

2013-2014 ON HER SHOULDERS CALENDAR

May 20	<i>A Man's World</i> (1909)	Rachel Crothers	Melissa Crespo
June 17	<i>Fashion</i> (1845)	Anna Cora Mowatt	Joanne Zipay Artistic Director, Judith Shakespeare Company
July 15	<i>Diana of Dobson's</i> (1908)	Cicely Hamilton	Gwynn MacDonald Artistic Director, Juggernaut Theatre
Aug 12	TBA		
Sept. 16	<i>A Taste of Honey</i> (1958)	Shelagh Delaney	Ludovica Villar-Hauser, Founder, Works by Women
Oct 21	<i>Les Blancs</i> (1970)	Lorraine Hansberry	Pat Golden
Nov. 18	<i>The Years Between</i> (1944)	Daphne DuMaurier	Abigail Zealey Ensemble Studio Theatre
Dec. 16	<i>A Bold Stroke for a Wife</i> (1717)	Susanna Centlivre	Rebecca Patterson, Artistic Director, The Queen's Company
Jan TBA	<i>The Convent of Pleasure</i> (1668)	Margaret Cavendish	Elyse Singer Artistic Director, The Hourglass Group
Feb TBA	<i>I'll Tell You What</i> (1785)	Elizabeth Inchbald	Kay Matschullat
Mar TBA	<i>Machinal</i> (1928)	Sophie Treadwell	Rachel Dickstein Artistic Director, Ripe Time

Thank you to our generous donors who have made this reading possible:

Judith Barlow, Suzanne Bennett, Jennifer Brown, Thomas Burka, Jill Dolan, Lue Douthit Keller Easterling, Gia Forakis, JEllen Gainor, Jayne Atkinson-Gill, Julie Gochman, Ludovica Villar-Hauser, Mari Lyn Henry, Heide M Jonassen, Leon Katz, Betty Kronskey, Kenneth Levis, Katt Lissard, Gwynn Macdonald, Susana Meyer, John Parks, Rachel Routh, What's the Story?, James SoRelle, Harriet Slaughter, Karen's Workshop



We are currently running an IndieGoGo campaign.
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ON HER SHOULDERS

presents

Anna Cora Mowatt's

"FASHION"

new adaptation by Bonnie Milne Gardner



Directed by Joanne Zipay
Dramaturgy by Celia Braxton

Monday, June 17th at 6:30pm
The New School for Drama,
55 West 13th St, Lang Student Center

Women have been writing plays for a thousand years, how many can you name?

Every ten years or so we are informed that THIS is the year of the woman, but women have been writing for a millennium, and many of their plays were among the most successful of their time.

Launch Reading's Educational Results:

On May 20th 2013 we officially launched our reading series with a reading of Rachel Crothers' A Man's World.

Please see the startling statistics from our post show survey:

- Have you ever heard of Rachel Crothers before this reading?
60% No | 40% Yes
- Have you ever read one of Rachel Crothers' plays?
79% No | 21% Yes
- Have you ever seen a production of one of Rachel Crothers' plays before this?
93% No | 7% Yes

The Ultimate Goal:

The goal of On Her Shoulders is to motivate producers and directors to champion and produce these brilliant plays in New York and/or regionally, and to excite audiences to demand to see these works. Restoring these plays to the living repertory makes it impossible to deny the great tradition, success and value of women's contribution to the theatrical canon. By making the history visible, we change our expectations of women playwrights today; they stand on the shoulders of giants, the knowledge of which should make these modern playwrights easier to see.

On Her Shoulders is a sponsored project of Fractured Atlas, a non-profit arts service organization. Contributions for the purposes of On Her Shoulders must be made payable to Fractured Atlas and are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

Admission is always free, Seating first come, first served, with RSVP at OnHerShouldersReservations@gmail.com

Play in Context (introduction and discussion) is supported in part by a generous gift from The League of Professional Theatre Women, a not-for profit organization promoting visibility and increasing opportunities for women in theatre since 1982. Visit: www.theatrewomen.org

Please also *like* us on Facebook & join the community:
[facebook.com/OnHerShouldersReadingSeries](https://www.facebook.com/OnHerShouldersReadingSeries)

Instead, she decided to become a public reader.

Mowatt began her career as a reader in Boston, at the Masonic Temple, and became a fashionable "hit" for her three-night run. She performed in Providence as well as New York that winter. She began a career as a magazine writer for publications such as *Godey's Ladies' Book*, *The Democratic Review*, and the *Ladies' Home Companion*. Many of her articles included comic sketches and essays comparing European and American manners. She also wrote and published a novel, *The Fortune Hunter*, and numerous articles on housekeeping, all under the name of Helen Berkeley.

Fashion was written at the suggestion of Epes Sargent, poet, playwright, and newspaper editor who was also a family friend. It was written within a few weeks, had a one-week rehearsal period (Barnes 100) and opened at the Park Theatre on March 24th, 1845. "There were no attempts in *Fashion* at fine writing," she wrote in her autobiography. "I designed the play wholly as an acting comedy." (203) The play was a first-class hit, and immediately went into production in Philadelphia, as well. But it did not bring in enough to pull James Mowatt out of the financial depths. At this point, Anna Cora Mowatt decided to go on the stage herself. She toured in the United States and England with success. After the death of her husband, she returned to the States. Her acting career virtually ended when she fell ill on tour.

During her convalescence, she began to write *The Autobiography of an Actress*, which was published in 1854. She briefly returned to the stage in the

summer of 1854 for a farewell tour. She then married William Foushee Ritchie, editor of the Richmond *Enquirer*, and retired to Richmond. It was not a happy marriage. When the Civil War broke out, Anna Cora returned North, and then went to England, where she continued to write columns for U.S. newspapers as a foreign correspondent. She also published two further novels based on her theatrical experience. Anna Cora Mowatt Ritchie died of tuberculosis on July 29, 1870, at Twickenham, England.

Barnes, Eric Wollencott. *The Lady of Fashion, the Life and the Theatre of Anna Cora Mowatt*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954.

Mowatt, Anna Cora. *Autobiography of an Actress; or, Eight Years on the Stage*. Boston: Ticknor, Read, and Fields, 1854.

Robinson, Alice McDonnell. "Mowatt, Anna Cora." In *Notable Women in the American Theatre, a Biographical Dictionary*, edited by Vera Mowry Roberts Alice M. Robinson, and Milly S. Barranger, 678-683. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989.

Biography of Anna Cora Mowatt

Anna Cora Ogden was born in 1819 in France. Her father, Samuel Gouverneur Ogden, son of an Episcopal clergyman, ran an international import/export business, and had taken his family to France to build connections and oversee the export side of the business.



Anna Cora Ogden was the second of four daughters born in France, and one of twelve children by the time they returned to New York in 1826. Her mother, Eliza Lewis, was the granddaughter of Francis Lewis, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Anna Cora's societal underpinnings were entirely secure.

Neither Samuel Ogden nor his wife had any animus against the theatre, and when Fanny Kemble arrived in New York City in 1831, Ogden took his other daughters to see her perform. Anna Cora, however, refused to go. She was at the time under the influence of Reverend, later Bishop, Eastburn, who spoke of theatres as "abodes of sin and wickedness," and she had vowed never to set foot in such a wicked place. However, she was unable to resist the opportunity to see Fanny Kemble in her farewell performance in

1833. "All my prejudices against the theatre melted 'into thin air'" with this first night," she writes in her *Autobiography*, "but I went very seldom, not more than three or four times, I think, while I remained at school." (38-40) When Anna Cora Mowatt did enter the theatrical world, she did so for reasons similar to those

advanced by Fanny Kemble. Kemble insisted that she had gone on stage only to help her father, actor Charles Kemble, get out of debt. Anna Cora Mowatt became a playwright and actress in order to save her husband. She had met James Mowatt, a successful lawyer twice her age, when she was only thirteen. Just before she was fifteen, he proposed marriage, and although Samuel Ogden was against so young a marriage and asked Mowatt to wait, they eloped within six months. For a number of years, they lived on a country estate in Flatbush, in Brooklyn. In 1841, James Mowatt was going blind, and could no longer work as a lawyer. He attempted to become a financier and went bankrupt. Anna Cora Mowatt decided that she must now come to the rescue.

When she first considered going on stage, "the idea of becoming a professional actress was revolting,"

Producers: Lillian Rodriguez and Andrea Lepcio
Playbill Design by: Kim Oria

The Play in Context:
Introduction by Celia Braxton

"Fashion"

Cast:

TruemanBill Galarno*
GertrudeSheila Joon*
Mrs. TiffanyDebra Cardona*
Mr. TiffanyOliver Conant*
Seraphina.....Rachael Hip-Flores
Prudence.....Gael Schaefer*
Snobson.....Richard Lear*
Millinette.....Lila Smith*
Zeke.....Amy Driesler*
Count Jolimaitre.....Ron Bopst*
Colonel Howard.....Greg Casimir
Tennyson Twinkle.....Matt Alford
Mrs. FoggVanessa Shealy*
Stage Directions...Vanessa Shealy*, Matt Alford

(*Member Actors Equity Association, an AEA Staged Reading)

Joanne Zipay (Director) As Founder & Artistic Director of NYC's award-winning Judith Shakespeare Company she has served as Director/Dramaturg for over half of Shakespeare's canon including the entire 10-play History Cycle - as well as new plays with JSC's RESURGENCE program. Directed 2008 Off-Broadway premiere of Timothy Findley's *Elizabeth Rex*; has worked in the theatre for over 35 years across the country. MFA Old Globe Theatre/University of San Diego; Professor at Pace University NYC, Collin College TX, City College of NY (CUNY), Stella Adler Conservatory of Acting/NYU; Writer/Director of Living History. www.judithshakespeare.org

Celia Braxton, Ph.D. is a member of New Perspectives Theatre's Women's Work Project. Before entering the CUNY Graduate Center doctoral program, she directed numerous plays and readings Off-Off Broadway. She has published in *NETJ* and *Comedia Performance*, and has presented at ATHE, the Association of Hispanic Classical Theatre and the MLA. Her dissertation examined how changes in expectations of women after the Civil War and changes in the business of theatre affected the way female performers managed their public personae. She teaches at Queensborough Community College, The Art of Theatre and The New York Theatre Experience at LaGuardia Community College.

**THERE WILL BE A BRIEF INTERMISSION DURING WHICH
REFRESHMENTS ARE SERVED.**

Join us after the reading for a discussion with the director and dramaturg.

On Her Shoulders "Mowatt's Influence On The Theatre"

Written by Celia Braxton

Anna Cora Mowatt was not the first American woman to write a play. Mercy Otis Warren wrote dramatic dialogues during the Revolution, Judith Sargeant Murray wrote a not very successful play in 1796, and Mary Carr wrote *The Fair Americans* in 1815, celebrating the contributions to the U.S. economy and the War of 1812 made by women. Mowatt was not even the first American woman to write successfully for the professional theatre. Susannah Rowson did that with *Slaves of Algiers*. These plays and many others are available in Amelia Howe Kirtzer's *Plays by Early American Women*.

But Mowatt *was* the first American woman of a Society background, with a capital S, to enter the theatrical profession openly and keep her own name. Because she did so, a career in theatre slowly began to open up to women from the middle and upper-middle classes.

At the time Mowatt wrote *Fashion*, the theatre was a small world, almost a craft guild, made up of a few highly interrelated families. Most American performers were British by birth or one generation removed. Most women entered the profession because they were born into it, and worked within a fairly protective family atmosphere. Theatre professionals in general were social outcasts, and women who entered theatre from outside the business were considered by others outside the business to be women of low repute. This reputation was not aided by the

fact that many, if not most, theatres reserved the highest tier of seats for prostitutes and their clients to meet, drink, and make arrangements. No matter what their own behavior, women who entered the theatrical profession during this period could easily be considered to be lending their talents to the business of prostitution.

A major objective of Mowatt's autobiography, therefore, was the defense of theatre as a profession, and the defense of actresses as women of good moral character. The book traces the development of her own understanding from that of knee-jerk anti-theatrical prejudice [37-40] to that of a crusader to her own class on behalf of the theatre and theatrical women. Mowatt provided ammunition for women to use in justifying their choice of profession which was used through the rest of the nineteenth century, and by many through the middle of the twentieth. She considers theatre to be in some sense a "mission," and warns young women not to take it up "unless she be strongly impelled by the possession of talents which are unquestionable, unless she be enamoured of Art itself." (426)

If she be prepared to meet petty as well as formidable trials, ... if she be sustained by some high purpose, some strong incentive; if she act in obedience to the dictates of the "stern lawgiver, Duty," - then let her enter the profession boldly; by gracing, help to elevate the stage; and

add hers to the purifying influences which may dwell within the walls of a theatre as securely as in any other temple of art. Let her bear in mind that the sometimes degraded name of "actress" can be dignified in her own person. (427)

Theatre is for her a vocation in some way. This sense of duty and vocation is echoed down the century, by performers such as Clara Morris, Fanny Davenport (E.L.'s daughter), Georgia Cayvan, Olive Logan, and many other women less well-known during their own time, not to mention our own. The horror she records at the thought of her younger sister following her onto the stage is related to the "the weariness and trials of the professional actress" (403) – the difficult physical conditions of work and travel that she has documented thoroughly throughout the book, and the concomitant lack of a stable home – more than any idea that a theatrical career is morally wrong or dangerous. (425) "I have known too many women bred upon the stage," she argues, whose lives were so blamelessly exemplary, whose manners so refined, whose intellect so cultivated, that they would adorn any sphere of society. The subject is not one into which I can fully enter; but this let me say, that the woman who could be dazzled by the adulation bestowed upon her talents as an actress, would be dazzled and led astray in the blaze of a ball room, in the excitement of social intercourse, in any situation where those talents could be displayed, in any position where she could hear "The false glozings of a flattering tongue." And from these where will she be shielded, except in utter seclusion? (426-27)

During the last third of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth, theatre professionals generally and theatre women in particular made great efforts to become considered respected members of the growing middle class; and women from the middle and upper-middle class often found that other than teaching or working in settlement houses, the theatre was the only avenue of opportunity for them. Anna Cora Mowatt Ritchie's personal experience, and her vigorous defense of theatre women in her *Autobiography*, provided a model and an ideal.