Documentary Theatre in the United States

An Historical Survey and Analysis of Its Content, Form, and Stagecraft

GARY FISHER DAWSON

Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies, Number 89

GREENWOOD PRESS
Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dawson, Gary Fisher, 1946–
Documentary theatre in the United States : an historical survey and analysis of its content, form, and stagecraft / Gary Fisher Dawson.
p. cm.—(Contributions in drama and theatre studies, ISSN 0163–3821 ; no. 89)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0–313–30449–1 (alk. paper)
1. Historical drama, American—History and criticism. 2. Theater—United States—Production and direction—History. 3. Literature and history—United States—History. I. Title. II. Series.
PS338.H56D38 1999
812'.051409—dc21 98–44418

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 98–44418
ISBN: 0–313–30449–1
ISSN: 0163–3821

First published in 1999

Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881
An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.
www.greenwood.com

Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48–1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Copyright Acknowledgments

The author and publisher gratefully acknowledge permission to use material from the interviews the author held with Martin Duberman and Emily Mann on March 8, 1994.

To Beverly, Nelson, and Munnis

Contents

Acknowledgments

This book is made possible with the assistance and encouragement of my dear friend and actor Ray Wasik, whose careful eye and close reading helped me to refine the document before you. Last, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to Tomoko (Lin) Kurihara, whose amazing insight and generous sense of humor was an anchor keeping everything from going out to sea.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

BRUCE A. McCONACHIE is Associate Professor of Theatre and Speech at the College of William and Mary, and he directs the college's graduate program in American Studies. He has published articles in *Theatre Journal*, *Theatre Survey*, and *Southern Theatre*.

DANIEL FRIEDMAN is Artistic Director of the Castillo Theatre Company, which is associated with the Otto Rene Castillo Center for Working Class Culture. He is an Adjunct Assistant Professor of English at York College, C.U.N.Y., and is Cultural Editor of *National Alliance* newsweekly. He is the author of twelve plays, the latest of which, *The Learning Play of Levi Yitzhok, Son of Sara, of Berditchev* was produced by the Gene Frankel Theatre Workshop.

Introduction

This book champions documentary theatre in the United States. It is an overview of American documentary theatre that provides a clear and simple definition of the genre within the broadest historic context. In so doing, it is demonstrated that a fourth period of expression in documentary theatre is currently underway in the United States. By surveying current, and distant, representative examples of American documentary theatre, the author determines that American documentary theatre is richly steeped in the oral history tradition. Therefore, American documentary theatre is an alternative to received journalism. American documentary theatre, not to be confused with television or film "docudrama," significantly adds to the importance of theatre art in learning about life.

Therefore, the book serves both as a corrective and also as a stimulant. As a remedy, its purpose is to reduce confusion about this modern theatre genre. As an encouragement, it serves to increase interest about the form, while adding to its furtherance. The relief created is one engraved from the ideas of numerous American documentary theatre practitioners over the course of its history. It is time this be done for this new, yet-not-so-new, theatre art that, now into its fourth period of development, is still bathed in confusion as to what to call it, what purpose it serves, and what contributions it makes to American theatre. In spite of its persistent, enthusiastic presence, the form continues to escape, for the most part, the awareness of the theatre community, the interpretive community, and the theatergoing public. Even though from time to time documentary theatre reinvents itself, its constituent parts uniformly show through the muslin each time. Although a considerable amount has been written and studied about the form, there is no current resource that attempts to show how this theatre genre developed, or is developing, in the United States. Therefore, an aim of this book is to describe developments in content, form, and stagecraft of American documentary theatre beginning with John Reed's *The Paterson Pageant* (1913)

to the present, and in so doing, determine the directions in which it is moving today. By examining recent and past representatives of the American documentary theatre, a more thorough dramatic pattern about this field of drama can be embossed than is currently available. Nevertheless, one could say that documentary theatre, a dramatic representation of societal forces using a close reexamination of events, individuals, or situations, is just what our suffering society needs at century's end: a difficult theatre art that somehow releases a healing effect "through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions."[1]

Documentary theatre is a difficult art that suits playwright Tony Kushner's idea of a form "not always artistically successful," because it makes penetrating demands on its audience. Difficult art demands effort, as Kushner points out: "thinking, piecing together, searching, interpreting, understanding."[2] Documentary theatre requires—and always will—difficult thinking from its audiences. For example, documentary theatre hardly provides answers to questions it poses about modern life. Because the historical moment, event, or circumstance it illumes is already known by its audience to have occurred, no suspension of disbelief is required to heighten tension. A documentary play is not character driven in the usual sense. Missing are the Aristotelian constituencies, such as plot, "the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of tragedy," and character, which "holds the second place," guiding the play's forward movement.[3] Instead of a through-line of consecutive actions, the documentary play possesses a circular through-line of action that derives from its Piscatorian stage devices[4]. These are sign systems that figure into the form and stagecraft of this nonfiction theatre. Typically, the *mise-en-scène* of a documentary play is like watching Bloomberg television with its multiple "dialogue boxes" giving out information over and around the newscaster's face. Because it is dense with information to absorb, assimilate, and clock for reference, instead of passive watching, a documentary play requires mental awakeness in a spectator, as Kushner might say, "doing some of the work." Difficult art, he claims, has a way of piling up its wins and losses in an inevitable historical process without so much concern for success. This is true for the documentary play as well. When a documentary play works, it does so because it moves the conversation about its subject matter from a state of entropy to a higher level of activation energy and discourse. To the stage documentarian, talk is good—healthy even. In fact, as difficult a theatre art as it is, when documentary theatre succeeds it often does so on a national scale with esteemed recognition often given to its award-winning makers. The documentary information milled red hot by the stage documentarian is only cooled down by degree during the process of selection, condensing, and arrangement. Considering the necessary hammering on primary source materials needed to compress the matter effectively into an aesthetic whole, documentary playwrights might be referred to as information millwrights, because more than researched, more than written, more than imagined, a documentary play is manufactured. Yet, the stories within their selected, edited and arranged facts stay long. Maybe the storytelling itself is what gives the documentary play its treacly fey. Deburred only slowly by the abrasive action of history, the stories, the messages they convey, make documentary theatre a kind of healing theatre art.

The documentary plays surveyed and analyzed here also fit what author Todd London labels as the new epic drama, which he defines as "the great, groping, revisionist, American history play."[5] London suggests that the emergence of these socio-historical dramas has some connection to the millennium's end. Whether true or not, perhaps the backward glance on nearly one hundred years of innovation, and the perspective time permits, will help to explain why the word "healing" so often appears in relation to the documentary play.

Playwrights have brought history back in a creative way, says London. But, he argues, they "aren't content to sketch the problems, they dream of solutions, healing cures." More and more, the history found in a documentary play is the oral history of a memory play offered up by the key players in the making of it. The oral history of a documentary play is its chief authentifying sign system that confers actuality: proof something actually took place. What could be healing about remembering the past and putting it on stage? How could probing "the racial, ethnic and sexual gulfs so visible from the precipice of century's end . . . [offer] a tentative, suggestive, inconclusive vision of healing and redemption–new ways of seeing," as London believes? A partial insight to the healing effect of new epic drama is conveyed by Todd Jefferson Moore, author of the award-winning documentary play, *In the Heart of the Wood* (1994). This is a play about the controversy surrounding the logging industry of the Northwest as derived from personal interviews. Moore believes,: "I've always had a kind of notion of a kind of naive community theatre which is community based, that would reflect the immediate community . . . challenge it, and reflect its members and troubles . . . making the two different camps understand one another a little better."[6] Immediately recognizable in this is the probing of the gulfs that divide and separate, and a bridging of the two extremes into one through plain talk.

The history of this theatre art form reveals that documentary theatre has relevance to numerous theatre artists and aesthetic movements. These include theatre practitioners Georg Büchner (1813–1837), Emile Zola (1840–1902), and Vsevelod Meyerhold (1874–1940). The form's antecedents include naturalism, realism, dadaism, and expressionism. It is also directly traceable to agit-prop theatre, the mass spectacle, the Soviet Blue Blouse, and the numerous international Living Newspapers of the worker's theatre movement of the 1920s and 1930s. The strength of the form, its ability to address the serious issues confronting the age of information, is also its weakness.[7] Playwrights of a documentary play seek out correct facts and arrange these facts in a certain order to promote a point of view.[8] As a result, objectivity becomes an issue. For instance, theatre critic Walter Kerr, responding to Donald Freed's documentary play, *Inquest*, about the Rosenberg 1950s spy-trial, wrote: "The Theatre of Fact has backfired both ways. No persuasive play has been written because we are meant to take the evening as fact. Fact has been compromised by the normal liberties, and the normal hazards of playmaking."[9]

Kerr's missive was a foreshadowing of other critical voices. Scholars Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff caution against new modes of communication. They argue that there has been a reduction in truth-telling in society, and this

change influences the general reception of nonfiction plays. They blame this fall in truth, in part, on the rising interest in the so-called *docudrama* as well as other influences, such as recent changes in the copyright laws. The eminent historians argue that the libel laws in the United States have been so changed that: "The press can without risk print fabrication—outright lies—provided no malice prompted the deed. At the same time, the newspaper reporter is protected from having to disclose his source. In these conditions, few public figures will venture to start a law suit—indefinitely long and expensive—in order to clear their good name."[10] Bearing witness and perhaps adding to this development, the Supreme Court ruled (21 June 1991) that "fabricated quotations attributed to public figures may be libelous *only if* [italics added] the alterations materially change the meaning of what the person actually said."[11]

Defining documentary theatre is not an exact science. As Appendix B verifies, the various attempts by numerous researchers and scholars to arrive at a definition are partly to blame for the lingering confusion about this form of theatre. Instead of finding consistency, there is a multiplicity. Instead of finding simplicity, there is complexity. Instead of finding a conversion, there is a diversion. What is needed is a simple genre definition for documentary theatre that yields it clarity. To begin, *documentary theatre* and *documentary play* are the preferred terms over the traditional designation, *documentary drama*, because the so-called true story or "docudrama" that has become such a mainstay in commercial television is at cross-purposes with a rule of accuracy in the documentary play. Filewod addressed the confusion of terms:

"The confusion of documentary drama and documentary theatre was not lessened by Piscator himself, who claimed that in the new drama of the 1960s he found a direct continuation of his documentary theater of the 1920s. The term had become so ambiguous that an alternative, more general phrase, "theatre of fact" (reputedly coined by Kenneth Tynan in the 1950s) enjoyed a brief vogue in the 1960s and 1970s."[12]

The term for the 1980s and 1990s is "theatre of testimony" as preferred by America's leading documentary playwright, Emily Mann. Theatre reviewer Larry S. Ledford (*Backstage*, 9 February 1996) affirms the use of this term when he writes, "*Greensboro*, like *Having Our Say*, is what the playwright calls 'theatre of testimony'— a memory play."[13] The operative term is *documentary play* because this describes "a script, text, or scenario for production and not docudrama, the term co-opted to mean 'Based on a true story.'" [14]

A primary source is "distinguished from a secondary source by the fact the former gives words of the witnesses or first recorders of an event. . . . The researcher, using a number of such primary sources produces a secondary source."[15] Hence, primary sources may include all public records, personal letters, entries from personal diaries, tape recorded and transcribed interviews, photographic projections, film and video images, and the like. In addition, documentary theatre's roots are continentally based. All documentary plays, be they American, Canadian, British, German, Mexican, Russian, or for that matter, South African, share common attributes since they belong to the same genera; a condition true of all subjects classified in the same genus. By knowing what genre a play is

situated in, we come to "experience" it more fully because it can be recognized when "expectations are fulfilled and when they are imaginatively adapted."[16]

There have been many studies, journal articles, and a few full-length books covering the development and evolution of documentary theatre of other cultures. These include such studies as scholar Gregory Henry Mason's, "Documentary Drama: A Study of the Form" (1972), a most thorough and accurate study, which subsequent writers have found extremely useful.[17] There is also educator Gillete Alexander Elvgren's study, "The Evolution of a Theatrical Style: A Study of the Interrelationship of Select Regional Playwrights, The Director, The Community, and The Round Stage at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent" (1972). This is a critical analysis of the contribution to documentary theatre practice made by British theatre director and documentary theatre innovator, Peter Cheeseman.[18] Other principal studies in documentary theatre are: researcher Sidney F. Parham's, "The Performance of Fact: A Study of Documentary Drama in Germany During the 1960's" (1975)[19]; investigator Michael Thomas Croak's, "Documentary Drama in the Twentieth Century: The Neglected Resource in Historical Study" (1978)[20]; scholar Daniel James Garrett's, "Documentary Drama: Its Roots and Development in Britain" (1977)[21]; researcher and playwright Ann Smith Utterback's, "Eisenstein's Method of Montage as a Paradigm for Scripting Documentary Reader's Theatre" (1981)[22]; Canadian theatre critic Alan Douglas Filewod's "The Development and Performance of Documentary Theatre in English Speaking Canada" (1985)[23]; and finally, there is investigator Stacey Jones Connelly's study, "Forgotten Debts: Erwin Piscator and the Epic Theatre" (1991).[24]

Articles of note include such examples as playwright Peter Weiss' most significant "Fourteen Principles for a Documentary Theatre" (1968)[25]; author Dan Isaac's "Theatre of Fact" (1971)[26]; Mason's "Documentary Drama from the Review to the Tribunal" (1972)[27]; writer Lauren Nussbaum's "The German Documentary Theatre of the Sixties: A Steriopsis of Contemporary History" (1981), in which she introduces a useful and simplified classification scheme for documentary theatre as used here[28]; Paget's "Verbatim Theatre: Oral History and Documentary Techniques" (1987)[29]; and, Favorini's "Representation and Reality: The Case for Documentary Theatre" (1994).[30]

Last, there are several books about documentary theatre. First among these is Piscator's *The Political Theatre* (1980), which provides historical and theoretical foundation for the genre. Next are theatre scholar C. D. Innes' *Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre: The Development of Modern German Drama* (1972), and author Gerhard F. Probst's *Erwin Piscator and the American Theatre* (1991). Each provides vital information and analysis about Piscator's contribution to the field. Other works about documentary theatre in other cultures include Filewod's *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Speaking Canada* (1987) and Paget's *True Stories: Documentary Drama On Radio, Screen and Stage* (1990). Finally, there is Favorini's most valuable, and recent, anthology of documentary plays called *Voicings: Ten Plays From the Documentary Theatre*, (1995), with a critical introduction by the educator and documentary playwright. Favorini explains the reason for *Voicings* thus: "It is

a response to the documentary impulse by a desire to make available plays that have fallen from view."[31] The anthology presents documentary plays not previously available, or difficult to locate, such as Piscator's *In Spite of Everything!* (1925), and the Russian documentary play, *Compensation* (1987) about the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Also included are Cheeseman's *Fight for Shelton Bar*, and the Federal Theatre Project Living Newspaper, *Ethiopia* (1936).

The organization of each chapter, for the most part, is chronological. Chapter 1 covers the several and various attempts to define the genre. Chapter 2 provides essential information about documentary theatre stagecraft and the manner of use of theatre semiotics in the book. Chapter 3, as based upon representative examples, examines the influence of historical developments of the form in relation to American documentary theatre practices. In chapter 4, following this foundation, information is offered about the unity of composition as revealed in a number of representative examples of American documentary theatre. The documentary plays under consideration here are then categorized in chapter 5 according to their content, form, and stagecraft. In the final chapter conclusions are reached as to the patterns of development in American documentary theatre and reasons are given as to why there is an increase in the documentary impulse. Last, Appendix A provides a production history of each of the plays showing their opening dates, cast(s) and director(s), and producing organizations. Appendix B is a year-by-year edited and arranged narration about the theory and definition of documentary theatre as selected from various practitioners and responders. Appendix C is a meta-analysis of the performance texts for each of the American documentary plays examined and surveyed in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

The verbatim entries of Appendix C are redacted from notices, for the most part, of each play's premiere. For clarification, the term "Responder" is the preferred expression over reviewer, or theatre critic, as a witness to a performance. The former more accurately describes the function, and does not carry the same level of responsibility assumed by the latter. The *Plus, Minus, Interesting* entries were chosen for insight, diversity, and informational value. Entries under *Form* stand for a play's structural properties. In context of documentary theatre, a play's *Form* signals whether or not a play has had the status of a documentary play conferred upon it by the institution called theatre. *Content* stands for the substance of the play relative to the actual event(s) reenacted on stage, the historical circumstance(s) therein, the real persons involved, the accuracy of factual information, or the language used in the play. Last, *Stagecraft* stands for the way in which meaning is made transparent, aided by the use of theatre sign systems identified by theatre semiotician Tadeusz Kowzan, as well as other authentifying sign systems known as Piscatorian stage devices. These include, in part, the use of primary source documentation, projections of actuality in the form, photographs, video and film inserts, the use of printed "documentary" sources, such as newspaper headlines and placards, and addressing the audience directly from the stage. Owing to the interdependency of the terms *content, form,* and *stagecraft*, some entries diffuse into one another making it difficult to filter out one or the other in a specific column heading. Because the information contained within a column entry heading is accumulated and diffused, it is recommended that this meta-analysis of the performance texts be read down, rather than across.

I apply a historical and a semiotic approach to the study of American documentary theatre. First, by identifying historical background material, and then, by examining the sign systems of the plays for an analysis of their form, content, and stagecraft as incorporated by their makers, it will be possible to show that documentary theatre in the United States is now in its fourth period of development. The evidence evaluated here will help to determine what patterns of development are occurring, or have occurred, in American documentary theatre practice, reduce confusion about its purpose, and thereby, increase awareness about this new theatre genre.

Various scholars on conducting historical investigations reinforce the notion of accuracy in historical research, the importance of pattern in the writing of history, and the need for primary source data supported by evidence. Historian Louis Gottschalk and colleagues suggest that writers of history perform four basic steps: seek out records; critically examine these records; interpret the information culled; and present the results as accurately as possible for the purpose of "writing up."[32] Again, these authors define a primary source as "the testimony of an eyewitness," and a secondary source as the "testimony of anyone who is not an eyewitness."[33] Barzun and Graff, meanwhile, give descriptive information on historical research method with particular emphasis to the identification of pattern making. They argue that because the human mind will manufacture a "form" even when one is not made available, the writing of history requires a pattern.[34] Once the historical investigator has given shape to events, "found and verified," the next stage is to interpret the emergent pattern in words, "describing conditions and complications, reaching climaxes and conclusions to aid understanding."[35] The late arts educator and author Richard Courtney adds, "To be regarded as genuine educational research," historical inquiry should be: rational and objective, accurate, based on primary sources, and supported by secondary evidence.[36] Relative to theatre, the renowned theatre historian Oscar Brockett, whose *History of the Theatre* has reached a thirtieth anniversary "landmark" achievement for publication,[37] has this to say on the subject: "A theatrical performance exists briefly and then is gone forever; when we seek to define its characteristics or to reconstruct the process by which it came into being, we must depend principally upon written accounts that are partial or personal."[38] Brockett advises that theatre history involves three basic steps, which are: "(1) the formulation of a question or hypothesis, (2) the discovery and evaluation of pertinent evidence, and (3) the communication of results."[39]

NOTES

1. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher, with an introduction by Francis Fergusson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), 61.

2. Tony Kushner, "The Art of the Difficult," *Civilization*, August–September 1997, 62–67.

3. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 63.

4. Derek Paget, *True Stories? Documentary Drama on Radio, Screen and Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 61.

5. Todd London, "Epic-Cure: History That Heals," *American Theatre*, July/August 1994, 43–45.

6. Todd Jefferson Moore, telephone interview by author, 23 October 1997, tape recording, Seattle, Washington.

7. Thomas Michael Croak, "Documentary Drama in the Twentieth Century: The Neglected Resource in Historical Study" (Ph. D. diss., Carnegie-Melon University, [Ann Arbor: UMI], 1978, AA78814228), 256.

8. David Edgar, *The Second Time as Farce: Reflections on the Drama of Mean Times* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), 54.

9. Walter Kerr, "'Inquest': Kerr Votes Against It," *New York Times*, May 3, 1970, Clippings, The Billy Rose Theatre Collection of New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, New York City, n. d.

10. Jacques Barzun and Henry F Graff, *The Modern Researcher* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Wald Inc., 1992), 108–9.

11. Linda Greenhouse, "Justices Refuse to Open a Gate for Libel Cases," *New York Times*, 21 June 1991, 1 and A13.

12. Alan Douglas Filewod, "The Development and Performance of Documentary Theatre in English-Speaking Canada" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, [Ann Arbor: UMI], 1985), 4.

13. Larry S. Ledford, "Emily Mann: Remembering 'Greensboro' at McCarter," *BACKSTAGE*, 9 February 1996, 15.

14. Derek Paget, "Oh, What A Lovely War! and the Broken Tradition of Documentary Theatre: An Investigation Into the Origins, Manifestations and Influence of Documentary Theatre in the UK" (Ph.D. diss., University of Manchester: Manchester, 1988), 40.

15. Barzun and Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, 114.

16. Wilfred L. Guerin et al. , *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1979), 253.

17. Gregory Henry Mason, "Documentary Drama: A Study of the Form" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin. [Ann Arbor: UMI], 1972 #72-33 864).

18. Gillette Alexander Elvgren Jr., "The Evolution of a Theatrical Style: A Study of the Interrelationship of Select Regional Playwrights, The Director, The Community, and The Round Stage at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent" (Ph.D. diss., The Florida State University, 1972, unpublished).

19. Sidney F. Parham, III, "The Performance of Fact: A Study of Documentary Drama in Germany during the 1960's" (Ph.D. diss., Tufts University [Ann Arbor: UMI], 1975, #76-19,456).

20. Croak, "Documentary Drama in the Twentieth Century."

21. Daniel James Garrett, "Documentary Drama: Its Roots and Development in Britain" (Ph.D. diss., England: University ofHull, 1977, unpublished).

22. Ann Smith Utterback, "Eisenstein's Method of Montage as a Paradigm for Scripting Documentary Reader's Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, [Ann Arbor: UMI], 1981, # 206505).

23. Filewod, "The Development and Performance of Documentary Theatre in English Speaking Canada." (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1985, no order number).

24. Stacey Jones Connelly, "Forgotten Debts: Erwin Piscator and the Epic Theatre." (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University [Ann Arbor: UMI], 1991, PN4000.5.C752).

25. Peter Weiss, "Fourteen Propositions For A Documentary Theatre," trans. Michel Batallion, *World Theatre*, Vol. XVII (1968): 375–89.

26. Dan Isaac, "Theatre of Fact," *Drama Review*, Vol. 15, No. 3A (Summer 1971): 109–35.

27. Gregory Henry Mason, "Documentary Drama from the Revue to the Tribunal," *Modern Drama* Vol. XX, No. 3 (Sept. 1977): 263–77.

28. Lauren Nussbaum, "The German Documentary Theatre of the Sixties: A Steriopsis of Contemporary History," *German Studies Review*, Vol. IX, No.2 (May 1981): 237–55.

29. Derek Paget, "Verbatim Theatre: Oral History and Documentary Techniques," *New Drama Review* (March 12, 1987): 317–36.

30. Attilio Favorini, "Representation and Reality: The Case of Documentary Theatre," *Theatre Survey* Volume 35, No. 2 (November 1994): 31–42.

31. Attilio Favorini, *Voicings: Ten Plays From the Documentary Theatre* (Hopewell, NJ: The Ecco Press, 1995), vii.

32. Louis Gottschalk, Clyde Kluckhohn and Robert Angell, "The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology," *Social Science Research Council*, Bulletin 53 (1945): 8.

33. Ibid., 11.

34. Barzun and Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, 193.

35. Ibid., 195.

36. Richard Courtney, *The Quest: Research and Inquiry in Arts Education* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), 100.

37. To mark the occasion, the Department of Theatre and Dance at The University of Texas at Austin held an open symposium in honor of Oscar Brockett, April 17–19, 1998, called "Constructing Theatre/History." The panel included Marvin Carlson, Graduate Center-City University of New York; Jill Dolan, Graduate Center-City University of New York; Sandra L. Richards, Northwestern University; Joseph Roach, Yale University; and, Professor Brockett.

38. Oscar Brockett, *History of the Theatre* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995), 670.

39. Ibid., 670.

Chapter 1

Defining Documentary Theatre

"Poetry is led more by philosophy, the reason and nature of things, than history; which only records things higlety, piglety, right or wrong as they happen."

—Thomas Rymer

A Short View of History (1643)[1]

Imagine William Shakespeare as the Ptolemy of historical drama; master of transforming moribund historical information compressed from secondary sources into orbits of plot and magical storytelling. Now, imagine the young German playwright Georg Büchner as the Copernicus of documentary theatre; a theatrical Galileo, whose purpose was to come as close to an actual event using instead primary sources at the center of his creation. This is a way to view two distinct forms of theatre art: in one, historical fact revolves around story; in the other, historical fact is the story. This chapter will provide a simpler definition of the form than is currently available.

Surprise is one response when it is learned that Büchner's *Danton's Death* (*Dantons Tod*) (1835) is a documentary play. Because it is the proto-documenetary play in the modern sense, it rightly should be the beginning point of inquiry into this field of drama. There is something oddly satisfying about the idea that this new theatre genre was invented by a young playwright who, though he died at the age of twenty-four of typhus, had published only three plays. Yet, each, on their own merits, is considered to be a masterpiece of imagination. *Danton's Death* premiered at Belle-Alliance in Berlin (5 January 1902). Perhaps its single most important production was Max Reihardt's at the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin (15 December 1916), after which it became a staple of German theatre, including Piscator's 1956 interpretation with design by Brecht's designer, Caspar Neher.[2] Another important production of it took place

in New York City (21 October 1965) when *Danton's Death* inaugurated the newly constructed Vivian Beaumont Theatre at Lincoln Center as performed by the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center, originally part of the Washington Square Theatre, as directed by Herbert Blau. Theatre critic Howard Taubman (*New York Times*, 22 October 1965) comments: "The first production, 'Danton's Death,' which marked the official baptism of [the] new theater and leadership last night, is a memorable occasion, bearing promise of a significant enhancement of the city's dramatic culture." Unfortunately, the production was not an overwhelming success as based upon the mixed reviews it received. Nevertheless, *Danton's Death* still continues to attract the interest of theatre artists. For instance, the New York City Irondale Ensemble Project's production under the direction of Jim Niesen (*New York Times*, 2 March 1992) moved critic Wilborn Hampton to consider that the "play still speaks to those today who would unleash tyranny in the name of liberty." Later that year world-class theatre director Robert Wilson presented his interpretation of the play at the Alley Theatre in Houston with actor Richard Thomas (John-Boy Walton) in the role of Georges Danton. *New York Times* (3 November 1992) reviewer John Rockwell characterized Wilson's production as "one of the director's finest achievements. It also serves to announce that the Alley Theater has entered into a newly vibrant period in its 45-year history." *Danton's Death* serves as a exemplar that still shoots long spears of light across history.

Büchner was born on 17 October 1813 in Goddelau in the Grand Such of Hesse-Darmstadt. His family had a long tradition as barber-surgeons. His father was a surgeon. Büchner studied zoology and comparative anatomy in Strasbourg between the years 1831 and 1833. It was also during this time that he became active in radical student politics. For instance, Büchner helped found the revolutionary "Society of Human Rights." In his *Hessian Courier* of 1834, he urged all peasants to revolt against unfair taxation. Much of his creative writing was done while being pursued by authorities for his political activities, which were viewed as seditious. He wrote *Danton's Death* in five weeks, a tragedy that uses verbatim documentation from key agents of the French Revolution, while fleeing to Strasbourg to avoid arrest. In 1835 he translated two plays by Victor Hugo and worked on his novella, *Lenz*, about a Storm and Stress poet on the verge of insanity. The Society of Natural History accepted his membership in 1836. It was here he read (in French) his paper, "The Nervous System of the Barbel-fish." During this year he unsuccessfully submitted his romantic comedy *Leonce and Lena* for literary competition, and most probably began work on *Woyzeck*. It was at this time that he wrote his nonextant drama *Pietro Aretino*. After his trial lecture "On Cranial Nerves," he was appointed Lecturer in Natural Science at Zurich University.

Why should "the best first play in world literature," according to Büchner scholar Victor Price, be classified a documentary play?[3] Because much of the play's dialogue comes directly from the primary source material researched by Büchner for the play. Historian Matthew Wikander sees *Danton's Death* as a dramatization of the fallen individual the playwright witnessed, apparently, as he searched his sources for the play about the French Revolution. Wikander refers

to Büchner's letter of 10 March 1834 addressed to his fiancée in which Büchner complains about being "crushed by the horrible fatalism of history . . . the individual just foam on the wave, greatness mere chance, the rule of genius a puppet-play."[4] *Danton's Death* is subtitled "Dramatic Pictures From France's Reign of Terror," which is suggestive of how historically authentic he considered the play. As Price explains,

> Büchner outdoes Shakespeare in reproducing his sources. Perhaps a sixth of the play is taken directly from Thiers or Mignet, or from a historical survey of the years 1789 to 1839, "*Unsere Zeit (Our Time)*" by Carl Strahlheim, which drew heavily on them. In I.iii, for example, the speech of the citizen of Lyons is from Thiers, and almost all of Robespierre's speech is from Strahlheim. Robespierre's other great speech, in II. vii, is from Theirs, as is Danton's speech in his own defense before the Revolutionary Tribunal.(III. iv)[5]

In a letter to his parents, Büchner explained that the goal of a "dramatic poet" should be to "get as close as he can to history as it actually happened."[6] On this basis, quoting directly from historical documents was his way to accomplish this aim. Directly incorporating primary source material into the fictive world of a play has led numerous critics and writers to see this play through the lens of documentary theatre. This condition sets a definitional standard and provides a basis of comparison between it and its larger categorical relative, historical drama.

The significance of the play in relation to documentary theatre is affirmed by Mason who feels *Dantons Tod* (1835) "represents an important step towards documentary drama."[7] Editor Michael Patterson also confirms the play's documentary status as he writes about Büchner's other masterpiece, *Woyzeck* (1837). Patterson remarks: "As in *Danton's Death*, which cites verbatim speeches of the French revolutionary leaders, Büchner here uses his sources with a fidelity which approaches what we would now term documentary theatre."[8] Most telling is the introduction to the play by contributor Manfred K. Kramer, who writes: "The play is a historical drama; in view of the fact that Büchner quotes directly from historical documents he has studied, it might even be called a documentary drama."[9] Here, then, is an example of confusion-in-terms that, for better or worse, characterize this theatre art.

The Last Days of Mankind: A Tragedy in Five Acts (1918) by Karl Kraus also represents a vital link in the development of documentary theatre. Filewod, former editor of the *Canadian Theatre Journal*, considers it the "first true documentary play." Kraus quipped that it would take about ten evenings to perform the play, and then it would only be performed on Mars because "theatergoers in this world would not be able to endure it."[10] Its style, accordingly, anticipates the documentary plays of Weiss and Hochhuth by forty years. Its theme is the suffering and degradation of human life in the war that Kraus blamed on society's greed for profit and power. He believed that the prime culprit in the conflagration was journalism because it "re-created the war in its own image, and the war adapted itself to journalism's forms and needs." Kraus asserts that the play documents the war when he states: "The most improbable

deeds reported here really happened. The most improbable conversations that are carried on here were spoken word for word. The most glaring inventions are quotations." Yet Kraus's assertion of word-for-word authority is only partially true because only about half of the play is constructed from primary source material. For the rest, confirms Mautner, "the intertwining of documents, quotations, and phrases with ordinary, freely invented action serves to confirm the factual authenticity of the events."[11] Second only to *Danton's Death*, its predecessor in grandeur and urgency, this prime documentary play continues to cast a satirical glance toward the war-weary twentieth century.

Like *Danton's Death*, it took *Mankind* more than sixty years to be recognized in the theatrical production sense.[12] Critic Franz H. Mautner believes there is "no satiric drama that can approach its greatness."[13] Kraus's biographer Edward Timms, in the chapter "Documentary Drama/Apocalyptic Allegory," explains that it was possible that Kraus used Büchner's *Danton's Death* as his "significant model." However, there is no proof to this claim. Kraus may have developed the documentary technique independent of Büchner. According to Timms, the problem overcome by Kraus, and one significant to the development of the art form, is the "combining of documents with imaginative elements."[14] Kraus does give mention of *Danton* as the "submerged masterpiece of nineteenth-century drama" in 1918. The strength of *Mankind*, states Timms, derives from Kraus's use of the "documentary method." The following historic perspective is offered by Timms: "*The Last Days of Mankind* is best described as a documentary drama—one of the first (and perhaps the greatest) ever written. It has often been praised as a panorama of the horrors of war. But its power derives initially from Kraus's resourceful handling of a technical problem. The problem, for any author writing about the First World War, was to find a literary form commensurate with the unprecedented magnitude and horror of events."[15] The same problem besets any playwright intent on combining the acid-base reagents of "dramatic form and the facts of history."[16] The greatness of *Mankind* accrues, in part, because of its vast size that renders it very difficult to produce. Consequently, few have seen or heard of it. The play contains 256 scenes in five acts in more than 800 pages of dialogue with more than 500 characters in residence. The varieties of these characters, all with dialogue, include a fetus, some army dogs, a dead tree, and a flock of ravens. Its various locations include the streets of Vienna and Berlin, barracks, churches, coffeehouses, military hospitals, homes, editorial offices, the front and rear lines, and a U-Boat. In spite of the play's traditional regard as a mere dramatic text, unproduceable, it has attracted the attention of some producers. For instance, *The Last Days of Mankind* opened, finally, in 1964 at the Vienna Theatre Festival. In 1983 the Citizens Theatre performed a version of it at the Edinburgh Festival.

The word documentary first entered the lexicon in February 1926 in a review written by the founder of the British film documentary movement, John Grierson, in the *New York Sun* about Robert Flaherty's documentary film *Moana*.[17] Flaherty is the "father" of American documentary film. His *Nanook of the North* (1922), about the life of an Eskimo and his family, is considered to be the first successful documentary film. Film critic Ephraim Katz describes *Nanook of the North* accordingly: "It wasn't simply a fascinating anthropological account of an exotic lifestyle but a dramatically powerful interpretation of reality."[18] As defined by Grierson, documentary stands for "the creative treatment of actuality." According to Filewod, "Brecht used the term in 1926, the same year as Grierson, in a reference to Piscator's 'epic and documentary plays,' and his use may well predate that."[19]

The relationship of the documentary play to the documentary film is one that needs to be established early in this analysis. It is made clear by director and distinguished documentary playwright Emily Mann. When people ask her to explain the form of documentary theatre she practices, she responds: "I usually ask them if they have seen any documentary films. Almost everyone has. I say, well that's what I do. I go out and I find the event. I go to the place. I do a lot of work on it. I do a lot of research on it. I interview a whole lot of people. I find documents that have to do with that. Then I construct a play out of that. I'm working from life and it's very personal."[20] Her method of going from the public to the private as Mann envisions her work is emblematic of the documentary theatre process itself. Cross fertilization such as this is not new to this brand of theatre. There is an epistemological base as well. *Documentaire* is a French term used to describe a travelogue. But the root, *docui*, actually, and importantly, derives from the Latin to mean "to teach, rehearse (*a play*)."[21] Therefore, the paradox in the term *documentary theatre*, with the bonding of document to drama, fact to fiction, world to word, public to private, where the first term contradicts the second, is resolved in small part. To teach and to entertain is a genuine way to regard this drama-in-history style of theatre as exemplified in Mann's work and documentary theatre. The kinship documentary theatre and documentary film share suits this particular practitioner's aesthetic sensibility. Others have commented on the affinity between the two. For example, Filewod believes that Grierson's "creative expression of actuality" is the "touchstone for most subsequent attempts to define the form in film and theater."[22]

Büchner's use of episodic scene structure, illustrative of the effect Shakespeare's writing had on the youthful playwright, antecedes Epic theatre practice as seen in the work of Piscator and Brecht. Büchner's influence upon Brecht led scholar John Fuegi to call him Brecht's "real theatrical godfather."[23] A major dramatist of the nineteenth century, Büchner's contribution to modern drama practices is still being assessed, for example, his anticipation of naturalism and expressionism in technique and use of dialogue.[24] The practice of incorporating primary source materials within the form of historical documents, thereby, creates the historical foundation for documentary theatre.

What attracts the interest of theatre practitioners "to get as close as he can to history as it actually happened?" A possibility rests in the nature of reality, the need to be informed, and the desire to learn something not known before, what aesthetician Arnold Hauser calls an "intensified hunger" for truth. He considers:

> This tendency to the factual and the authentic—to the "document"—is evidence not only of the intensified hunger for reality characteristic of the present age, of its desire to be well informed about the world, with an activistic ulterior motive, but also of

that refusal to accept the artistic aims of the last century which is expressed in the flight from the story and from the individual, psychologically differentiated hero. This tendency, which tied up, in the documentary film, with an escape from the professional actor, again signifies not only the desire that is always recurring in art, to show the plain reality, the unvarnished truth, unadulterated facts, that is, life "as it really is."[25]

The leaning toward documented reality is represented practically everywhere today in the arts and other media cultures such as film, television, radio, and the internet. One example, for instance, is postmodern literature. During the 1960s activity in documentary theatre dramatically increased. In fact, according to most scholars, it was entering its third period. Also on the increase at this time was metafiction, which emphasized intertextuality; the so-called nonfiction fiction. But many other forms of documented reality besides this have become commonplace in media culture. Recently, for instance, author Richard Rhodes introduced the term *verity* (pronounced like clarity) to take the place of the word nonfiction. He did so because nonfiction, accordingly, "hardly does justice to the many kinds of writing it lumps together."[26] Documentary realism in literature, meanwhile, transits a parallel course with the documentary process in theatre. This aspect is observed by author Lars Ole Sauerberg. He writes: "When reading documentary realism the reader is asked to 'compare notes' with the information acquired from nonfictional texts such as eye witness reports, biographies, histories, or journalistic reportage." Moreso, the narrative technique of documentary realism draws upon primary sources such as diary entries, personal letters, and published confessions and apologies. Documentary realism, as in documentary theatre, relies upon a verifiable reality that calls "explicitly or implicitly to the differences between the fictional and factual."[27] Examples of documentary realism as offered by Sauerberg include such works as Fay Welson's novel *The Cloning of Joanna May*, which borrows from the Chernobyl nuclear accident. There is also John Fowle's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, in which the character Sarah joins the household of the English artist, Rossettis, as well as other documentary materials. This list also includes James A. Michener's *Texas*, Anthony Burgess's *Earthly Powers*, E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night*, William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, Thomas Kenally's *Schindler's Ark* (British title), and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*.

Several theatre critics acknowledge this steadily increasing tendency for documented reality. Bernard Weinraub (*New York Times*, 3 December 1996), in connection with the movies *Shine* by Jan Sardi, *The People Versus Larry Flint* by Larry Karaszewski and Scott Alexander, and *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller, affirms this: "Movie studios are drawn to fact-based dramas. And the blurred and sometimes controversial line between fact and fiction is evident." More recent evidence of the ever increasing interests in historical themes in movies include the films *Titanic* and *Amistad*. Theatre reviewer Margo Jefferson captures this change in the direction of documented reality in our culture:

Biography and autobiography are the lifeblood of art now. We have claimed them the way earlier generations claimed the novel, the well-made play and the language of abstraction. Literature is filled with memoirs, personal essays, the travel book as a journey into oneself as well as another country. Theaters, too, are filled with solo performers. . . . Wherever you turn there is social and literary history on stage, dramas based on the words and deeds of the famous (Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison) or the not-so-famous who capture something genuine about life as we know it.[28]

As biographies and autobiographies help fill theatres across the nation, fact-based offerings on television and radio have little trouble arousing already stimulated audiences. A glance at television listings reveals a host of offerings on commercial and cable networks. A brief sampling of cable networks specifically dedicated to so-called reality TV programming include such examples as "The Discovery Channel," "Court TV," "The History Channel," "Lifetime Television," and "The Learning Channel." Actual fact-based programs currently available are: "60 Minutes," "Nature," "National Geographic," "American Experience," "This Old House," "American Masters," "Frontline," "Bill Nye the Science Guy," "Dateline," "48 Hours," "Real TV," and "20/20." This partial listing does not include hard news programming at the local and national levels, nor does it cite the so-called television docudrama which represents a special case to be taken up later. Interest in showing "the plain reality, the unvarnished truth, unadulterated facts, that is, life 'as it really is'" in television documentary has simply surged since Ken Burns's phenomenally successful "The Civil War," increasing at a rate not seen before in the history of televised entertainment.

Still, the practice of directly incorporating primary source materials into the spine of a play, is now more than one and one half centuries old, using *Danton's Death* as the starting point. Ultimately, the evolution of the form stems from the production style known as neo-realism as a result of a number of paradigmatic shifts that trace to scientism itself, via the influence of Sir Charles Darwin. Naturalism, which first appeared in France in the 1870s, was wedded to the principle of cause-to-effect as set forth in the scientific method admired by Philosopher Auguste Comte who, in turn, influenced author Emile Zola—the movement's main advocate. Naturalism, rooted in Darwinism, considered heredity and environment the prime movers in the fate of humankind. Zola wanted dramatists to acquire the detachment of scientists in the search for truth. Regarding the mise-en-scène, Zola believed it should reproduce exactness. Expressionism and other production styles that were opposed to realism and naturalism altogether emerged as an outgrowth of naturalism. This is demonstrated in the following chart. Here, the principal shifts are from an Aristotelian paradigm (exposition, complication, recognition, reversal, complication; resolution) to a non-Aristotelian one (montage, juxtaposition, historical documentation, distantiation, direct address, audience participation, Total theatre). This is indicated by the swing from causality to montage and juxtaposition in plot construction; movement away from clearly delineated character to a more compressed cut-out of a human persona; and movement from representational acting style to an ob-

	The Well-Made Play	Realism	Naturalism	Expression-ism	neoRealism	Epic Theatre
Foremost Practitioner	Eugène Scribe (1791-1908)	Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906)	Emile Zola (1840-1902)	L. Jessner (1878-1945) and Jürgen Fehling (1890-1968)	Erwin Piscator (1893-1966)	Erwin Piscator(1893-1966)
Example	*A Scrap of Paper* (1865) by Victorien Sardou	*The Ghosts* (1881) by Ibsen	*The Vultures* (1882) by Henri Becque	*The Beggar* (1912) by Reihard Johannes Sorge	*Revue Roter Rummel (Red Riot Revue)* 1924) by Felix Gasbarra and Piscator	*The Good Soldier Schweik* (1928) by Piscator
	Aristotelian			non-Aristotelian		
Through-line of action	Cause-to-effect logical development where secrets are withheld, and using a late point of attack and mounting suspense.	Enhances the well-made play form using psychological realism in which heredity and environment rules.	Search for the truth using shocking subjects. Genetics and society are to blame in a world where man and nature coexist.	Plots are disjointed, episodic, about bizarre events. Truth is in human spirit. Reality is alterable.	Ordinary people in life situations. Takes an objective and political view of society.	Focus is on the historical documented background of an event using montage and juxtaposition in place of exposition.
Character	Three dimensional			Two dimensional		
				Cartoonish, allegorical, or grotesque	Factually based within a social context.	
Societal dynamic	Manipulates stereotypes in society.	"Drama of Ideas," concerning social problems.	Highlights the working-class and their rights.	Pessimism prevails. Warns of impending doom.	Past comments on the present. Assumes critical stance towards society by distancing the audience. Desires to transform society.	
Mise-en-scène	Lavish	Fidelity towards detail in which authenticity rules.	"Slice-of Life," faithful reproduction of domestic scenes. Set specific.	Visually distorts reality	Uses film, projections, recordings, loudspeakers, machinery, and multiple playing areas.	Total theatre
Acting style	Declamatory Flamboyant	Representational		Presentational		
	Actor Driven	Director driven		Blatant	Objective-acting	

jectified acting style. In the chart serrated lines represent the free passage, in some cases, of a mode, a model, or a method from one cell to another because of a commingling effect and overlapping time periods. For example, the Ibsenite well-made play form, most scholars would agree, is a manifestation of the model provided by the French playwrights Eugène Scribe and Victorien Sardou. Therefore, diffusion among the three Aristotelian modalities occurs here. Also, full agreement is not axiomatic as to who is the foremost practitioner regarding the three non-Aristotelian counterparts listed. Where Brockett gives credit to the playwrights Leopold Jessner and Jürgen Fahling as principal innovators of expressionism, playwrights such as Ernst Toller (1893–1939) *Hurray, We Live*!, Georg Kaiser (1875–1945) *From Morn to Midnight*, and Reinhard Johannes Sorge (1892–1916) *The Beggar*, accordingly, are contributors as well. A case can be made that Büchner or playwright August Strindberg ought to be considered expressionistic dramatists as well. Also, there is still a considerable degree of divergent opinion as to whom is responsible for producing the paradigm shifts in theatre history as far as neoRealism and Epic theatre practice are concerned.

On this point I am more inclined to accept the conclusions reached by Connelly. It is paramount to establish the role of Piscator in the developments as shown in this table. His contributions to documentary theatre are truly relevant. For far too long, in my opinion, he has been overshadowed by the work of his students and protégés. Piscator's ideas and advancements in theatre practice are immense, and need to be brought to the fore so that more people are familiar with his name and his work.

There are three periods of development in the history of documentary theatre, each traceable to a foundation laid by Piscator. These occurred during the new objectivity movement, or *Neue Sachlichkeit*,[29] which dominated the Weimar theatre in Germany during the early 1920s, and the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) period in America during the late 1930s as sponsored by the Works Projects Administration (WPA), and their performances called Living Newspapers. The third expression of development began with the premiere of Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy* under Piscator's direction on 20 February 1963, and came to rest shortly after, I believe, with Donald Freed's documentary play *Inquest* (1969). This third period of activity is known by the names theatre-of-fact, and the New documentary theatre.[30] Scholar Sidney F. Parham III confirms the time sequences of these three periods of growth, and while doing so, explains how these are related to advances in technology:

The proof of Parham's theory that links cultural ideas to political ideas via technology has been borne out of late. The 1980s produced not only exponential growth in the use of the home personal computer technology, but brought about the remarkable increase of whole new cable television products. Also, this time period sadly fostered the cancerous growth of racial fission in this country, finding its way into streets, homes, courts, novels, television screens, movie houses, and finally, theatres. The quotient of all this activity has been the establishment of the fourth period of expression of documentary theatre practice, whose chief principal architect for its advancement is playwright and director, Emily Mann. Her pioneering documentary plays have, from time to time, fo-

cused the attention of the theatre coterie on this unique form that she champions. These include: *Annula, An Autobiography* (1977), *Still Life* (1980), *Execution of Justice* (1984), *Having Our Say* (1995), and *Greensboro (A Requiem)* (1996). Other American theatre artists who have contributed handsomely to this theatre art include such names as Molly Newman, Julie Crutcher, Barbara Damashek, Vaughn McBride, and, of course, Anna Deavere Smith.

Parham, meanwhile, in his analysis of major German documentary plays, attempts to show how "documentary drama is about history only in so far as that history explains present experience. . . . It has no interest in antiquarian pursuits or even parables from history."[31] The problem with this position is that it imposes limitations that playwrights of American documentary theatre have overcome. For instance, researcher Thomas M. Croak expresses a point of view that is more open about the way documentary playwrights can work with historical materials: "In creating, continuing, and rediscovering the documentary theatre, the men and women of the documentary drama demonstrate that the contemporary stage can be responsive to urgent social and political issues and can serve as a valuable tool for the historian studying the times, places, and people which the genre portrays."[32] Croak does not set a time limit as Parham does. On one end of the scale, documentary theatre is a means of interpreting history within the fictive domain of the stage. On the other, it is also a means to arrive at a better understanding of social and political dynamics in a way standard journalistic means cannot, or do not, provide. Therefore, it is useful, apparently, for any period "which the genre portrays."

Telling drama-in-history based *in* fact, rather than drama based *on* fact, provides documentary theatre a pedagogical purpose other researchers such as Connelly and Paget raise with regard to theatre-in-education and drama-in-education practices as originally conceived in Great Britain and now currently being promoted in the United States. Contrary to regnant criticism, documentary theatre can be a form of entertainment rich in ideas and one high in value for learning more about a historical event. One need only cite Mann's *Having Our Say*, which has been singled out by *American Theatre* magazine (October 1997) when they reported that it "will be hitting the boards at no fewer than 15 theatres this season." An example of the confusion about the purposes of documentary theatre can be found in the writing of the eminent historical drama critic Herbert Lindenberger whose unsympathetic stance toward documentary theatre has recently been noted in the literature.[33]

Documentary theatre is known by an assortment of names and expressions, such as a type of drama, a kind of historical drama, a contemporary history play, a subgenre, and more recently, a genre. Critics and playwrights from time to time refer to it as theatre-of-fact, as faction, as nonfictional theatre, as theatre-of-reportage, and as theatre-as-journalism. Because of all of this confusing terminology, perhaps it is time to simply call the form documentary theatre. The difficulty in naming documentary theatre is understandable considering the equal uncertainty in naming the larger class to which it is related: historical drama.

Historian Jonathan Locke Hart argues that the history play is an unstable genre for two reasons: it is permeable to other genres, and history is related to the state of truth and the process of interpretation. Hart explains: "History is human action in time, its representation and interpretation. History is constantly in a state of crises because no one can agree on the ultimate truth about this fallen world and because, in an etymological sense, crisis means 'decision' or 'cutting up,' taking the Heraclitean river of time and cutting it up into sections to interpret, to translate or explain."[34] The process of historical writing, explains Hart, is akin to Aristotelian plot development in which dramatic time and historic time "diverge at least as much as they converge." The arrangement of fact, in Wikander's assessment of historical drama, is an activity as fictive as, say, the way in which events themselves become facts in the process of memory and recording.[35] This position is similar to historian R. G. Collingwood's pronouncement that history is the imaginative reenactment of past experience,[36] and to Grierson's definition of documentary. One final dimension to add to the uses of history in a play is that of theatre historian Jan Kott. "History in the theatre," writes Kott, "is mostly just grand setting; a background against which the characters love, suffer, or hate, experience their personal dramas." Some plays use history as scenery. Some do not. In Shakespeare's historical dramas, in Kott's view, something other that a historical textbook is offered. Instead, history unfolds before us. So there are, according to Kott, three kinds of uses of historical matter in drama: (1) history as background, (2) history as foreground, and (3) history as ground itself.[37] The latter two place historical drama and documentary theatre within reach of the other, but not quite.

In *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality*, Lindenberger also speaks of a river: a river of uncertainty, the fluid boundary between historical drama and other genres, such as tragedy and romance. Lindenberger asserts: "One might remember that every major dramatist from Marlowe through Brecht (with the exception of Molière, who specialized in comedy satirizing contemporary historical moments) was also a writer of history plays."[38] A major area of confusion concerns the documentary play and its relation to historical drama. In order to better understand the relationship the following two diagrams are offered. In the first, the simalarities between historical drama and documentary theatre are tabulated for comparison. In the second, the system of classification created by Swedish botanist Carl Von Linné (1707–78) is hypothetically applied to historical drama and its relation to documentary theatre. This will posit the form within the ascending hierarchical domains of which it is a part. To demonstrate this, something akin to a Linnaean hierarchy can be imagined. Depicting this ascension will help to clarify where documentary theatre orients within human expression.

In such an approach communication becomes the super-division in which art, its subdivision, belongs since one of the purposes of art, both a static and dynamic representation, is to communicate meaning. Literature, at the same time, is a communicative art and, therefore, is the class to which drama locates itself. Within it, as Aristotle sees fit, is the class tragedy that Lindenberger argues belongs to historical drama. Accordingly, documentary theatre is a subdivision of

the larger category, historical drama, which it is most related to by way of its documented historical content. Historical drama, meanwhile, belongs to the genre tragedy and not the genre comedy as configured by Aristotle. To see hisory as tragedy, wrote Lindenber, "is to view reality through a special lens." He continues:

> The alliance that history and tragedy have, for one reason or another, maintained since the Renaissance has all too easily made us see tragedy as an action in historical dress and history as an unending movement toward catastrophe. We rarely think of history as comedy. . . . Tragedy, in turn, gives history a way of making "sense" out of what might otherwise be a chaos of events; or the catastrophes whose inevitability it demonstrates works to confirm our worst fears about the nature of events. . . . Seeing history as tragedy has at certain times seemed a natural act for the imagination.[39]

Historical Drama	*Documentary Theatre*
Aristotelian	Piscatorian
Metahistorical	Microhistorical
Secondary sources	Primary sources
Linear through-line	Circular grammar of forces
Plot driven	Content driven
Invented dialogue	Verbatim language
Rhetorical	Persuasive
Transfer of power	Seeks to empower
Dramatic irony	Documented realism
Public to private	Private to public
Tragic fall	Public outcry
Great turning points	Life's continuum
Tragic heroes	Lacking heroes

A Linnéan Model for Classifying Documentary Theatre

Kingdom→Communication

Phylum→Art

Class→Literature

Order→Drama

Family→Historical drama

Genus→Tragedy

Species→Documentary theatre

As everyone knows, at particular times in American history, events have turned tragic. One of these moments is exemplified in Mann's documentary play: *Greensboro (A Requiem)* (1996). It concerns the anti-Klan riot/massacre in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1979 in which five demonstrators were killed and thirteen people were wounded. Her work, as well as that of other stage documentarists, is a corrective employed to reinvestigate a lost truth, a forgotten reality. The direct relationship between tragic events that emanates out of American violence and how these end up as documentary plays is a characteristic that will be noticeable in almost all of the twenty or more documentary plays appearing here.

The criticism of documentary theatre form by Lindenberger, at its worst, may account for one of the reasons why the form remains a theatre art on the periphery.[40] At its best his analysis helps to outline the traditionally held critical points of view about the form. Lindenberger's list of limitations begins with the notion that documentary theatre offers only a select view of history that seeks recent, rather than distant, history. He adds that playwrights of documentary theatre, or "arrangers" as he prefers, intentionally "manipulate" historical documents for the purpose of shaming, celebrating, or complimenting someone, or its audience. Also, Lindenberger believes that as far as dramatic literature is concerned, "most, in fact, seem, dead on the page"[41] because they are dependent upon creating a "sense of community," which he believes is their central goal. Lindenberger states that performances of this form of theatre do not need to be professional "in any traditional sense." He holds that, certain semidocumentary plays, citing Weiss's *Marat/Sade* as an example, eventually often reach the stage of what he calls drama-as-therapy. Lindenberger believes: "We are fast becoming to define our everyday lives in dramatic terms; if drama once justified itself through its ability to imitate life, in certain contemporary contexts life justifies itself by the quality and intensity of its drama."[42] His list of limitations suggests that, structurally speaking, documentary plays take the form of a trial, actual or symbolic. This aspect misleads the reading public about the various other forms documentary playwrights have chosen to use, and why. If these limitations were true of documentary plays in 1975, this does not appear to be the case now, when current developments in American documentary theatre, *vis-à-vis* the plays of Emily Mann and Anna Deavere Smith, are taken into account. Smith's own new one-woman documentary plays, *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, are now in published form. Also, in 1963 when *The Deputy* and *Oh, What A Lovely War!* premiered, another American documentary play opened called *In White America: A Documentary Play*. This play, however, was broad in its history, and was not a tribunal form of documentary theatre. It is true that historian Martin Duberman did manipulate historic documents, arrange primary source materials, and edited these into a composition. It is also true that the way he did so makes this particular American documentary play, thirty-five years later, able to still hold the stage.

Author Robert Leach wrote in 1975, "Just as there can be no firm definition of theatre . . . Is ballet theatre? Are street entertainers theatre? So there can be no firm definition of a documentary play."[43] Nevertheless, there have been nu-