

1-1-2009

A Historiography of Informed Imagination: A (Hi)Story Drawn from the Correspondence of Annie Russell and Faith Baldwin

Joseph Bromfield
Rollins College

Jennifer Jones Cavanaugh
Rollins College, JCAVENAUGH@rollins.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.rollins.edu/stud_fac



Part of the [Theatre History Commons](#)

Published In

Bromfield, Joseph and Cavanaugh, Jennifer Jones, "A Historiography of Informed Imagination: A (Hi)Story Drawn from the Correspondence of Annie Russell and Faith Baldwin" (2009). *Student-Faculty Collaborative Research*. Paper 6.
http://scholarship.rollins.edu/stud_fac/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Rollins Scholarship Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student-Faculty Collaborative Research by an authorized administrator of Rollins Scholarship Online. For more information, please contact wzhang@rollins.edu.

A Historiography of Informed Imagination: A (Hi)Story Drawn from the Correspondence of Annie Russell and Faith Baldwin

By Joseph Bromfield and Jennifer Jones Cavanaugh

The problem with historical narrative is that while it proceeds from empirically validated facts or events, it necessarily requires imaginative steps to place them in a coherent story. Therefore a fictional element enters into all historical discourse.¹

This essay is an experiment in theater historiography. We have been inspired in part by the methods of creative non-fiction, and more deeply by the writings of historians Hayden White and Peter Burke to explore the use of the imagination in the writing of theater history. Our subject is the actress Annie Russell, Shaw's original Major Barbara and one of Charles Frohman's early stars. Though the theater at our college was built for Miss Russell, few of our colleagues knew much about her career, and so we began to explore her history as part of a faculty/student summer research project. In the college archives, in a folder in a basement file, we stumbled upon a small note written by Miss Russell's great nephew years after her death. "I fear that Annie's personal life is hard to get at," he wrote. "Some kind of Victorian dark cloud was over her reputation. I can only speculate that she was bisexual or that she contracted a social disease from her first husband. But mine is an uninformed guess."² A clear picture of Annie was indeed "hard to get at," and as our research progressed we encountered numerous mysteries in our secretive subject's story: Missing years spent recuperating from an unnamed but grave illness in Europe; a first husband whose name is violently scratched out of letters; cryptic

references to constant pain both physical and psychic; and diary entries that fixate on the women in her life. A hint here and there, a tantalizing suggestion, but like so many historical subjects, a sense of “the real” woman was ultimately elusive.

In Annie Russell’s papers at the New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division we found correspondence with nearly every major player in turn of the century British and American theater including Maude Adams, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, Rachel Crothers, Clyde Fitch and Edith and Israel Zangwill to name just a few. In her papers we were surprised to find the largest set of letters came from a woman neither of us had ever heard of: Faith Baldwin. Faith and Annie’s correspondence spanned thirty years and filled nearly one quarter of the archive. Who was this woman? A friend? A confidante? A lover? Another mystery.

We soon discovered that Faith Baldwin was a prolific writer of romance novels: she published over eighty-five books between 1921 and 1977, sold more than ten million copies, and was, “one of the handful of...novelists to complete a five-foot shelf.”^{3,4} Furthermore Faith first met Annie Russell backstage at the Astor Theater in 1906 as a precocious thirteen year old girl when Annie was a middle aged actress at the height of her career. After reading over three hundred letters written between the years of 1906 and 1936, we realized that Faith and Annie’s correspondence could help us to fill in some, but not all, of the gaps in Annie’s story. This brings us back to the historian’s imagination.

Most historians would agree that a vivid imagination is an important component of historical investigation. Historian and theologian F. Thomas Trotter wrote: “To be able imaginatively to enter history is one of the great gifts of being human.”⁵ However it is a

gift looked upon with some suspicion in many scholarly venues. In the theater we are creative and imaginative by choice, and yet in our historical scholarship we often strive to distance ourselves from our inventive abilities for fear of sacrificing scholarly rigor. Dr. Trotter describes how the imagination, once considered indispensable to the historian, has gradually lost credibility as an investigative tool.

In the Middle Ages, the word *imagination* had a somewhat wider usefulness ...it had to do with creating mental images, conceiving reasons for things...Subsequently, *reason* has come to be used more exclusively in connection with scientific method, where the emphasis is on precision of argument, while *imagination* has been relegated to *fanciful* reflection. For some time now, the artist has been seen as a decorator or an illustrator, because the artist's vision has been perceived to be *fanciful* and, in our society's judgment, disposable.⁶

Whatever the subject of inquiry, gaps in the historical evidence are inevitable and all historians face the dilemma of drawing conclusions and crafting narratives from faulty, biased or incomplete data. Peter Burke writes in New Perspectives in Historical Writing, "Historians have long been aware of the difficulty of defining the extent to which evidence can be trusted and the extent to which historians fill in the gaps with the help of their imagination."⁷ Though we regularly engage in speculation based upon our research, theater historians have perceived imaginative intervention as a compensation for limited access to some complete and knowable past. Despite our creative training and heritage, we have been markedly distrustful of utilizing our imaginations in crafting our

histories. Imagination seems fanciful, to use Trotter's words, and therefore disposable, lacking historical weight.

So how then should a scholar address the dilemma of not knowing what occurred between a letter written in 1912 and one written in 1914? Since we don't know what happened between these two letters we can either: a) make no speculation at all; b) craft speculation that we defend as highly probable based upon available evidence; or c) clearly mark the events that lie between the two letters as fiction. The first option reduces the function of historiography to data gathering. The second option operates on the pretense that speculation carries the same weight and serves the same function as "evidence." The third option (the one we are exploring here) acknowledges the ethical imperative of historians to make themselves visible in the narrative in order to counter the belief that they are writing what actually happened.⁸ In addition this option has heuristic value, provoking otherwise unconsidered insights and possibilities; and who better than *theater* historians to appreciate the heuristic value of a good story.

So what if we, as artist-scholars, were to engage unashamedly in a historiography of informed imagination? In light of our facility with processing given circumstances, back story, character psychology and conflict, might we be uniquely equipped to, as Trotter suggests, "imaginatively enter history." Rather than apologizing for our educated guesses, might we, by using our imagination to "create mental images" and to "conceive of reasons for things", actually be recovering a valuable, yet neglected historiographical tool? In the first issue of the journal Rethinking History founding editor Robert A. Rosenstone wrote, "We believe that the writing of History can be an art, and that innovation in any art calls for boldness, audacity, and the courage to try out things that

can seem strange, even to the author."⁹ And so we determined to write a fictional history not knowing how our historical fiction would be received in a scholarly community.

Would the fiction, negate the history or could it be illuminating in its own right?

Most historians either consciously or unconsciously draw upon literary traditions in order to create a compelling narrative. "Critics from Michel Foucault to Hayden White have argued that written history is a kind of fiction, that historians (like scientists) 'construct' the facts they study and that their stories follow classic fictional plots such as tragedy or tragicomedy."¹⁰ By any traditional accounting, Annie Russell's life leaned toward tragedy: an impoverished childhood, a life of illness, professional frustrations and unrealized career aspirations. But in her letters to and from Faith Baldwin a different story emerges, a story of resistance, humor and grace. Throughout the tumultuous thirty years of their correspondence, two things remained constant: Annie's unwavering belief that she, and the theater itself, were capable of more than commercial mediocrity, and Faith's unwavering belief in Annie.

What follows is our (hi)story based upon intensive research into the thirty year correspondence between romance novelist Faith Baldwin and actress Annie Russell. Our subject, secretive in life, was fast fading into the obscurity reserved for actors who had outlived their fame. Through our (hi)story we hope to reanimate her, to envision ourselves in Annie Russell's presence and imagine what she might ask of us. To a large extent the narrative is drawn from the correspondence as well as press clippings, biographical profiles and other letters in the collection. The words in italics are direct quotes taken from the letters or from articles or speeches written by Annie Russell. We

have included extensive endnotes to help the reader identify our source material; however, with no apology, much of what follows springs from our own imagination.

The Story

Brooklyn, October, 1929. The briskness of autumn had returned to New York by the gusty first day of October, and Brooklyn was on fire with the colors of the changing leaves. Along a row of big brownstone townhouses, there was one stoop covered in crunchy, brown leaves from the large elms looming overhead. Two floors above, Faith Baldwin sat next to the window at her typewriter, pondering an ending for her latest novel, Broadway Interlude. A woman in a white Nurse's uniform stood behind her massaging her shoulders.

Faith spoke, "Gonnie dear, have you checked on the twins."¹¹

"Sound asleep, but now that you mention it, I had best go check on Hugh Jr. and Hervey in the front yard to make sure they stay out of trouble."

"What would I do without you, Gonnie?"

"Never get any work done, I suppose," and with that, Gonnie leaned down to kiss her friend on the cheek and made her way downstairs to check on the children.

Out of the corner of her eye, Faith saw little Hervey skipping to a pile of leaves situated under one of the massive elms sitting in the front yard. A strong gust of wind blew Faith's hair back as she watched her daughter playing in a colorful whirlwind of leaves. She was struck with a vivid memory of her own childhood, not playing in a field of leaves, but sitting in a Broadway theater watching Puck fly about a magical forest in A Midsummer Night's Dream. It had been more than twenty years since she first met her

beloved Annie Russell playing that very role, but the memory of their first meeting was still fresh in her mind...

Manhattan, September, 1906. The precocious young Faith Baldwin was sitting in the brand new Astor Theatre where A Midsummer Night's Dream was playing with Annie Russell as "Puck". A native New Yorker, Faith had the luxury of attending as much theatre as her heart desired. Her father and Charles Frohman, *or C.F.* as she liked to call him, were on friendly terms, and thus Faith began her love affair with the New York stage from an early age.¹² What Faith adored most of all were the prominent players of the day. One month her affections would favor *John Drew* as the most comedic personality of the American stage. The next she would favor the classical performances of *Julia Marlowe*. At the present moment, Faith was in love with the young and talented *Maude Adams*.¹³ Her father had promised Faith tickets to the Broadway debut of J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan the following month. In the meantime, Faith had to occupy her mind somehow. And so she found herself in the theatre yet again.

Faith had never seen Miss Annie Russell perform. She had followed her career abroad in England where Miss Russell had been hailed as "the Duse of the English-speaking stage" for her portrayal of the title role of Bret Harte's Sue.¹⁴ Faith had also read about Miss Russell's reputation as "a sensitive, wraith of purity"¹⁵ and "a snowflake of womanhood."¹⁶ Most recently in The New York Herald, Faith had read about her triumph abroad in the title role of George Bernard Shaw's Major Barbara.¹⁷ Today she would see if Miss Russell's critiques were deserved. The lights dimmed, and Faith gave her attention to the stage to soak in another theatrical experience.

Miss Annie Russell made her first appearance by descending to the stage. Faith could hardly believe her eyes. She was flying! To be honest, Faith had not expected to see anyone flying onstage until next month when she was sure to see Maude Adams flying through the air as Peter Pan. Faith watched on in awe as “Puck” orchestrated the forest around her: from flowers that lit up at her kisses to hoot owls and tumbling fairies. As she danced and flitted between flowers, owls, and fairies, Faith thought how absolutely magnificent and exhausting all of it must be. Yet whenever “Puck” had a speech to make, she gave the verse a full, vibrant voice demonstrating her prowess as an actress.¹⁸ Based on her performance as “Puck”, Miss Russell hardly seemed like the “tender, sensitive plant” that she had expected. By the time the play was over, Faith was head over heels for Miss Annie Russell. She simply had to meet her.

After the performance, Faith waited in line to meet Miss Russell with all of the other matinee girls. The line formed by the stage door and snaked around to the front of the theatre. Faith was *the last but one* in line.¹⁹ She waited patiently for her turn as the girls around her tittered and shrieked with delight when supporting actors and actresses such as Thomas Coffin Cooke and Catherine Proctor exited through the stage door, waved, and disappeared into the crowded streets of New York.²⁰

After what seemed like hours, the line of fifty had turned into no less than two—Faith, *the last but one girl*, and the last girl, Faith’s *clever friend Mildred DeHaven*, who stood behind her insisting that the best is always saved for last.^{21,22} Miss Russell’s assistant beckoned Faith forward through the stage door of the just-completed Astor Theatre.²³ Faith followed her down the dark corridors until she reached a door with a star and “Miss Annie Russell” printed across it. Faith felt her heart leap out of her chest as

the assistant opened the door, flooding the hall with a bright white light. Miss Russell was just bidding a giddy red-haired girl farewell. Her assistant took the girl's hand and guided her to the door. Before they left, the assistant announced that they were almost finished, "This is *the last but one*, Miss Russell."

"Thank you, Agnes."²⁴ Miss Russell, who had turned her attention to her collection of oriental antiques on her dresser, paused, put on a smile and turned her attention to the black-haired girl standing before her.²⁵ "Good afternoon. Did you enjoy the performance?"

Faith was frozen, mesmerized by Miss Russell's telling brown eyes. She stammered out a response, "You look exhausted."

This was not the response Miss Russell had expected. "Excuse me?"

"You look exhausted. Not that I blame you. You must work up quite an appetite onstage... with all of the flying and dancing."

Clearly unsettled, Miss Russell paused to regain her composure. She had been fighting off a case of bronchitis for the past week. Indeed Annie had been fighting off various illnesses for years now; it was the shadow that had been hovering over her since childhood.²⁶ Unaware of Annie's delicate state, Faith moved on to her next announcement. "Just so you know—I don't think that you're a 'Puck in pastel shades.'"²⁷

At this, Annie forgot all about composing herself and let out a laugh and a smile. "So you read The New York Times, do you?"

"Whenever I get the chance, *and I read The New York Herald too.*"

"I'm glad to hear that you don't agree with everything you read then. It is good for a young woman to think for herself as soon as she is able."

“Well, how could a ‘sensitive plant’ or a ‘snowflake of a woman’ perform such a physically demanding part as ‘Puck’?”²⁸

“I don’t know, dear.”

“Did you know that you are the first major actress ever to play ‘Puck’ on an American stage?”²⁹

“I did not know that,” she said turning to her stationary to begin collecting some of her fan letters. “But I do know how hard I had to fight Mr. Frohman to play something besides those dreadful ‘*Annie-genues*’ he always has me playing.”^{30,31}

“‘*Annie-genues*’?”

“Oh, you know dear—the girl whose highest ambition is to get married to a suitable man. And I’ve played that part a hundred times: in Esmerelda, in Sue, in Mice and Men, and I probably will play it a hundred times more if I continue on with Mr. Frohman. Oh, *I should like to play a real live woman; a woman with brains and a will of her own, who doesn’t simply stand around and whimper when Fate slaps her in the Face, but who gets up and does something!*”³² Annie smiled mischievously at the young girl in front of her, but *I love Puck. I have been conventional so long and he is such a delightful escape.*³³ ‘Puck’ is hardly an ‘*Annie-genue*’, and for that I am grateful.”

“Father knows Mr. Frohman. Maybe he can tell *C.F.* how good you were as ‘Puck’, and you can play Hamlet next,” said Faith imagining herself playing Ophelia.

“Oh my dear, I don’t think Mr. Frohman will be producing another classic play any time soon. *It was nearly impossible to persuade him to risk his money on this production, ‘I am not in art for my health,’ he told me every time I asked to play Shakespeare. Finally he said to me ‘They will come all right if we bill it like a circus.’* It

*was either that or nothing, and accordingly we have vulgar posters boasting 'A hundred and fifty fairies!' And the people have come in great crowds my dear, but alas I shall never know what induced them to come—the pure love of art, Shakespeare intelligently acted, or one hundred and fifty flying fairies!"*³⁴

“I came to see you.” Faith blushed, and then as if to cover her embarrassment, she launched into another question, “Why did you pretend to smile when I came in the door?”

This question halted Annie. She set down the stack of letters she had collected, turned and faced this strange little girl, “Pretend to smile?”

“Yes. I could tell when I came in that you were tired. And before you looked at me for the first time I saw you turn away and make yourself smile.”

“Well, I suppose it was just an instinct. When you are an actress, you get used to smiling a lot. Nobody wants to see an actress exhausted, sick or depressed. *I smile, not because I feel like it, but because I must. The public demands a smiling actress.*”³⁵

“I think that is sad.” Faith looked down at her feet for a bit and then around Miss Russell’s dressing room at all of the naked light bulbs, cards and flowers. She turned back to Miss Russell and looked directly into her eyes, “What is your favorite kind of flower?”

“Any yellow flowers are quite nice.”³⁶

“Then I shall send you some yellow posies, so you can feel like smiling more often.”

“Aren’t you a dear. I simply must remember you.” Faith’s eyes lit up.

Suddenly, a charming gentleman, who Faith recognized as ‘Lysander’ from the play, entered the dressing room without so much as a knock. He spoke with a British

dialect, “Darling, it is nearly a quarter to six. I’ve already told Agnes to turn away the last matinee girl. We really must be going.”³⁷

Annie looked back at the sweet, thirteen year old girl standing before her, “I’m sorry dear...what is your name?”

“Faith Baldwin.”

“I’m sorry Faith, but you must excuse me. I have another engagement to attend to. It truly was a pleasure to meet you Faith Baldwin.”

Before Faith knew what had happened, Miss Russell’s assistant, Agnes, had reentered the dressing room, grabbed Faith’s hand and ushered her back through the dark corridors, out the stage door, and onto the streets of New York. Faith stood perfectly still for a moment to gather herself. She was beaming.

Back in the front yard of Faith’s Brooklyn brownstone townhouse, Hervey and Hugh had finished playing in the leaves when an elderly woman approached the townhouse. She walked slowly supporting herself with a walking cane. She looked at the address and then back at an invitation. “Is this 156 97th Street, the Baldwin residence?”³⁸

“Yes ma’am.” Hugh stood up to greet the strange woman.

“You must be Hugh Jr. I’m here to wish your mother a happy birthday.”³⁹

Just then the front door opened framing the woman in the white nurse’s uniform. “Mrs. Yorke?” she said in surprise. Annie’s face cringed a bit, but she put on a smile and nodded. “We weren’t expecting you until a quarter past I’m afraid, but not to worry, I’ll have the maids serve the tea shortly. She offered the elderly woman her arm as they

climbed the steps. Why don't you just wait in the library while I tell Faith you've arrived?" Gonnie made sure Annie was comfortable and then set off to tell Faith that her *dearest lady* was here. Gonnie wanted to prepare Faith for Annie's frailness. It would come as a shock, for in Faith's mind Annie had always been a tower of strength.

In the library, Annie marveled at shelf upon shelf stacked with books—*Rudyard Kipling, Gellert Burgess, Guy de Maupassant, Upton Sinclair, Laura Jean Libby*, and a growing Faith Baldwin section.⁴⁰ She began counting Faith's novels: Mavis of Green Hill, The Office Wife, Sign Posts, Rosalie's Career, Thresholds, Those Difficult Years, and there were at least half a dozen more.⁴¹ Annie thought to herself how busy Faith must have been the past couple of years—two children, a husband, and what looked like a dozen novels.

Feeling a coughing fit coming on, Annie reached inside of her purse for her handkerchief. As she reached, Annie first felt a tattered, old letter. She recognized it instinctively and smiled as she thought back to the first time she had read it nearly twenty years ago, and of the many times afterwards. She pulled out the letter and began reading the familiar passage:

"...But this much I do know and I'd like most awfully well for you to know it too—and believe it. That I've loved you ever since I saw you run across the stage to the sleeping fairy—and I love you yet and "I've a hunch" that I always will—and I've loved your letters ever since the first little one...and they never could cease being a source of delight to me—and I've loved and valued your friendship—ever since the first and I hope and pray that you will never stop caring for me if only just a wee little bit..."⁴²

She ran her fingers across the smooth parchment, folded and unfolded so many times...

Manhattan, November, 1916. It was a miserably cold and rainy afternoon. The freezing rain pelted the defenseless city below and anyone daring to venture outside. After months of unemployment, Annie's husband Oswald Yorke had finally gotten an interview with Mr. Comstock, a powerful theatrical manager, so she had taken the opportunity to run some errands. As she opened the door to her *three-room pied à terre* she was surprised to see Oswald sitting at her writing desk.⁴³ Why was he home? She removed her overcoat, set down her purse on the coffee table and grabbed a towel to dry off.

"Oh, my beloved, you must be freezing," he crossed to help dry off his wife. "You know you should not be traipsing about the city on a miserable day like this. It is no wonder you come down with grippe every fortnight."⁴⁴

"Actually dear, today is a good day. No pain."

"I worry about you, that's all. You know just as well as I that it is hard enough for two mature actors to find work in this city right now if we are healthy. You simply cannot expect to find work if you fall ill again." Oswald wrapped his arms around his wife, holding her tight.

Oswald was right, Annie thought to herself; their careers were growing dormant. She had traveled to Worcester, Massachusetts for her most recent role, and that was over a year ago.⁴⁵ What's more, she did not see any major opportunities on the horizon. *As she got older, she found the rewards of acting diminishing humiliatingly with the years.*⁴⁶

She shifted gears to Oswald's career, "Any luck in your appointment with Mr. Comstock?"

"None," he said pulling away from her, "I didn't even get to see him. He cancelled at the last minute."

"Oh, I'm sorry dear." Here it comes she thought, the accusation she had been hearing for years now.

"I'm sorry too. I'm sorry that you found a way to offend every major manager in all of New York City in your campaign to elevate the art of theatre. You have successfully alienated the entire New York theatre community with your crusade against commercial theatre."⁴⁷

"Oh, Oswald, don't start this again."

Flustered and frustrated, Oswald crossed to the coffee table to pick up Annie's scrapbook of her published writings. The scrapbook was growing by the month. Now that she no longer acted it seemed she published an article every week! He flipped the book open and began to read one of her "manifestos": "*'My plans and my work I know, will probably meet opposition from the managers of a certain type'... every last manager in all of New York,*" Oswald inserted, "*'...And to bring out a hue and cry from the uncultured, ignorant, and incompetent actor, but I welcome this as a proof that the time and hour is right.'*"⁴⁸ He flipped the page to find yet another confrontational article, "*'The responsibility for the sort of plays that are being shown today rests with the theatergoers and not the actors or the playwrights...playgoers applaud and encourage insipid works, romantic insincerities, sensational indecency, vulgarity, and*

coarseness.”⁴⁹ He tossed the scrapbook back on the coffee table and looked at his wife, “Thanks to your critical pen, managers refuse to even see me for a part.”

“Why are you blaming me for your cancelled appointment? I’m sure Mr. Comstock just had something come up at the last minute...”

“I doubt it. This is the third time he has cancelled on me in the past month. The truth is that he doesn’t want anything to do with you. Your “good cause” is killing both of our careers.”

“Is it so wrong to believe that the theater is capable of so much more than leg shows and vulgar comedians. I’ve told you that I will sacrifice to create the ideal theatre, but you have no right to blame your unemployment troubles on me, unless you blame me for your successes as well.⁵⁰ You did not blame me when you were playing “Lysander” in A Midsummer Night’s Dream at the Astor Theatre or when you were playing “Malvolio” in Twelfth Night at the New Theatre.”⁵¹

“But I do blame you for conning me into performing “Malvolio” with the New Theatre.”

“That’s absurd. You asked me to get you a part in that play.”

“That was one of the worst decisions I ever made—following you into that wretched New Theatre.”

“Yes Oswald, *The New Theater was a failure, done to death by a scornful press and an indifferent and abusive public, who really prefer the offerings of the commercial manager; the kind who translates brilliant French and Italian plays with the collaboration of the stage carpenter so that the English may not be too highbrow!*”⁵²

Oswald began to protest. “Don’t!” commanded Annie, “*Whatever the faults and failures of the new theater were, and there were many, its aims and its achievements were fine and great.*”⁵³

Oswald stared at Annie. “I’m not going to argue.” He turned abruptly, opened the front door and stormed down the stairwell.

Annie’s head began to throb. It seemed as though her afternoon in the freezing rain was catching up with her, and arguing always triggered headaches and agitation in her lungs. Checking to see that Oswald had not returned unexpectedly, Annie crossed to one of her favorite antiques, a Louis XV desk. *She often wondered to whom this desk belonged, what kind of letters and documents were written upon it. What secrets had it held?*⁵⁴ She opened a hidden drawer and pulled out a stack of letters tied up with a blue ribbon. Her correspondence with the young Faith Baldwin had been a constant comfort over the last ten years, though she’d had to hide Faith’s letters ever since Oswald had denounced Faith and her liberal politics.⁵⁵ From the top of the stack she pulled out a well-worn letter *dated October, 1910*; she smiled at the familiar salutation, “*Dearest Lady*”⁵⁶ and sighed, “What are we going to do Faith, what are we going to do?” She held the oft read letter close to her breast. She knew the words by heart, “*...But this much I do know and I’d like most awfully well for you to know it too—and believe it. That I’ve loved you ever since I saw you run across the stage to the sleeping fairy—and I love you yet and “I’ve a hunch” that I always will – and I’ve loved your letters ever since the first little one...and they never could cease being a source of delight to me...*”⁵⁷

Over the years she had received thousands of letters from fans *chiefly consisting of every kind of request—requests for positions, interviews, for photographs, autographs,*

*souvenirs—from her handkerchief to her household furniture—for loans or for gifts.*⁵⁸

But Faith, dear Faith had given her love unconditionally, asking for nothing in return.

Though they rarely met in person, Annie felt a deep connection to her “last but one girl.”

Now that the world seemed done with her, *when she had outworn her popularity and had nothing left for herself*, Faith’s belief in her was more important than ever.⁵⁹

Sitting in the library of 156 97th Street, Annie stared at Faith’s letter. It was remarkable how one small piece of paper could bring back so many memories. The library door creaked open to reveal a full grown, dark-haired woman in the doorway. Annie had not heard it open, so Faith stood in the doorway and watched her for a moment. Twenty three years ago, she had fallen in love with this woman as she danced and flew freely about the stage as Puck. *She could not endure to see her winged Puck shackled to a cane.*⁶⁰

Annie snapped out of her reminiscent gaze and moved from the wall of shelves to the mantle over the fireplace to inspect some pictures. All of the pictures, save one of Faith and Ginnie, were of the children. By the looks of things there were not two, but four of them. “Good heavens,” Annie said under her breath.

“Good heavens, indeed!” echoed Faith’s voice from the doorway, giving Annie a bit of a shock. “Let me give you a hug, Dearest Lady.”

The two women embraced, “Happy Birthday, my last but one girl!”

“Oh--thank you, Annie. May I escort you to the living room for a nice cup of tea? I’m so anxious to hear what you’ve been up to these past couple of years.”⁶¹

Holding Annie's hand in her own, Faith led her out of the library, through the foyer, and into the small, but cozy living room. The tea tray was already in place with a steaming pot of tea, a plate of biscuits, and two china tea cups. The room was brightened by a vase of yellow posies, centered on the table. Annie smiled as she took her seat.

As Faith began serving the tea, Annie remarked, "I've already had the pleasure of meeting your two oldest on the front steps this afternoon, but I had no idea that you had two more."

"Oh—Stephen and Ann are twins and only just eighteen months," said Faith as she offered Annie a biscuit. "I know I've been awful at keeping in touch these past couple years. We must make a resolution to keep one another better informed."

Annie declined the biscuit, sipped her tea, and nodded in agreement.

"It's no excuse, but I have been rather busy since the birth of the twins."

"Understandable, my dear."

"Really, *it has just been one damned thing after another*⁶² ever since Stephen and Ann were born last April."

"Has Hugh Jr. stayed out of trouble since his accident with the match? That was the last letter I've had from you."⁶³

"Unfortunately he has been in and out of the hospital, but he has been out of any major trouble. That child will be the end of me. Since *he stole and secreted a match and burned himself all over his right side, he has had abscessed ears, his tonsils and adenoids removed, double pneumonia, a collapsed lung, septic poisoning, and a fine case of the chicken pox.*⁶⁴ Then all four had the measles and finally whooping cough. *I am fortunate in that my best friend is a trained nurse.*⁶⁵ You met her down in the foyer, I believe. We

have only just now become a relatively healthy, sane household. And much of that is thanks to the simple fact that Big Hugh is gone for good.”⁶⁶

“Oh my dear girl! When did he die?”

“Oh, Annie, not like that. Although I would be lying to say that his passing would not have made things much easier and certainly cleaner.” She gave a nervous laugh to show that everything was fine, “Really, *it has been coming for four years...* in August I told him we must separate.”⁶⁷

“But why, dear?”

“*My reason for a separation is a maladjustment of sex.*” Faith declared. Annie raised her eyebrows in surprise but Faith continued. “*I have had to work hard and contribute nine tenths of our income. This is quite all right, we have never quarreled about money. You know I would not. I have borne four children. The two eldest are sixteen months apart, the twins came along in two more years. I worked all thru my hard pregnancies and immediately after my deliveries. I had to. But despite this—I must be frank... I had continuous demands upon me, every night of my life. I saw several doctors thinking my lack of response was an abnormality. But they were horrified. Any compromise was simply effected by force and resulted in such sulks and weeps that I always submitted. I have been a fool.*”⁶⁸

“No more of a fool than most of us, my dear. Sometimes I wonder why we even bother with the creatures at all.” Faith smiled and then Annie took a deep breath, looked into her friend’s eyes and seemed to brace herself, “I’ve some news of my own...Oswald has left me.”

Faith moved to the chair next to Annie's and took her hand, "No! Annie I can't believe it."

"Oh believe it my dear. Two years ago, Oswald left me for a younger woman. I had to testify to his infidelity in open court. It was...humiliating." Annie's hands shook as she set her teacup down. *"I won't try to tell you about the different kinds of hell I have been through. You'll understand what it has meant after twenty three years of effort to lift that creature up to a plane where I could love and respect him—and the useless years fighting against his domineering—his hatred of my preeminence—his hatred of my family—his hatred of America—hatred, hatred, hatred—meaning hatred of everything and every person I had any least contact with—and last of all his ill concealed hatred of me..."*⁶⁹

"Oh Annie, I had no idea! I know he was distant with me, but I always believed Oswald adored you." Annie let out a short bitter laugh, "Do you remember when Oswald traveled to France to entertain the troops just after the war ended in 1919?"⁷⁰

"Oh, I remember the Great War quite well, and yes I remember his travels. You were so lonely."⁷¹

Annie's frail hand twisted and untwisted the pearl necklace at her throat "While I was at home volunteering for the Stage Women's War Relief and missing my husband, that man was... picking up diseases from harlots in France."⁷² Of course when he came home I was so glad to see him...I didn't know..." Faith felt the anger rising in her chest.

"As you can imagine, I have been quite sick these past ten years. While he traveled to perform wherever he could get work, I stayed home to face the leftovers of my life--loneliness, blindness and disease. I can barely see anymore, my lungs are failing,

my throat bleeds, the headaches are constant... Damn this body—I have fought it my whole life...”⁷³ Annie pushed her cane away with a violence that surprised them both and her tears began to flow freely.

For once Faith Baldwin, prolific writer that she was, was at a loss for words. Gently she took Annie into her arms and stroked her hair. “There, there...” she whispered as she held on to the woman whom she had loved these many years.

When Annie’s tears had subsided, Faith finally spoke, “*I feel so hideously disappointed in my illusion of Lysander, --yet, in reality, I only knew him through your eyes and my hopes.*”⁷⁴

“And I suppose neither was terribly trustworthy,” Annie said in a whisper.

Faith responded softly, “Our husbands were both *charming creatures, especially when things went well*. Oh but they were also *weak and drifting... And bullies too! We sacrificed so much of our work* so that they could feel important.”⁷⁵ How could two such brilliant women as ourselves have wasted so much time with such dullards. Let us agree here and now to be done with the lot of them!”

“Indeed, we are better off with each other.” Annie agreed. “*Men are such fools!*”

“Oh Annie that would make a wonderful book title—may I steal it?”⁷⁶

“I give it to you with my love dear girl. Consider it a birthday present.”

“Now in all seriousness dearest lady, since we have agreed to put our mistakes behind us and to soldier on, I must ask you: When will you return to the stage? Have you been to the theater lately? It is all dancing girls and vulgar comics!”⁷⁷ The theater is in desperate need of your good service and you have been shirking your duties, hiding

yourself away in Florida of all places! I have missed reading your declarations of war against the tired businessman and the mediocrity of commercial theater.”

“My ‘militant manifestos’, as Oswald use to call them. Much good they did... ”

“No you were just ahead of your time, dear lady. Oh, I shall never forget your address to the Women’s City Club of New York. There you were, all five feet and two inches of you, up on that podium telling the ladies of Park Avenue that the theater was *‘filled with good millenary, good looks, high kicking and low thinking!’* and what were they going to do about it? And then you told them to *‘keep their daughters away from vulgar plays’* and take them to *Shakespeare instead.*”⁷⁸ Faith’s eyes twinkled as Annie smiled broadly for the first time that day. “Oh you were a force to be reckoned with Miss Russell! Don’t tell me you have given up the fight?”

“Well actually my dear,” Annie said with uncharacteristic shyness, “I may be returning to the theatre very soon.”

“Well bully for you Annie, it is about time! What role will you play? When? Where? I’ll call for tickets today...”

“Now don’t get ahead of yourself my girl. I said I *might* be returning to the stage. It’s rather a long story...”

“Oh but I love stories” Faith said as she poured them each another cup of tea and settled back into the sofa, “I’m all ears.”

“You remember my good friend Mary Curtis Bok of Philadelphia? I’m sure you’ve heard me talk of before...”

“Oh yes, I know she has been a wonderful friend to you these many years.” Faith thought she detected a slight blush on Annie’s cheek.

Annie continued, “Mary wants to give Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida a theatre in my name with the stipulation that I be the producing director.”⁷⁹

“What wonderful news, Annie!”

“Well, it is much too early to say, and at the present moment I don’t know if I am even up to anything theatrical, especially given my wretched health.”

“But Annie, this is your dream. To have your own company to guide and nourish as you see fit. To produce theatre that you want to see done, to play roles that you want to play. No producers telling you what to do or financial strains holding you back!”

“Yes Faith, but...”

“But what, Annie? How could you possibly turn such an offer down?”

“I am an old lady now Faith. My Old English Comedy Company was my chance at my dream. I was fifty then, and we lasted less than two years.”⁸⁰

“Then be grateful that Mary has given you a second chance.”

“But I’m so tired Faith, I don’t think I can do this.”

“Nonsense! Annie, you have come too far, you are too strong, and you have sacrificed too much to turn this down.”

Annie paused and pictured a brand new theatre bearing her name in Winter Park, Florida. She saw full audiences packed into the red velvet seats, visiting guest artists performing and teaching, and most important of all, she saw students engaged in a theatre of distinction and purpose. “Maybe it is time for me to move on to the next chapter of my life.”

“Maybe?” Faith raised her eyebrows as she sipped on her tea.

Annie stared back at the woman sitting next to her so full of life and energy,
“Fine, it is time for me to move on.”

Faith lit up with a broad smile, and she instantly recognized the twinkle that had
appeared in Annie’s eyes. Mischievous Puck was back to play.

The story did not end there of course. Mary Curtis Bok did give Rollins College
the money to build the Annie Russell Theater in Winter Park, Florida and the cornerstone
was laid on January 9th, 1932, three years after Annie and Faith’s last meeting in
Brooklyn. Mary Curtis Bok could not attend the ceremony but sent Annie a telegram
with the following message:

Regret infinitely my inability to be with you today for the laying of the
cornerstone of the Annie Russell Theater. The building is just my loving tribute
to you as a woman and artist and dear lifelong friend, but you will give it a soul.
Your spirit and knowledge and artistic integrity will be the inspiration for the
youth of Rollins College privileged to work under your guidance. My love to you
and God speed the project.⁸¹

In writing this (hi)story we have been searching for “the soul” of the woman
whose name graces the building we work in every day. In the course of our experiment
we have drawn upon many of the skills that drew us to theater in the first place. As
researchers we have immersed ourselves in diaries, letters and personal ephemera. As
playwrights we have reconstructed the given circumstances of Faith and Annie’s world.
And as actors we have imaginatively entered their psyches. We are committed to the

rigor of meticulous research, but it was the “filling in the rest” that created an intimate engagement with our subject.

The research

Though the finished product of our experiment in theatre historiography may flow easily, the process of crafting it did not. The journey from reading the first letters of the correspondence spread out on the office floor, to our finished (hi)story was messy and unpredictable. We began our summer research project with a simple question: what do we expect to learn about Annie and Faith after reading their letters? Our answers became some of our initial research goals: uncover Faith’s development as a writer, follow the progression of their relationship with one another and with their respective husbands, unearth how these two women conformed to, and resisted, traditional gender roles of their period. When we asked if the project held any significance beyond satisfying our own curiosity we decided that for our own community the significance lay simply in shedding light on the faded figure of Annie Russell after whom our theater is named. But when we asked ourselves if this project could have any significance for those beyond our local community we were less certain. The realization that the creation of the (hi)story itself would become significant came to us much later in the process.

The correspondence seemed to fall into three phases. The first (1906-1910) featured Annie in the prime of her career and Faith as a “matinee girl” fan. The second phase (1911-1919) explored Annie’s role as an activist in the theatre and as a mentor for Faith who was coming of age both as a young woman and a writer. The third and final phase (1920-1936) followed Annie’s declining career and failing health as well as Faith’s struggles to balance her difficult husband, rambunctious children, and blossoming literary

career. In addition to the correspondence, we sought out supplementary material to help us contextualize the letters and to explain unfamiliar references. Our first stop was the Archives and Special Collections at Rollins College's Olin Library where we found an abundance of material on Annie Russell. We combed through boxes of personal diaries, reviews, interviews, and literary works as well as the small library of books Annie left to the college. Despite Faith's immense popularity as a romance novelist in the 1930s and 1940s, contextual information on her life and career proved a bit more difficult to uncover. Luckily, her letters, especially her earlier ones are much more detailed than Annie's, and we were able to use references in her letters to better understand her world. An example: she referenced her schooling at Mrs. Dow's in Briarcliff, NY, and we were able to uncover that Mrs. Dow's was a finishing school for rich young society women. We are also fortunate that Faith left behind more than eighty-five novels for us to draw from. We read several of them in order to better understand her development as a writer and her nascent feminism. One of the novels, *Self-Made Woman* tells the story of a career-driven woman struggling to choose between her lucrative career in real estate and the prospect of a husband and raising a family. This would ultimately influence how we drew Faith's character in the (hi)story.

At the conclusion of our summer research, we felt as if we were standing in a long corridor lined with doors stretching as far as the eye could see. We had a great deal of information but no clear understanding of its historical significance. Should we explore the women's various career paths? Their dysfunctional families? Their devotion to each other and other women? Their disappearance from the historical record? Their politics? Their sexuality? With so many different doors, how could we decide which of them

deserved opening, and more importantly which one deserved entering and exploring? And finally, how were we to format our findings in a way that engaged an audience, pleased us as researchers, and honored Annie and Faith?

Discovering a structure

We continued working into the school year and one afternoon as we debated possible thesis statements for an article Joseph said, “Too bad we can’t just write a play or a story. After all Annie was an actress and Faith was novelist. It would seem fitting.”

“Interesting,” I replied. “But that’s way too far outside the box. It wouldn’t be scholarly.”

“Why not?” he asked.

Why not indeed? I found I had no clear-cut answer to his question. Well that started us on an exploration of the genre of creative non fiction. Lee Gutkind, founder and editor of the scholarly journal *Creative Nonfiction*, describes the genre:

Dramatic, true stories using scenes, dialogue, close, detailed descriptions and other techniques usually employed by poets and fiction writers about important subjects...[Creative nonfiction] allows a writer to employ the diligence of a reporter, the shifting voices and viewpoints of a novelist, the refined wordplay of a poet and the analytical modes of the essayist.⁸²

This seemed like the perfect solution. By combining primary source research with the tools of creative nonfiction, such as dialogue and detailed description, we could reanimate Annie in three critical scenes representing the three major phases in her relationship with Faith. Creative nonfiction would allow us to personalize the historical record these two women left behind, paying respect to the creative nature of each, and

making theater history come alive in a narrative reminiscent of a romance novel or a play. It would also foreground the fact that the letters left us with many unanswered questions that our imaginations, informed by research, unsurprisingly sought to answer.

Unfortunately there was one rather significant problem with this idea. One of the basic tenets of creative nonfiction is that you “do not add,” in other words, you cannot make up something that did not happen. You may condense or even reorder events, but you cannot create them from your imagination. So although creative nonfiction gave us a starting point it would not allow us to imaginatively enter Annie and Faith’s history. Though we ultimately gave up the idea of writing a creative nonfiction essay, the fact that the genre had been significantly theorized gave us the confidence to go forward with a creative essay. We decided to write three scenes in which we would illuminate important facets of Annie and Faith’s lives while reinforcing the importance of their relationship during times of crisis. Before writing each scene we made a list of the “historically significant information” we wanted the scene to convey. In other words, if the scenes were traditional academic essays, what information would they include? For example, in the first scene our list included: Annie’s reputation as a “delicate flower” juxtaposed against her personal strength; Charles Frohman’s power as part of the Syndicate and Annie’s dependence upon him for employment; Faith’s precociousness and infatuation with Annie; Annie’s desire to play roles that challenged her in plays that she felt would elevate the state of the theater; and a physical description of Annie’s performance as Puck. After we had developed our list, Joseph would draft the scene; then we would then work together to ensure that the stories were communicating the historical information that we had intended. When we got stuck we would ask: Where is the history here? What

do we want people to know about the past and about Annie and/or Faith in this moment of the story?

Scene One explored the first meeting between the two women after a matinee performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream at the Astor Theatre in 1906. As Annie was forty-two years old and Faith thirteen at the time of the first meeting, the scene proposed an answer to a fundamental question: how did this correspondence begin and why did it continue? Scene Two jumped ten years ahead to a rainy Monday afternoon in Annie's apartment in New York City and switched the focus to Annie's rocky marriage with Oswald Yorke. Although Faith was not physically present in the scene, her letters were present and provided a source of conflict between Annie and Oswald. Because the letters were our inspiration, it was important to us to have a letter figure prominently in the narrative and so utilizing Faith's love letter as a central prop in the scene seemed fitting. Scene Two proposed to answer the question of how important the correspondence was to each of the women, and how it offered a unique support as they fought battles, both public (Suffrage, Annie's campaign to elevate the American stage) and private (marital, career, and health). Scene Three leapt another decade and a half ahead to Annie's visit on Faith's thirty-sixth birthday, the scene that we ended up using as the present day for our (hi)story. It proposed to answer the question of how intimate the relationship was and how representative it may have been of the female centered relationships in each of their lives. Together these three separate, but interrelated, scenes comprised about thirty pages and would become the foundation upon which we built our final (hi)story, though we would end up cutting, revising, and shuffling portions from each of the original three scenes. And even though we were placing the women in

imagined situations, we sought to retain some sense of the mystery that had drawn us to their story in the first place. Though our research had given us a much better sense of Annie and Faith's professional lives and of Faith's personal life (she was far more forthcoming in her letters) there were still many aspects of Annie's personal life that remained obscure. Her first marriage, her illness in Europe and her sexuality were as unclear to us as they had been when we started. Our own interpretation of Annie's story would have to maintain certain ambiguities if we were to conscientiously engage the nature of the evidence.

Deep and Apparent Subjects

The stories were written but they needed a framework to clarify what it was we were trying to do with them and how we imagined other theater scholars might be able to use them. While researching the genre of creative nonfiction we had come across the terms "deep subject" and "apparent subject." Myrna Kostash explained "Every piece of writing has an apparent subject; it's the one that answers the question 'What are you writing about?' But if you spend enough time and thought with your material you will eventually uncover the deep subject, the one that is driving the apparent one."⁸³ Annie and Faith's correspondence was clearly our apparent subject, but what was our deep subject? What was driving us in our investigation into their lives and letters? After a good deal of reflection we realized that our deep subject was actually the writing of theater history itself. These women were vanishing from the historical narrative, but they had been writing a kind of history in their letters to each other which had been left to us to interpret and to share. Though our artifact, the correspondence, was fragmented and imperfect it awakened in us a deep attachment to Annie and Faith, and a subsequent

desire to reanimate them so that we might deepen our connection to our past. This led us to craft stories which both posed and answered research questions: Why did two women so different from each other in circumstances begin a correspondence that lasted so long? How intimate was their relationship? How did they influence each other's careers? How important was this correspondence in their lives? As we wrote, we had been answering these questions by combining our research data with our scholarly intuition and ultimately our imaginations.

The discomfort I felt utilizing my imagination so freely in a history essay compared to Joseph's adventurous leap into uncharted waters (Why not?) made me keenly aware of the institutional constraints theater historians deal with on both a conscious and subconscious level. As a veteran of academia I was inured to traditional ways of doing things; my training, my past publication experiences, my own participation in the field all limited my vision even as they gave me professional credibility. As an acting student who had taken no theater history courses at the time our research started, Joseph came to the project wanting to learn and teach through storytelling. In the joyful collision of actor, storyteller, data gatherer, historian, writer and director that emerged in our collaboration we discovered the deep subject of the essay.

Now we needed to edit the stories, frame them with a discussion of historiography and imagination and let the reader make of it what s/he may. Out of the three separate scenes of thirty pages we combined, revised, and crafted our final unified (hi)story of twenty pages. In order to do this, we had to reexamine each of the stories to create a singular focus to give the finished product an overall through-line. When we took a fresh look at the original scenes we decided to focus on Annie as the central character

supported by Faith. The through line would be Annie's desire to elevate the American stage and her belief that she was capable of more than she was being allowed to do. We trimmed away ten pages of material and added material from Annie's newspaper and magazine interviews, and the result was a narrative that was clearly focused on Annie's professional life but still included information about her personal relationships. We did however have to cut some very interesting parts of Faith's story. For example, in Scene Two Faith is present only through her letter. As it stands now there is one brief reference to a conflict between Oswald and Annie over Faith: "though she'd had to hide Faith's letters ever since Oswald had denounced Faith and her liberal politics." In our original scene, the conflict between Annie and Oswald erupted because of Faith. The scene had opened from Oswald's perspective. He sat staring out the window on a rainy afternoon waiting for the return of his wife. As he waited, the mail arrived with a letter from Faith. Oswald thought that he and Annie had agreed to break off communications with Faith because Faith maintained a neutral stance in WWI. Faith's neutral stance can be attributed to her two year visit to Germany in the years just before the war broke out. Sent to live with her aunt and cousin after graduating from finishing school, Faith fell in love with a young German boy, who joined the army at the onset of WWI. Because of this she could not bring herself to view Germans as "the enemy", a position that angered Oswald and prompted him to write her a scathing letter.⁸⁴ (We do not have a copy of this letter, only a letter from Faith to Annie in which she references being hurt by Oswald's last letter.) In our first draft Oswald opened Faith's letter to discover Faith's political stance and to read her declaration of love for Annie. When Annie returned from her errands she found Oswald reading her letter, thus their argument first centered on Faith's relationship

with Annie and then moved to Oswald and Annie's failing careers. Unfortunately, there was not room in the final version to discuss Faith's experience in Germany as we prioritized Annie's professional struggles in the scope of the overall (hi)story.

Other interesting material from the letters that didn't make it directly into the (hi)story but nonetheless influenced it include : 1) Annie's confession that she enjoyed playing hooky from all of her responsibilities by writing long letters to Faith while she was on tour; 2) Faith's acquaintance with several prominent theater people who were her family's neighbors on Long Island (including William Gillette whose boat she snuck onto one night when she was fourteen); 3) Annie's advice that Faith be a writer and not an actress and her own confession that she wished she had been a writer instead of an actress; 4) Annie's dependence upon, and infatuation with, philanthropist Mary Curtis Bok in her later years; and 5) Faith's battles with depression as well as her periodic financial difficulties.

In the end our experiment produced a document which had no real prototype as far as we knew. It wasn't a fiction, it wasn't a history; it was a hybrid in need of a name. And so we called it a (hi)story, feeling the *story* had the most weight in the equation. Though we took many twists and turns arriving at it, we found that our historiography of informed imagination actually had a clear methodology:

1. Primary source research must happen first;
2. Questions arise from the evidence which cannot be completely answered by the evidence;
3. Contextual research is conducted; and then

4. The writer(s) uses their informed imagination to create an answer (not the answer) to the questions.

How useful any individual (hi)story produced by this method might be to another historian will depend on the interests of that scholar. It cannot be used as historical evidence itself—not in its entirety, but portions of it can be, and another scholar might, with a different set of lenses, write another (hi)story based upon that same evidence. The two could then be put into dialogue creating a potentially useful exploration of historical discourse itself.

This historiography of informed imagination has pedagogical value as well. At the same time Joseph and I were working on this project, I was teaching undergraduate Theater History and I thought it might be interesting to incorporate our methodology into the class. I asked students to craft a story or a scene that allowed them to demonstrate their understanding of the historical evidence but also asked them to speculate on questions that we have no firm answers to. For example one question read:

Shakespeare, Giacomo Torelli, Lope de Vega, and Madeline Bejart, are sitting together in a theater pub. Aside from arguing over the bill what would they each say are the most pressing problems facing theater practitioners in their country?

What would they say were their greatest accomplishments?

It was fascinating to watch my students practice on a small scale what Joseph and I had been working on for over a year. They responded with great enthusiasm, writing elaborate scenes and nuanced stories full of historical detail and humor. The exercise allowed them to draw upon skills practiced in other theater classes (acting, design and directing) and to apply them to a class they had previously thought of as theatrical only in

subject matter. Almost all reported spending much more time on this assignment than other; and they eagerly shared their scenes with each other creating an extended creative dialogue based upon, but not limited to, historical evidence. When they were asked to imaginatively enter the history of their chosen profession students forged a link with their ancestors, drawing upon their own theatrical skills to become active participants in the history they were studying.

What my students wrote, and what Joseph and I have written together may be historical fiction, but through it we have collectively tried to achieve the historian's goal of reanimating our ancestors, connecting their stories to our own and pointing to the unfinished nature of our inheritance. In her speech delivered at the dedication of the theater built in her honor, Annie Russell described acting as, "one soul shouting across space to another soul."⁸⁵ She might just as well have been speaking of the historian's quest to reach into the past to hear the voices of the dead asking to be heard and remembered. In writing our (hi)story of Annie Russell we have come to believe that a historiography of informed imagination may open the door to a more dynamic connection between theater practitioners and their ancestry. It may also invigorate historical narratives of the theater when scholars are no longer asked to distrust their own theatricality. Perhaps by releasing our claim to historical objectivity we can openly acknowledge, even celebrate the mytho-poetic nature of history itself.

¹ Georg G. Iggers, Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 2.

² Letter from Winthrop Carty to Steve Neilson. Rollins College Archive, Annie Russell folders.

- ³ “Faith Baldwin, Author of 85 Books and Many Stories, Is Dead at 84,” *New York Times*, 19 March, 1978.
- ⁴ “Amazing Faith,” *Time Magazine*, 1 May, 1950.
- ⁵ F. Thomas Trotter, “Imagination and History” in Religion-Online [database online] (cited 5 February, 2008); <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=514>
- ⁶ Ibid
- ⁷ Peter Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, 2nd Edition, (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 21.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Robert A. Rosenstone, *Rethinking History*, “Editor’s Preface,” vol. 1, [journal online] (cited 5 February, 2008); <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/13642529.asp>
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 11 January, 1929, *Annie Russell Papers*. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations
- ¹² Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 21 April, 1907, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ¹³ Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 28 October 1906, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ¹⁴ Gustov Kobbé, *Famous Actors and Actresses & Their Homes*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1903), 205.
- ¹⁵ Amy Leslie, *Some Players: Personal Sketches* (Chicago & New York: H.S. Stone & Co., 1909), 424-427.
- ¹⁶ William Young, ed., *Famous Actors: Actresses on the American Stage* (New York and London: RR Bowler Co., 1975) 990.
- ¹⁷ *Who Was Who In the Theatre* 16th ed., vol. 4, s.v. “Russell, Annie.”
- ¹⁸ “Astor Theatre Opens With Lovely Spectacle,” *New York Times*, 22 September, 1906, 7.
- ¹⁹ Annie Russell to Faith Baldwin, 25 October, 1906, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ²⁰ “Annie Russell,” in Internet Broadway Database [database online] (cited 14 June, 2007); <http://www.ibdb.com/person.asp?id=58657>
- ²¹ Annie Russell to Faith Baldwin, 25 October, 1906, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ²² Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, Undated, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ²³ “Astor Theatre,” in Internet Broadway Database [database online] (cited 14 June, 2007); <http://www.ibdb.com/venue.aspx?id=1049>
- ²⁴ Agnes Hill was Annie’s nurse and companion while she was in Europe (1889-1893). The women remained friends until there seemed to be a break in their relationship sometime in 1908. Annie Russell to Agnes Hill, 15 March, 1908, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ²⁵ Idah McGlone Gibson, “In My Portrait Gallery: Annie Russell,” Dec. 1909, Annie Russell Faculty and Alumni Files, Dept. of Archives and Special Collections, Olin Library, Rollins College, Winter Park, FL.
- ²⁶ Annie Russell Diary Entry, 1920-1924, Annie Russell Faculty and Alumni Files.
- ²⁷ “Astor Theatre Opens...” *New York Times*
- ²⁸ Leslie, *Some Players*, 424.
- ²⁹ “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” in Internet Broadway Database (cited 14 June, 2007); <http://www.ibdb.com/show.asp?ID=1194>
- ³⁰ William E Sage, “Miss Russell Loves Humor,” Undated Article, *Cleveland Leader*, Annie Russell Faculty and Alumni Files.
- ³¹ Charles Frohman to Annie Russell, 2 August, 1909, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ³² Annie Russell quoted in “Untitled Article,” *The Washington Post*, 26 February, 1899, Annie Russell Faculty and Alumni Files.
- ³³ Gibson, “Portrait Gallery,” 3.
- ³⁴ Annie Russell, “The Player’s View of the Playgoer,” (1912), Annie Russell Faculty and Alumni Files.
- ³⁵ Annie Russell, “What it Really Means to be an Actress,” *The Ladies Home Journal*, January 1909, vol. 26, 9. *Russell Annie Papers*.
- ³⁶ Annie Russell to Faith Baldwin, 1 November, 1906, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ³⁷ Annie’s husband, British actor Oswald Yorke played Lysander in this production.
- ³⁸ Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 3 February, 1930, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ³⁹ Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 17 May, 1925, *Annie Russell Paper*.
- ⁴⁰ Authors Faith wrote she admired. Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 21 June, 1907, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁴¹ “Brooklyn Best Seller,” *Time Magazine*, 8 July, 1935.

-
- ⁴² Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 5 October, 1910, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁴³ Annie Russell to Faith Baldwin, 28 September, 1910, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁴⁴ Oswald always referred to Annie as Beloved in his letters. Oswald York to Annie Russell, 20 September, 1911, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁴⁵ Who Was Who In the Theatre, s.v. "Russell, Annie."
- ⁴⁶ Annie Russell to Faith Baldwin, 14 July, 1912, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁴⁷ "A Reply to Annie Russell," 30 March, 1913, *The Brooklyn Eagle*, Annie Russell Faculty and Alumni Files.
- ⁴⁸ Annie Russell. "The Stage and Its People: A Chronicle of the Passing Show" *Philadelphia Telegraph*, 27 February, 1907. No page number.
- ⁴⁹ Annie Russell quoted in "What Actors Think of Audiences", *Pittsburg Gazette*, 9 March 1913. No page numbers.
- ⁵⁰ Walter Prichard Eaton, At the New Theatre (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company) 10.
- ⁵¹ "Oswald Yorke," in Internet Broadway Database (cited 8 July, 2007); <http://www.ibdb.com/person.asp?id=69127>
- ⁵² Annie Russell, "The Player's View of the Playgoer," (Author's Draft 1912), 5. Annie Russell Faculty and Alumni Files.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Gibson, "Portrait Gallery," 3.
- ⁵⁵ Implied by Faith's response to an unavailable letter from Oswald. Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 14 January, 1917, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁵⁶ Over 70% of Faith's letters begin with this salutation.
- ⁵⁷ Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 5 October, 1910, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁵⁸ Russell "What it Really Means," 9.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid
- ⁶⁰ Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell 9 October, 1930, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁶¹ There is a gap in the correspondence between 1927 and 1929.
- ⁶² Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 11 January, 1929, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁶³ Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 3 January, 1927, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁶⁴ Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 11 January, 1929, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Annie Russell to John Carty, 16 December, 1927, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁷⁰ Annie Russell to Faith Baldwin, 28 March, 1920, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Faith Baldwin to Mrs. Smith, 25 March, No year, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁷³ Annie Russell Diary Entry, 1920-1924, Annie Russell Faculty and Alumni Files.
- ⁷⁴ Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 24 January, 1929, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁷⁵ Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 11 January, 1929, *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁷⁶ Faith Baldwin published a book entitled Men are Such Fools in 1936, the year Annie died.
- ⁷⁷ Faith Baldwin to Annie Russell, 31 March 1929. In this letter she talks about how the theater has degenerated since the war (WWI).
- ⁷⁸ Annie Russell quoted by H.L Kleinield in biographical entry on Annie Russell in Annie Russell Faculty and Alumni Files Author, title unknown, undated, 210.
- ⁷⁹ Mary Curtis Bok donated \$100,000 to Rollins College in 1930 to build a theater in honor of her life long friend Annie Russell. She stipulated that Annie was to be the theater's director and the College agreed. The theater was completed in 1932 and Annie Russell ran it until her death in 1936.
- ⁸⁰ The Annie Russell Old English Comedy Company occupied the Princess Theater in New York and produced plays from the fall of 1912 until it ran out money in 1913.
- ⁸¹ Telegraph from Mary Curtis Bok to Annie Russell, 9 January, 1932. *Annie Russell Papers*.
- ⁸² Lee Gutkind, "What is Creative Nonfiction?" www.creativenonfiction.org/thejournal/whatiscnf.htm (cited 19 June, 2008).

⁸³ Myrna Kostash , interviewed by Gordon Morash http://library.athabascau.ca/drr/mais617/MAIS_617-Kostash_interview.pdf (cited 20 June, 2008).

⁸⁴ We do not have a copy of this letter, only a letter from Faith to Annie in which she references being hurt by Oswald's last letter.

⁸⁵ Annie Russell, Speech at the Dedication of the Annie Russell Theater, 1932. *Annie Russell Paper*