mothers or an immoral (heterosexual) prostitute. While Postlewait rightly problematizes the narrative devices actresses used to present their sexuality, he limits his analysis to the perceived deviance of the heterosexual prostitute and does not explore the possibilities of actresses’ negotiation of female desire.
Stebbins must balance representations of Cushman’s sexuality, as the morally suspect actress and the possibilities of her female desire, carefully throughout the memoir. The inclusion of the first anecdote of a crucial meeting between Cushman and a man within descriptions of her family tree may be an attempt to immediately place Cushman within patriarchal norms of women as helpless creatures to be saved by men. Yet within the anecdote, Stebbins specifically describes Cushman’s father searching for dry clothes and putting her in a “pair of overalls and a large jacket, called a spencer” (8). That is, men’s clothing. This anecdote, whether intentional or not, cites Cushman’s success as a breeches actress and the male attire she wore at times in public. Could the anecdote then be coded to speak to a lesbian audience? Soon after this anecdote, Stebbins discusses Cushman’s identification as a “tomboy:”

The precious memoranda of Charlotte Cushman’s earliest days in Boston open with the following sentence: ‘I was born a tomboy.’ In those days this epithet, ‘tomboy,’ was applied to all little girls who showed the least tendency toward thinking and acting for themselves. It was the advance-guard of that army of opprobrious epithets which has since been lavished so freely upon the pioneers of woman’s advancement and for a long time the ugly little phrase had power to keep the dangerous feminine element within what was considered to be the due bounds of propriety and decorum. Things which now any young girl can do as freely as her brother, many of the games which were considered strictly and exclusively masculine, are now open to both sexes alike, to the manifest benefit of the limbs, muscles, and general development of the future mothers of the race. (13)

This statement seems to more explicitly point to ambition than Postlewait’s analysis of narrative devices within actresses’ autobiographies. Mullenix points out the significance “that upon reflection, Cushman selected this term [tomboy] to describe herself, thus recognizing her own transgression and attempting to escape discourses of containment by appropriating and celebrating such aspersions” (Wearing the Breeches 224). Yet, Stebbins balances this ambition with the last sentence of this paragraph: “to the manifest benefit of the limbs, muscles, and general development of the future mothers of the race” (13, my emphasis). Stebbins presents the equality of men and women ultimately as benefitting the role perceived at the time as one of the most moral roles a woman enacted: mother. Regardless of the association between equality and motherhood, however, this passage seems to upset some of the narrative devices Postlewait
identifies. In addition to using Postlewait’s analysis of actresses’ autobiographies to help read the autobiographical sources, it is also important to notice when the sources deviate from them.

Throughout *When Romeo was a Woman*, on which much of “Casa Cushman” is based, Merrill works through the problems inherent within primary sources, especially the autobiographical ones, concerning Cushman’s life and career using several lenses including gender studies, performativity, queer studies, and theories of spectatorship (xvii). In specifically analyzing Stebbins’s memoir of Cushman, Merrill supplements her discussion of the memoir itself with letters written between Sidney Lanier, one of Cushman’s friends, and Stebbins about the prospect of even creating such a memoir. The letters seem to clearly indicate what Stebbins did and did not want included as well as her extreme desire to write it herself, “lest unworthy and careless hands undertake it” (Stebbins qtd. in Merrill 248). In addition, Merrill’s second chapter, “The Hero in the Family and on the Stage,” explores how Cushman carefully selected (and possibly changed) stories about herself. Merrill admits to being “less concerned with the absolute veracity of the facts she [Cushman] told than [she is] with the meanings she [Cushman], and her supporters or detractors, attempted to wrest from her circumstances to account for her extraordinary success” (16). She reads these stories “against the backdrop of her [Cushman’s] era, an era that made possible and necessary some of the meanings Charlotte attributed to her own behavior and allowed for some of the resistant readings that help constitute possibilities outside of mainstream norms” (17). Merrill is then able to read multiple autobiographical, auto/biographical and biographical sources against each other and insert commentary on the “backdrop of [Cushman’s] era” using various theoretical lenses.

Fondakowski comments that she found Stebbins’s memoir “boring” when reading it as a straightforward document.³⁰ She explains that the memoir “does not account for a life. It does not account for the magnitude of her [Cushman’s] life and everything that she accomplished. The most [Stebbins] writes about is the dog…[Stebbins] loved Rome. She loved the dog. She’s not going to talk about her [Cushman’s] life as an actor. She [Stebbins] didn’t even like the theatre!” (Personal Interview). Fondakowski’s frustration with what Stebbins “left out” made her decide to “write in her voice everything that I wished she had said” (Personal Interview).

³⁰Fondakowski also had access to Merrill’s biography as well as other interpretations of Stebbins’s memoir including Mullenix’s *Wearing the Breeches* and Marcus’s *Across an Untried Sea*. Fondakowski seems to have read Stebbins’s memoir on its own to gauge its surface value for including direct quotations from it into “Casa Cushman” without immediately referencing these other interpretations.
Fondakowski feels that Stebbins “left out the love between the women, what it meant to them and how complicated all the relationships were” (Personal Interview). Through reading the original letters between Charlotte and other women (including Stebbins), Merrill discovered that what letters were included in Stebbins’s memoir “were edited so that the eroticism evident in the original letters is omitted” (250). Cushman’s relationships with other women (in whatever capacity, friendship or erotic) were also largely edited out of existence within the memoir. The added factor of Cushman’s sexuality/lesbianism further complicates piecing together a historiography of her life and a reading of her performance of gender on and offstage. As Postlewait pointed out, actresses often wrote with an awareness (and a negotiation) of how their vocation affected their perceived sexuality and morality, but he does not explore the possibility of female desire or lesbianism. Davis and Postlewait largely limit a discussion of sexuality to how women negotiated the perceived deviance of entering the (male) public sphere and inviting the male gaze, an act that did not fit norms of femininity. They do not fully explore how to read these documents for the possibilities of female desire.

When creating historiographies of women, especially for women before the twentieth-century, it may be helpful to look at Martha Vicinus’s assertion: “…I believe that the lesbian is never absent from any definition of woman, whatever her avowed sexual preference. I am arguing here for the primacy of a continuum of women’s sexual behaviors, in which lesbian or lesbian-like conduct can be both a part of, and apart from, normative heterosexual marriage and childbearing” (58). Vicinus advocates not just for “more lesbian history” but for “lesbians and lesbian-like women in history” (58). Without such an approach, historians could fall into the trap of assuming that if lesbianism is not explicit in the historical record, it is absent. Yet, the

31 “Emma Crow Cushman is only briefly identified as Charlotte’s ‘dearly beloved niece.’ Although whole paragraphs of Charlotte’s letters to her and to Sarah Anderton are incorporated into Emma Stebbins’s text, the letters were edited so that the eroticism evident in the original letters is omitted. Hatty Hosmer, with whom Charlotte and Emma Stebbins lived for years, is only mentioned once. Eliza Cook is reduced to a ‘devoted friend’ who ‘celebrated her friendship in many fervid lines.’ And Rosalie Sully and Matilda Hays are omitted entirely. Instead, the image of Charlotte Cushman that her surviving partner forged from the ‘current of their two lives [which] ran, with rare exceptions, side by side,’ emphasized Charlotte’s ‘pure’ life and the dramatic profession that she had ‘honored’ with her ‘noble’ character” (Merrill 250-251).
32 For an insightful auto/biographical account of a scholar attempting to decipher an actress’s sexuality from the archive see Wolf.
33 They also largely ignore the complexities of race.
34 It is important to note that Vicinus separates her “continuum for women’s sexual desires” from Adrienne Rich’s “continuum of ‘woman-identified experience’” (58). Vicinus explains that she “seek[s] to understand a continuum of women’s sexual experiences that also contains an irreducible sense of the dangerous difference implicit in homosexuality. Perhaps no image—continuum, circle, or margin—can embody a subject as pervasive as sexual desire. But I contend that the lesbian is at the center rather than the periphery of any study of women and men” (58).
word “lesbian” did not actually exist until the late nineteenth-century and following post-structural thought, if the word does not exist to describe it, then the act/desire did not fully exist.

The absence of the word “lesbian” manifests in two interconnected ways: a hesitance in locating lesbian subjects in history and a lack of definitive, explicit evidence of lesbianism in the archive. As Robert Schanke and Kim Marra explain, scholars in lesbian and gay theatre studies “specialize more in the areas of theory and criticism than theater history. While many focus largely on contemporary theater, their perspectives have informed how we read theater history” (Passing 5, Staging 7). Schanke and Marra articulate many of the problems for the historian including the problem of finding evidence: “Most people’s sexual desires—straight or queer—have not been conclusively documented with direct forms of proof, like eyewitness accounts and explicit photographs. Moreover, an individual’s sexual behavior and desire may neither coincide nor remain consistent” (Passing 7). If proof ever even existed, it has “likely been destroyed or kept hidden from researchers to protect reputations” (7). Proof of a double standard, however, is that no one has to “prove heterosexual subjects’ sexuality; it is simply presumed, automatically buttressed less by facts than by hegemonic assumptions” (7). A lack of examination of gay men and lesbians in history correlates with a paucity of empirical/positivist facts in the historical record. Queer theory, gender studies, and feminist theory can then provide a lens through which to help fill in blanks and read against the grain of archival documents. The absence of documents becomes more of a silence and historians must learn to read these silences.

Jennifer Terry offers one way to read these documents in “Theorizing a Deviant Historiography.”35 Terry argues against attempting a revisionist history for gays and lesbians that seeks “the discovery of great gays in history whose essence travels across historical and discursive formations and whose coherent stories must be told” (58).36 These “alternative” historical narratives” cannot be created because they can never be fully separated from the dominant records/narratives: “a lesbian and gay history which hopes to find homosexuals totally free of the influence of pathologizing discourse would be an historiographic optical illusion” (58). Instead, she proposes that historians of “deviant” subjects attempt to “map the techniques by which homosexuality has been marked as different and pathological, and then locate

35 I mined this source from Merrill’s When Romeo was a Woman.
36 Terry uses the lenses of “Michel Foucault’s effective history and Gayatri Spivak’s deconstruction” to come to this conclusion (58).
subjective resistances to this homophobia” (58). She relays three problems with sources, predominantly from the late nineteenth-century and beyond:

1) Materials documenting the discrete identities of ‘lesbians’ and ‘gay men’ are specific to certain places and periods. … 2) Much of the material written by lesbians and male homosexuals has been destroyed through homophobic vandalism, effacement, and suppression. Thus we are left with few accounts which offer us representations of sexuality produced by those living at the sexual margins. 3) Many of the extant historical materials concerning homosexuality and lesbianism are overwhelmingly pejorative and oppressive accounts of sin, criminality, or pathology. (59)

Though these sources are not explicit, they do provide material that is “ripe for the destabilizing strategies of reading for difference” (59). The “new archivists” look for “deviant subjects revealed through conflict within dominant accounts” (59). The “deviant” subject in these accounts does not occupy a “fixed deviant subject position” (59). The “deviant” subject exists fluidly, within a “provisional position corresponding to a discursively fashioned outlawed or pathologized sexual identity—the location from which a resistant historiography can be generated” (59).

Vicinus offers another way to read these documents in “Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory?”37 She notes, like Schanke and Marra, that queer theorists have been less concerned with “historical questions, but instead have focused upon the cultural construction of gays and lesbians at the present time” (61). She problematizes these queer theorists, however, and questions the value of using them in historicizing lesbians in history:38

My own criticism of ‘queer theory,’ as defined by Judith Butler and Sue-Ellen Case, rests in part on its ahistorical nature. The wholesale embracing of a theatrical metaphor denies the historicity of all lesbian roles, and their specific meanings at different historical times—indeed, even the possibility of their nonexistence in the past. Modern sexual behavior cannot be divorced from its intersection with race, class, and other social variables, nor can it be wholly a matter of fashionable, presentist metaphorizing. Moreover, the focus of queer theory upon performance is also a privileging of the visible, which returns us to some of the same difficulties that have characterized identity-based

37 I mined this source from Merrill’s When Romeo was a Woman.
38 Vicinus is careful how she phrases this: “To paraphrase Judith Bennett, I am not making a case for lesbian history, but for the central place of lesbians in history” (67).
history…From its very inception lesbian studies has been concerned with ‘making visible’ the lesbian of the present and the past. This process of reclamation has focused almost entirely upon the mannish woman because she has been the one most obviously different from other women—and men. What does this insistence on visibility do to notions of both femininity and feminism? Are we fixated on visibly marked difference, whether it be a ‘performed’ gender or a gendered identity, because the explicitness of our age demands clear erotic signals? (62-63)

As Vicinus argues, if gender is a performance, then it must always be visible. If it must be visible, then it must be rather explicit in the archive for historical women. This has led to an “identity model of lesbian history” that breaks lesbianism into two categories: “romantic friendships and butch-femme role playing. The former depends upon our present-day identification of these friendships as homoerotic, if not homosexual, while the latter depends upon the self-identification” (59). She argues that the either-or-neither categories of romantic friendship or butch-femme “leave little room for women who might behave differently at different times, or who might belong to both categories…or neither” (60). Romantic friendships are problematic in themselves because they are made to either fit “the visible marked mannish woman or the self-identified lesbian.” If neither of these categories applies, the romantic friendship is “labeled asexual” (57).

Besides the problem of historians only reclaiming lesbians who visibly fit within strict binary categories, there is the additional problem of how to even describe female desire before the twentieth-century and whether or not the word “lesbian” even fits. This often devolves into a debate on whether the women in question had sexual relations with other women, oversimplifying an analysis of female desire. Terry points out that history has marginalized gay men and lesbians through “different kinds of historical elision, different conditions of visibility, and different strategies of resistance” (68). Part of the problem of examining lesbians in history stems from the fact that,

the homosexuality of men is more explicitly documented in the archive in everything from novels to police reports of public sex arrests for sodomy. A persistent problem for historians of lesbianism is to find evidence of its very existence, and particularly of its sexually explicit forms. Even more difficult is locating sources about lesbianism produced by lesbians themselves. Lesbians have not had much of a public
sexuality…Women are less frequently arrested for unnatural acts. And of those rare occasions, they confuse the phallocentric police and lawmakers who basically cannot believe that sex between women is really possible. (69)39

If historians and theorists could find the language to describe female desire that does not rely on sexually explicit documents, problematic visible markers, or self-identification, then perhaps they could more productively read against the grain for all historical women, especially those that broke gender and sexual norms of the period and place, whether or not that included sexual relations with other women. Performance as historiography could offer possibilities and suggestions through the juxtapositions of theatrical vocabularies rather than the either-or-neither approach that print historiography often falls into.

Other primary sources used for “Casa Cushman” like Cushman’s diary of 1844 and the letters Cushman wrote to the women in her life are perhaps more straightforward in descriptions of her desires as they were not written for publication, but they are still problematic. Confusion lies when it comes to passages that might suggest erotic desire for other women. Citing the rareness of finding sources with the explicitly “lesbian behavior” recorded in the early nineteenth-century diary of Anne Lister, Vicinus cautions against waiting for other such explicit materials to appear and encourages the development of “better skills to decode the language of the past in order to know what women did with each other” (66).40 Vicinus also warns “against focusing on what is said—either by others or by a woman herself. By doing so we may fall into the trap of the same literalism that has characterized our search for the visible markers of lesbian sexuality” (66). So what exactly does Cushman mean when she writes in her diary “Slept with Rose” (Cushman qtd. in Merrill 9)? Merrill explains that “slept with may not have had a sexual connotation in an era when it was not uncommon for same-sex friends to share a bed” (9, her emphasis). However, as Merrill goes on to point out, the next entry is even more puzzling: “‘R.’ Saturday, July 6th ‘married’” (9). Merrill finds the quotation marks around “married” especially intriguing signaling that the “commitment, forged by the two women after whatever intimacies were shared when they slept together, was noteworthy to Charlotte but had to remain coded, indicated by initial and quotation marks even within the privacy of her own diary” (9).

39 Terry adds, “Race, ethnicity, age, and class also structure understandings of homosexuality within both dominant and marginal discourses” (69).

40 According to Vicinus, Anne Lister (1791-1840) “developed a complete vocabulary to define her lesbian behavior, including such words as ‘kiss’ to describe her orgasms and those of her partners. Entries written in code are quite explicit about what she did in bed, as well as what she suspected numerous other women of doing” (65).
Throughout *When Romeo was a Woman*, Merrill seeks to reveal the “code” in the sources left behind by Cushman and her contemporaries. She explains that, contrary to those theorists who claim that women who loved each other in earlier time periods experienced their attachments to each other as innocent, socially acceptable romantic friendships, Charlotte’s diary, letters, and those of women in her intimate circle are filled with their own active negotiation of how much of their intense, passionate feelings for other women they could safely display. (8)

While Merrill does not seek to definitively prove how these women physically manifested desire for each other, she does identify Cushman specifically as a lesbian in several places. She explains her “study of Charlotte Cushman reveals the concerns that underlie her negotiations, revealing that women’s erotic desire for each other was legible—to anyone who could read the ‘code’” (8). Therefore Merrill uses the “term *lesbian* to signal this awareness” (8, her emphasis). Merrill also clearly indicates that in exploring how these women understood themselves, she hopes to understand something about herself as well. She admits that “in recognizing Charlotte Cushman as a lesbian, the particular history I struggle to transcribe, decode, uncover, and contextualize is my history as well” (13). Merrill’s repeated reference to lesbian as a term “in an era before some claim the word—or the self-identification—existed” (2) perhaps reveals her own negotiations on how to understand Cushman and how much Merrill’s history can be informed by Cushman’s.43

Fondakowski is also very aware of presenting the complexities of Cushman’s sexuality, especially as it is presented, or not presented, in the primary documents themselves. With the documents available, Fondakowski admits that there is no way to definitively know how the women expressed their desire for each other: “Maybe they never touched each other the way that

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41 Merrill aligns herself with “Martha Vicinus, Emma Donoghue, and Terry Castle, all of whom intentionally employ the term *lesbian* to signal this awareness, even when located in women who lived before the term was commonly used, I am interested in how women in earlier periods struggled to understand themselves and their passions” (8, her emphasis).

42 Interestingly, Denise Walen seems to criticize Merrill’s dissertation, the basis for *When Romeo was a Woman*, for her “opaque allusions to Cushman’s sexuality” and notes that Merrill “demonstrate[s] anxiety about identifying Cushman as lesbian” (43). Walen explains in a footnote that she, Walen, “use[s] the word *lesbian* to identify Cushman’s behavior and her desire, a desire that even within the conventional bonding of female friends of the nineteenth century reveals a transgressive eroticism” (59). A topic for further research might be an examination of Merrill’s hesitance to call Cushman a lesbian in her dissertation versus her use of lesbian to describe Cushman in *When Romeo was a Woman*.

43 Merrill’s stated negotiation between her own history (life) and Cushman’s history (life) fits well within the auto/biographical nature of feminist biography. See Stanley, Donnell and Polkey, and Alpern et al.
we would think that sex goes. Maybe but it was so much emotion that it overtook them even because their passion had to be contained. So who knows? I think I would like for the characters in the play to be figuring that out too” (Personal Interview). Fondakowski relates that she has had “people say to me dramaturgically only focus on the love triangle; nobody cares about her professionally” (Personal Interview). At one staged reading of the play, a “group of lesbians” confronted Fondakowski to criticize her depiction of Cushman as a lesbian with so many relationships. As Fondakowski explains, “In the scope of your life if you have three or four or even five romantic relationships…nobody’s really going to think you’re crazy. But if you’re compressing time into two hours and she’s [Cushman’s] rolling through these loves it begins to feel like ‘Oh, I’m done with you. I’m going to see what happens next’” (Personal Interview).

The group of lesbian audience members felt that since “it’s so rare that we have a lesbian protagonist you can’t make her like this” (Fondakowski). They wanted Cushman to be “heroic” and for Fondakowski to “show how she’s been oppressed and risen above oppression.”

The narrative that Fondakowski chooses to construct for Cushman using the sources is not unlike the narrative that historians use in constructing their subjects. As Merrill admits in the “Preface” to When Romeo was a Woman, “All representations are partial, and this book…is no exception. There is no complete narrative of a life, and I do not attempt one here. By focusing on a particular aspect of Charlotte Cushman—her performance of gender and sexuality and the ways that performance was received—I have necessarily left out other, equally compelling aspects of Cushman’s life for another exploration” (xxi). As I set out in the beginning of this chapter, two questions piqued Fondakowski’s interest in this project: the ephemerality of performance and the nature of Cushman’s and her contemporaries’ female desire. Fondakowski repeatedly expresses a concern that “Casa Cushman” could come across as the “diary of a philanderer” in its depiction of four of Cushman’s lovers over the course of thirty years and three hours, which the audience members at the staged reading also feared. Yet Fondakowski disagrees with the criticisms of these audience members to a certain extent. She points out that Cushman “rose up from nothing. She had all these hardships, but she was also pretty emboldened and pretty ambitious and went for it. And I don’t think that’s bad to show her ruthlessness because if you want to say why history has not remembered her, I think her ruthlessness was part of that, which is not feminine” (Personal Interview). Stebbins certainly tempered Cushman’s ruthlessness and ambition in her memoir. If Fondakowski also did so,
though for different reasons than Stebbins, she might continue to promulgate the image of the passive female, which Fondakowski perceives as a continued norm in contemporary society. She elaborates, “Men who rise to the top by ruthless means, nobody goes around saying they did that because they were ruthless but when a woman makes similar moves it’s like ‘look at her’” (Personal Interview). While understanding the political necessity of a “heroic” lesbian protagonist in Cushman, Fondakowski in many ways feels that such a depiction neglects the historical sources even as difficult as they are to read against the grain: “I’ve never had any problem admiring her for her choices. I mean every once in awhile I’m like ‘Oh come on Charlotte’ but I do believe after everything I’ve studied and read that she did have the best interests of the people at heart even though it’s never a good idea to try to control the destiny of all the people around you. It just gets you into trouble. But I don’t think she had malintent” (Personal Interview).

In addition, Fondakowski makes clear that “Casa Cushman” is not necessarily a play about homophobia. Instead, the play is “about how a woman who loves other women who lived in this time period constructs a life where she and these women are safe and protected and they have the life that they want” (Personal Interview). Thus, the representation of Cushman that Fondakowski wishes to portray is largely how Cushman tried to control the narrative of her life and how history remembered her. In many respects, this differs from the narrative of Cushman’s life Merrill creates in When Romeo was a Woman. “Casa Cushman” also examines “the devil’s bargains that they make along the way so as not be found out,” such as the marriage between Crow and Cushman’s nephew Ned (Personal Interview). The narrative and representation of Cushman’s life that Fondakowski constructs perhaps more subtly presents her sexuality than the representation those audience members want depicted. Yet the representational approach Fondakowski takes fits more within the historiographical approaches Vicinus, Terry, Schanke, and Marra encourage in historicizing lesbians, lesbian-like women, and “deviant” subjects. If Fondakowski chose to only use the love letters Merrill transcribed to construct the play, she perhaps could have created that play, but as she points out, people can read the love letters for themselves. Facing the problems of reading these letters (and other primary documents) that has been explored thus far in this chapter, Fondakowski decided that she wanted to “make a more emotional version, a more dynamic version [of Cushman’s life] and one that shows that she was
at cross-purposes with herself with wanting to be remembered and wanting to hide big aspects of her life” (Personal Interview).

Fondakowski knew that in writing this version of history she presents a version of Cushman that Cushman carefully tried to construct differently. In the introductions to both Passing Performances: Queer Readings of Leading Players in American Theater History and Staging Desires: Queer Readings of American Theater History, Marra and Schanke note that some scholars raised objections to creating their edited collections on the basis of a “fear that reputations of cherished icons will be tarnished and the value of their art negated, attitudes rooted in homophobia that continues to permeate the theater world as well as the larger society” (Passing 3, Staging 4). In writing these histories, “certain ethical questions are raised. Are we revealing information that will hurt people? Are we violating our subjects by taking it upon ourselves to reveal what they had fought hard to conceal? Are we breaking the time-honored code that queers cover for each other?” (Staging 4). Ultimately they conclude that these histories must be written because without acknowledging or identifying “same-sex sexual desire” we cannot fully understand “their contributions” nor write a “fuller and more accurate account of history” (Staging 4).

Cushman has been a favorite for theatre historians to explore notions of gender and sexuality, working against heteronormative readings of her, but Cushman’s sexuality in a performance medium provides different challenges. Fondakowski explains,

Charlotte Cushman wanted to be remembered as a great Shakespearean actress and the play is going to bring that aspect out but we’re bringing her ‘out’ because she was a lesbian before we even had a word for that. So in a way, she’s being remembered for the thing that she most wanted to not be remembered for and that she was most careful to cover up. So that to me is the great irony and power of the play. (Personal Interview)

In juxtaposing Cushman’s theatre life with her private life represented in primary sources through the theatrical medium, Fondakowski has the opportunity to explore how the two realms interact and interrelate. Fondakowski asserts that Cushman’s professional life “is so much who she is that I never could write that play [the love triangle only]. I just had no interest in that play” (Personal Interview). Fondakowski perceives a firm connection between Cushman as an actress and how she publically constructed a representation of herself as a true woman, using her lack of male suitors to enhance a perception of chastity. Fondakowski does not see how Cushman’s
career and sexuality can be separated: “You have to have one with the other…She can be passionate onstage in a way that she can’t show in her life. I also find that very intriguing. She sort of uses the stage to play out all this stuff, which is interesting about her” (Personal Interview). Historiographically left with large gaps and questions within the primary sources available in terms of Cushman’s career, sexuality, and how both inform and interact with each other, Fondakowski began filling gaps dramaturgically and with performance devices.
CHAPTER II: Dramaturgy as Historiography

In comparing the process of writing “Casa Cushman” to the writing of historiography/biography using Liz Stanley’s critique of textual modern biography, this chapter has two purposes. The first is to problematize the terms “historically accurate” and “historical fiction” in relation to thinking of performance as historiography and “Casa Cushman” as a historiographical endeavor. As examined in Chapter I, the predominantly autobiographical, and auto/biographical, sources used to construct “Casa Cushman” occupy a slippery territory between fact and fiction and require the implementation of theory to read against the grain. Without the ability to use theories in the text of “Casa Cushman” as Merrill could in her written biography, Fondakowski hesitates in the August 2009 version to fill in the gaps within the historical record thus preventing the audience from really being able to read against the grain of the sources. Therefore, the second purpose of this chapter is to identify the dramaturgical devices Fondakowski uses in the August 2009 version and how they function. I then problematize these devices and suggest that Fondakowski’s firm attachment to documents and “found text” in this version inhibits her ability to fill in the gaps and fully utilize the performance elements of performance as historiography.

Liz Stanley groups biography, autobiography, and historiography because “they are the prime genres of writing concerned with the past” (“Is There Life in the Contact Zone?” 29). In 1992, she noted a “growing analytical discourse about autobiography, and very little that is comparable on biography, the editing of diaries and letters, or social science productions and uses of written lives” (Auto/Biographical I 3). While she wrote this in 1992, I have still found more literature on the process of interpreting the construction of autobiographies than on the construction and interpretations of biographies, especially in analyzing performance. Stanley explains that for biography “largely the same epistemological, theoretical and technical issues arise, in relation to the ontological claims of each of these apparently distinct genres as do for autobiography” (Auto/Biographical I 3). Stanley uses the term “auto/biography” then “to encompass all these ways of writing a life and also the ontological and epistemological links between them” (3). With a breadth of biographical plays, which I define here as about the life of

44 There seems to be an abundance of analysis of one-person autobiographical and auto/biographical (one-person shows of historical figures) plays but not as much on biographical dramas featuring multiperson casts. See Schiavi for a further discussion on the boom of the one-person show (203-204).
a person that is not a one-person show and is not written by the person examined, it seems that greater attention needs to be paid to the construction of these texts from other texts, how they function within the discourse of autobiography, biography, and historiography, and how they might serve performance as historiography.

As noted earlier, Ryan Claycomb has also written about the connection between feminist biographical drama and history.45 Within the plays he analyzes, however, he seems to perceive the function of history in the plays solely as a vehicle used by feminist playwrights to promote feminist polemic for contemporary (feminist) audiences.46 Claycomb does not explore the plays’ potentials as forms of historiography or even how historiographical sources contributed to the construction of the plays. He identifies that one of the common criticisms against the plays he analyzes is “inaccuracy” (“Playing at Lives: Biography and Contemporary Feminist Drama” 528). Thus, in my analysis of “Casa Cushman” as a historiographical endeavor one of the largest arguments against my analysis is the idea of historical accuracy. While Claycomb points out that many of the playwrights of the plays he analyzes do not see historical accuracy as a “primary concern,” he fails to analyze how historiography might function within the plays or how the plays might operate as historiography. He concludes his discussion of historical accuracy by explaining:

Ultimately, the verifiability of historical narrative and its resistance to simple malleability make criticism of its historical accuracy seem like mere pedantry (history forgives mistakes on the details committed in order to create better polemic) and magnify the urgency of these contemporary political analogues by showing how overdue change is and how deeply entrenched many of these issues really are. So issues of "correct history," while they offer room for close reading, do not change the plausibility of a narrative that hinges on several choice "facts" from the biographical narrative, certain key correspondences between the real and the representational that foreground the arguments made by the play. (529)

45 He is also one of only a few scholars looking at feminist biographical drama. Much has been written on feminist autobiographical or auto/biographical drama, featuring casts of one, but not much at all on biographical drama or auto/biographical drama featuring a multi-person cast.
46 Some of the plays he analyzes include Pam Gems’s Queen Christina, Fiona Templeton’s Delirium of Interpretations, Joan Schenkar’s Signs of Life, Jamie Pachino’s “Theodora: An Unauthorized Biography,” and Caryl Churchill’s Top Girls.
While it is not my purpose to reanalyze the plays he uses to construct his argument, I notice several problematic points. He isolates the selection of certain key historical “facts” to construct “contemporary political analogues” to feminist biographical drama only rather than to all forms of historiography.

Stanley points out that facts are often considered to have an “independent existence and are external to the text” (“Is There Life in the Contact Zone?” 13). They are ”discovered, not invented” (13). Yet what is often excised from the writing is that facts are also selected to support an argument (13). Not only this, there is an “epistemological rupture which is necessary to make the facts ‘speak:’ 1. A set of things is described successively in time. 2. A conclusion is drawn about their meaning” (13). The rupture occurs with the belief that each fact (given in chronological order) causes the next. Stanley argues that the conclusion determines causality and that causality does not shape the conclusion. Once causality is decided upon, it “determines what will be selected as ‘the facts,’ and what will not because ‘merely facts,’ facts that are unconnected and thus irrelevant. Time, then, is indeed of the essence, for it is by doing things with time that historical, biographical and autobiographical arguments and conclusions are made” (13). It is the retrospective knowledge of a person’s life that shapes the biography, autobiography, and historiography, not the linear progression of events or facts. This often results in canonical—“the things that are said to be known”—and contrary facts, neither of which are “natural facts” because they result from a process of selection (24). What then occurs is that the “rhetoricity surrounding and representing [contrary and canonical facts], and the irreducible things that happened themselves, are not now separable, if indeed they ever were” (24). The facts, whether canonical or contrary, cannot be separated from an argument. Nor can the facts/argument be separated from the “irreducible things that happened” because the only way to describe the irreducible thing is through facts which always serve a rhetorical purpose. The “contemporary political analogue” that shapes the selection of “several choice ‘facts’ from the biographical narrative,” as Claycomb observes, is not entirely different from the rhetorical purpose that the biographer/historian uses in selecting facts from the historical subject’s life. While “Casa Cushman” is not as steeped in “contemporary political analogue” as the plays that Claycomb analyzes, Fondakowski carefully selects “facts” and deconstructs others to support the narrative of the historiography she creates.
Claycomb also seems to work under the assumption that there is a “correct history” or “good history” that exists somewhere waiting to be found. As Stanley explains, however, history does not exist independently from the present, as a place that can be traveled back to along a straight line in time. In order to present their subjects’ successes, modern biographers present their subject’s life linearly. The linearity is constructed around the idea that each event within the subject’s life amasses to propel the subject into greatness. The modern biographer then “sees the central task of biography as the reconstruction on paper of the essential fundamental person, from a myriad of contemporary shifting and conflicting views of this event, that relationship, this activity and that achievement” (Auto/Biographical I 7). Making this the central task assumes that a person can be reconstructed using the right sources. As of 1992, she suggested that the field of biography is behind historiography: “Good history eschews such a belief, and so too should biography” (7). A subsequent consequence of making this the central task is that it “effectively trains a spotlight on [the biographical subject] and them alone” (9). Such an approach often does not adequately portray the biographical subject within a social structure of friends, colleagues, and family (9). In addition, the linear/chronological approach in modern biography often does not actively take into account that a biography “does not operate in a forward mode only” (21). A biography works from hindsight whether the subject is still alive or dead. Stanley criticizes the biographer who works without an active awareness that “we can read images and other biographical information backwards through time, to impose ‘real meaning, with hindsight:’ an account of ‘what it all meant’ that eluded us at the time but was supposedly ‘really’ always there” (21).

This brings us back to modern biographers’ idea that the subject can be reconstructed. Paralleling trends in historiography’s views of the past, Stanley explains the past does not exist as an independent entity from the present. The past only exists through “representational means” (“Is There Life in the Contact Zone?” 6). She compares these representational means to a set of Russian dolls:

one ‘sits inside’ the other, sits inside another, then these another, and so on, until we approximate to that small kernel, the thing itself, the ‘moment’ being invoked, described,

47 It would, of course, be interesting to see how the field of biography may have changed in the intervening twenty years. Examples such as Merrill’s When Romeo was a Woman certainly demonstrate the multiplicities of representations of Cushman’s life. It seems, however, that studies on the methodologies of biography are still underdeveloped.
redescribed, analysed, explained, concluded through the ‘voices’ and positions within this field of claims and counter-claims. And ‘the thing itself’ now exists only in some representational form or another. (‘Is There Life in the Contact Zone?’ 6)

She later calls the Russian dolls metaphor both “apt and misleading” in two main ways:

the last doll is presumptively the biggest, that which has privilege over and thus in this sense encapsulated the others, and this conveys very well the epistemological, as well as temporal, privileging built into the relationships operant within this ‘field.’ However, it also both assumes and presumes that there is a ‘tiniest doll’ which is the kernel the others enfold, which sits at the centre, which acts as that which all else makes claims about, which is ‘it,’ the moment itself on which all those others are predicated. (‘Is There Life in the Contact Zone?’ 10)

To think of biography or history using the Russian doll metaphor is to think of “time as a line…which goes back again as well, from now to then” (10). This, again, implies that there is somewhere to go, a point in time and space, but in reality history only exists in the present with present interpretations of history’s artifacts (10-12). The act of writing, both in terms of writing biography and in the act of writing documents that will one day get used in biography, deceptively “flattens time. It removes time from ‘its time’ into the time of the writing, which almost immediately becomes a kind of perpetual present locked in the perpetual and peculiar kind of past that are books, articles, book chapters—like so many flies caught in amber, but caught there on different days, weeks, years” (14). However, these documents cannot be locked in time because “time passes; it is not a state but a process” (14 emphasis added). Thus, Claycomb is perhaps not entirely incorrect in asserting that there can be “good history” or “correct history,” but he has certainly oversimplified the presentation of history within the plays he analyzes.

The term “historical accuracy” and “historical fiction” is a bit of a non-starter in an argument against “Casa Cushman” as performance as historiography. The term “accuracy” ultimately implies a truth, the thing itself that can be reconstructed or that kernel of truth at the center of the Russian nesting dolls. Yet, as Chapter I demonstrated, the autobiographical sources used to construct “Casa Cushman” and all of the other biographies and articles about Cushman—that is, the historiography of Cushman—intertwine fact and fiction. While Cushman may have actually been saved from drowning by a man in her childhood, the “accuracy” is less important
than the narrative/rhetorical purpose it serves within Stebbins’s memoir. Using Stanley’s analysis as a theoretical lens, it becomes clear that a simple divide between fact (accurate, tangible) and fiction (inaccurate or undocumented) in biography, autobiography, and historiography is a misleading binary that construes the complexities within lives, facts, rhetoric, the biographer, and the subject and is not a useful analytical tool. The sources themselves are merely representations of the subject and do not recreate the subject itself. “Historical fiction” in relation to plays usually fits Claycomb’s analysis of feminist biographical drama—the selection of just a few key “facts” among many that the playwright uses to serve her argument/story, which is the “fictional” part of a play. I argue that performance as historiography in “Casa Cushman” supplements the gaps in “facts” with story and performance devices that, as Canning notes, might provide the framework to “demonstrate aspects of and ideas about history that are less possible in print” (“Feminist Performance” 230). Without such a clear divide between accepted forms of fact and fiction, the analysis of “Casa Cushman” as a historiographic process, both in its dramaturgical construction and its performance aspects, becomes more possible.

Fondakowski continues to struggle with how to present the interplay between “Casa Cushman” and history and what it means to be historically accurate. In January 2011, she still played with the idea of whether or not she wanted...

...to give an overall note that this [“Casa Cushman”] is historical fiction or if I’m going to make notes, disclaimer notes, at the end of listing things that I really made up like compressing time like when Central Park is being designed versus when Charlotte Cushman gets breast cancer versus when the marriage is....So if anybody knows when they actually did that they’re going to say ‘Oh, the history is wrong.’ But I’m not making that play. I’m doing, for emotional reasons, the construction of the angel—if you wait until well after their married life it just loses focus. (Personal Interview)

Fondakowski questions how to signal to her audience that in her representation of Cushman’s life she does not value the linear chronology as much as the emotional impact the ordering of Moments may have on an audience. In not presenting Cushman’s life chronologically,

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48 See Chapter I for a fuller analysis of this incident recorded in Stebbins’s memoir.
49 Performance will bring whole new levels of meaning. An analysis of audience reception, however, most especially in aspects of the gaze are not possible here, as the performance has not yet been staged.
50 Fondakowski refers here to the later versions of the play. The August 2009 version largely presents Cushman’s life chronologically and as we will see, does not quite succeed in achieving the dramaturgical and historiographical goals of the play.
Fondakowski demonstrates that she is not concerned with, as Stanley criticized of modern biography, the “reconstruction on paper of the essential fundamental person” (*Auto/Biographical I* 7). Having extensively researched Cushman, Fondakowski knows the entirety of her life and chooses to stage Moments that most clearly serve the representation of Cushman that Fondakowski wants to construct. In emphasizing the “emotional” over the “correct” chronology of Cushman’s life, Fondakowski utilizes one of the specific tools theatre offers: empathy.

That Fondakowski toils with how to reveal to the audience the processes of the play’s construction parallels with Stanley’s advocation of what she calls “intellectual biography.” Stanley describes this term

…as a means of making accountable by inscribing the processes of researching and thinking within (rather than beneath the surface of) research accounts…As part of this, it is important that we promote active readers who can engage with the claims-making of the things that are written; and to do this it is crucial to explore the processes, mechanics and effects of writing, as well as reading, about past lives. (“Is There Life in the Contact Zone?” 27)

Elsewhere, Stanley explains it as “mak[ing] available to readers as much of the evidence, and of different kinds, that they work from as possible, but also an account of what facts, opinions, and interpretations they find preferable and why” (*Auto/Biographical I* 9-10). The inclusion of these elements “enables readers to make their own evaluation of whether and to what extent they find the result plausible or acceptable” (9).

Throughout the development of “Casa Cushman,” Fondakowski signals on the title page of the play some of the source material for the play. Below the title of the play and playwright, Fondakowski includes: “Adapted in part from WHEN ROMEO WAS A WOMAN by Lisa Merrill and other published and unpublished material” (January 2011 1, her emphasis). This technique begins Fondakowski’s use of citations for source materials. The use of subtitles to denote sources is not unusual in biographical and autobiographical dramas. For example, Anne Ludlum’s *Shame the Devil!: An Audience with Fanny Kemble* contains the brief note after the title: “Based on the Writings of Fanny Kemble.” Doug Wright subtitles *I Am My Own Wife* as “Studies for a Play About the Life of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf.” Playwrights might also include

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51 There is some slight word ordering variation to this in the different versions. For example, the August 2009 version reads: “Adapted in part from WHEN ROMEO WAS A WOMAN (and other unpublished material) by Lisa Merrill and other found text” (1).
a bibliography of sorts. Inside the title page to Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls* a note reads: “The author gratefully acknowledges use of the following books: *The Confessions of Lady Nijo*, translated from the Japanese by Karen Brazell, and published by Peter Owen Ltd, London [and] *A Curious Life for a Lady* (about Isabella Bird) by Pat Barr, originally published by Macmillan, London” (n.pag.). Anne Ludlum includes a “bibliography” and “recommended biographies” at the end of the “Production Notes” of *Shame the Devil*. William Luce lists all of the sources he used in the “Acknowledgements” of *The Belle of Amherst: A Play Based on the Life of Emily Dickinson*. While these citations signal to the reader that the play has some document/archival base, it does not itself reveal the *processes* of constructing the play.⁵²

Sometimes the playwright will include something about the construction of the play in the introductory notes or playwright’s notes in the published play. Fondakowski was especially intrigued by Doug Wright’s note in *I Am My Own Wife*. In it, he explains:

> For although I dutifully set out to evoke the life of a real person, I have nevertheless taken the customary liberties of the dramatist. I have edited Charlotte’s anecdotes for clarity; I have condensed several characters into one when it best served the drama of her story; I have created certain archetypal figures in the play, such as newspaper reporters, bureaucrats, and specialists; I have imagined certain scenes while wholly inventing others for narrative clarity and in pursuit of my own thematic purpose. While I hope the text does justice to the fundamental truths of Charlotte’s singular life, it is not intended as definitive biography. (“Portrait” xxiv)⁵³

Wright never explains in the dialogue or stage directions, however, what he edited, condensed, or imagined. Fondakowski was intrigued that “you didn’t know and he didn’t want you to know. Because he’s making a play, right? So I might do that version” (Personal Interview).⁵⁴

In the four versions I have of “Casa Cushman,” however, Fondakowski only makes an author’s note once—in the January 2010 version. It reads:

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⁵² An interesting exception is Fiona Templeton’s *Delirium of Interpretations*. She includes an extensive bibliography at the end of the published play. She also makes margin notes (not spoken by actors) next to every line revealing each line’s textual source. This, however, is available only to the reader of the play, not the audience.

⁵³ Fondakowski paraphrased recalling from somewhere that “he said, ‘based on interviews that he did with Charlotte.’ He said ‘some of this is based on what Charlotte actually said to me that I recorded and some of it is what I remember her saying to me and some of it I entirely made up’ and he just made a note like that” (Personal Interview)

⁵⁴ For other examples, see “Production Notes” in Ludlum, “Chronology of the Life of the Real Queen Christina” in Gems, and “Synopsis” in Templeton.
The text of this play is part invented, part found. ‘Found’ meaning historical or biographical and taken from many sources including WHEN ROMEO WAS A WOMAN by Lisa Merrill and a collection of unpublished letters written by Charlotte Cushman to Emma Crow between the years 1836-1877.

Because Charlotte Cushman was so careful to destroy evidence of her life, there are many gaps in the historical record. This play, therefore, is a dialectic between what can be documented or footnoted in history and what is imagined by the playwright.

The essential facts are these: Charlotte Cushman lived from 1816 to 1876 and was considered in her time to be the greatest actress on the English speaking stage. After becoming a famous actress, Cushman established a home in the city of Rome, which became a place for female artists to come live and work. After several love affairs, Cushman had what she referred to as a ‘marriage’ with the American sculptor Emma Stebbins who created among other works, the ‘Angel of the Waters’ in Bethesda Fountain, Central Park. Cushman met and fell in love with Emma Crow, a woman twenty-two years her junior shortly after marrying Stebbins and decided that she wanted to keep both Emmas—have both her wife and her lover with her in the same house. To this end, she convinced Emma Crow to marry her nephew, Ned, a marriage Cushman described as one which would produce children which she could call her ‘own.’ They all tried to live happily ever after… (2 her ellipsis)

Even if this note is not included in the final version, it is helpful here in examining Fondakowski’s conscious effort to acknowledge her own processes. She reveals her theoretical lens for constructing the play: the “dialect between what can be documented or footnoted in history and what is imagined by the playwright.” She also reveals her own positioning, perhaps unconsciously, in determining and divulging what she considers the “essential facts” of Cushman’s life.

What is new about “Casa Cushman” is the extent to which Fondakowski reveals to the actual audience (not the reader) how she constructs the play and thus, how she constructs Cushman.\(^{55}\) The process of creating the different versions of the play, as well as the processes revealed within each version, correlate with Stanley’s “intellectual biography.” Each version

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\(^{55}\) Other plays might contain some mention of source materials within the dialogue. See Ludlum’s *Shame the Devil!* for example; however, “Casa Cushman” shows a greater awareness of this construction for the audience.
promotes active viewership in how it reveals the processes of construction. However, the development of the play from August 2009 to January 2011 reveals a negotiation on how precisely to present the processes of construction to match how Fondakowski wished to construct Cushman, a process itself. To begin understanding how “Casa Cushman” reveals historiographical processes in a performance text, let us first look at the dramaturgical devices and how they function in the August 2009 version. This version contains very little imagined dialogue and is the version Fondakowski found to not “be dramatic enough” and forced her to “fill in the blanks” in future versions (Personal Interview). I believe that Fondakowski worked under the assumption that through rearranging and re-presenting the actual words that Cushman and others wrote about herself, she might reveal that innermost Russian doll, the kernel of the thing itself. As Stanley points out, however, this is a “misleading” metaphor because the innermost doll does not exist independent of all the other dolls. This is part of the problem that the August 2009 version reveals. The August 2009 version then does not fully succeed in presenting Cushman as an active non-unified subject for her active audience. Nor does it fully examine or expand upon the subjects of the ephemerality of performance and female desire. Finally, the version does not fully utilize the possibilities of historiography within a performance context and move beyond embodying the words of a past person within a contemporary person, as other plays have done before.

The August 2009 version contains forty-five Moments that progress chronologically through Cushman’s life, except for the first two Moments (“Prologue” and “The Players”) and the last two Moments (“The Players Reprised” and “Charlotte Cushman’s Eye”).56 The first Moment, “Prologue,” creates a context for the play through introducing certain “facts” about Cushman’s life and will be further explored below. The next moment, “Players,” introduces some of the key characters in “Casa Cushman” and Cushman’s life: Ned Cushman, Emma Crow, Emma Stebbins, Sallie Mercer, Matilda Hays, and Charlotte Cushman.57 The next to last Moment of the play, “Players Reprised,” describes what happened to each of the characters after Cushman’s death. The final Moment, “Charlotte Cushman’s Eye,” depicts a contemporary historian discovering Cushman’s letters in the Library of Congress. The Moments in between

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56 For a list of these Moments and a brief description, see Appendix. As Fondakowski noted, certain events have been presented out of chronological order to serve the dramatic purpose of the play; however, the structure of the play itself proceeds linearly.

57 These characters, of course, represent whom Fondakowski deems important in Cushman’s life for the purposes of this version of the play.
these four bookending Moments feature Cushman performing her life from her early career to her death.

A close examination of the first Moment, “Prologue,” reveals many of the dramaturgical devices that occur throughout the play and to some extent, teaches the audience how to begin reading the performance. As the play opens, the stage directions describe,

_Eight actresses in dark Victorian dresses enter the stage. THEY move as a single unit, hoop skirts indistinguishable one from the other. THEY stand facing S[tage]R[ight] and gently begin to sway. Their movement creates an ocean of great Victorian hoop skirts. In front of them a scrim. On it a projection appears._

PROJECT: A historical photograph of Charlotte Cushman taken in New York in 1865.

_Behind the projection we see the women and their ocean of skirts swaying. Because it is a scrim we see both the image and the women._

“Projections” constitute one of the dramaturgical devices used in “Casa Cushman.” In the August 2009 version, they function most often to juxtapose the image of the “real” person with the actress playing her so that the audience sees “both the image and the women” just as the stage direction describes.

Following the projection of the historical photograph of Charlotte Cushman, the Chorus begins narrating “facts” about her life:

_CHORUS #1: Charlotte Cushman, the American actress, was born July 23, 1816 in Boston. Died February 18, 1876 in Boston._

_CHORUS #2: One of the most important actresses of her time, Cushman was famous for her interpretation of the leading MALE roles in Shakespeare, most especially, Romeo._

The “narration of ‘facts’” is another dramaturgical device used throughout the play. The sources for these “facts” are never cited. Fondakowski writes all of them in the past tense even within the scenes taking place within the present world of the play. Only the Chorus or named characters other than Cushman narrate. Cushman never narrates her own life. She always speaks to a particular person within the world of the play. The narration of “facts” often functions as a

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58 How the play is staged will greatly affect the lines Cushman speaks in the Prologue. Within the text of the Prologue, I interpret her lines spoken to a particular person that the audience cannot see; however, if Fondakowski
way to condense time. Often, as in the quote above, the narration of “facts” function as a “caption” for the projection and explain to the audience what the projection represents.

After Chorus #1 and #2 speak in the “Prologue,” the projection changes to “A historical photograph of Cushman as Romeo” (2). The Chorus explains:

CHORUS #3: When Miss Cushman made her last stage appearance in New York in 1874, fans filled the streets at 23rd Street from 5th to 6th Avenues just to catch a glimpse of the actress from her balcony. There are reports that over 14,000 people attended.

PROJECTION: An etching of Cushman from the balcony of her hotel at 23rd street; throngs of fans in the streets.

CHORUS #4: Miss Cushman often said,

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: (With a mischievous and mysterious grin): What is or can be the record of an actress, however famous? (2)

The Chorus still functions in these lines to narrate “facts” concerning Cushman’s life and to contextualize the projections. Cushman’s line, quoted above, is the first instance that the audience sees or hears Cushman onstage. Cushman’s line constitutes another dramaturgical device used throughout the play: “direct quotes that are not cited within the dialogue or stage directions.” This quote, for example, comes from Stebbins’s memoir of Cushman (Stebbins 11). The majority of the August 2009 version contains direct quotes that are not cited.

The “Prologue” continues alternating projections, narration, and direct quotes that are not cited to explain that Cushman wrote letters avidly but asked her correspondents to burn them. The Chorus explains:

CHORUS #5 (cont’d): One did not. A woman by the name of Emma Crow refused to burn them. She kept hers.

EMMA CROW sits alone with a box of letters. SHE unlocks the box, and proceeds to open each layer, like Russian nesting dolls. SHE finally gets to the letters and lays them out. SHE opens one and reads it, for the 10,000th time.

PROJECTION: A photo of one of the letters: tiny handwriting almost indecipherable, fading ink

chooses to have Cushman specifically address the twenty-first century audience in front of Cushman, this will change my dramaturgical analysis of the play slightly. For example see the lines:

CHORUS #4: Miss Cushman often said,

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: (With a mischievous and mysterious grin): What is or can be the record of an actress, however famous? (2)
EMMA CROW: The letters which Miss Cushman wrote to her friends were almost too
intimate to publish, even in these days when nothing is too private or too sacred to be
withheld from the public. (3)
Instead of projecting the image of a person, Fondakowski projects the image of the letter—a
visual citation of the source of many of the words spoken in the play even if not all of them are
contained within this projection.
Once the Chorus establishes that Crow kept “thousands of letters,” Fondakowski makes
her playwright’s note through the spoken words of the Chorus:
CHORUS #2: The play you are about to see is constructed from these letters, as well as
biographies, diaries, reviews, clippings, portraits and photographs saved by Cushman’s
friends.
CHORUS #3: Because Miss Cushman was so careful to destroy evidence of her life there
are many gaps in the historical record. When those gaps occur we will refrain from
trying to invent narrative—unless—events can be strongly inferred from the evidence.
CHORUS #4: Otherwise, we’ve left gaps where they are. They tell us as much about our
character as the things that remain.
CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: (With a mischievous and mysterious grin): What is or can
be the record of an actress, however famous? (3)
Not only do these lines describe the process for creating the play, they establish that the play
leaves more gaps than it fills in the historical record. The repetition of Cushman’s line also
establishes that a major thematic focus of the play concerns the ephemerality of performance.
The August 2009 version is the only version that contains this explicit of a playwright’s note,
which seems to correlate with Fondakowski’s attempt in this version to strictly adhere to the
words within the documentary record.59
The next Moment, “The Players,” in the August 2009 version contains another
dramaturgical device: “I am” statements. This device allows the characters to introduce
themselves and their relationships to Cushman:
NED CUSHMAN: I am Ned Cushman, Charlotte Cushman’s nephew.
EMMA CROW: I am Emma Crow, the love of Charlotte Cushman’s life.

59 The other versions of the play cut Chorus #3’s and #4’s lines, which explain the prevalence of gaps in the
historical record and when these gaps will be filled in.
EMMA STEBBINS: I am Emma Stebbins, the sculptor and Charlotte Cushman’s wife.
SALLIE MERCER: I am Sallie Mercer, Charlotte Cushman’s right hand.
MATILDA HAYS a.k.a. MAX: I am Matilda Hays, a.k.a. Max. I gave Charlotte Cushman a decade of my life.
CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: And I am Charlotte Cushman—considered the greatest actress on the English speaking stage. (4)

This version groups all of the “I am” statements together rather than throughout the play. The presentation of the characters in this way draws a comparison between Cushman’s life and a play. Whereas Cushman does not break the fourth wall again, the other characters frequently break the fourth wall to narrate facts throughout the rest of the play.

Though the “Prologue” only contains instances of the narration of uncited “facts,” characters occasionally cite or introduce sources in other parts of the play. This dramaturgical device is what I call “verbal citations.” This device uses direct quotes from primary sources and tells the audience what the source is. The first example occurs in the fourth Moment, “Macready.” The Moment begins when the Chorus introduces Macready:

CHORUS: William Charles Macready. The famous British tragedian, seen here as Macbeth, offered Cushman the biggest break of her career when he invited her to perform opposite him.

MACREADY enters the pose of the photograph of him as MACBETH. The photo is taken.
The audience sees:

PROJECTON: William Charles Macready as Macbeth.

MACREADY: (to CHORUS) thank you for the introduction. I quite agree it was the biggest break of her career. And I might add that she never fully appreciated it.

HE goes to a table and writes:

MACREADY: 23 October 1843

CHORUS: From the diaries of the English actor William Charles Macready.

MACREADY: Last night dined with Prescott, J Hamilton, Dr. Francis, Girard, etc. An America dinner: terrapin soup, bass-fish, bear, wild turkey, canvas-back duck, roasted oysters. Drank those ingenious and beautifully composed, I should say, ‘constructed’ drinks that are conspicuous in this country.

Beat.
CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN crosses to her dressing room. Sits down in front of her dressing room mirror. SHE prepares. SALLIE is with her.

MACREADY: Acting opposite the American Miss Cushman tonight. She is the manageress of the Walnut Street Theatre, and has acted about New York and Philadelphia to…respectful reviews. But I shall be the judge [of] her talents.

(7)
The combination of devices here (the projection, the narration of “facts,” and the verbal citation of sources) largely functions in this instance to frame Cushman’s performance of Lady Macbeth, as well as her interaction with the actor Macready in the next Moment, through Macready’s eyes.

The verbal citation of sources occupies a similar function in the fourteenth Moment of Act One, “The Tussle Before Witnesses.” The Chorus explains:

CHORUS: Annie Brewster (an old friend of CC’s from Phila) wrote in her diary this bit of gossip told to her by Hatty Hosmer.

HATTY HOSMER: […] Miss Hayes was very jealous of a new friendship Miss Cushman had formed. Miss Stebbins, the sculptress, had come to Rome and Miss C had taken a great fancy to her. Miss H. foolishly grew jealous and there were numerous disturbances, Sallie told me, about this matter. So—I had fallen into a daze when I was aroused by a noise and awakening saw Miss H. attacking Miss C with her fists and Miss C. defending herself!

Upstage CC and MAX play the scene. CC at her writing table.

MATILDA HAYS: To whom are you writing?

CHARLOTTE: It is a business note.

MATILDA HAYS: If it is truly a business note, then show it to me.

CHARLOTTE: I will not. […] (30)

In the August 2009 version, the Chorus citing to the audience the source of this story functions as a signal that the story is told through several perspectives (from Fondakowski’s, from Brewster’s, from Hosmer’s), none of which are Cushman’s. Not all instances of this device, however, introduce a perspective. For example, “Moment: Farewell” begins with a Chorus member explaining, “From a farewell speech given by Charlotte Cushman, May 1852” (27). Cushman then proceeds to give the speech and the Moment ends. The verbal citation here helps to indicate the setting and a jump forward in time from the previous Moment. In other instances,
most especially when it concerns Cushman’s letter writing, the device helps to contextualize the quotation.

The verbal citation device is used much more frequently in the August 2009 version than the January 2011 version. A higher use in the August 2009 correlates with the lack of imagined dialogue; however, the device is used predominantly in the first act in this version. The first act of the August 2009 version also largely covers what some might consider the height of Cushman’s career and so Fondakowski had a greater range of sources to use (photographs, reviews, Cushman’s one extant diary, in addition to the memoirs, letters, and others’ diaries and biographies of Cushman). The second act of the August 2009 version focuses more on Cushman’s personal life. Though the second acts still predominantly uses direct quotes from sources, they are not as frequently cited perhaps because the sources are not as diversified. The majority of the quotes come from the love letters.

As the Chorus indicates in the “Prologue” of the August 2009 version, however, the sources used in constructing the play clearly leave gaps. When Fondakowski creates imagined circumstances to fill in these gaps, she indicates to the audience through what I call “we don’t know…” statements. What is most informative about these instances is perhaps not the statement that the historical record leaves a gap, but how the playwright fills the gap. When Matilda Hays first enters in “Moment: Matilda Hays” she says: “I met Charlotte Cushman in England in 1846. History does not record exactly when or where or how” (24). Fondakowski follows this “we don’t know…” statement with a simple, imagined meeting between the two:

CHARLOTTE crosses downstage, shakes MAX’S hand, and smiles mischievously.

MATILDA HAYS: Miss Cushman, welcome to England.

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Thank you, Miss Hays.

MATILDA HAYS: Please, call me ‘Max.’ Or, if you prefer, ‘Mathew.’

The WOMEN look at each other intensely, with broad smiles. It is obvious that there is great chemistry there. THEY dance. MAX dresses CUSHMAN like a man from the waist up.

MATILDA HAYS: (to audience) By 1848, Charlotte and I were living together as a couple. (24)

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It occurs about sixteen times in the first act and about seven times in the second act.
In establishing the gaps in knowledge, Fondakowski can also condense time and jump forward in time to when the archive does record them together.

Other gaps in knowledge are not staged so briefly. At the beginning of “Moment: The Dream,” Emma Stebbins explains: “The winter and part of the summer of this year were passed in the states acting all about the country with her usual success. Letters and notices of this period are wanting…” (36, her ellipsis). The Moment continues as an imagined conversation between Stebbins and Cushman using pieced-together but uncited quotes from Stebbins’s memoir. In the conversation in “The Dream,” Cushman reveals her childhood obsession with cracking dolls’ heads “open to see what they were thinking of,” a metaphor Fondakowski (and Cushman and Stebbins) uses to assert Cushman’s proto-feminism. Cushman also questions Stebbins about the ephemerality of performance and what remains of an actress after death (37). Finally Cushman expresses her dream “to set up a Roman home: a place with apartments for artists to come live and work” (38). Fondakowski uses this gap in knowledge to express Cushman’s struggle with the limitations of being a woman in her society, her frustration with how she will be remembered as an actress, as well as providing the motivation for the house in Rome.

Fondakowski uses other gaps in knowledge to explore the nature of female desire and make some assertions about what it might have meant to Cushman. In “Moment: Burn This Letter,” the Chorus explains:

CHORUS: Between June 12 and June 19, 1858, Miss Cushman and Miss Crow meet again in Pittsfield, MA

CHORUS: History does not tell us what happened in this meeting. (45)

These statements are followed with the stage directions: “Meeting with Emma Crow. THEY are alone together finally in a hotel room. CC unfastens EMMA CROW’S dress and corset, exposing her neck” (45). After this hint of desire and sensuality, the Chorus continues:

CHORUS: However, after this meeting, Miss Cushman writes to Emma Crow.

CHORUS TOGETHER: Burn this letter,

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Metropolitan Hotel, New York, Sunday, 20 June 1858

And how is it with you, my beloved? Are you glad to be rid of your ‘ungentle mistress?’ Or are you thinking more tenderly of her as your ‘ladie love?’[…] (45)
Based on what Fondakowski found in the record, that Cushman and Crow met between June 12 and 19, 1858 and the letter Cushman wrote immediately afterwards, Fondakowski gives us a glimpse of what might have happened.

A similar instance occurs in “Moment: Paris,” but this time Fondakowski more explicitly suggests, but does not show, sex. The Chorus explains, “Before returning to America, Emma Crow and Charlotte Cushman meet again in Paris” (61). After a dance, “a musical chairs of sorts,” in which different characters see who “will end up with whom,” the Chorus reiterates,

CHORUS: No one knows for sure what happened in Paris.

As the WOMEN begin to undress to make love CHARLOTTE says:

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: In my dreams I see you my darling, as perfect as the day we met. My commitment to you in unchanged. Even now. Eyes reaching out to eyes…

EMMA CROW initiates a very passionate kiss.

The ‘doors’ of their room [are] closed and we see only their shadows. SALLIE sits outside the door.

CHORUS: The next day, CHARLOTTE wrote to EMMA:

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Now that I have tasted the sweets of such communion as is given to few to know…I will not, I can not live without you. (61, her ellipsis)

Like the previous instance, Fondakowski uses the recorded meeting and the letter that followed to imagine/suggest what happened in between. The closing of the door is a strong sign but is still not an explicit depiction of what the women did behind those closed doors, just as the love letters suggest strongly sexual desire but do not explicitly state it.

There is another “we don’t know…” instance indicated by the stage directions but not within the dialogue in “Moment: Wasted Life.” In this Moment, Cushman reads aloud a letter she writes to Crow:

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN (quoting from the letter she’s read): “A wasted life…a wasted life?”

CC begins to write a letter.

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Great Western, June 28, 1869

My darling, your letter has given me very much great pain, more than perhaps you knew…it may not be that I have many years to be with you…and so you must bear with any mistakes I may make…
Lights up on EMMMA CROW in another part of the stage.

EMMA CROW (deliberately): “A wasted life.”

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN:…and not hold them so unforgivingly in your heart.

EC appears to CC. THEY have the following scene, as imagined from the letter: (73)

The stage directions indicate that the scene is based on this letter Cushman wrote to Crow in response to a letter Crow wrote indicating that she considered her life “wasted.” This stage direction indicates one of the problems with the sources Fondakowski used: the love letters were always one-sided. Crow saved the letters Cushman wrote her but Cushman did not save the letters Crow wrote her. Without Crow’s letters, we are largely missing Crow’s point of view in the historical record. Here, Fondakowski imagines what Crow said to distress Cushman as well as what might have happened had the conversation happened in person rather than in letters.

Another instance occurs in “Moment: The Death of Charlotte Cushman.” Unlike the other previous two examples in “Paris” and “Burn This Letter,” Fondakowski does not fill in a gap between an event and the letter that followed. Here she uses even more imagination. After the narration of events Cushman partook in as she neared the end of her life, Emma Stebbins says, “The next day is one I never wrote about, but one that is permanently and indelibly recorded in my mind’s eye” (86). What follows is Stebbins at Cushman’s deathbed. The two discuss largely how Cushman will be remembered as an actress:

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: I am haunted by certain thoughts. All the roles I have played, all the lines I have memorized, all the prompt books and properties, meticulously kept, the reviews, the rivalries, the costumes and the travel, the endless travel, what was it all for? What was all this labor all for? Where does it all go?

Beat.

EMMA STEBBINS: Charlotte, you did not just perform your roles, you are these roles. And the theater is your life.

CHARLOTTE CUSHAMN: Yes. Like the drawing made of me when I first was in England.

EMMA STEBBINS: ‘The Yankee hanging out her banner.’

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: I am Meg Merrilies. I am Hamlet. I am Queen Katherine. I am Cardinal Woosley. I am Nancy Sykes, I am ______, I am Lady M.

Beat.
I am Romeo.

EMMA STEBBINS: Shhh, it is time to sleep now, my darling. (86-87)

Here Fondakowski imagines what Cushman and Stebbins may have discussed on Cushman’s deathbed. In focusing on Cushman’s career and how she might be remembered for her life as an actress, Fondakowski ends the play without fully resolving her exploration of female desire within the play. Right before Cushman dies, she says, “I can see everything, Emma, understand everything, including your courage” (87). Emma “takes her hand” and replies, “Bless you my darling. I love you so much, I love you so much, I love you so much…” (87, her ellipsis). In these last few lines before her death, Stebbins expresses her desire more than Cushman. This deathbed conversation shapes how Cushman will be remembered at the end of the play despite the presence of two more Moments after it.

Yet if Fondakowski shapes Cushman’s deathbed concerns around how she will be remembered as an actress, she includes very few instances of Cushman performing as an actress. When Cushman “acts” within the world of the play, she generally recites a few lines from the play, which is then followed by reviews of her performance. The actress-as-Cushman is only juxtaposed against the image of Cushman-as-Romeo.\(^61\) The third Moment of the play, “Moment: Toy Theater Tableau World of Charlotte Cushman’s Life,” summarizes Cushman’s performances from her portrayal of “Countess Almaviva in Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro* in Boston” to when she becomes the manageress of the Walnut Street Theater in Philadelphia. This two-page Moment summarizes her roles as Countess Almaviva in Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro* in Boston, Lucy Bertram in *Guy Mannering*, Lady Macbeth to John Barton’s Macbeth, the “gentlewoman to a famous Lady M[acbeth],” Meg Merrilies in *Guy Mannering*, a three-year contract at the Bowery before it burned down two months later, a “walking lady” at the Park Theatre, Nancy Sykes in *Olivier Twist*, and the manageress of the Walnut Street Theater (5-6).

Within this Moment, Cushman gets minimal performance time. She sings “a few notes from *Marriage of Figaro*” twice, recites a line from Macbeth, and recites a line from a speech given as the manageress of the Walnut Street theatre. The rest of the Moment features the Chorus narrating her progression in her career and the reviews she received at each stage. The next time she performs is in the fourth Moment, “Moment: Macready,” as Lady Macbeth opposite William Charles Macready’s Macbeth. She rehearses a few lines in front of her mirror before going

\(^61\) This occurs in the “Prologue” (2) and “Moment: Playing Romeo” (22).
onstage to briefly act opposite Macready, followed by Macready’s analysis of her performance. As I said earlier, Macready’s perspective frames Cushman’s performance and does not fully allow for an analysis of what was new and/or unusual about Cushman’s performances. In “Moment: Quotes,” Sallie and Cushman read reviews of her Bianca in Fazio, but we do not see Cushman perform Bianca.

“Moment: Playing Romeo” perhaps gets closer to an analysis of Cushman’s performance, rather than a reiteration of the reviews given of her performance. Fondakowski includes an echo of the performative element of Cushman’s performance. Before going onstage, the stage directions read:

MISS CUSHMAN is completely undressed. SHE stands naked before the audience (preferably facing upstage) before donning the male attire. First, SALLIE binds her breasts. Then, SHE hands CUSHMAN male undergarments, then, tights, breeches, shirt, hat, cloak, etc.

When completely transformed, CC moves physically differently now: she is a man (21)

Cushman proceeds to rehearse her lines with Sallie. We do not see Cushman perform onstage, however. Instead, Cushman steps “out of her dressing room to footlights and large applause” (22). She then takes “the pose of Romeo from a famous portrait” which is juxtaposed against the projection of this “famous portrait.” The Chorus narrates: “Charlotte Cushman as Romeo, ca. mid-late 1850s. Cushman’s visibly female buxom Romeo was often read by nineteenth-century spectators as convincingly male and youthful” (22). This image is followed with quotes from reviews of her Romeo.

She performs Romeo once more as Crow recalls her performance in “Moment: The Seduction of Emma Crow:”

CC takes EMMA CROW by the hand and places her in the audience. CC takes on the role of ROMEO. It is the balcony scene. EC is watching.

EMMA CROW: The play which took place that evening was Romeo and Juliet.

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN (as ROMEO)

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:
Be not her maid, since she is envious;
Her vestal livery is but sick and green
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.
It is my lady, O, it is my love!
O, that she knew she were!

*EMMA CROW stands up and [sic] from her place in the audience. The play within the play fades into the background as EMMA CROW and CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN finish the scene.* (39)

Emma Crow recites Juliet’s lines to finish the *Romeo and Juliet* scene and then explains her perceptions of Cushman the actress.

What these representations of Cushman’s performances predominantly rely on is other people’s memories of Cushman in the form of reviews, diaries, or letters as well as images. Understanding the ephemerality of performance, Fondakowski wanted to avoid having the actress playing Cushman attempt to mimetically re-create Cushman’s performance. Fondakowski explains, “The actor can pretend she’s Cushman and do a good job, but the audience won’t understand why the act that she did and the things that she did on stage were so radical unless you kind of draw that out for them” (Personal Interview). In the August 2009 version then, Fondakowski relied very heavily on other’s recollections of Cushman’s performances and a few juxtaposed images of the actress-as-Cushman against Cushman-as-actress. Yet this approach only reinforces the notion that what remains of an actress is the “vaguest of memories” (Cushman qtd Stebbins 11). This seems to continue to problematize the question of how an actress is remembered, but does little more than to reiterate that reviews, memories, and photos remain. The August 2009 version does what Davis warns against in “Questions for a Feminist Methodology in Theatre History:” it accumulates archival artifacts “to describe but not to analyze performance” (Davis 65, my emphasis).

In addition, though Fondakowski contextualizes projections of photographs throughout the play with the narration of the Chorus, she does little to present the processes that enable us to understand the past through the present. The past only exists in the present. The photographs themselves exist as tangible objects, but what they represent cannot be separated from the social context in which they were created and the social context in which we try to interpret them.
Without some sort of “bridge,” a dramaturgical or performance device that goes beyond introducing the figure, place, and time, the projections function more as an accumulation of artifacts than an effective historiographical device. They mistakenly reinforce the notion of time as a line: the photographs as a part of the past and the bodies of the actors as a part of the present.

The narration of “facts” and verbal citations also provide other problems to the historiographical endeavor of the play. Both devices often negate Cushman’s agency, making her seem more like an object of biographical scrutiny than a subject with agency performing her life. Because others narrate very large portions of her life within the play, Cushman seems to have little control over how her life is constructed. Yet a close analysis of the primary sources available, as explored in the previous chapter, indicate Cushman carefully constructed various versions of herself. While her actions within the play are juxtaposed with the narration and citations, her actions follow these rather than create them, which fails to present life writing as a dynamic process between the subject, sources, and biographer/historian. The frequency of the narration of “facts” and verbal citations of sources gives the impression that Cushman’s life has already been performed and is being represented here through documents and photographs, which at times replaces empathy with didacticism. The devices make it seem like Cushman is acted upon rather than acting through. Of course she is a representation of the historical personage, as are all biographical subjects, but an overreliance on documents prevents fully utilizing the theatrical vocabulary available to construct Cushman within the theatrical medium.

Fondakowski begins to more fully explore the theatrical vocabulary and historiographical possibilities with the “we don’t know…” device. The imagined moments offer a way to read against the sources and create ways of knowing beyond the written documents’ ability to carry meaning. Yet Fondakowski seems hesitant to do this in this version. She uses the device six times and in stating what we do not know each time these instances happen, Fondakowski seems to try to explain what is “fact” and what is “fiction” within the play. Yet, as the future versions demonstrate, Fondakowski begins separating her own connection between “fact” and “written document” and explores the possibilities of making “Casa Cushman” not only dramatically compelling, but, as I interpret it, a historiographical endeavor able to move beyond the gaps in

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62 These ways of knowing can be much more fully analyzed once the play is performed and will make an excellent topic for future research.
the archive thus establishing a methodology for other artists/scholars to use performance as a historiographical tool.
CHAPTER III: Performance as Historiography

Following an intense six-week workshop of “Casa Cushman” in November 2010 in Minneapolis, my interview with Fondakowski in January 2011 reflected many of the major discoveries Fondakowski found in the workshop. She explained that she currently viewed the “organizing principle” of the play as how Cushman “tried to control the narrative of her life.” The January 2011 version of “Casa Cushman” reflects this organizing principle. Fondakowski elaborates:

She [Cushman] tried to construct and control the narrative—how she would be viewed, the parts that she picked, the timing of when she picked them…A fine artist, a moral woman, because there were so many moral prejudices against actresses at the time. So what I’m trying to do in the theatrical representation is show those elements, kind of deconstruct those elements. (Personal Interview, my emphasis)

Ultimately, she explained, “we’re kind of trying to use a contemporary performance to shed light on what was so radical about what she was doing at the time” (Personal Interview). The January 2011 version contains the addition of several new performance devices that largely replace the dramaturgical devices of the August 2009 version. The performance devices seek to deconstruct Cushman’s performances in terms of theatre, gender, and sexuality. Fondakowski works from a premise that the historical figure of Cushman cannot be reconstructed from primary sources, which always represent the past but are never the past itself. Instead, Fondakowski attempts to deconstruct those sources to use a “contemporary performance to shed light on what was so radical about what she [Cushman] was doing at the time” (Personal Interview).

In the August 2009 version of “Casa Cushman,” Fondakowski constructed a narrative through re/arranging the words from primary documents (found text) concerning Cushman and canonical “facts” (birth, death, dates, and places) about Cushman. This chapter carefully analyzes the January 2011 version, which moves away from the recitation of words from documents and does not provide a clear dichotomy between “facts” and what stems from the playwright’s imagination. The primary source documents available concerning Cushman, as demonstrated in Chapter I, are problematic in the gaps they leave as well as necessitating the ability to read the documents against the grain and not take the words as empirical truths. The

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63 To see how Tectonic Theater Project uses the term “organizing principle” see Introduction.
January 2011 version of “Casa Cushman” de-emphasizes the construction of the play through the verbal citation of sources and instead emphasizes visual citations of documents, performances, costumes, dress forms, and photographs/portraits to deconstruct the historicized subject of Cushman. This version layers the visual, embodied, aural, and textual to use performance to deconstruct representations of Charlotte Cushman. Using Elin Diamond’s performative notions of “doing” and “done” and Charlotte Canning’s application of them to feminist history, I lay a theoretical base for how the January 2011 version more actively juxtaposes sources with the bodies of actors, thus more fully utilizing the performance vocabulary than the August 2009 version. I argue that “Casa Cushman” juxtaposes the “doing” of Cushman performing her life with the “done” (insertion of quotes, pictures, etchings). Through this active juxtaposition, Fondakowski begins opening a performative space that demonstrates that the historicized subject exists in the present only through sources and subsequent historicizations, including this performance. The representational nature of theatre, therefore, correlates with the representational nature of history.

Performance as historiography allows the reading of documents against the grain to occur using the semiotics of the stage—costume, actor, gesture, set, staging, images, projections, and props—in the present moment of performance. As performance, however, any historiographical knowledge gleaned from watching “Casa Cushman” concerning the ephemerality of performance or female desire may not be translatable into written text just as the actual historical subject can be represented but not reconstructed through text. Thus, the play may not contribute new insights on Cushman as much as an epistemological shift in how the insights can be understood: that the deconstruction of history can be as much visual and sensual as textual. Just as the actual mortal Cushman is not present, the representations of her (photos and words) also do not act as substitutions for her. They do not have the ability to recreate or reconstruct her. Nor do they stand alone to provide tangible “truths” about her. Fondakowski layers performance elements over the documentary elements not to recreate Cushman but to aid in understanding what made her performances (in terms of sexuality and theatre) unique and new and to problematize representations of her. Using four main mediums for visual citations—projections, dress forms, dress forms,
props, and costumes—Fondakowski creates performance frames to aid contemporary audiences in deconstructing representations of Cushman as we read them today.

As I argued in Chapter II, the accumulation of dramaturgical devices and their relationship to representational sources in the August 2009 version describe Cushman’s performances, rather than analyze them. Because so much of the August 2009 version is narrated, the only juxtaposition created is between the contemporary actresses and the historical figures they represent. While this may still be useful and educational, for “Casa Cushman” to function as performance as historiography it must move beyond purely dialogue-based historiography. It must utilize and actively juxtapose the performance elements available through the theatrical medium to deconstruct the historicized subject of Cushman. The term “actively juxtapose” is vague so let me clarify the theoretical lens I use to analyze this juxtaposition in the January 2011 version. Elin Diamond explains that “performance is always a doing and a thing done” (Introduction 1). Diamond describes a “doing” (as part of performance) as “embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others (and/or the watching self)” (1). She explains that “a thing done” is the “completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted, and passionately revisited across a pre-existing discursive field” (1). Broadly speaking, “Casa Cushman” as a theatrical performance exists as a “doing” and “a thing done.” Diamond continues:

Common sense insists on a temporal separation between a doing and a thing done, but in usage and in theory, performance, even its dazzling physical immediacy, drifts between present and past, presence and absence, consciousness and memory. Every performance, if it is intelligible as such, embeds features of previous performances: gender conventions, racial histories, aesthetic traditions—political and cultural pressures that are consciously and unconsciously acknowledged. (1)

Performance then inherently places “doing” and “done” side-by-side in temporal and discursive spaces. Diamond later explains how meaning occurs in these spaces: “When performativity materializes as performance in that risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing (a

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65 Diamond broadly defines “performance” as she uses it here. She explains, “Whether the performance of one’s gender on a city street, an orientalist impersonation in a Parisian salon, or a corporation-subsidized, ‘mediatized’ Broadway show, each performance marks out a unique temporal space that nevertheless contains traces of other now-absent performances, other non-disappeared scenes” (Introduction 1).

66 For more on how all performances “ghost” previous performances, see Marvin Carlson’s The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine. Carlson builds off of Diamond, as well as other performance theorists, and expands the argument into a book-length study.
reiteration of norms) and a thing done (discursive conventions that frame our interpretations), between someone’s body and the conventions of embodiment, we have access to cultural meanings and critique” (5).

Because “Casa Cushman” functions as performance as historiography, the historiographical endeavor of the play brings slightly new interpretations of “doing” and “done.” In terms of historiography, Canning uses Diamond’s ideas to explore the performative in feminist history. Canning reads the “doing” in feminist history as “the past actions of women that were often forgotten or ignored by the ‘thing done,’ that is the historical profession and discipline. The act of turning the past into history effectively revealed a gap between the two, a gap that had been hidden in the attempt to naturalize the historical erasure of women” (“I am a Feminist Scholar” 225). For Canning, the negotiation between “doing” and “done” reveals the erasure of women’s actions through the (re)iterative “act of turning the past into history.” The erasure then leads to an erroneous assumption that women had no significant past actions to contribute to historiography. Thus, the writing of feminist history constantly negotiates the overlapping and interconnected temporal and discursive spaces between the “doing” of women in history and the “done” of the written history.

Read through these lenses, the January 2011 version of “Casa Cushman,” as performance as historiography, features a double “doing/done.” The first is the “doing/done” of the historical subject of Cushman’s actions within her lifetime and the “done,” the historicization of Cushman. The “doing” of Cushman’s life can now only be represented in the archival sources saved, which is reflected in the historicization (“done”) of Cushman. The second “doing/done” is the performance of the play “Casa Cushman.” Performance allows the “doing/done” of the character of Cushman to represent the “doing/done” of the historical figure. The interaction between the double “doing/done” reveals the representational and discursive nature of history. Just as the figure of Cushman onstage is not the actual Cushman, the figure of Cushman in Merrill’s book is not the actual Cushman. Because the historical figure cannot be reconstructed and exists only through representational means, the performance of “Cushman” reveals a gap between the “doing/done” of history. The “doing” of a representation of Cushman through the body of an actress emphasizes a notion that the “doing” of Cushman will always be mediated through the social, historical, and cultural discourses (“done”) through which she and her contemporaries wrote about her life and the discourses through which the historian, playwright, actor, and
director writes. The January 2011 version succeeds as performance as historiography in developing the tensions between the “doing/done” of Cushman’s history with the “doing/done” of a contemporary performance in a framework that deconstructs Cushman thus problematizing for a contemporary audience the relationship between past and present. In developing the tensions between the “doing/done” of history and the “doing/done” of performance, “Casa Cushman” historiographically succeeds in doing what Canning calls for in performance as historiography: “...I am arguing for history that overtly acknowledges the ways in which it is a performance of the past, but not the past itself” (“Feminist Performance” 227).

Let us examine the first Moment of the January 2011 version, “Moment: Prologue,” to see more specifically how “Casa Cushman” uses “doing” and “done” dramaturgically and historiographically and how it begins to integrate the visual citations over verbal citations. The Prologue begins with the stage directions:

An ACTOR walks into the space. U[p]S[stage] is a collection of period furniture: Victorian tables and chairs, books, picture frames, pedestals, dress forms, busts and wig forms. There is a feeling that time has abandoned this place and its contents. The ACTOR takes in the audience and welcomes them:

ACTOR: Casa Cushman. Act One.

Eight actresses in dark Victorian dresses enter the stage. THEY move as a single unit, hoop skirts indistinguishable one from the other. THEY stand facing S[tage]R[ight] and gently begin to sway. Their movement creates an ocean of great Victorian hoop skirts. The two MEN in the ensemble remain to the sides. CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN steps forward.

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: I am Charlotte Cushman, considered the greatest actress on the English speaking stage. (3)

There are several changes to the beginning of the Prologue in this version from the August 2009 version: the description of the objects/artifacts onstage before the presence of bodies, an actor introducing the play, and the immediate presence of Charlotte Cushman introducing herself. According to the stage directions, Fondakowski wants the objects/artifacts on stage to read as both Victorian and abandoned by time. Such a description begins creating an ambiguous temporal space.67 The actor announcing the title of the play and the commencement of Act One

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67 The actual staging might clarify the ambiguity, add to the ambiguity, or perhaps do both.
disrupts a theatre space of realism and demonstrates a metatheatrical awareness within the play of the “doing/done” of the historicization of Cushman.

The actresses entering in their hoop skirts place signs of the Victorian era onto contemporary actresses’ bodies. The actress who steps forward and announces, “I am Charlotte Cushman,” begins to create something of a dialectical image. Elin Diamond explains that the dialectic image “doesn’t stand in for an absent real (woman, man, toaster, Chevy), nor is it internally harmonious. A version of the demystifying gestus, the dialectical image is a montage construction of forgotten objects or pieces of commodity culture that are ‘blasted’ out of history’s continuum” (Unmaking Mimesis 146, her emphasis). In speaking about feminist biographical performance, Claycomb uses Diamond’s understanding of the dialectical image to explain the relationship between the actress and the biographical subject she portrays in feminist biographical drama:

That is, the actress’s body, a dialectical image, provides an analogue for what is historically relevant: not necessarily the historical body itself, but the transgressive performances it undertook.... The body of the biographical subject, the initial site of reclamation, is long gone; it can only be reclaimed as history. What can be reclaimed for the present, however, is the performance enacted by both bodies—the signifier of the actress’ performance and the signified of those performances drawn from her subject’s life—and the meta-narrative that the dialectic between the past and the present creates to reinforce the connection between them. (“Playing at Lives: Biography” 531-532)

In other words, the actress does not stand in for the subject she portrays but is a “montage” of representational structures pointing towards the “performance enacted by both bodies,” actress and subject. Within “Casa Cushman,” the dialectical image might also be read as the physical embodiment of the interplay between the “doing/done” of history and the “doing/done” of performance. The character declares that she is Charlotte Cushman but the actress is not Cushman. The actress does not recreate Cushman but instead represents Cushman.

The notion that the actress playing Cushman is not Cushman herself is further reinforced by the projection following her declarative statement:

In front of them is a scrim. On it a projection appears:

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68 Diamond puts a feminist slant on two theories in these statements: Walter Benjamin’s “dialectical image” and Bertolt Brecht’s gestus and epic acting. Once “Casa Cushman” is produced, it will most certainly warrant a closer analysis using Brechtian theory and Diamond’s feminist reappropriation of Brecht.
PROJECTION: A historical photograph of Charlotte Cushman taken in New York in 1865.

Behind the projection we see the women and their ocean of skirts swaying. (3)

The audience knows this is a play, which the actor reinforces in announcing the title and act. The presence of the projection then reaffirms that this is not Cushman. The actress’s body will not entirely match the representation of Cushman in the photograph, which is only one of many different representations of Cushman in images. The photograph, then, is not Cushman either, only a representation. Cushman’s “I am…” statement at the very beginning of the play also clearly begins establishing her subject position within the play, as someone performing, or “doing,” her life rather than acted upon by others. The projection of her and the narration of “facts” that follow begin juxtaposing her “doing” against the “done” of her historicizations:

CHORUS #1: Charlotte Cushman, American actress, born July 23, 1816 in Boston. Died February 18, 1876 in Boston.

CHORUS #2: One of the most important actresses of her time, Cushman was famous for her interpretation of the leading MALE roles in Shakespeare, especially, Romeo.

PROJECTION: A historical photograph of Cushman as ROMEO

CHORUS #3: When Miss Cushman made her final stage appearance in New York in 1874, 14,000 fans filled the streets at 23rd Street from 5th to 6th Avenues just to catch a glimpse of the actress from her balcony.

PROJECTION: An etching of Cushman from the balcony of her hotel at 23rd street; throngs of fans in the streets. (3)

This section of the Prologue is exactly the same as the August 2009 version except for two elements: what comes immediately before it and after it. Because of what comes before it, as described above, the “narration of ‘facts’” in the January 2011 version serves to further problematize the actress onstage playing Cushman who announces in the present tense that she is “considered the greatest actress on the English speaking stage.” The narration of “facts” coupled with the projections of the actual Cushman establishes for the audience that she has been dead for about 150 years.

What happens immediately after this section is also different from the August 2009 version. Over the projection of the etching of Cushman, the following projection appears: “a pen moves; tiny handwriting appears over the etching” (3). As the handwriting appears, the Chorus
explains “Miss Cushman was an avid letter writer and wrote continuously to her friends and admirers” (3). The projection of the etching being written upon resembles the performance ("doing") of letter writing. The visual representation of the creation of the image of the words themselves begins to establish what the January 2011 version does differently than the August 2009 version. The January 2011 version actively engages the projections, dialogue, and eventually the bodies onstage rather than simply juxtaposing body and image.

Instead of telling the audience through the Chorus that “few of her [Cushman’s] letters survive today” as Fondakowski did in the August 2009 version, she allows Cushman to tell the audience that she burned her letters.69 The audience must then make the connection on their own that burning all of her letters means that few of them survive:

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: I wish you would burn my letters. I have asked you to do so.
You do not know into whose hands an accident might make them fall.

The WOMEN stop swaying.

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN (con’t): You can always keep one, & when another comes then destroy the old one—this is wisest and best. (4)

Not until after Cushman performs this line does the Chorus provide any narration about the letters. The Chorus continues:

CHORUS #3: Most of her correspondents agreed to her request.
CHORUS (overlapping): “Yes, Darling.” “Yes, my love.” “Of course, darling.” “As you wish, Charlotte.”

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Emma?
Silence.

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Emma Crow? (Silence).

EMMA CROW steps forward.

EMMA CROW: I am Emma Crow. I was her lover—(SHE holds up a letter) how could I destroy heart records? (SHE kisses the letter). (4)

Instead of the Chorus describing Crow’s refusal to burn the letters, we see Cushman ask for Crow, Crow identifying herself, Crow describing her relationship to Cushman, and indicating that she did not want to destroy “heart records.” While Cushman seems to be in the present

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69 It is not clear in the stage directions to whom Cushman speaks. It might be to the audience or an invisible Emma Crow. How Fondakowski stages this section will certainly affect the interpretation I make here.
moment, asking for Crow, Crow speaks in the past tense with a retrospective awareness of Cushman’s life. She was her lover. How could she destroy heart records? In terms of performance, both Cushman and Crow occupy a “doing/done” space. As Cushman stands in the present before the audience, however, Crow frames the “done” of Cushman’s history. The Prologue continues:

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Do you remember our last night in Paris? Ah what delirium is in the memory & how every nerve in me thrills as I look back & feel you in my arms held to my heart so closely, so entirely mine in every sense as I was yours. Ah its is very sweet, very precious, full full of extasy (sic)

PROJECTION: A photo of the actual letter: tiny handwriting almost indecipherable, fading ink

EMMA CROW: The letters which Charlotte Cushman wrote to me were too intimate to publish, even in these days when nothing is too private or too sacred to be withheld from the public.

CHORUS (together): Burn this letter.

CHORUS #1: Emma Crow defied her lover and kept thousands of letters.

PROJECTION: Image of thousands of letters. (4)

Cushman’s words are quoted directly from the letter (“doing/done” of history), which Fondakowski now visually cites with the projection of the “actual letter.” Crow’s line then brings up the problems of tenses and dialectics again. Her quote speaks twice: Cushman’s letters were not published during Crow’s lifetime nor are they published today. Does Crow speak to the twenty-first century audience before her, to an imagined nineteenth-century audience, or both? If “these days” exists in a space that melds past and present, the rest of Crow’s line can ironically comment on the strictness of Victorian gender and sexuality codes. The line can also speak to 2011 when reality shows dominate television and biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs concerning anyone who has a hint of fame line the shelves of bookstores (commodified now electronically and in print).

After all the indications through the lines, the Chorus then reiterates what the lines implicitly reveal: Emma Crow “defied her lover and kept thousands of letters.” Following the projection, the Chorus then explains: “The play you are about to see is constructed from these

70 Merrill does plan to publish the transcribed love letters.
letters, as well as diaries, reviews, clippings, portraits and photographs saved by Charlotte Cushman and her friends—the rest is imagined by the playwright” (4). Fondakowski reveals here her sources and to some extent how the play is constructed. She does not explain, however, what will prompt the instances that are “imagined by the playwright” as clearly as she does in the August 2009 version. The simple statement given in the January 2011 version removes a clear dichotomy between fact and fiction in the play, as we will see in later examples. As seen in Chapter I, the sources themselves do not clearly delineate fact and fiction. What Fondakowski “imagines” in the play helps fill in the gaps within the sources but is still firmly based with the information available in the sources and the interpretations of other historians examining the documents. To clearly delineate fact and fiction within the play might falsely set up a relationship between the sources and pure unmediated facts.

“Moment: Philadelphia” immediately follows the Prologue and contains devices that further establish the performance frames that Fondakowski uses to deconstruct Cushman. The point of attack of this Moment, and also of the staged “story” of Cushman’s life, is Cushman’s performance of Lady Macbeth opposite William Charles Macready in 1843; however, time works more fluidly and is less constrained by clear notions of past and present within the world of the play in the January 2011 version than in the August 2009 version. “Moment: Philadelphia” begins:

**PROJECTOR:** Philadelphia, 1843

*CUSHMAN* leads the CHORUS in a sweeping exit. *SALLIE MERCER* steps forward with a 19th century trunk. The trunk is battered and well worn from lots of travel. The trunk contains books, letters, prompt books, newspaper clippings, a scrapbook, sketches, photographs, and a diary...the ephemera saved by Cushman and her friends. (5)

The projection at the beginning of the Moment ostensibly establishes a time and place for this Moment as opposed to the time and space of the Prologue, which Fondakowski makes ambiguous. The stage directions clearly describe that the trunk contains all of the “ephemera” that Fondakowski used in constructing the play; however, like the actress playing Cushman, these are not the objects themselves. As props, they are representations of the representations of Cushman. Their continual presence onstage, largely unseen within the trunk, references back to the “doing/done” of Cushman’s life. The Moment continues with Sallie’s “I am” statement:

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71 Though we know, like all performance, it exists in the present moment it is seen.
SALLIE MERCER: I am Sallie Mercer, Miss Cushman’s “right hand.” She acquired me in 1843. Eighteen years before the Civil War. I was only 14 years old, a free black woman. I was meant to be Miss Cushman’s maid and her dresser. I became much more to her than that. I helped her create her characters and develop her stagecraft. And I was indispensable to Miss Cushman in the management of her personal affairs.

ROSE SULLY enters.

SALLIE MERCER: Come along with me, Miss Sully. Miss Cushman has set aside a seat for you at the theater. I will take you there.

SALLIE puts ROSE in a chair. (5)

Sallie introduces herself and identifies her relationship with Cushman to the audience, breaking the fourth wall. When Rose enters, Sallie enters back into the time and place of Philadelphia, 1843, a theater. Once Rose sits in the chair, Rose breaks the fourth wall to tell the audience: “I am Rosalie Sully, ‘Rose.’ I met Charlotte Cushman in Philadelphia as she sat for a portrait painted by my father, Mr. Thomas Sully” (5). At this point, we enter a flashback:

The CHORUS constructs a semblance of the portrait studio of THOMAS SULLY. SULLY at work. CUSHMAN sitting. ROSE assisting.

ROSE SULLY: I was assisting in my father’s studio the day Miss Cushman sat for her portrait. She recognized in me something that was, at that time, just a spark:

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: “paint”

ROSE SULLY: she said to me,

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: You should be a painter like your father. And if we work hard enough and destiny falls on our side one day we can live upon our art and be women of independence.

ROSE SULLY: And I said, “Yes.” When Miss Cushman looked at me it was as if her eyes were showing me the whole world.

SALLIE MERCER: Beginners, Miss Cushman, beginners.

The SULLY world dissolves and CUSHMAN’S dressing room is constructed. (5)

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72 In the August 2009 version Mercer introduces herself in “Moment: The Players.” The Chorus delivers the rest of the information about Mercer in “Moment: Shipboard.” Having Mercer say these lines herself helps to move her towards establishing some agency in the January 2011 version. She had nearly no lines in the August 2009 version, which I attribute to the absence of her voice in the documentary record. Because the August 2009 version was so document-based, Mercer did not publish on Cushman, and no letters or diaries of her survive, she has almost no voice. Fondakowski has fixed this somewhat in the January 2011 version by giving Mercer lines from Stebbins’s memoir and imagining some others but the character of Mercer never takes a fully-fledged subject position.
The flashback shows us how Cushman and Rose could have met. This is the memory Rose undoubtedly carries with her as she sits down in the theatre to watch Cushman perform. Such flashbacks occur with Rose as well as Matilda Hays and later Emma Stebbins. In addition to playing with the fluidity of time and memory, the flashbacks create a sense of the community of women around Cushman by showing Cushman’s influence upon them. They emphasize the artistry of other nineteenth-century women around Cushman. The flashbacks are also imagined instances, which Fondakowski does not indicate. They shape Cushman as Fondakowski imagines her: a very giving character and someone who financially and emotionally supported a number of female artists, as opposed to a player who just wanted all the attention. The circumstances are documented; we know Cushman presumably met Sully when she sat for a portrait, but we do not know exactly what words took place at that meeting. In emphasizing the artistry of Rose, Hays, and Stebbins, Fondakowski accentuates her own role as an artist. The flashback ends as we enter back into the time and place of the play and Cushman prepares for her performance of Lady Macbeth.

Unlike the August 2009 version, Fondakowski does not hesitate in the January 2011 version to have Cushman “perform” some of her major roles. As I described in the previous chapter, Fondakowski wants to avoid having the actress playing Cushman attempt to mimetically recreate Cushman’s performances. In the August 2009 draft, however, Fondakowski had not yet found the performance devices to really start deconstructing Cushman’s performances. Cushman’s first performance in the January 2011 version occurs in “Moment: Performing Lady M.”

*The CHORUS creates the performance world for the play within the play. The performance world is constructed from the ephemera in the trunk through theater magic—projected images, fog, paper, lights, sound, music, etc. The vocabulary is part 19th century illusionist, part contemporary technical performance space—these deconstructed elements of the theater represent what was shocking and new about CUSHMAN’S acting in the mid-19th century.* (7)

Fondakowski dives into the interconnectedness of the “doing/done” within the historical and performance vocabularies and the interlacing of past and present. She uses the contemporary

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73 This was especially evident in the staged reading of the play. The actress playing Cushman turned her full body towards the characters she spoke to. Her words were warm and kind (not commanding as the line might be read) as she looked intently at the woman beside her.
performance space as well as the representations, not the actual performances or objects
themselves, of nineteenth-century American and British performance conventions. The Moment
continues:

SALLIE MERCER: “Curtain.”
CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: It is time.
SALLIE MERCER: Act I, Scene V. “Entrance.” “Pose.”
CUSHMAN takes the “pose” of Lady M[acbeth].
PROJECTION: Charlotte Cushman as LADY MACBETH
CHORUS: (pointing to the image) Charlotte Cushman as Lady Macbeth ca. 1844. (7)

Sallie’s narration signals to the audience the beginning of the performance (“Curtain”), the part
of the play we see (“Act I, Scene V”) and navigates Cushman’s actions (“Entrance,” “Pose”).
The actress playing Cushman takes the pose of Cushman as the actress playing Lady Macbeth
yet the two representations of Cushman will never be Cushman nor do they capture Cushman’s
performance of Lady Macbeth. So Fondakowski deconstructs Cushman further: “A projection of
CUSHMAN as LADY M appears. A CHORUS member “captures” the image on the pages of a
book or newsprint then slowly begins to cross D[own]S[tage]. As SHE does the image appears
to be walking too as if haunting the space, alive. Distorted period music accents the sense of a
haunting” (7). The performance device of “capturing” an image in the January 2011 version
begins with a projected image. An actor then walks towards the projected image and holds up
either a book or a newspaper (a symbol of the archive) so that the image becomes projected onto
the book or newspaper. While the rest of the projected image might spill onto the actor or
further upstage of the actor and book/newspaper, the portion of the image “captured” on the
book/newspaper becomes the focal point onstage. The presence of the image “captured” on a
book or newspaper cites the location of the image and its archival/documentary status. It
reiterates that the image is a mediated presence/absence, the “done” of Cushman’s performance
that does not fully account for the “doing” that created it. As the Moment proceeds, it also
clearly separates the representative image of Cushman, the photograph, with the representative
voice of Cushman, the actress playing Cushman:

SALLIE MERCER: “Voice.”
CUSHMAN speaks in full performance mode:
CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN (as LADY MACBETH)
Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature’s mischief! Come, thick night
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell
That my keen knife sees not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
To cry “Hold, hold”

Enter: Macready (as Macbeth) to great Applause.

Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!
Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant

MACREADY acts opposite the projected image. The actress playing CUSHMAN recites all the lines. (7-8)

Fondakowski chooses for Cushman to recite some of Lady Macbeth’s most gendered lines for her first performance in “Casa Cushman.” The separation of voice and image with the presence of distorted music will not create a unified performance but will emphasize separately the image of Cushman, Lady Macbeth’s words, the actress’s interpretation of Cushman’s voice, and Macready’s interaction with Cushman’s deconstructed Lady Macbeth. The Moment concludes with Macready’s reaction:

Exeunt. Rapturous applause. MACREADY is “called for.” As HE takes in his audience of the day, HE speaks his diary entry:
CHORUS: From the diary of William Charles Macready

MACREADY: Acted Macbeth equal, if not superior, as a whole, to any performance I have given of the character. Called for warmly, and warmly received. I do not know what the papers may say of me, but such a performance would have made any man’s fortune in London.

*CUSHMAN is “called for.”* MACREADY, surprised, looks at HER as SHE bows:

MACREADY: I should say—there was a Miss Cushman who acted Lady Macbeth opposite me. She has to learn her art, but she showed mind and sympathy with me, a novelty so refreshing on the stage.

*THEY take a last bow. The crowd “dims.”* CUSHMAN sees ROSE. SHE nods. (8)

The deconstruction of Cushman’s performance will not allow the audience to experience the “mind and sympathy” Cushman showed Macready that he references in his diary, but this is not the goal of the performance. The addition of the passage from the diary, which the Chorus verbally cites to the audience, adds another layer to Cushman’s deconstruction: Macready’s interpretation of her performance. This Moment then interweaves the historical “doing/done” of the image of Cushman’s Lady Macbeth, the text of *Macbeth*, and Macready’s diary with the possibilities of the “doing/done” of performance that created them: Macready’s performances, Cushman’s body, Cushman’s voice, and the performance of an intentionally selected scene from Macbeth that reinforces themes within “Casa Cushman.” The interweaving of the “doing/done” of history and performance does not mimetically recreate Cushman’s performance. Nor does it simply describe the performance as the August 2009 version did. Instead, it assembles and *simultaneously* deconstructs the sources to analyze the performance, which is much less possible in written historiography.

One of the main performance devices used in the January 2011 version, both in deconstructing Cushman’s performances and in visually citing documentary sources, includes the device of “capturing” images as seen in “Moment: Performing Lady M.” As I argued in the previous chapter, the simple juxtaposition of an actress’s body against the photographic image of the historical figure she represents does not sufficiently utilize the theatrical vocabulary to create performance as historiography and not simply dramaturgy as historiography. Within the development of “Casa Cushman,” now evident in the January 2011 version, the process of “capturing” images served as a way to deconstruct one of the fundamental questions that first
interested Fondakowski in this project: how the visibly buxom Cushman read as a man when she played Romeo. As Fondakowski continued working with Casa Cushman, she struggled with how to present Cushman’s Romeo as “sexy” to a contemporary audience. She explained: “There’s nothing sexy about this Romeo [to a contemporary audience]. It’s ridiculous. I mean it’s not sexy. You put any actress in that outfit; they’re not going to look sexy. I don’t care who they are. Even if it’s Cherry Jones or Cate Blanchet or the sexiest actress, they’re not going to look sexy in that. They’re going to look stupid” (Personal Interview). While a nineteenth-century audience may have read the presence of Cushman’s legs in her Romeo costume as “sexy,” Fondakowski knew that a contemporary audience would view Cushman in her costume much differently. Struggling with how to contextualize for a contemporary audience what a Victorian audience might have read as “sexy” using performance rather than verbal explanation, Fondakowski took a newspaper rack and hung a newspaper over it during the November 2010 workshop of the play in Minneapolis. She projected the image of Romeo and asked an actor to …take a panel of the pole and start at the feet of Charlotte Cushman and rise up the image. So what the audience is seeing is the feet, the calves, the skirt, the legs. And as you went all the way up her body like that it just looked…It became sexy! The action of the actor’s relationship to it [the image] going like this [moves arms vertically]…I was like “Oh my god! Finally Romeo is sexy!” That’s how you do it! You have to play with the historical remains. The contemporary performer has to confront or interact with the historical stuff to bring out what the nineteenth century audience saw. (Personal Interview)

Fondakowski’s discovery that the actor performing (“doing”) with the historical material (“done”), not simply just performing (or reciting) the historical material helped create a performance framework for contemporary audiences to not simply read the play through a contemporary lens, but to build that lens partially out of the previous lenses (here, the nineteenth-century audience) that haunt our present understandings.

Another way the “capturing” of images functions in actively juxtaposing the actress playing Cushman and the image of Cushman is through the absence of Cushman’s theatrical costumes on the actress’s body as she performs different roles. In the performance analyzed so far in this chapter, Lady Macbeth in “Moment: Performing Lady M,” the actress playing
Cushman does not wear the costumes of the character depicted in the photograph. Fondakowski explains that she is

…pretty sure at this point, she’ll [Cushman] never be in costume. That she’ll have a costume that she wears the whole time and that’s her costume. Maybe she has nightclothes and day clothes and that’s it. But the costumes, the literal costumes, will be piece-by-piece meticulously reconstructed but they’ll be present only on a dress form the way you would see them in a museum. So if you rolled in the costume on a dress form and she’s standing next to it but not in it [the costume] or she has one piece off—like she takes the sword off the dress form, or she takes the hat off the dress form, that there’s a relationship between the performance now and the historical.

The presence of carefully reconstructed costumes on dress forms and not the actress’s body is another performance device in the January 2011 version that seeks to deconstruct Cushman’s performances and stage the “doing/done” of history and performance in a simultaneous stage space.

The costume on a dress form device occurs twice in the January 2011 version: for Cushman’s Bianca in *Fazio* and Meg Merrilies in *Guy Mannering*. Both instances occur in “Moment: Rising Above Macready.” In both occurrences, the presence of the costume on the dress form functions in conjunction with several other performance devices. Let us examine the first occurrence when Cushman portrays Bianca. As “Moment: Rising Above Macready” opens the audience sees:

*SALLIE opens the trunk and pulls out the prompt book.*

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Quick, Sallie, my trunk—the “Fazio” prompt book.

*SALLIE MERCER opens the book.*

SALLIE MERCER: “Costume” (*The costume of BIANCA is wheeled in on a dress form.*)

“Prompt book” (*SALLIE takes it from the trunk*).

“Hair” (*CUSHMAN puts on a head piece*).

Bianca: the devoted wife of Fazio:

“Pose: Devoted” (*CUSHMAN poses*)

“Pose: Suspicious” (*CUSHMAN poses*),

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As I noted in the Introduction, Fondakowski is still in the process of writing “Casa Cushman.” This device, then, might be used more in subsequent versions or the actual performance.
“Pose: Betrayed” (CUSHMAN poses)

ENGLISH CRITIC: “Princess Theater”: Miss Cushman, the American actress, respecting whom there has been much curiosity for some weeks, makes her first appearance tonight. (19)

As in the Lady Macbeth performance described earlier in this chapter, Sallie helps contextualize the performance. She pulls the representation of the documentary evidence out of the trunk. She coordinates Cushman’s preparation for the performance. Sallie calls for the costume and it is wheeled out on its dress form and left on the dress form. The only portion of the costume that Cushman wears is the headpiece. Sallie also introduces the character when she says “Bianca: the devoted wife of Fazio.” The three poses Cushman takes essentially summarize the character arc of Bianca but do so in the nineteenth-century theatre practice of taking specific poses for emotions, a technique called making a “point.” The English Critic’s comment helps to explain to the contemporary audience the magnitude of Cushman’s appearance. The Moment continues with a projection of Bianca:

_PROJECTION: Charlotte Cushman as BIANCA

CHORUS: (pointing to the image) Charlotte Cushman as Bianca.

The image is “captured” by the CHORUS on a book or newsprint. (19)

At this point, the contemporary audience sees: the body of the actress representing Cushman with Bianca’s headpiece, the form of the reconstructed historical costume, the prop that represents the promptbook, the image of Cushman as Bianca, and the image captured on a symbol of the archive (book or newspaper). The audience now also has an idea of the character of Bianca and the stakes for Cushman’s performance of her. Finally, Fondakowski includes the last deconstructed element of Cushman’s performance—some of Bianca’s lines:

SALLIE MERCER: “Cue line” “Entrance.” (Period music begins) She suspects her husband’s adultery.

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN (as Bianca): “Fazio, thou hast seen Aldabella!”

SALLIE MERCER: She begs for his life despite his betrayal.

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN (as Bianca): …If thou dost save him,

It is but just he should be saved for thee.

…Thou shalt enjoy all—all that I enjoy’d:—

His love, his life, his sense, his soul be thine;
And I will bless thee, in my misery bless thee.

SALLIE MERCER: And in the final moments of the play...(A CHORUS member sounds a bell)

ENGLISH CRITIC: Let the reader imagine a female of the middle height, with a firm and rather muscular frame, surmounted by a head, not of the antique Grecian oval, but square and low browed; her profile showing a marked projection of the facial angle at the chin; her complexion sallow, and her features far from regular,—yet all these defects are forgotten when she speaks!

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN (as Bianca): Hark! Hark! Hark!—the bell,
The bell that I set knolling—hark! Here, here,
Massy and cold it strikes—Here, here. (with her hand to her bosom)
[O...] It breaks, it breaks, it breaks, it is not iron. (dies)

Rapturous applause. SALLIE pulls a newspaper from the trunk. (19-20)

As Cushman performs selected lines from the play, Sallie helps contextualize what purpose the lines serve within the play. Instead of immediately hearing the final lines of the play after Sallie introduces them, however, Fondakowski inserts the observations of an English critic watching Cushman’s performance. The critic’s words, a direct quote that is not cited, describes Cushman’s appearance. While it is possible that the actress cast to play Cushman may resemble the images of Cushman, the words here do not describe the contemporary actress. The words contextualize for the contemporary audience all of the “defects” a nineteenth-century audience might perceive in Cushman’s appearance. Despite the defects, however, the staged nineteenth-century audience, represented by the Chorus, receives Cushman’s final lines with “rapturous applause.”

Within this example, the costume on the dress form is only one of many performance devices occurring. In other parts of the play, however, the dress form itself, without costumes, more singularly serves an interplay between “doing and done” and the interactions of the contemporary performers with historical objects. The stage directions at the very beginning of the Prologue indicate the dress forms’ presence onstage from the beginning of the play. They are not actively used again until “Moment: Rising Above Macready” for the costumes of Bianca and Meg Merrilies. They are next used in “Moment: Max,” but they function slightly differently. The Moment begins with the introduction of Matilda Hays:
PROJECTION: London somewhere between 1846-1848.

MATILDA HAYS, a.k.a. MAX appears.

MAX: I am Matilda Hays, a.k.a. Max. I met Charlotte Cushman in England, somewhere between 1846-1848. History does not record exactly when or where or how.

MAX and CUSHMAN see each other. There is obvious chemistry between them. THEY enter the pose of a cabinet photo.

CHORUS: Charlotte Cushman (seated) and Matilda Hays (standing) ca. 1851. Charlotte Cushman and her lover Matilda Hays posed in matching male clothing for this cabinet photo.

The photo is taken, the audience sees:

PROJECTION: A cabinet photo (historical) of Cushman and Hays (projected on to two dress forms, one male and one female). (27)

After Max’s “I am” statement and her “we don’t know” statement, Fondakowski stages what we do know: in 1851, Max and Cushman took a cabinet photo in “matching male clothing.” The actresses arrange themselves in the pose of the photograph and the Chorus explains the photo. Once the photo is “taken” the audience also sees the historical image against the contemporary actors “doing” the photo. Instead of “capturing the image” on newsprint or a book, however, the image is captured on two dress forms: one male and one female. The dress forms with the projections seem to function as the ghosts of presences. A seamstress uses a dress form to approximate (but not recreate) the body dimensions of the person for whom she sews. The dress forms in this Moment do not necessarily approximate the physical dimensions of Cushman and Max. The addition of the projections on the dress forms, however, further reiterates the representative nature of images. The image represents Cushman and Max but does not recreate them either on the stage or in a history book. Fondakowski’s choice to use a male dress form and a female dress form further deconstructs the performance of gender in both of their lives, of which the image represents only a slice.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Part of the analysis of this Moment also depends on two production elements: costume and staging. Fondakowski says that she imagines Cushman “will go from female attire to male attire when she’s with Max” (Personal Interview). It is not clear yet in the text of the play, however, at what point Cushman will change clothes. Whether or not she wears male attire in the staging of this photo will deepen an analysis of gender and sexuality in this Moment. In addition, the staging choice of how the picture falls on the two forms will also affect an analysis of gender and sexuality. The Moment could be staged so that each dress form captures the image of either Cushman or Max. In this case, the choice of which dress forms (male or female) captures which character will be important. If the Moment is staged so the figures in the projection are distorted across both dress forms, so that Cushman and
In “Moment: Three Months in Rome,” the dress forms also seem to represent the ghosts of presences but in a slightly more abstract manner. The Moment begins with the stage directions: “The stage fills with dress forms clothed in dresses created from letters. CUSHMAN searches for CROW in and among the dress forms and letters, hunting her like prey. Periodically, MISS WHITWELL, STEBBINS, NED, and [sic] cross through the space as obstacles to CUSHMAN getting to CROW” (52). The Moment is not only imagined by the playwright, but echoes what she called movement sequences in earlier versions. She describes movement sequences as “a major story telling component of the play. These choreographed sequences will have an impressionistic, stylized and sometimes anachronistic quality: the ‘dances’ go beyond what can be spoken (or even felt) in the historical world of the play” (January 2010 2). This Moment does seem to go “beyond what can be spoken.” The presence of the dress forms with “dresses created from letters” enhances the feeling of being taken out of the “historical world of the play” while simultaneously foregrounding the historiographical operations of the play. The dress forms clothed in letters in many ways mirror the characters in the play. The characters represent but do not recreate historical figures. The characters have been constructed through documents, such as letters, that have been pieced together in different shapes and sizes to create a form, the play, to historicize Cushman. Cushman uses the dress forms to playfully “hunt” Crow but she and Crow also use them to hide from the intruding presences of Whitwell, Stebbins, Ned and the larger society around them.

As the presence of the letters on the dress form attests, the January 2011 version does not try to hide the documentary sources that Fondakowski used to construct the play. These sources instead have been more fully integrated into the performance elements of the play. As first seen in the Prologue, Fondakowski uses the projection of words from documents. This device often replaces the verbal citation of sources in the August 2009 version. The projection of words allows the audience not only to see the words but to also see the handwriting of the person who wrote them as well as the aging of the document (faded ink, yellowed paper). The trunk present through the majority of the play contains tangible representations of the documents. While with the “capturing” of the images, performances of roles, and the dress forms, Fondakowski seeks to deconstruct Cushman, the presence of the documents also functions to problematize what the

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Max fall on both dress forms, the analysis may be slightly different. See also Vicinus (64) for a brief analysis of how Cushman’s and Max’s dressing alike in male clothing serves as a visual signal of deviance but is still problematic in terms of lesbian historiography.
sources contain as well as the perspectives of who provided them. These problems appear in “Moment: A Diary.” The Moment begins:

*SALLIE takes the diary of 1844 from the trunk. SHE opens the diary.*

*PROJECTION: 1844*

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: 23 October 1844—Talked about England (with Macready).

Going.

SALLIE MERCER: This is the only diary of Miss Cushman’s to survive.

*A bell rings. A page from the diary turns:*

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Saturday—Rec’d from theater (Walnut Street) $34.62

Loaned to Mother—$20 board

Sunday—Clover Hill

Bracelet from Rose & note. Answered. (11)

The trunk then, full of the ephemera saved by Cushman’s friends and represented through prop pieces, provides Charlotte Cushman’s diary. Sallie provides an important fact to the audience about the diary: it “is the only diary of Miss Cushman’s to survive” (11). The phrasing of this sentence implies that Cushman wrote other diaries. Whether or not this is true, the statement emphasizes what is written in the diary because it is the only extant diary, but not necessarily because it contains important information. The action of turning a page correlates with Cushman performing what is inside the diary.76 The audience can hear and/or see, depending on how it is staged, that the diary entries are terse and almost coded. The Moment continues:

*ROSE enters. Another page turns:*

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Came home hungry.

*Another page turn:*

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Tuesday July 23rd. Slept with Rose.

ROSE SULLY: Happy birthday, my love. (11)

As I discussed in Chapter I, the entry “slept with Rose” could have multiple meanings. With the entrance of Rose onstage directly after this entry, it is not clear if Rose enters Cushman’s

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76 It is not clear from these stage directions whether or not the image of the diary page is projected onto the screen and if these images change as the pages of the diary turn. In the staged reading of the play, the historian is present throughout the play and she turns the pages during this Moment. Images of the pages are projected behind her. This deepens the meaning of the play and contributes to the idea of the constructedness of history (that this Moment occurs in the imagination of the historian as she reads the diary), but as I stated in the Introduction, I am using the January 2011 version to analyze.
memory as she reads/performs the diary or if this is a staging of a diary entry. As it is Cushman’s diary, however, even if the latter is Fondakowski’s intention, Rose still functions as part of Cushman’s memory. Fondakowski provides the following scene, which does not definitively answer the question of what “slept with Rose” means but instead suggests what it could mean:

_A movement event occurs here: the CHORUS WOMEN’S hoop skirts begin to “swish,” signaling the possibility of sex. The skin of a neck or a shoulder is revealed through all the layers of the Victorian clothing._

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: Wednesday. Burned letters.

_CUSHMAN reaches the skin of her lover. A last page turns:_

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: R. Saturday, July 6 Married.

_CUSHMAN takes ROSE in her arms and they share a highly charged, erotic kiss._

_PROJECTION: close-up of the words in the diary (captured on their bodies), Cushman’s handwriting: “R. Saturday, July 6 Married.” (11)_

This part of the Moment functions in several ways. Similar to the “we don’t know” statements in the August 2009 version, Fondakowski takes the gaps in diary entries from July 1844 and imagines what might have happened in between. The movement event takes the Moment out of realism, as it does in “Moment: Three Months in Rome” discussed above, and expresses ideas through movement rather than words. In explaining she does not want or need explicit sexual scenes onstage, Fondakowski emphasizes the visual Victorian world created through the set pieces and the women’s full Victorian costumes. She explains, “You know in a world like that if you expose a shoulder of skin, that’s all you need. You don’t really need much more than that” (Personal Interview).

The suggestion of sex in this Moment, and several others in the play, seems to correlate with the suggestions in the love letters. This movement event also portrays female desire as it relates to erotic desire much earlier in the play than the August 2009 version. The projection captured by the bodies of the actresses at the end of this sequence circles back to the visual citation of the prop diary at the beginning of the Moment. The visual citation of the words “R. Saturday, July 6 Married” on the actresses’ bodies embraced in a “highly charged,

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It is interesting to note that Fondakowski believes a contemporary audience will perceive the sensuality of exposing a shoulder from underneath a full Victorian costume and not the “sexiness” of Cushman wearing the Romeo costume. I speculate that the action of exposing skin from underneath the full coverage of the costume may function similarly to the “capturing” of the Romeo image, engaging the contemporary performers with the historical ephemera around them.
erotic kiss” allows Fondakowski to interpret what the entry means without explicitly putting it into dialogue. It also interweaves the “doing/done” of history with the “doing/done” of performance. The Moment continues through memory or some ambiguous time-space continuum:

*THEY exchange rings.*

ROSE SULLY: R. Saturday? It should say: “Rose.”

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: But what if my papers were to be accidentally looked through?

ROSE SULLY: *(surprised)* What if they were? We have nothing to hide.

Silence. *(12)*

Rose’s confusion over “R” tells us two things: the diary entry does not explicitly say “Rose” and that Cushman wrote in coded language. In the following conversation, Fondakowski uses Rose as a plot device, a surrogate for the audience, so that Cushman can explain her negotiation of gender and sexuality in her private life, which still could never be separated from her public life—and how her negotiation leads her to consciously construct a public persona:

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: A few years ago I had a very dear friend from a good family who came to me every afternoon and we would pass the hours together in the sitting room reading Shakespeare; she helped me memorize my lines—I loved her so much. One day—we were not even touching, we were only reading books—and without warning her brother Mr. Brewster burst in on us and he said:

BENJAMIN BREWSTER: “Miss Cushman, I forbid you to have any further association with my sister. Your influence upon her is not proper. What you do is monstrous—on and off the stage. You are a monster. If you come near my sister again, you will live to regret it.”

CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN: He seized her by the arm and dragged her out of the room. I never saw her again. Now, Rose, when I first became manageress of the Walnut Street theater—to paint the walls, repair the seats—but also to make the curtain rise earlier so that mothers and fathers would consider bringing their daughters and sons. I wanted to establish myself not only as a great actress in Philadelphia, but also as a moral woman, a true artist—and to make the theater in America a fine art. It was the men—the
producers—who wanted the prostitutes in the balconies—they sold more tickets! When Brewster walked in on us that day he had no reason to suspect anything—we were not even touching, and yet this is what he saw. What we feel as love, Rose, others might see as dangerous—they could understand the true nature of our love for one another. And so I live a private life, and answer every rumor about me no matter how incidental with the greatest force—I burn all my letters and I have asked you to do the same. This is wisest and best.

ROSE kisses CUSHMAN. (12)

Dramaturgically Cushman’s monologue serves several purposes: to explain to the audience Cushman’s conscious negotiation of gender and sexuality, to demonstrate Cushman’s attempt to construct her life narrative, and to serve as a warning to Rose that whatever it is they feel for each other must be hidden. The presence of a male actor playing Benjamin Brewster, though emanating from her memory, suggests the physical and menacing male presences in her life. Snippets of this monologue come from certain events in Cushman’s life, but the words themselves are Fondakowski’s.

“Casa Cushman” exists at several performative levels. Following Diamond, as a performance the play is simultaneously both a doing (“embodied acts,” “reiteration of norms”) and a done (the “completed event,” “pre-existing discursive field”). Each performance of the play will bring new “doings” and “dones.” Reading the play through Canning’s understanding of the performative of feminist history, “Casa Cushman” also negotiates the gap between “doing” (“past actions of women”) and “done” (“historical profession and discipline”). As performance as historiography, the frequent intertwining of the “doing/done” of history and the “doing/done” of performance problematizes the representations of Cushman for a twenty-first century audience. It also problematizes the representational nature of the sources used to construct her. Both problematizations reveal that the sources and Cushman exist only through present discourse, but that a different discursive space informed the formation of Cushman and the sources: that is, the performance devices of the January 2011 version present the fluidity of gender and sexuality norms through time, which contributed to her reception as an actress in the nineteenth-century and as a historical figure remembered in the present. The “suggestions” of sex leave more to the unknown and the unknowable of how Cushman understood female desire, but does not ignore the presence of a desire. The separation of voice, body, image, and costume
in performances bridges and unites the past as understood through the present and attempts to represent how we understand what made Cushman’s performances so revolutionary.
CONCLUSION:

Historians create history predominantly using the documents remaining in the archive. The advent of feminist theory, however, problematized the once perceived objectivity of the historian and of the sources he used. Feminist historians argue that history clearly lives through the historian who interprets documents and that the documents themselves are created in very specific sociohistoric discourses. Despite the changes between the August 2009 and January 2011 versions of “Casa Cushman,” the final Moment, “Charlotte Cushman’s Eye,” remains almost exactly the same. The Moment takes place in the Library of Congress and stages a contemporary female historian looking through Cushman’s love letters. The stage directions explain:

All evidence of the 19th century, all period furniture, lighting, etc. is removed from the stage, the past is gone. The only other thing on stage is the box of letters. The simplest representation of a contemporary library is constructed on stage: a table, a light, and a single book truck. A CHORUS member enters, dressed in contemporary clothing (1980s). SHE sits at a table with the box of letters, among other archival material. SHE opens the box of letters and begins to go through its contents. Having difficulty deciphering the letters, SHE picks up a magnifying glass and reads: CHORUS: Tell me of your love for me...if you wish...your letters shall be destroyed... SHE pauses. SHE puts the magnifying glass down and begins to type on her laptop. CUSHMAN approaches the CHORUS member, standing behind her. CUSHMAN picks up the magnifying glass and holds it to her eye. CHORUS: their contents...almost lost to the present and all future time...your heart records will be safe with me. PROJECTION: The audience sees the painting by Rose Sully, “Charlotte Cushman’s Eye.” CHORUS: (she picks up the tiny painting, preserved in a velvet box)

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78 This Moment also occurs in the January 2010 and December 2010 versions. In the April 2011 staged reading I attended, the historian first enters the play in the Prologue and remains onstage for a portion of the play. In the staged reading version as well, the historian performs some of the citational devices in physically flipping the pages of letters and the 1844 diary. This is an extremely interesting addition that I think will ultimately further the arguments presented in this thesis should it be included in the actual performance of “Casa Cushman.”
An oval piece of ivory.
Designed to be worn as well as displayed.
This eye gazes,
As if through a peephole, just past the viewer.
A gold frame,
Resting in a velvet box,
It almost might be her actual eye,
FULL CHORUS: I do love you earnestly and sincerely, perhaps too much…write me all, everything you will and your letters shall be destroyed as soon as I have mastered the contents…Write to me freely, w/out fear. (Their voices drop out, leaving CUSHMAN to say this last line alone:) My letters are quite safe from observation.
END OF PLAY  (January 2011 101, her ellipsis)
This Moment is an ode to all of the historians of marginalized subjects who travel deep into the archive to find the voices and stories history missed, who perform the “doing/done” of history in rewriting it.
Specifically, this Moment echoes a passage in Merrill’s biography of Cushman. Merrill explains that her favorite pictorial representation of Cushman is the painting “Charlotte Cushman’s Eye:”
Synecdotal of the assertive, direct woman it represents, this eye gazes, as if through a peephole, just past the viewer. There are hints of sadness in the arched brow, a ‘knowing’ look, a possibly wry smile teasing at the corners of a mouth we cannot observe.…In its gold frame, resting in a velvet box, it almost might be her actual eye, reduced now to a talisman. It is shocking in its directness, singular and specific; a sole piece that stands for a larger picture. (xx)
Fondakowski pulls the poem the historian recites directly from this passage. In fragmenting it, however, Fondakowski further illustrates that this representation of Cushman in “Casa Cushman” is also just a “piece that stands for a larger picture.” That is, it is just one representation among many. Fondakowski pulls from Merrill’s book among many other sources but has ultimately placed her own perspective on the life of Charlotte Cushman. “Casa Cushman” ends where the history begins: with documents. During the course of the play, however, “Casa Cushman” illustrates that history is part document and part performance.
Fondakowski mines the performative of feminist history in conjunction with the performative of performance (theatrical and life) to re/present a historical woman in a combination of history and performance never quite seen before.

When I asked Fondakowski if she saw herself as the woman in the Library of Congress at the end of the play, she replied: “It’s a nod to historians. It’s a nod to the love and the devotion that it takes to meticulously, piece by piece, comb over what remains and draw it out and devote your life to it and make sure it’s preserved. It’s a nod to that” (Personal Interview). Through the writing of this thesis, I seek to demonstrate that the process of creating “Casa Cushman” parallels that of more traditional modes of historiography: the written biography and history.

Fondakowski, though not necessarily thinking of herself as a historian, began just as historians do with several research questions: why and how did nineteenth-century audiences read the visibly buxom Cushman as masculine when she played Romeo? How did the ephemerality of performance and Cushman’s careful constructions of her life narrative affect history’s representation(s) of Cushman? How did Cushman and her contemporaries understand female desire?

These questions seem particularly conducive to performance as historiography because the written word, language, problematically represents the themes of the ephemerality of performance and female desire. In many ways, language, actually fails even when backed with theory. As I described in Chapter I, historians debate if the word “lesbian” applies to historical women who lived before the word existed. Without the language to capture the nature of female desire and more broadly, the sexuality of historical women that works beyond the oversimplified binaries of lesbian or heterosexual, prostitute or moral woman, it seems that the once held notion of women lacking sexual desire gets perpetuated through historical discourse. While feminist and queer theory offers a way to read against the grain, performance as historiography might offer a language to describe the possibilities of historical women’s sexualities that is not textually based: the skin of a shoulder exposed under the mountains of Victorian clothing; movement sequences that suggest but do not definitively show sex; the first caress of two lovers.

Language also problematically represents the ephemerality of performance. Charlotte Cushman once lamented:

What is or can be the record of an actress, however famous? Ask any number of persons to give you a real picture or positive image of the effect any great actor produced in his
time, and they can tell you nothing more than that it was fine, it was grand, it was overwhelming; but ask them how did he do such or such a thing, how did he render such a passage? Describe his manner, his gesture, even his personal appearance, that we may have a living picture of him,—and they are at once at a loss. It is all gone; passed away. Now other artists—poets, painters, sculptors, musicians—produce something which lives after them and enshrines their memories in positive evidences of their divine mission; but we,—we strut and fret our hour upon the stage, and then the curtain falls and all is darkness and silence. (Cushman qtd. in Stebbins 11-12)

The archival document, in image or writing, and the written historiography that may follow does not replace the performance of an actress. Over one hundred years later, Peggy Phelan makes a similar comment in describing feminist performance artists:

This particular cultural moment exerts an urgent pressure to account for what cannot be reproduced. As those artists who have dedicated themselves to performance continually disappear and leave ‘not a rack behind’ it becomes increasingly imperative to find a way to remember the undocumentable, unreproducible art they made. The paradox is that in writing a testimony to the power of the undocumentable and nonreproductive I engage the document of the written reproducible text itself. (31)

Nineteenth-century actresses, and perhaps even contemporary female theatre artists, occupy an interesting space where the performances that brought them into the archive, the transgression from the private sphere to the public career of the stage, cannot be reproduced or recreated. That which made them famous and for which the archive saved their documents despite their sex cannot be captured. Performance as historiography, while not attempting to reproduce these performances, could seek to use performance and theatrical vocabulary to deconstruct what made these performances new and unique or what energy in the actress’s person prompted her remembrance in the archive.

Though perhaps not realizing the ramifications these questions might have for an analysis of “Casa Cushman” as performance as historiography, Fondakowski went into the archive and encountered the inherent problems with autobiographical sources—constructed narratives that writing subjects wish to be remembered for, complete with embellishments, and written within very specific discursive moments. In constructing the first version of “Casa Cushman,” Fondakowski largely assembled sources that, as Davis warned against, “described but did not
analyze” Cushman’s theatrical and everyday performances (Davis 65). Performance as historiography allows the possibility of analysis to occur in theatrical vocabularies rather than just the written theory that historians, such as Merrill, use to create written historiography that continues to rely on (the Western notion) of written language as the sole medium of knowledge. Through my analysis of the two versions of Casa Cushman, I propose that performance as historiography, to function well, needs to reveal the processes of a dramatic text’s construction (dramaturgical devices) but cannot rely on this only. To only reveal the processes of construction within the dialogue functions more as dramaturgy as historiography and does not as clearly lift historiography from the power of written text. For “Casa Cushman” to work as performance as historiography, it must seek to provide performance devices that not only describe the historical subject but also provide a framework to analyze the subject through the intertwining and deconstruction of the “doing/done” of history and the “doing/done” of performance.

Suggestions for Further Research:

Fondakowski hopes to premiere “Casa Cushman” in the fall of 2011 in Minneapolis. The production will only add to an analysis of “Casa Cushman” as performance as historiography and will clarify the staging possibilities that warrant several interpretations that I have identified throughout this thesis. The script also may feature many changes from the January 2011 version, the latest version I have. I anticipate the addition of more performance devices that will continue to contribute to a reading of the play as performance as historiography. With the addition of an audience, a future researcher can conduct a full audience reception analysis and develop an argument as to how the play shapes their understanding(s) of Cushman.

In addition, I suggest the development of performance as historiography for Sallie Mercer. While the January 2011 version of “Casa Cushman” gives her slightly more agency that the August 2009 version, she still possesses less agency than the white characters around her. Though I am guilty of this as well, Mercer tends to get shoved to the very edge of every study concerning Cushman. I could attribute this to the absence of Mercer’s voice in the archive—she did not leave behind letters or diaries—but the fact that she was African-American and Cushman scholars are white cannot be completely unrelated to this underdevelopment. I am certainly not implying that Cushman scholars are racist but point out that despite the best intentions, white
feminist scholars still sometimes unwittingly reinforce hegemonic norms when it comes to race. Mercer spoke several languages, stayed with Cushman longer than any of Cushman’s lovers, kept Cushman’s costumes repaired, prepared Cushman for all of her performances, never married, and retired with the Cushman family. Because of her association with Cushman, there is some record of her life in the archive and piecing this together could tell an incredible story.

Every historical subject exists within specific discourses according to race, sex, class, gender, sexuality, and culture as well as the discourses that inform the identity of the historian. Therefore, not every example of performance as historiography will function exactly the same as the methodology I have created for reading “Casa Cushman.” The analysis of “Casa Cushman” focuses predominately on a white, middle-class, nineteenth-century “lesbian.” I believe that approaching historical women through performance as historiography could provide a useful analytical tool for both artists and scholars but will present many different challenges as the identity structures, time period, and cultures change. As the archive often silences women, constructing performance as historiography may necessitate the need for new dramaturgical and performance devices to account for a lack of archival evidence and perhaps forge new ground into even more non-traditional sources. Performance as historiography reinforces not just a notion of the ephemerality of all performances, but the ephemerality of history. The “doing” of history is gone as soon as it is “done.” What we are left with are representations, but as so many historians say “not the past itself.” Performance as historiography offers possibilities in bypassing the failures of language and in the development of new epistemologies for history and performance devices in theatre. Perhaps it could also provide a bridge for artists and scholars to work together to expand the fields of theatre and history and more fully inform each other’s work.
APPENDIX

Moment Break-down of August 2009 Version

ACT ONE:

1. Prologue (introduces “canonical” facts and how play constructed)
2. The Players (briefly introduces players)
3. Toy Theatre Tableau World of Charlotte Cushman’s Life (summarizes career from playing Countess Almaviva in Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro in Boston to first meeting William Charles Macready)
4. Macready (Macready plays “Macbeth” opposite Cushman’s “Lady Macbeth” and comments on it)
5. Dressing Room (Cushman visits Macbeth in his dressing room, told from Macready’s perspective)
6. Shipboard (Cushman sails to England in 1844)
7. London (Cushman arrives in England and exchanges letters with Macready)
8. Maddox (Maddox comes to offer Cushman “Emilia” to Edwin Forrest’s “Othello”)
9. Quotes (Cushman and Sallie read through her reviews and “correct” them)
10. Playing Romeo (Cushman gets a letter from Rose, plays “Romeo,” various people comment on her performance, Rose dies)
11. Matilda Hays (Cushman meets Matilda Hays, Elizabeth Barrett Browning comments on Cushman and her community of women, Cushman returns to America, Hays dedicates her translation of Sand’s Fadette to Cushman, various people comment on Cushman’s performance, Hays and Cushman decide to return to Rome)
12. Farewell (Cushman gives a farewell speech in America in 1852)
13. Rome (Hatty comments on her life in Rome, Cushman meets Stebbins in 1856)
14. The Tussle Before Witnesses (Hatty recounts the fight that ended Hays and Cushman’s relationship)
15. Her Better Half (Stebbins and Cushman truly fall in love)
16. The Dream (Stebbins and Cushman have lunch in New York, imagined dialogue)
17. The Seduction of Emma Crow (Crow describes meeting Cushman when she played Romeo in St. Louis in 1858)
18. A Business Meeting (Wayman Crow and Cushman meet to discuss finances and Emma
Crow’s reaction to Cushman’s “Romeo”)

19. The Letters (Cushman reads the “hook-up” letter written to Crow)
20. Burn This Letter (Cushman and Crow meet in Pittsfield, MA, imagined scene)
21. Shipboard (Cushman writes to Crow from ship)

ACT TWO:
1. “Casa Cushman” (Stebbins briefly describes getting “Casa Cushman” ready, 1859)
2. Ned Has Run Away With Your Picture (Cushman plots to get Ned to think that Crow is interested in him, Stebbins discovers the picture and confronts Cushman about Crow)
3. What Sallie Knows (Stebbins asks Sallie who is in the picture, mostly imagined)
4. Burning Letter (Cushman gets a letter from Crow, reads it, burns it, and writes back)
5. Looked Through (Cushman and Crow try to convince Wayman Crow to let Crow come to Rome, from a compilation of letters)
6. Roman Salon (The Crow girls arrive and Stebbins expresses her jealousies)
7. Temper the Fire (1860, Crow and Cushman say their good-bye’s at a train station in Rome)
8. Hatty Letter #2 (Hatty and Wayman exchange letters about Crow)
9. Paris (Crow and Cushman meet in Paris, imagined meeting)
10. Ned’s Expectations (Cushman convinces Wayman to let Ned marry Crow)
11. Wedding to Ned (Crow and Ned get married)
12. The Morning After (Crow and Ned have sex for first time; Cushman writes Crow a letter)
13. Miscarriage (Cushman visits Crow after her miscarriage)
14. Finding the Lump (Cushman asks Stebbins to feel a lump on her breast)
15. A Commission (Colonel Stebbins commissions Central Park fountain for Stebbins)
16. Wasted Life (Cushman responds to a letter in which Crow refers to her life as “wasted,” imagined encounter, based on real letter)
17. Bethesda Fountain (Stebbins describes her ideas for the Bethesda fountain)
18. Bethesda Fountain Revealed (Cushman describes how she wants her arrangements after she dies, Bethesda Fountain revealed in 1873 to poor reviews)
19. The Apology (Cushman apologizes for her behavior towards Stebbins over the years)
20. Letters (Stebbins has Crow burn letters from Cushman)
21. Final Farewell (Cushman and Palmer work out arrangements for Cushman’s final
appearance in America)

22. The Death of Charlotte Cushman (Cushman gives speech to Arcadian club, Chorus describes scene, Cushman writes letter describing her nearness to death, Stebbins sits at Cushman’s deathbed, description of funeral, Stebbins describes creating Cushman’s biography)

23. The Players Reprised (Players describe what happened to them after Cushman’s death)

24. Charlotte Cushman’s Eye (Cushman visits historian in Library of Congress)
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