MATOAKA: Pocahontas in the Age of Identity

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Matoaka: Pocahontas in the Age of Identity

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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BFA, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003

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Abstract

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This thesis details the labors of research and judgment that informed the writing of Matoaka, a Play in Three Acts. Specifically, the thesis explores the historical puzzles surrounding the life of Pocahontas and justifies the decisions made in dramatizing her life in the aforementioned play. Non-fictional works of the last four hundred years are considered, as well as popular dramatic performances of the nineteenth century. These works are examined closely in order to reveal the Pocahontas story as a point of contact between many concurrent social discourses. Reflections are also offered on the production of the aforementioned play and its reception in Petersburg, Virginia, in April and May of 2007. Finally, the production script of the play itself is offered as an appendix.
Introductory Remarks

In early 2004, Christopher Shorr and I were discussing production ideas for the as-yet unopened Sycamore Rouge, a theatre and performance venue in Old Town Petersburg, Va. As the only two members of the programming committee, the task fell to us to give potential donors an idea of what type of theatre would be done in the proposed venue and how it might enrich the Petersburg community. We did not fear any dissention from the budget committee, as that was another two-person committee consisting of Christopher and myself.

One idea to which we kept returning was the idea of addressing Virginia history from minority or previously-suppressed viewpoints. We decided on a loosely-related triptych of plays that would culminate during Virginia’s 400-year anniversary in the spring of 2007. We planned to premiere a new play in the series each year. With the premiere of the third play in 2007, all three plays would run in repertory through the summer. This third play would focus on the settling of Jamestown from the American Indian perspective.

I was interested from the beginning in tackling the problem myself and offered to begin work on the play. Christopher objected strenuously at first, insisting that the play needed to be written by an American Indian playwright. I pushed back, reasoning that for our purposes, it was more important that our playwrights be Virginians, past or present, and there were no American Indian playwrights from the Virginia tribes. I also pointed out that while hiring a white, Anglo-American playwright to write this play may be considered offensive to some, it would be at least equally offensive—if not more so—to equate all American Indian tribes as representing a homogenous perspective. A
Blackfoot (or Siksika) playwright would come from an entirely different cultural background than a Hopi playwright, and both of these cultures are worlds away from those of the Eastern Woodlands.

By the fall of 2005, I had prevailed in my argument and had begun my research. In addition, Sycamore Rouge had begun informal programming and was slated for a grand opening in January of 2006. As my research expanded to unwieldy lengths, the focus of the play gradually tightened, from contact between the two cultures to an exploration of Powhatan’s family and the leaders of the English colony to a play specifically about Pocahontas. After just over a year of research, I began the main writing phase on January 8, 2007. The play, *Matoaka*, opened at Sycamore Rouge on April 20, 2007, and was directed by Beth VonKelsch. The following thesis addresses my writing process and puts it in historical perspective against the ever-evolving mythology of the Pocahontas story.

The major portion of my research for the writing of this play was in reconstructing the events of early Virginia. As my work progressed, I narrowed my focus onto the life of Pocahontas. I discovered that in the transmission of her story over the centuries, fictional work and historiography have intertwined in a continuous discourse. In tracking this discourse, I found her story to be a point of contact between various identities: male and female, European and Indigenous, colonizer and colonized, and many more. In addition to her role as intermediary between identities, Pocahontas accomplished a historic revision of her own identity. I decided, therefore, to treat her story as a site for reflecting the recurrent pattern of self-revision that is at work both in
our broader culture and on a more local level as Petersburg, Virginia, tries to revitalize its historic downtown community.

In the first chapter, I will give historical context to the development of Pocahontas historiography, identifying the major turning points in the writing and reception of the story, and then look critically at the current state of scholarship. In the second chapter, I turn my attention to dramatic representations of Pocahontas in theatre, paying particular attention to the “Pocahontas plays” of the early nineteenth century. I will probe some of the dramatic uses to which playwrights and others have put the circumstances (both real and imagined) of Pocahontas’s life, while also exploring the sociocultural dimensions of the story’s alternate tellings. In the third chapter, I will talk in more detail about my own process in answering the historical questions inherent within the subject and fusing them to a narrative built to apply to a new sociocultural mindset. In my final chapter, I will reflect on the production process and the play’s reception during its run in Petersburg. As an appendix, I have attached the production draft of the play used in Sycamore Rouge’s production in the spring of 2007.

I hope to show in this thesis that the Pocahontas story has for centuries served as a crossroads for multiple discourses including issues of racial harmony and gender equality. I also seek to elucidate and justify my decisions in framing the story as I did as addressing and continuing those discourses.
The State Of the Question

Although Pocahontas is easily one of the most important characters in the American pantheon, we cannot give a factual account of her life with much conviction. Her legend has been passed on in every form available to America’s mythmakers, from history books to plays to paintings, and in so doing, it has gathered an accretion of conjectural sediment. After 400 years of telling and re-telling, details that often started as wild fancy have calcified into bedrock truths in the American imagination.

The historian’s first task in approaching Pocahontas’s life is to simplify the story by reducing it to what is known. Sharon Larkins has provided a very helpful template that does exactly that. What follows is her chronological sketch of Pocahontas’s life.

1. Her birth about 1595.
2. The traditional story of her rescue of Captain John Smith in 1607 and her continued relationship with him and help to the people of Jamestown.
3. Her abduction by Captain Argall in 1612 and subsequent captivity at Jamestown.
4. Her conversion to the Christian faith in 1613 while living in Jamestown.
5. Her marriage in 1614 and the birth of her son in 1615.
6. Her trip to England in 1616 including her success there as an Indian princess.
7. Her death at Gravesend in 1617.

(Tilton 7-8)

Even of these few, the first two can be chalked up to conjecture. One could, of course, make the tautological argument that we know Pocahontas to have been born, but the date of 1595 is little more than a guess. The list could possibly be expanded with addition of some small but documented details (for instance, her reception at King James’s court, or her attendance at Ben Johnson’s Twelfth Night masque, *The Vision of Delight*), but this list effectively outlines the known facts of a life that was both short and poorly documented.
The greatest absence in Pocahontas’s story, however, is not a more detailed itineray of her brief life, but a catalogue of her motivations. Even the events which we can distinguish with certainty only offer more mysteries for historians and biographers as they attempt to construct a composite understanding of Pocahontas’s beliefs, loyalties, and character. The need to fill this vacuum must be kept prominently in mind, as it has been a primary goal for those involved in reconstructing Pocahontas’s story over the last four hundred years, and as such necessarily informs these scholars in concocting their particular blend of truth and rumor.

Before we begin looking at that four hundred-year development, however, it is important to take a moment to look at the seventeenth-century primary sources in which Pocahontas first appears.

The most well-known Virginia writer of that time, of course, is John Smith, a name that has rarely come up in four hundred years without Pocahontas’s quickly following. Smith wrote a long and detailed letter to correspondent home in England and that letter was published in 1608 (with neither Smith’s knowledge nor permission) as *A True Relation of such Occurences and Accidents of Noate as hath Happened in Virginia*. It is in this account (which I shall hereafter refer to as *A True Relation*) that Pocahontas makes her first entry into the pages of history. She enters not as savior nor as victim, but as a diplomat. In Smith’s account, the English have captured and detained a number of Powhatan’s men. To resolve the situation, Powhatan sent “Pokahuntas,” who was “his daughter, a child of tenne years old, which not only for feature, countenance, & proportion, much exceedeth any of the rest of his people, but for wit, and spirit, the only
Nonpareil of his country.” Significantly, this passage is Smith’s only mention of Pocahontas in his earliest account.

In the second edition of his *New England Trials*, Smith gives us another glimpse of Pocahontas. He claims that Powhatan’s men “tooke me prisoner; yet God made Pocahontas the Kings daughter the means to deliuer me.” This account was published in 1622, not coincidentally the same year as the “Great Massacre,” when Opechancanough led a bloody attack against the English settlers in Virginia. In fact, *New England Trials* can be seen as the effort of an unwillingly retired Captain Smith to compare his own leadership of the colony with the ineffectualness of his successors.

It was not until two years later that Smith would color in the well-known details of that episode in his *Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, the Summer Isles* (1624). In this account, Pocahontas’s role in the colony’s life has been upgraded to that of a major supporting player.

Smith was not, however, the only Virginian writing during Pocahontas’s lifetime. Particularly significant to our purposes is Ralph Hamor, who came over as the secretary of the colony in 1610 (Smith had returned to England in 1609). Hamor published his account of life in the colony, *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia*, in 1615. Unlike Smith, Hamor was in Virginia during the circumstances that comprise Pocahontas’s adult life, and he devotes a great deal of his narrative to her. Also of great importance are the writings of Alexander Whittaker. The Reverend Whittaker was the man who housed and fed Pocahontas during her captivity. He also taught her to read and write in English while giving her instruction in the Christian Bible. Whittaker wrote two letters back to England, both of which were published in his lifetime. While *Good News*
from Virginia (1613) contains his valuable observations on Powhatan religion and culture, it is the second letter, written to his cousin “M. G.,” which was published in Hamor’s book and contains much of the known information about Pocahontas’s religious conversion.

There are two more primary source narratives that are worth mentioning, although it must be borne in mind that these narratives, though written in the early seventeenth century, were not discovered and published until the mid-nineteenth century. Edward Maria Wingfield was elected as the Jamestown colony’s first president in May of 1607, only to be deposed in September. Upon arriving back in England the following May, he wrote a detailed account of the first year at Jamestown in the interest of defending his name. The manuscript was re-discovered at Lambeth Palace in the nineteenth century and finally published in 1860.

William Strachey had been Hamor’s predecessor as secretary of the colony. In 1612, at the Virginia Company’s urging, he wrote his own account of life in the colony. The Virginia Company, however, found his portrait less than flattering, and refused to publish the work. Strachey’s account, The History of Travail into Virginia Brittania, would not be published until 1849. It is at least of interest, however, that Strachey had documented acquaintanceships with both William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, and his account is thought to have had the largest impact on their interpretations of the New World in their works.

Before leaving behind the subject of primary sources, it is worth pointing out the fallibility of these accounts. If one were to read through these narratives, one would soon find that the authors present much of their information second-hand, having heard
accounts from others rather than witnessed events for themselves. In this category, Samuel Purchas must be mentioned. An early scholar, compiler, and editor of travel narratives, Purchas himself never traveled more than 200 miles from his birthplace in Essex. However, he made the acquaintance of John Rolfe while Rolfe was in England and Rolfe disabused Purchas of many of the latter’s preconceptions of Powhatan religion, culture, and daily life. This second-hand account, even if chronicled by a man who never set foot on the North American continent, must be taken at least as seriously as the accounts of English colonists, as it comes through a source who would have been more intimately familiar with those details.

The first major attempt by a colonial writer to reconstruct the Pocahontas narrative as a historical piece was Robert Beverley’s *History and Present State of Virginia* in 1705. Beverley does not embellish much on the primary sources available to him, but his treatment of the story does occasion a lengthy digression on Beverley’s part concerning the issue of miscegenation. Beverley opines that intermarriage was clearly the Indians’ original intention and that their jealousy of the settlers’ possession of white women accounted for all the “Rapines and Murders they committed.” He goes on to lament the settlers’ refusal of such a circumstance, pointing out that “many, if not most, of the Indians would have been converted to Christianity by this kind Method” and that “the Country would have been full of People, by the Preservation of the many Christians and Indians that fell in the Wars between them” (38). Robert Tilton puts this passage in the context of a larger eighteenth century conversation about miscegenation. He points out that Beverley was by no means the only English writer to believe that intermarriage was a far preferable option to war. Tilton also points out, however, that these sentiments
either harkened back to a time when such unions were possible or looked ahead to a time when such unions might be possible. Says Tilton, “There was clearly no time for it in the present” (25).

In any case, Beverley’s account is significant in placing more emphasis on Pocahontas’s marriage to Rolfe than to her supposed rescue of John Smith. In fact, Beverley allows Smith to tell us the rescue story himself. Rather than write the story out in his own words and thus lend the credence of his pen to Smith’s story, he merely quotes Smith at length, without adding any commentary of his own. Beverley’s account of Pocahontas continually returns to her virtues—her English, Christian virtues, of course—and she is compared favorably to the roguish Captain Smith, for “even a state of Nature teaches to abhor Ingratitude” (30). Beverley concludes his account: “She left Issue one Son, nam’d Thomas Rolfe, whose Posterity is at this Day in good Repute in Virginia, and now hold Lands by Descent from her” (31). This last comment is significant, as it begins a trend that continues to this day of flattering Pocahontas’s descendents. Also concealed within the statement is a silent rebuke of the issue of less auspicious mixed marriages.

In April of 1782, the Marquis de Chastellux found himself at the home of one of these descendants in Petersburg, VA. Chastellux’s description of Mary Burton Bolling borders on the fawning and does not miss the significance of her lineage. He connects the dots for his readers, tracing Mrs. Bolling back to Pocahontas and commenting, “We may presume that it is rather the disposition of that amiable American woman, than her exterior beauty, which Mrs. Bowling inherits” (136) He goes on to give his own account of the Pocahontas narrative, embellishing both on the primary sources and on other eighteenth century accounts.
Chastellux’s narrative does not represent a great innovation in the story, but the popularity of his work gave a greater exposure to the story than any previous incarnation. He published *Voyages de M. le Marquis de Chastellux dans l’Amérique Septentrionale: dans les Années 1780, 1781, et 1782* in France in 1786. It was first translated into English the next year. That same year, 1787, when the editors of *Columbian Magazine* decided to print an “Anecdote of Pocahunta,” they merely reprinted Chastellux’s description. Chastellux was even plagiarized by no less a figure than Noah Webster, who cribbed Chastellux’s narrative for his own *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking*. Though brief, Chastellux’s telling became the definitive Pocahontas narrative for the first American generation.

The Jeffersonian generation, on the other hand, would meet Pocahontas by the pen of John Davis, and this Pocahontas was hardly recognizable from the former incarnations, besotted as she was by the fever of love. John Davis was not the first writer to hypothesize a romantic relationship between Pocahontas and John Smith, but he was the first of consequence. John Davis, incidentally, in no way lacked a sense of his own consequence.

Thus have I delivered to the world the story of Pocahontas; nor can I refrain from indulging the idea, that it was reserved for my pen, to tell with discriminating circumstances, the tale of this Indian girl. No Traveller before me has erected a monument to her memory, by the display of her virtues; for I would not dignify by that name the broken fragment which is to be found in the meager page of Chastellux.

Davis wrote of Pocahontas on several occasions, but his fullest treatment is to be found in *Travels In the United States of America During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, And 1802,*
which was published in 1803. He interrupts this narrative of his travels to bloviate for fifty pages on the story, leaving no torrid detail unmined for cheap romance. Tilton points out the shrewdness of Davis’s ear for the market: by the first decade of the nineteenth century, the majority of the reading public was women. Conventions of gender identity being what they were, this occasioned a shift in market demand, one that supplanted the more sober narratives of the past for the impetuous sensibility of Davis. Davis’s narrative was already part of what would become known as American Romanticism.

Davis’s narrative also marked an irreparable shift in focus within the narrative itself. Pocahontas’s quite legitimate relationship with John Rolfe shrunk to an insignificant detail, while her imagined romantic relationship with Captain Smith came to dominate the narrative. While the literary sensibility of the age may account for Davis’s penchant for melodrama, it does not entirely account for this shift. Certainly, a torrid romance narrative could have been woven out of the story of a kidnapped royal daughter and her lover/captor. Davis, however, chooses to focus his romantic fever on a chapter of the story in which it is the Englishman who is captive, not the foreign woman.

The cause of this shift seems to lie in a fundamental change in Indian-U. S. relations. Davis’s narrative was published in 1803, which is not coincidentally the same year as the Louisiana Purchase. The rhetoric of the American Revolution and the odds-defying providence of its success were already effecting a heady brew of nationalist purpose that would soon lead to the Monroe Doctrine and eventually to Manifest Destiny. These epistemic changes dramatically refashioned the new nation’s relationship with the American Indian peoples. Previous discourse on the subject of a future on the North
American continent had often centered on a dream of absorption. As the nineteenth century would wear on, however, extermination would come to seem not only desirable, but certain.

The Pocahontas of Beverley, still most notably the wife of John Rolfe, embodies the myth of absorption. She is an adult partner in Rolfe’s enterprise, both enriching the endeavor (through her knowledge of tobacco growth) and sharing in its benefits. Her descendants figure into the narrative because she embodies the virtue of harmony, and her mythic counterparts are figures such as Rebecca in the Old Testament (which would become her Christian name) and Lavinia in Virgil. Davis’s Pocahontas, on the other hand, is a barbarian child-queen, consumed with irrational feeling and something akin to lust that transcends the loyalty she owes to tribe and father. Her mythic counterpart is Hesiod’s Medea, and she is just as easily forsaken. She is a bit player in a larger drama, ordained to speed the hand of providence. She was an early cultural signpost of a newly developing myth, one that could euphemistically be called a myth of replacement.

It would be reckless to suggest that Davis was deliberate in ushering in this new age in Indian-U. S. relations. In 1805, Davis published Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas, An Indian Tale, and in this expanded version of the narrative, he concludes with a lament on the destruction the Indians had faced at the hands of Whites. Robert Tilton suggests that one of Davis’s ulterior motives was to force public consideration on the question and effect some measure of reversal on U. S. policy. Tilton may or may not be overreaching here, but in any event, Davis’s narrative is not without internal contradictions. Whatever his regard for the humanity of his Indian subjects, however, Davis was too keen an opportunist to seriously challenge the conventional views of his
reading public. His narrative gave voice to the rising foment of the era of the Romantic Indian.

Davis’s narrative is important for at least one other reason. Davis wasted no scruples worrying about the historical veracity of his account. He did not even try to prove the romantic link between his main characters, it was enough to suggest it. That his audience accepted such a leap proves that the Pocahontas narrative had at this point leapt into the territory of myth, and fictive embellishments were not unwelcome. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Pocahontas would see an explosion of fictional portrayals. The themes of these portrayals, and theatrical performances in particular, will be treated in the next chapter.

As the Civil War approached, Pocahontas gained particular ascendancy in the South. Considered to be the ancestor of many of the Southern aristocracy’s top families, she was also the savior of Virginia’s first Cavalier—John Smith. As early as 1822, the New England editor of North American Review seems to be motivated at least in part by sectionalist loyalties when he teasingly disparages John Smith’s character (Tilton 58). By suggesting Smith was a tendentious exaggerator, he tacitly characterizes the South as a land of self-important fish tales.

Such was the atmosphere when Charles Deane edited the newly discovered writings of Edward Maria Wingfield. Wingfield’s account of the Jamestown settlers’ first year includes a brief summary of Smith’s captivity which contains no mention of the supposed rescue. Citing Wingfield’s silence (as well as that of little-read Ralph Hamor) and comparing Smith’s varying accounts of the story, Deane was the first scholar to seriously and systematically question the veracity of the rescue narrative. Additionally,
he considers the character of Powhatan as presented by Smith in his earlier account and brings up Smith’s account of a similar adventure in Turkey. He concludes,

No one can doubt that the earlier narrative contains the truer statement, and that the passage last cited is one of the few or many embellishments with which Smith, with his strong love of the marvellous, was disposed to garnish the stories of his early adventures, and with which he or his editors were tempted to adorn particularly his later works

(Wingfield 32 n49)

Both Tilton and Lemay argue that Deane’s motivations were fueled by his identity as a New England historian—one who had already published extensively on the Plymouth colony—to strike out at Virginia’s founding narrative.

Whatever Deane’s motivations were, we can have no illusions about the motivations of the far more famous historian who took up his cause. The young Henry Adams has left us a smoking gun: “[Disproving Smith’s story] is in some sort a flank, or rather a rear attack, on the Virginia aristocracy, who will be utterly gravelled by it if it is successful.” (Tilton 173). At the insistence of John Gorham Palfrey (whose History of New England of 1858 Deane had cited as a predecessor in his thinking about Smith), Adams took up the cause of attacking Smith’s account, meanwhile showing off the new historiographic and bibliographic methodologies he had just studied in Europe. In January of 1867, North American Review ran Adams’s essay. The Southern Review struck back: “If Pocahontas, alas, had only been born on the barren soil of New England, then would she have been so beautiful as she was brave. As it is, however, both her personal character and her charms are assailed by knights of the New England chivalry of the present day.” (Fishwicke)
Other scholars charged under Adams’s banner: Moses Coit Tyler, Edward T. Channing, Charles Dudley Warner. Most notably, the story came under the pen of Edward D. Neill, celebrity historian and personal secretary to Abraham Lincoln. Neill wrote *Captain John Smith, Adventurer and Romancer* to smear John Smith as “a gascon and beggar...always in the attitude of one craving recognition or remuneration for alleged services,” but his *Pocahontas and Her Companions* went a step farther, smearing not only Pocahontas but John Rolfe as well.

No less a Virginian than William Wirt Henry, grandson of Patrick Henry, rose to Pocahontas’s defense, calling her a “guardian angel” in his 1882 essay, “The Settlement of Jamestown, with Particular Reference to the Late Attack upon Captain John Smith, Pocahontas, and John Rolfe” (*Proceedings of the Virginia Historical Society* February 1882). He also wrote three other articles, in 1875, 1891, and 1893. Also taking up Pocahontas’s defense was Virginia governor Wyndham Robertson, who in 1887 published his book *Pocahontas alias Matoaka and Her Descendants through Her Marriage with John Rolfe*. This book spoke up for Pocahontas’s character through the words and actions of the London social set that so warmly embraced her during her 1616 stay. Robertson also did not miss the opportunity to attempt a genealogy, heaping praise on those he thought to be her heirs—who were not coincidentally some of Virginia’s most powerful families.

Smith’s reliability took its sharpest blow, however, not from a New Englander, but from a Hungarian journalist and historian living and working in Britain named Lewis L. Kropf. Kropf spent decades rifling through the British Museum’s archived material, studying British-Hungarian relations. In 1890, he published findings in *Notes and
Queries that John Smith’s account of his time in southeastern Europe was entirely fictional. Both places and people had been fabricated. Smith had probably never been to southeastern Europe.

During this period, the rescue narrative not only held more attention than the story of Pocahontas and Rolfe, it replaced the more verifiable story altogether. The myth of absorption was over. 1871 had marked the end of treaties between the U. S. and the Native tribes as American lawmakers ceased to think of the Indian nations as Chief Justice Marshall had declared them nearly forty years earlier, “distinct political communities” (*Worcester v. Georgia* 6 Peter 515 1832). In 1887 came the Dawes Act, which cemented the deterioration of communal Native lifestyles. The myth of replacement had reached its fruition—the Indian nations were no longer politically or militarily viable communities.

Very little scholarly material was written about Pocahontas or even Captain Smith and the Jamestown colony during the first half of the twentieth century. Exceptions include Wesley Frank Craven’s *Dissolution of the Virginia Company: the Failure of a Colonial Experience* (New York, 1932), which attempted to quietly rehabilitate Smith by using his accounts as a supposedly reliable source. Charles M. Andrews followed suit in his first volume of *The Colonial Period of American History* (4 vols, New Haven, 1934-1938).

While Pocahontas was fading from the view of national historians, however, she was enjoying a growing presence in poetry and children’s literature. She had first appeared in a children’s story in Peter Parley’s tales of the 1820’s and 30’s. One hundred years later, her most popular account was John Gould Fletcher’s *John Smith—Also*
Pocahontas (New York, 1928). Fletcher was an Arkansan associated with a group of writers calling themselves the Southern Agrarians. They published a collection of manifestos/essays entitled I’ll Take My Stand in 1930 which voiced notes of conservative populism and a renaissance of Southern culture.

In 1952, a rehabilitation of Smith began in earnest. Bradford Smith waded into a sea of original documents pertaining to Smith’s life—many of which had never been consulted or were newly discovered. He was able to reconstruct much of Smith’s account of his life through independent sources and showed Smith to be a reliable narrator (Captain John Smith: His Life and Legend Philadelphia, 1953). His book included an appendix by Laura Polanyi Striker, an Austrian-born Hungarian scholar who took the first critical look at Kropf’s work. Since 1890, scholars had left the Hungarian-language documents on which Kropf had based his theories well enough alone. Striker showed Kropf’s work to be shoddy and dishonest. She also showed Smith’s understanding of the area’s geography and political situation to be too astute not to be based in first-hand experience. Her fellow Austrian, Dr. Franz Pichler, continued her work by corroborating many of the military details in Smith’s account and by deciphering some of Smith’s misspellings of known names and places (“Captain John Smith In the Light of Styrian Sources” Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LXV July 1957, 332-354).

The man who continued Striker’s work and eventually became the late twentieth century’s definitive authority on John Smith was Philip L. Barbour. With a background in linguistics, Barbour was familiar with many more central and southern European languages than any scholar before him had been, giving him direct access to many
obscure historical sources in minor languages. Barbour’s background in East European history brought him to Smith, an interest that over the years would shift his focus to the events of colonial Virginia. Barbour’s prolific output on Smith began in 1957 with an investigation of Smith’s travels through Turkey and Russia for the *William and Mary Quarterly* (“Captain John Smith’s Route Through Turkey and Russia” Third Series, Vol 14, No. 3 July 1957 pp.358-369) and would lead ultimately to his scholarly edition of *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith* (3 vols. Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1986), published six years after his own death and considered by many to be a masterpiece of textual scholarship.

Of course, by the 1960’s, when Barbour was doing most of his work, the conversation had left Pocahontas behind completely. Pocahontas had become a staple of children’s stories, but was considered unsuitable material for treatment in an adult biography. That condition would change with the advent of the American Indian Movement and the publication of Grace Steele Woodward’s *Pocahontas* (Norman: Oklahoma UP, 1969). With just over 150 pages of text, Woodward’s account is slight and fraught with errors. Nevertheless, it bears mention for being the first biography of Pocahontas written for adults in the post-modern age. In his review of the book for *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Philip L. Barbour laments, “[I]t is to be profoundly regretted that so much goodwill and energy have produced so unreliable a volume[...].” *(The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Jan., 1970) 177).

Barbour must have taken such regret to heart, for he released his own entry, *Pocahontas and Her World: A Chronicle of America’s First Settlement, in which Is Related the Story of the Indians and the Englishmen—Particularly Captain John Smith,*
Captain Samuel Argall, and Master John Rolfe in 1970 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970). Barbour’s work, Woodward’s work, and Frances Mossiker’s Pocahontas: The Life and Legend (1976) comprise the three most prominent books written for a large audience during the early period of the American Indian Movement. Barbour sums up the aims of Pocahontas biography during this period in his self-proclaimed aim to portray her “as a child of the forest.” Underneath the veneer of scholarly interest, there was the resuscitated heartbeat of the Romantic Indian. The Powhatan Indians were still portrayed as primitive, irrational, and child-like. Woodward went so far as to characterize Powhatan culture as “a culture of dark superstitions and devil-worship, a culture of easy cruelty and primitive social accomplishments.” (p. 8)

These three writers were harbingers of a rising tide in scholarship of the story, a tide that amounted to a greater emphasis on Pocahontas’s side of the story and a search to excavate her “point of view.” Unfortunately, all three of them clung to the traditional habits and methodologies of historians, and therefore were able to offer nothing new to the story. What they failed to take advantage of were the gains made by ethnohistorians, anthropologists, and folklorists throughout the twentieth century. In 1941, the respected scholar of American Indian Anthropology Dr. Frank Speck sent a group of students from the University of Pennsylvania down to Virginia to investigate research leads among the Chickahominy tribes. Thus was the door opened for an avenue of study that occupied some of the best scholars in their field(s): Theodore Stern, J. P. Harrington, Nancy O. Lurie, and Maurice A. Mook among them. Even James Mooney, the definitive chronicler of the Ghost Dance, has left us some work on Tidewater Indians.
While none of these ethnologists’ work touched on Pocahontas specifically, they provided a cultural framework by which historians could gain unprecedented insight into her actions. One of the earliest and most effective scholars to look at the Virginia Indian perspective on the Jamestown colony was James Axtell. In a series of articles from the late seventies through the mid-nineties, Axtell addressed the development of ethnohistory, which had come into prominence as a side effect of Congress’s Indian Claims Comission in 1946, and called for an expansion of the field into the study of points of contact between cultures. His call was soon heeded by scholars such as Francis Jennings and Bruce Trigger.

This enterprise to give voice to the Powhatan perspective soon met with the burgeoning field of Atlantic History. Atlantic History, which traces its roots back to Robert R. Palmer’s *The Age of Democratic Revolution* and Bernard Bailyn’s *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, is a reading of world history that focuses on the cultures inhabiting the rim of the Atlantic Ocean and the points of contact between these cultures. Many Atlantic Historians have synthesized the work of Virginia Indian ethnologists into their surveys of the Age of Discovery. The best among these are Karen Ordahl Kupperman’s *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America* (2000) and Daniel Richter’s *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (2001).

While Walt Disney Pictures was releasing an animated film about Pocahontas, cultural critics were beginning a conversation that focused not on the details of Pocahontas’s life, but on her cultural uses. The best book by far in this vein is Robert Tilton’s *Pocahontas: The Evolution of an American Narrative* (1994). Tilton traces the
transmission of the Pocahontas narrative throughout early American History, exploring how it both affected and was affected by the surrounding culture. He pays particular attention to visual representations of Pocahontas, focusing especially on the paintings of the Sullys and the civic painting of John Gadsby Chapman. His study ends with the Civil War and Charles Deane, but he covers the preceding periods masterfully and engagingly. He focuses mainly on the racial aspects of the myth, however, and does little to address the gender implications. For a study of the latter, readers should consult Rebecca Blevins Faery’s *Cartographies of Desire: Captivity, Race, & Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation* (1999). Faery compares the narrative of Pocahontas’s captivity in a white world to the corresponding narrative of Mary Rowlandson’s captivity in an Indian world and then charts cultural references to this mythos of captivity over the next three hundred years. Faery is an accomplished essayist, not a historian, but she nevertheless makes good use of sources and her book comes with appropriate scholarly apparatus. The fact that both Tilton’s and Faery’s books are revisions of PhD dissertations speaks to the relative newness of this field and gives a reader hope that these scholars will provide more material in the coming years.

As the 400-year anniversary of Jamestown’s founding approached in 2007, another swell of Pocahontas biographies surfaced. The main concern of biographizing Pocahontas in the first decade of the twenty-first century was in casting Pocahontas as an independent actor with an agenda of her own, as opposed to a willing instrument of British imperialism. In deciphering what that agenda may have been, however, the biographer must necessarily rely on his or her imagination to a greater or lesser degree, as
there is no documentary evidence of Pocahontas’s motivations, and any discussion of what they may have been requires that author and reader take a considerable leap of faith.

At one end of the spectrum, there is David A. Price’s bestselling *Love and Hate in Jamestown: John Smith, Pocahontas, and the Heart of a New Nation*. Price’s Pocahontas is merely a supporting player in the English drama, without volition or character. Price, who is a journalist and not a scholar, has followed Smith’s later account of his rescue in every detail, not even alerting his readers that controversy has ever surrounded the veracity of Smith’s claim.

At the other end of the spectrum is Paula Gunn Allen’s *Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepeneur, Diplomat*, which is almost entirely a work of imagination. Allen blends Pocahontas’s story with the myths of other Native tribes and attempts a mythopoetic account of Pocahontas’s life, not as the historical evidence supports, but as Allen’s Laguna Pueblo roots inform her. One of her major sources is Pocahontas herself, who allegedly speaks to Allen in dreams and visions. The whole exercise would be criminal, except that Allen admits openly that she is only concerned with telling an alternative story, not an accurate one. Nevertheless, some of her claims are departures too bold to be made without some sort of precedent or documentation...such as when she claims that Pocahontas was assassinated. The gravest of Allen’s sins, however, is the essentializing of American Indian thought, assuming that she can speak for the way all Natives think.

The two strongest works to come out of this group are Camilla Townsend’s *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma* and Helen Rountree’s *Pocahontas, Powhatan, and Opechancanough: Three Lives Changed by Jamestown*. Townsend’s aim is to
synthesize the existing evidence into a cohesive narrative rather than to present anything new. Some of her interpretations are bold and brilliant; some are just bold. All in all, the book is the most readable and accessible adult biography of Pocahontas currently available. Helen Rountree, meanwhile, is the foremost expert on the tribes of Virginia and she has written extensively on Powhatan culture from before European contact into the present day. Her book is not only the most detailed and clear-headed of the bunch, it represents the first attempt to treat Powhatan and Opechancanough as biographical subjects. The book stretches imagination a bit far at times, as when it diagnoses Pocahontas with “Stockholm Syndrome,” but nevertheless culminates a lifetime of rigorous and innovative anthropological work. Both Townsend and Roundtree succeed in centering their narratives around the negotiation of meaning between cultures at a critical point of contact. Townsend does this by shrewdly exploring Pocahontas’s assimilation into English society and the gender-based dimensions thereof, while Rountree pursues a fascinating tactic of rearranging the spellings of familiar English names in order to disorient the reader and thus make the reader more receptive to the Native view.

These writers all have their detractors, of course. At the April 2007 Virginia Forum in Richmond, Virginia, Dr. Fred Fausz presented portions of a paper that he would later web-publish entitled “Jamestown at 400: Caught between a Rock and a Slippery Slope.” Fausz, who was Philip Barbour’s assistant editor on his monumental edition of John Smith’s writings, laments the ubiquity of careless error in Jamestown scholarship. He addresses directly the works of Price, Allen, Townsend, and Rountree, as well as Bernard Bailyn, Edmund S. Morgan, James Horn, and several others. Fausz also assails the reliance of many historical sites’ official websites on text from long-outdated sources,
asking, “Why does the general public continue to embrace such flawed, dated information when it would be unthinkable to rely on medical advice from the 1920s?” Fausz ultimately blames declining standards of historical scholarship and the encroachment of “political correctness,” and these points are where his argument loses merit. A close study of Jamestown scholarship over the years shows that it has always been fraught with persistent and clumsy error, and that it has always been a mouthpiece for the conventions of contemporary decorum rather than a disinterested forum for scholarly rigor. Fausz’s argument ultimately sinks by its own culturally reactionary gruffness.

In the coming years, Pocahontas’s story will continue to operate as a point of contact between two cultures. As scholars continue to explore Pocahontas’s negotiation of identity, their work will shed new light on both of these cultures. Scholars have already begun exploring the racial/ethnic dimension of Pocahontas’s life and, to a lesser degree, the gendered construction of her changed identity. One particularly rich area that remains to be explored are the dimensions of class inherent in the story of “Princess” Pocahontas and her colonist captors/townmates. Another timely study would be an exploration of the Rofles’ marriage as the first crisis of English marriage law on American soil and how that has affected the development of American marriage law (including the Loving case, also in Virginia).

The study of Pocahontas’s life would also be much enriched by further study of the periods before and after her life. The legend of Don Luis—and how familiar Powhatan and his people were with the story—could be an excellent source of insight into Powhatan culture before the settling of Jamestown and thus give great insight into
the motivations of the Indian players in this drama. Likewise, more rigorous study of the period following 1644 and the unique diplomatic relationship between the colonists and the Indians would greatly enrich our view of the complex needs and impulses of both sides.

In any event, further study of Pocahontas and of the Jamestown colony in general will surely move away from the limited dichotomy of colonizer/colonized, or aggressor/victim. Besides being reductionist in its view of the situation, such a view is also essentialist in its ethnic views and too often characterizes American Indians as tragically extinct, rather than addressing their reality as surviving and largely autonomous communities. Similarly, too much study has been marred by demonized generalizations of the English, and the world is ready for a scholar who does not accept the desire to conquer as an inherent human trait, but rather assumes that such a project can only be justified in the human mind by an elaborate cultural construction, a construction which that scholar will then begin to investigate.
Chapter Two

The “Pocahontas Plays”

In 1837, Robert Dale Owen (writing as “A Citizen of the West”) introduced his play *Pocahontas* with the following statement:

> The story of my heroine [Pocahontas] is in every heart. It is intimately connected with the very first successful effort to colonize Northern America from Europe, a marked epoch in our history. It is connected, too, with the fates of a noble race, which is fast fading away from the earth; and that, through our agency: a race, the savage magnificence of whose character appears to me indifferently well adapted to a dramatic effect. (21)

Owen’s play was not the only play of his time to focus on Pocahontas as its subject—nor was it the most popular—but he identified several of the main themes that run through all of the early nineteenth century plays that shared his subject. The Pocahontas story was a vehicle for U. S. society’s relationship to its own history and the European origins of that history as well as its relationship to North America’s aboriginal tribes and the U. S.’s undeniable culpability in their destruction.

Arthur Hobson Quinn estimated that there were nearly fifty “Indian plays” between 1825 and 1860, but most have been lost. Of these plays, a great number focused on the Pocahontas story. We can never know exactly how many “Pocahontas plays” were written, as many of the records have been lost to time, but we can safely characterize her life as a popular dramatic subject of the time. What records remain tell us of five such plays: Albert M. Gilliam’s *Virginia, or Love and Bravery* (1829), George Washington Parke Custis’s *Pocahontas, or The Settlers of Virginia* (1830), Robert Dale Owen’s *Pocahontas: A Historical Drama* (1837), Charlotte Mary Sanford Barnes’s *The
**Forest Princess, or Two Centuries Ago** (1844), and John Brougham’s *Po-ca-hon-tas, or The Gentle Savage* (1855). Scripts survive for all but the first of these plays.

No discussion of Pocahontas as a subject in the nineteenth century U. S. theatre would be complete, however, without mention of James Nelson Barker’s *The Indian Princess, or La Belle Sauvage* (1808). Barker’s play has the distinction of being not only the first Pocahontas play, but also the first play on an Indian theme to be performed in America.¹ As we shall see, it served as a predecessor for the later plays not just in its choice of subject but in its treatment of certain themes inherent in Pocahontas’s story.

That the popularity of these plays cover just a few years, and that those years marked dramatic shifts not just in Indian-U. S. relations (culminating in the Indian Removal Act of 1830) but also in gender equality (particularly through the work of women such as Frances Wright, Lucretia Mott, and Margaret Fuller) is a correlation that we cannot afford to ignore. A change in cultural pattern is the smoke that suggests the fire of ideological shift. Certainly the clustering of plays around a given subject, unprecedented in the two hundred years prior and unmatched in the years since, constitutes a significant change in cultural pattern, and is worthy of study from an ideological standpoint.

Pinpointing this ideological shift, however, is not a facile task, if it is possible at all. We are on especially thin ice if we attempt to determine these plays’ effect on or reflection of the social attitudes of their audiences. One of the enduring challenges that theater historians is the lack of any tool by which one might measure or record the

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¹ The first play with an Indian subject to be published by a North American playwright was *Ponteach*, by Major Robert Rogers, published in London in 1760. The play was never performed, however.
reaction of an audience to a theatrical performance. We can ascertain just enough to
tentatively register whether a play was popular in the broadest sense. Custis’s play, for
instance, was unquestionably popular, while Owen’s was not. We have no yardstick,
however, to tell us to what elements of Custis’s play his audience reacted so favorably.
We do not know if his portrayal of American Indian characters elicited pity, terror, or
hostility or to what extent that portrayal challenged or reinforced his audience’s
prejudices. While discussing recent political interpretations of John Augustus Stone’s
Metamora (1829), Scott C. Martin assails literary scholars and theater historians for
offering up:

...interpretations that highlight the Indian drama’s political implications [and]
make implicit contentions about Jacksonian audiences’ reception of the play while
offering little evidence to support them. Assuming the operation of Jacksonian
racial ideology in popular culture, they beg the question of exactly how the play
accomplished its putatively political work. What did audiences find appealing
and why? Were alternative readings of Metamora possible? (74-75)

Martin’s points apply equally well to studying the “Pocahontas plays” of the same
period, and thus we must proceed advisedly.

In this chapter, then, I will seek to frame these plays in context to one another and
the political temperature of their time without overdetermining the sociopolitical outlook
of either their authors or their audiences. Instead, I will contend that these plays hold an
important place in American cultural history, owing to their focus on one of the first
successful dramatic themes in U. S. literature and also to their stories’ thematic resonance
with contemporary stirrings in racial and gender relations. While I allow that these plays
may have been seen by some audience members as justification and promotion of the
Democratic Party’s emerging policy of Indian removal—and I freely acknowledge the
strong ties of at least two of the authors (Barker and Owen) to the Democratic Party—I also maintain that the plays had more than partisan appeal and therefore cannot be read as merely polemics.

Before we begin to consider the Pocahontas plays of the 1830’s and 1840’s, we must consider their predecessor. James Nelson Barker (1784-1858) premiered his The Indian Princess, or La Belle Sauvage at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia on April 6, 1808. The curtain had to be brought down early on this first performance due to the audience’s intense distaste for the actor playing Larry the Irishman. Barker himself claimed to have made the decision. Soon enough, however, the play was playing all over the United States, beginning with New York’s Park Theatre in June of 1809.

Barker identified his main source for the play as John Smith’s General History of 1624. Barker did embellish on Smith’s story, however, especially in answering the main theatrical flaw of the traditional Pocahontas story: that the most dramatic moment—Pocahontas’s rescue of Captain Smith—comes near the beginning of the story. Barker does indeed get the rescue scene out of the way in the first scene of act two, but then spends the next nearly two acts focusing on his real topic—coupling. In Barker’s telling, the historical narrative only supplies a backdrop for the assignations of four other couples, one of which is also mixed-race. The structure of the play resembles an Elizabethan comedy of errors, and was surely a deliberate model of the plays that would be best-known to the Philadelphia audience.

Barker even uses romance as the driving motive of his historical narrative. Tensions between the Indians and the settlers are fueled by the jealous caprices of Miami, a Powhatan brave who longs for Pocahontas’s hand in marriage. He is aided in his
treachery by a sinister priest named Grimosco, whose motivations remain somewhat unclear. So begins a universal feature of the Pocahontas plays—Powhatan himself is never portrayed as inherently bellicose, but is always deceived by someone. In this case, Powhatan only becomes suspicious of English motives after he is led astray by the nefarious Miami and Grimosco. Miami’s and Grimosco’s villainy, however, does not extend to the rest of the Indians portrayed. They are seen as aberrations fueled by Miami’s sexual jealousy when he is rejected by Pocahontas. Once Powhatan is disabused of his suspicions, he grovels: “Shame ties the tongue of Powhatan.” But Smith saves him from disgrace, acting the part of the forgiving and benevolent patriarch: “No more./Wiser than thou have been the dupes of priesthood.”

Also significant in Barker’s play is its attitude towards England. Rolfe puts a fine point on it in the first scene: “Let our dull, sluggish countrymen at home/Still creep around their little isle of fogs,/Drink its dank vapours, and then hang themselves.” (119) Captain Smith concurs, praising his fellow settlers as men “[w]hose stirring spirits scorn’d to lie inert./Base atoms in the mass of population/That rots in stagnant Europe.” (119) Without presuming to know too much about Barker’s racial sensibilities, we can mark with curiosity that Barker has saved harsh words for his own English forbearers and none for the Indians.

The first Pocahontas play of the Removal Act period of which we have any record is Albert M. Gilliam’s Virginia, or Love and Bravery. According to advertisements appearing in local newspapers, Gilliam’s play premiered on May 27, 1829, in Richmond, VA. An early advertisement in the Richmond Daily Whig identifies the play as Virginia, in its Earlier Days, but the sub-title had normalized to Love and Bravery by the next
week. The play was billed as “a new romantic drama” and the producer took pains to note that “appropriate Indian and English costume has been procured for the occasion,”

Although no script survives for this production, cast lists that were published in the newspapers give us an indication of the main characters. The most outstanding feature of this play is that it does not feature a John Rolfe character, so we can safely assume that it portrays only the early events of Pocahontas’s life. Also, the relative absence of female characters (only Pocahontas and a “Mary” among the settlers) suggests that this play was thematically very different from Barker’s. While clearly not an Elizabethan-style comedy, the subtitle Love and Bravery does at least suggest some romantic content. Given the absence of Rolfe, we can hypothesize that the romance in question was between Pocahontas and Smith.

There are a couple of other significant issues that arise from looking over this cast list. The play was performed on May 27 for the benefit of Mr. Garner (the theatre’s manager) with an announcement in the Richmond Commercial Compiler of a performance to follow on Friday May 29 for the benefit of Miss Fairfield (who played Pocahontas). By Thursday, however, the announcement of Friday’s performance had changed to The Merchant of Venice, in which Miss Fairfield played the relatively minor role of Nerissa. By the following Wednesday, Gilliam’s play was on the boards again—this time for the author’s own benefit—with a few casting changes. The part of Christopher Newport was now played by a Mr. Walton, who had originally been doubling in the parts of Ratliffe and an Indian character named Powhatafian. The role of Powhatafian was cut from the list while the role of Ratliffe marked only a blank line
where the actor’s name should have been. No explanation was given as to the fate of Mr. Estell, who had originated the role of Newport.

At the time, such an explanation may not have been necessary. A coroner’s inquest on Thursday May 28 shows that a Daniel Estell, actor, fell from a third-story window at the house of a Thomas Baxter, where Mr. Estell was a boarder, sometime between two and four in the morning. Mr. Estell fractured his skull and died. Although no exact age was given, he was described as a young man and a native of Philadelphia. His sudden death accounts for the unplanned schedule change, so we cannot take that as a measure of the play’s success.

Perhaps the most noteworthy detail of Gilliam’s cast is the fact that John Smith was played by none other than John Augustus Stone. In addition to playing Smith, Stone composed and performed a prologue to the piece. This discovery is particularly exciting as Stone’s own play Metamora, which would become the most popular of the Indian dramas of the nineteenth century, was submitted to Edwin Forrest within two months of this performance. We cannot say for sure the extent to which Stone was inspired by acting in piece about Pocahontas, but it seems clear that the possibility of Indians as dramatic subjects was prominent in his mind. It would be especially fascinating to see if the prologue he gave in Richmond in any way constituted a rough draft of the issues and themes he addressed in Metamora. It would also be interesting to know, since Stone was also a Philadelphia-based actor, what the extent of his relationship with Daniel Estell was and whether Estell’s death had any effect on Stone’s notoriously fragile state of mind.

George Washington Parke Custis (1781-1857) was the next dramatist to treat the Pocahontas theme and his Pocahontas, or The Settlers of Virginia premiered on January
16, 1830, at the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia (which was ironically the main rival of Barker’s Chestnut Street Theatre). The play ran for twelve performances, which was unprecedented at the time. The play was later produced in New York before being revived in Philadelphia.

George Washington Parke Custis spent most of his life in the shadow of another historical giant altogether. Orphaned as a young child, Custis went to live with his grandmother—a fact that would not be so unusual except that his grandmother was Martha Washington and her husband was the first president of the United States. Custis lived with his grandparents until their respective deaths and inherited at twenty-one the large tract of land that now holds Arlington Cemetery. For the next twenty-five years, he lived the life of a wealthy land-owner, content to pursue his own fame through exploiting his memories of the great General. It was not until late middle age that he turned to playwriting.

Custis rearranged the incidents of the story entirely, most significantly in placing Pocahontas’s rescue of John Smith at the end of the play. Robert Tilton points out that this also allowed Custis to end the play before the Rolfes’ marriage, thus avoiding the theme of miscegenation. He also added a detail of English soldiers that were approaching at the time of the rescue who could have arrived in time to save Smith, a device that amplified the suspenseful capabilities of the narrative. Custis’s play capitalizes on the play’s suspense as well as its spectacle, but it downplays the elements of romance that Barker had focused on. The colorful episodes of Custis’s play were so spectacular, in fact, that the Walnut Street Theatre had to close down for a week prior to opening night so that elaborate preparations could be made.
The sharpest note in Custis’s rhetoric is his frequent return to the theme of patriotism. This theme is of particular importance when considering his characterization of Matacoran, the Indian who leads Powhatan’s attack against the English. Custis follows Barker’s lead in using the animosity of an Indian brave to drive the historical incidents of the play. But Custis’s play has one crucial difference: Matacoran has none of the villainy of Barker’s Miami. Although he gives Powhatan ill-advised council, he could not fairly be accused of deceiving Powhatan. And while there is a hint of sexual jealousy (Matacoran was once betrothed to Pocahontas), He makes it clear that he is not driven by this jealousy; he is motivated instead by his pride in his people and his nation, telling Powhatan, “as an unwilling bride I would not receive even Pocahontas to my arms.[...] Matacoran must have done with love. Glory and his country must return and possess his soul.” (184) Other characters echo Matacoran’s resolve. The Englishman Barclay (who has been living among the Indians) has this to say of Matacoran in the play’s very first scene:

Surely, Prince Matacoran, the brave in war, the just in peace, the favourite of his king, the friend of his country, must admire that patriotic feeling in another, which he himself possesses in no ordinary degree. ‘Tis one of the first of the virtues, and one of the last that will abandon the generous bosom.

(173)

Where Barker’s Miami ignominiously takes his own life at the end of The Indian Princess, Matacoran is praised and released, with Smith intoning, “The brave honour the brave alike in misfortune and prosperity.” Perhaps not surprisingly for a playwright of such auspicious birth, patriotism and honor in battle are presented as virtues that transcend racial differences.
Despite the sympathetic portrayal of the Indians, however, Custis does not shy away from his own nationalist rhetoric of expansion. In Act III, Scene 4, Smith promises Powhatan to “plant my banner in victory on the throne where thou now sittest.” (189) Rebecca Jaroff argues that Custis has chosen the events he portrays in a careful and deliberate manner in order to highlight the exotic “otherness” of the Indians, further alienating them from his white audience. In any event, Custis’s play includes many more references to skin color than Barker’s does, often applying the word “dusky.”

This last point is best considered in the broader context of the “Indian problem,” which Americans were beginning to conceive as a racial—rather than cultural—difference. Lewis Cass, who as President Jackson’s Secretary of War managed Indian affairs, observed, “We are all striving in the career of life to acquire riches in honor, or power, or some other object, whose possession is to realize the day dreams of our imaginations; and the aggregate of these efforts constitutes the advance of society. But there is little of this in the constitution of our savages.” In 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, which resulted in forced treaties of removal of Indians throughout the southeast. An aging Chief Justice John Marshall tried to stem the tide in his majority opinion for *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) calling such efforts “repugnant to the Constitution” and enjoining President Jackson to offer the Cherokee Indians of Georgia the protection of the U. S. Military. Jackson flagrantly denied Marshall’s order, sparking a constitutional crisis from which the Supreme Court, having no standing armed enforcement, was forced to back down. In 1836, John Ross led a delegation from the Cherokee nation to Washington D.C. to protest their removal, but without success. Ironically, Custis’s play was revived at the National Theatre in Washington D.C. during
their trip. The Cherokee would be removed, along with the four other “Civilized Tribes,” and forced to walk the famous Trail of Tears in 1838. More than a third of them would die during this march.

In that same year, Pocahontas returned to the stage. Robert Dale Owen (1801-1877), Scottish by birth but living in America, wrote *Pocahontas: A Historical Drama* in 1837 and it premiered at the Park Theatre in New York on February 8, 1838. Owen, who would go on to become a member of the United States Congress, purported to have made a thorough survey of available documents in crafting his play, which he claimed was more historically accurate than the others. As with the others, however, he had to contend with providing a climax at the end of the play, so his solution was to have Smith rescue Pocahontas after she is kidnapped by the Englishmen. This scene is presented as a repayment for the earlier rescue scene.

In 1825, Owen helped his father, the Welsh socialist Robert Owen, create a utopian community in New Harmony, Indiana. While he was there he met and became close with Fanny Wright, the free-thinking feminist who was also a Scottish emigré. Owen and Wright travelled and wrote together throughout the 1820’s and 1830’s. During this time, Owen wrote *Moral Physiology*, believed to be the first book advocating birth control to be published in the U. S. By the time Owen’s *Pocahontas* (which would be his only play) premiered, he was already a member of the Indiana State House of Representatives and embarking on his first of two unsuccessful bids for the U. S. Congress (he would be successful on his third bid). His most memorable accomplishment during his appointment was drafting the bill that established the Smithsonian Institution.
It is not difficult to read some of the implications of Owen’s free-thinking socialism in his script. After spending some time among the English, Pocahontas concludes that “Woman was made to be the friend of man,/To share man’s confidence—
win his respect—/To be—to be—his EQUAL?” (149) She continues, “Is’t not good to feel/Something within, that tells me, I am born/To aid, but not to slave; to stand beside,/Not crouch behind [...].” (149) Owen has deliberately framed the Pocahontas story as a site for discourse about gender equality, and has found in Pocahontas herself a mouthpiece for his own progressive ideas.

Also significant in Owen’s script is that Powhatan is counselled not only by a jealous or hate-filled Indian (in this instance, the xenophobic Utta Maccomac), but by a Dutchman named Hans Krabhuis who has defected from the English camp. While Maccomac bears a hostile suspicion of the white race and employs (as in Barker’s and Custis’s plays) one of Powhatan’s priests to convince him to strike, Krabhuis is motivated by greed and ambition. Krabhuis hates Smith and all of the attention he gets. He also longs to dig for gold in Virginia. He goes to Powhatan, then, to sell out the English, and Smith in particular.

This same theme will show itself again in Charlotte Barnes’s play. Charlotte Mary Sanford Barnes (1818-1863) was twelve years old when her mother, Mary Greenhill Barnes, played Pocahontas in Custis’s original production of *The Settlers of Virginia*. Barnes’s own version, *The Forest Princess, or Two Centuries Ago*, first premiered in Liverpool in 1844, but its American premiere was at the Arch Street Theatre, once again in Philadelphia, on February 16, 1848. Like Owen, she was concerned with historical accuracy and went as far as the British Museum in doing her
research. She eschewed narrative embellishment, suggesting in her Introduction that “the judgment of such a course may be questioned, especially when, as in the present case, it would detract from the pure disinterestedness of a woman’s fame.” (323) She was a bit naive, however, about the historical veracity of the sources she used, noting, “All the particulars of her biography are confirmed by relatively distant and unimpeachable testimony.” (322)

In Barnes’s play, the Miami/Matacoran/Utta character is gone altogether and Powhatan is led astray by the villainous Volday, listed as “a Switzer.” (324) Volday is nearly identical to Owen’s Krabhuis, a misanthropic foreigner who is jealous of Smith’s celebrity. Volday laments, “Smith! Is there no other brave, bold man, that he must be the burthen of every song?” (327) When Powhatan learns of Volday’s treachery, he is incensed: “The red man wars with strangers, enemies;/But thou wouldst slay thy brothers.” (345) This character is not one who appears in the historical record, so it certainly seems likely that Charlotte Barnes was familiar with Robert Dale Owen’s script and freely appropriated from it.

Rebecca Jaroff has argued that Barnes’s play repudiates Custis by subverting his pattern of male domination. However, her argument fails to make any mention of Owen’s play, which contains far stronger language in favor of women’s empowerment. While the notion of a daughter re-writing her mother’s role to liberate it from patriarchal trappings is an attractive one, we must not forget that Owen provides a middle step between these two authors and that he is the one who did much of the subverting.

Jaroff is on firmer ground when she asserts that Barnes’s play “challenges the brutal national agenda toward Indians that Custis’s play seeks to reinforce.” (484)
Barnes’ play contains significant passages that at the very least convey the grimness of the Indians’ future and to a large extent lay blame at the feet of the white man. When he is justifying his execution of Smith to his merciful daughter, Powhatan prophecies:

Their deeds, their history, their conduct then,
To our tribes will ever be the same.
The time will come they’ll spread o’er all the land.
Foul tyranny and rapine they’ll return
For friendly welcome and sweet mercy shown,
Defrauding or exterminating still
Our ancient race, until the red man’s name
Will live but in the memory of the past,
Or in some exile powerless, who sells
For a few ears of corn his father’s land,
Lord of that soil, where then he’ll beg a grave.

POCAHONTAS: And should our race thus pass from earth away,
The shame will not be theirs, but their oppressors’

(333)

In another scene, Powhatan gives an anguished cry, “The red man’s portion is...decay!” (347) and when Powhatan gives Pocahontas to John Rolfe as his bride, he bids Rolfe to protect her when “her kindred [are] driven from the earth./As soon they will be, beneath the crushing strides/Of thy vast nation.” (352)

Barnes’s play makes a sharp departure from those of her predecessors by following Pocahontas all the way to England and ultimately to her deathbed. The international excursion affords Pocahontas another rescue—this time she rescues her husband Rolfe, who is on trial for treason, once more through the villiany of Volday. Ailing and frail, Pocahontas makes her way to Prince Charles (who would later rule as Charles I—until his execution, of course). She appeals to Charles for mercy for her husband and even gives him the following premonition: “clouds may dim thy reign, and woes/Arise, such as crowned heads but rarely know.” (363) Charles replies, “Thy words prophetic seem.” Prophetic, indeed.
Perhaps it is significant in this case to recall that Barnes’s play premiered in England before it premiered in the U. S. It was certainly not an appropriate forum, then, for Barker’s style of Euro-bashing. Barnes was writing a play that not only placed Pocahontas in the context of U. S. history, but one that identified her as a player in British history as well. Barnes goes to pains not to disparage Britain, but to also underscore Pocahontas’s strong ties to her home. Enchanted but homesick, Barnes’s Pocahontas has this to say:

> For beautiful is England, with her groves,  
> Her castles, palaces, and abbeys old.  
> Like fairy homes her vales and streams appear.  
> Each landscape glows with history and wears  
> The sober perfectness of ripened age.  
> No classic lore adorns my land;  
> But rich, redundant nature reigns alone.  
> Great rivers, giant lakes in silence sleep,  
> And rushing torrents by their solemn voice  
> Call man to praise his Maker.

(359)

Her beguilement with England and her dalliance with the future Charles I, however, are trumped by what may be the strangest episode in any of these plays—Pocahontas’s deathbed vision of George Washington. After the figure appears to her, Pocahontas proclaims, “From that beloved soil where I drew breath/Shall noble chiefs arise. But one o’er all,/By heaven named to set a nation free,/I hear the universal world declare,/In shouts whose echo centuries prolong,””The Father of his Country!” (367) It is particularly telling that Washington is praised by the “universal world.” Pocahontas continues, “The island mother and her giant child/Their arms extend across the narrowing seas,/The grasp of loving friendship to exchange!” (367)
With such outlandish spectacles, it is little wonder that Pocahontas’s stage career ended in satire. John Brougham (1814-1880) had a penchant for such satire, and when he wrote *Po-ca-hon-tas, or The Gentle Savage*, he sought not to add to the Pocahontas mythos, but to annihilate it. Brougham’s play premiered on Christmas Eve of 1855 at Wallack’s Theatre in New York. In Pocahontas’s story he found a vehicle for a burlesque on the social and political themes of the day. He also infused the play with a great deal of wordplay. For instance, the first spoken lines (after a sung introduction by a chorus of Indians) are, “Well *roared*, my jolly Tuscaroras/Most loyal *corps*, your king *encores* the *Chorus*.” (5)

Brougham’s main target is not Pocahontas at all but the shenanigans of politics and the excesses of the contemporary theatre. For instance, on slavery: “The king who would enslave his daughter so/Deserves a hint from Mrs. Beecher Stowe.” (21) He does, however, address the issue of Indian rights and property theft, if only in jest, when the white settlers offer the Indians bullets: “some potent pills/Warranted to cure all mortal ills/With a few doses you’ll be undertakers/To rid you soon of all your pains and acres.” (12) In Brougham’s play, Rolff [sic] is a dutchman who is betrothed to Pocahontas—equating him with both the Miami/Matacoran characters and the Krabhuish/Volday characters—but Pocahontas casts off Rolfe in favor of Smith, even though she knows it will incense historians. The rescue scene is Brougham’s best twist: Powhatan saves Rolfe from Smith rather than Pocahontas saving Smith from Powhatan.

Brougham’s play is credited with bringing an end to the craze for Pocahontas plays. No new plays about Pocahontas were performed for the rest of the nineteenth century. Only one such play was written—Samuel H. M. Byers’s *Pocahontas: A*
*Melodrama in Five Acts*—but it was never performed. The play was copyrighted in 1875.
By the spring of 2007, Pocahontas was once again ascendant in the popular imagination. The books of Rountree, Townsend, Price, and Allen were some of the main points of contact between the Pocahontas narrative and the American public. Other points of contact at this time include Terence Malick’s film *The New World* and the May 2007 issue of *National Geographic*, which featured a John White illustration on its cover and included a feature article, a pictorial of artifacts, and a map supplement all relating to the Jamestown colony. Malick’s film I will consider at greater length below. *National Geographic*’s feature article was written by Charles C. Mann, the bestselling author of *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*. Mann reconsiders the early commerce between the Powhatans and the English and casts English dominance in terms of their effect on the ecosystem and how that affected the Powhatans. His article will surely be an often-cited benchmark in the field over the next twenty years.

What all of these points of contact share is that they exist in—and speak to—a culture obsessed with identity. Newspapers talk of identity theft, identity politics, and cultural identity. Identity politics in particular became ubiquitous the following year with the historic Obama/Clinton Democratic primary contest. Differences in defining cultural identity are at the very center of the so-called culture wars, and different political factions are competing to change not just how the government works or what its parameters of authority are, but what its defining principles are. America is in the midst of a Constitutional identity crisis, as Supreme court cases increasingly return 5-4 verdicts,
split along party lines, and the rhetoric of published opinions moves farther from moderation and closer to biting condemnation of the opposition.

Concurrent with this constitutional identity crisis, more and more commerce is conducted in the disembodied space of the World Wide Web. The integrity of personal identity as physically embodied space is being supplanted by a cyberspace of avatars, screen names, and virtual world programs such as Second Life.

When I began this project, I set out to compose a play that used the Pocahontas narrative to speak to this atmosphere of mutable identity. Pocahontas, alias Matoaka, alias Amonute, alias Rebecca Rolfe, lived a life of mutable identity herself and I wanted to center the emotional arc of the play not around romance or conquest, as my nineteenth-century predecessors did, but around Pocahontas’s act of self-revision in converting to Christianity and changing both her name and her cultural identification. In keeping with my sympathy for New Atlantic History studies, I tried not to allow my narrative to privilege or endorse either the culture she adopted or the culture she left behind. By not doing so, I hoped to be able to portray her decision as a complex but clear choice made of her own volition in response to a grim situation. In this way, Pocahontas can be given a voice rather than remaining the instrument of a drama dominated by men.

I was lucky in my early research to pick up Helen Rountree’s book first. The book is full of factual detail, but couched in a feisty narrative that captures the voice of a somewhat eccentric scholar who is the undisputed master of her field. Moreover, hers is the only scholarly book that attempts to reconstruct the Powhatan point of view, which was, after all, a significant part of my charge.
The two other books that never left my side during the writing process were Camilla Townsend’s book and Frederic W. Gleach’s *Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*. Townsend’s book provided me with clear narrative guidance unencumbered by the dense forest of facts found in Rountree and buoyed by a keen sense of the telling detail. Gleach’s book, though it does not address the Pocahontas story at length, was an invaluable source of information on seventeenth century Powhatan and English cultures. In particular, I gained much information about daily life and religious practices as they existed within the two cultures.

Perhaps the most surprisingly fortuitous breakthrough in my research occurred in an unexpected setting. While I was in the initial research phase, I made my living waiting tables at a nearby French restaurant. One of my co-workers at this restaurant was Dr. Edward Ragan, who had a PhD from Syracuse in the history of the Rappahannock Indians. Dr. Ragan was very helpful in guiding my research and provided a useful sounding board as I developed my theories. He also disabused me of any illusions concerning the marketability of a PhD.

I viewed Terence Malick’s movie during this time, hoping to excite my imagination as to the story’s narrative possibilities. The movie was painfully backwards in its politics and historical understanding. This flaw was all the more damning because the filmmakers marketed the movie as something different entirely—a progressive and balanced look that de-mystified the Indians and incorporated the latest research breakthroughs. The film was, in fact, another rehashing of the Pocahontas-John Smith-John Rolfe love triangle. Worse still was the portrayal of the Indians. Although great pains had been taken to more accurately represent the details of Powhatan life, this was
contrasted against English settlers who looked, talked, and swaggered like the movie stars of today. If the seventeenth century Englishmen had been portrayed accurately, they would have seemed as foreign to modern eyes as the Powhatans did. But instead the English are presented as being “normal,” while the Powhatans are exotic “others.”

The movie did inspire me in its sound design, however. Particularly at the beginning of the film, there are long patches without dialogue during which can be heard the sounds of the forest and the river. These scenes gave me an idea that would help me overcome one of the largest obstacles of the play.

I had been struggling in particular with the question of staging. Although I myself was not ultimately responsible for the staging of the play, I wanted to have some idea of how the play would look and sound as I was writing it. There was no conceivable way of recreating a Tidewater forest onstage. The Powhatan Indians also presented a unique problem. To follow the lines of historical accuracy, they would have been largely unclothed, covered in tatoos, with half of their heads shaved. There was also the problem of Central Virginia’s paucity of American Indian actors. Pictorial realism was not an option at any level.

Nevertheless, this play would depend on our creating the texture of a world very different from that outside of the theatre. After viewing Malick’s movie, I lighted on the idea of a soundscape that would permeate every scene. The texture of pre-industrial Virginia would be introduced by the sounds of rivers, brooks, breezes, indigenous wildfowl, toads and other Virginia wildlife. As Pocahontas moved farther from her home through the play, these sounds would be replaced, at first by the more industrial and clustered sounds of Jamestown, and ultimately by the commercial hum of London. The
other main element in this vision was the lighting, which would follow a similar trajectory from the warm and natural colors of the Virginia sky to the more shadowy and harsh lighting of England. This template would answer my own questions about the design while still allowing the designers a reasonably unconstricted space in which to create.

The director, Beth Von Kelsch, and I also came up with the idea of dressing the actors playing the Indians in form-fitting clothing that allowed them to move uninhibitedly while allowing the audience the opportunity to see their grace and the line of their movement. Later in the play, when the same actors would become English characters, they would add on costume pieces that were more constricting. This progression would help satisfy our goal of telling the play from the Indians’ perspective by exoticizing certain articles of seventeenth century English clothing. This progression also gave me an image to work with in crafting Pocahontas’s arc, as she herself came to be more constricted by her clothing. I decided that by the end of the play, she should hardly be able to move.

My original inspiration came from an account of Pocahontas and John Smith reuniting in England during her stay there, first recorded by Smith in his Generall Historie. Even so practiced a self-aggrandizer as Smith does not attempt to gloss over Pocahontas’s contempt. She rebukes Smith strongly on behalf of her father for his ingratitude and his deception (Powhatan believed Smith dead). I thought that such a scene would be rich both metaphorically and dramatically. My original intent was to write a play that ended with this scene. I abandoned it, however, when I realized that there was not time to develop Smith as a character, especially since during his time in Jamestown,
Pocahontas was ten. I similarly abandoned an idea where Powhatan Indians sitting around a campfire told each other stories of the English, and eventually came to embody the English characters, framing the play as one long storytelling exercise.

When I began my first draft in the early Winter of 2006, I still had the story beginning at the nightly campfire that was so important to Powhatan social life. The character Opitchapam, who only appears in the earliest drafts and is based on a historical character, is telling this particular tale:

...And so it was that the Great Stag was slain. And Ahone, the great spirit of the earth and of the sky, wept bitterly. But as his tears fell over the Great Stag, each tear caught one of the Stag’s lifeless hairs. The hairs slipped away from the dead Stag’s body and one by one grew into deer, who ran into the forests of the earth. When we hunt these deer and when we eat their meat, we eat Ahone’s tears as well. We live on these tears...It is Ahone’s sadness that sustains us and fuels our lives.

This story is based on the Algonkian creation myths reconstructed by Frederic Gleach. I decided the idea of oral storytelling was of great importance to this play, and to that end, I used N. Scott Momaday’s essay in the Columbia Literary History of the United States (1988) entitled “The Native Voice.” This essay provides what is still one of the most coherent discussions of oral culture as it existed in American Indian societies. Momaday talks in particular about the power of words in an oral culture and the resulting economy with which they are used.

I had this essay—and many of the suggested readings that Momaday provides—firmly in mind when I composed the “tree” story that Powhatan tells at the end of Act One (in this earlier draft, Opitchapam told the story soon after telling the “Great Stag” story). This story was first inspired by a scene at the end of Wong Kar-Wai’s 1998 film In the Mood for Love, where a man travels to a religious shrine and whispers the details
of an extra-marital affair into a hole in the shrine’s wall. I found the image of a person rising up on their toes to whisper their secrets into a hole to be unexpectedly moving. I also thought that a tree was a strong central image for both Rolfe and Powhatan, as we know both of them to be stoic and devoted.

This early draft went on to incorporate the character of Thomas Savage, who was a young Englishman, just a year or two older than Pocahontas, who was traded to Powhatan and lived as his son for a time. The idea behind such a trade was that Savage would learn the language and serve as a translator. In exchange, Powhatan gave the English his son Namontack, who was killed while he lived with the English, though he was killed by another Indian. In the play, Savage and Pocahontas become friends as she seeks to break through the language barrier. Following Helen Rountree’s example, I morphed his name into something more like the way the Powhatans would have heard it—as they were unfamiliar with English names—and called him Tommasabitch. I also molded his lines into a nonsense language to dramatize the language barrier between the two characters. Later in the play, Savage was the one who had to bring Powhatan word that his daughter had been kidnapped. Opechancanough wants to kill Savage in retaliation, but Powhatan stops him, saying he has lost enough children. The director asked me to drop the subplot, calling it “sappy.”

After that first draft, I focused the action of the play more tightly on Pocahontas’s later life. I also dropped characters such as Opitchapam and Okolask because the director rightly pointed out that there were too many Indian names for audiences to keep straight. I divided Opitchapam’s character and functions between Powhatan and Opechancanough, who were originally his brothers.
One marked change I made from the historical accounts I read was in the character of Opechancanough. Opechancanough is usually portrayed as Powhatan’s younger brother, but this is only based on the fact that Opechancanough succeeded Powhatan (or, more precisely, succeeded Opitchapam, who succeeded Powhatan). But the society of Tidewater Indians followed a matrilineal succession pattern. Powhatan inherited his position from his mother, and his sisters would pass it on to their sons (after being leaders themselves, of course). Incidentally, this means that Powhatan could never have passed leadership on to Pocahontas...or her children. But it also means that if Powhatan’s mother had a younger sister, then her child—even if he was older than Powhatan—could be behind Powhatan in a succession line. I used this idea simply because I was more interested in the dynamic of a younger boy growing up to become leader over his slightly bullying older cousin.

Perhaps the biggest structural problem I faced was how to set up the world of the play. The producer was very insistent that the play be grounded in a contemporary framework, from which I envisioned a play put on by actors who were self-consciously contemporary actors and as such capable of addressing the audience directly. This conceit would also help us allow for the fact that there were far more characters involved than we could really cast. As actors self-consciously playing roles, the performers were free to double- or triple-up on roles. The question, though, was how to do it. How could the conceit be introduced and how could we make that first transition from actors to characters? The producer had two more questions: how could we use these actors-as-actors to make this play relevant and how could we relate it back to Petersburg, Virginia?
As to the producer’s questions, I have to admit that they were not considerations I ever valued highly. First, I have a distaste for incorrect use of the word “relevant.” “Relevance” describes a relationship, not an intrinsic property. A statement may be relevant to an argument, or a piece of information may be relevant to a murder case, just as a spark plug is relevant to the operation of a motor engine. But none of these things are in and of themselves “relevant.” When the producer asked about the play’s relevance, I would ask him to clarify. I never got an answer, so I do not know whether or not I was successful in that regard.

On the question of relating the play to Petersburg, I never saw why it was necessary to go out of one’s way to do that when Petersburg has a Matoaka High School, a Pocahontas Island, and is less than ten miles from Pocahontas State Park. Moreover, most of the action of the play takes place in the Henricus colony, which is less than twenty miles from downtown Petersburg. I was, however, strongly encouraged to relate the play to the Bolling family, an important family of Petersburg who claim to be descended from Pocahontas. I refused to do so, mainly because the Bolling family’s claim—like any other family’s claim—is based on oral history over too long a period of time to be taken seriously, and no scholar has officially recognized the link, and also because flattering references to Pocahontas’s descendents are part of a longstanding framework that puts Pocahontas in the position of colonized object and an instrument of Manifest Destiny.

As for introducing the actors-as-actors effectively, I have never been very happy with the result. My earliest drafts had a broadly comic feel, as each actor tried to organize remembered facts from fourth grade into telling the story of Pocahontas. The
scene was fun, but it belonged to a different play. At the producer’s suggestion, I re-wrote the scene in a more somber tone. The director was reluctant to see the scene go. She agreed that it belonged to a different play, but added, “That’s the play I wanted to direct.”

Once I had a firm grasp on the structure of the play, I had to face some historical questions. As previously discussed, the historical record is frustratingly thin in some key areas, and in order to compose a cohesive plot, I would have to judiciously weigh what few facts there were, while also using a touch of imagination. The four most important factors of the story about which I would have to make a judgment call were the John Smith “rescue,” Pocahontas’s real name and its meaning, the nature of Pocahontas’s first marriage, and the emotional bond (or lack thereof) between her and John Rolfe.

Reams have already been written about John Smith and the alleged rescue. Leo Lemay covered the argument fairly exhaustively in his book, Did Pocahontas Save Captain John Smith? Lemay’s conclusion is that the event happened, though Smith may have been mistaken in thinking that he was about to be executed. What Lemay is suggesting, which was first formulated by Philip Barbour, is that John Smith may have undergone a Powhatan adoption ritual involving a mimetic death and “rebirth” as a member of the tribe. Many modern scholars have followed this line of thought, including Mossiker and Kupperman.

Here is what we do know: Smith wrote an account of his captivity in A True Relation (1608) and he makes no mention of the episode. He refers obliquely to having been rescued by Pocahontas fourteen years later when he wrote New England Trials (1622), but it is in his General Historie (1624) that he first gives us a fully rendered
account of the supposed incident. By 1624, of course, Pocahontas’s star had already risen considerably higher than John Smith’s, and he had much to gain by attaching his name to hers. But motive does not invention prove. Furthermore, we must take into account that *A True Relation* was published without Smith’s permission and that the editor expressly states in his preface that cuts were made.

It may be significant that Smith’s contemporaries are silent on the subject, most notably Edward Maria Wingfield and Ralph Hamor, the latter of which devoted a great deal of *A True Discourse* to Pocahontas. It may be significant, but it may not. Wingfield, after all, was Smith’s bitter rival, and he may not have been interested in aggrandizing the man’s already considerable reputation. And Hamor’s book mostly covers the period after 1610. Even if he was aware of the story, he may not have considered it pertinent.

Also worth considering is the Virginia Company’s injunction against colonists publishing negative reports from Virginia. Smith’s experience was not an effective advertisement for the colony, and he may have been enjoined from sharing it. Moreover, if we ask ourselves why his contemporaries did not corroborate his story, we can equally as well ask why they did not correct his story, if indeed it was false. Many people who had been with him at Jamestown were still alive in 1624, and none of them stepped forward.

Much has also been made of Smith having told similar stories in his other accounts, most memorably his story of the Lady Tragabigzanda in Turkey and Lady Callamata in Tartaria. It is not credible to say the least that Smith would so often find himself the center of aborted executions that landed him in the arms of a regent’s
daughter. Some might even call it implausible. Implausibility, however, is more a concern for film critics than historians. The events of real life are all too often implausible. Historians must adhere to the words of Sherlock Holmes: “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

It seems as if, when we look at all the written evidence with a historian’s even-handed skepticism, we have no choice but to accept Smith’s account, however suspiciously. But to do so only highlights the limits of traditional historiography. If we apply some of the methodologies of other disciplines, such as anthropology and performance studies, while still maintaining a skeptical difference and an insistence on falsifiable theories, we can dig deeper into the story.

If we accept one of the basic premises of performance studies—that meaning in a society is imbued through the repetition of socially performed practices—and then apply a basic tenet of anthropology—that societies behave consistently—then we must ask a different question: can we find any corroborative evidence that John Smith would have witnessed a ceremony such as the one he describes? When we look at other accounts of English soldiers who were executed by Powhatans—and there are plenty such accounts—we see a very strong pattern into which Smith’s story does not fit. All other Englishmen we see face execution are tortured to death by having their limbs pulled apart with sharpened mussel shells and thrown into a fire burning behind them. There are no accounts of Englishmen being executed any other way. Therefore, it does not seem that Captain Smith—whatever he may have witnessed—was ever in any serious danger. Looking at the situation through this methodology gives us a strategy for “reading” an
oral culture through the written records of a colonizing force with only minimal interference from the inherent prejudices of the colonist writers.

As to the possibility of Smith having undergone an adoption ritual, I admit that the story is attractive. It allows us to revise history without having to disparage Smith as a liar. However, we should not allow wishful thinking to cloud reasonable judgment. If we apply the above criteria to this question, we quickly see that there are simply no corroborating stories on which to build a pattern of seventeenth century Woodland Indian adoption ceremonies. While it is true that similar adoption ceremonies have been seen in other aboriginal societies around the globe, no legitimate methodology allows us to authoritatively put forth the idea that the Powhatans had such a ceremony. In this last point I differ from every major scholar on this subject except Helen Rountree.

The next major point about which I had to make a decision was Pocahontas’s real name and its meaning. According to Winganuske’s brother Machumps (by way of William Strachey), “Pocahontas” was a nickname meaning “little wanton.” Pocahontas was also known as Amonute, which may have been the name she was given at birth. Samuel Purchas tells us—having heard it secondhand from Rolfe—that Pocahontas declared at her baptism that her “true name” was Matoaka and that she had concealed it from the English “in a superstitious fear of hurt[...].” The standard interpretation of this passage is that Powhatan Indians gave their children secret names in addition to their public names and that these secret names were vulnerable to hexes that could cause harm to the name’s bearer. Such practices do indeed exist in other cultures worldwide. Applying the methodology I used in the last question, however, there is no evidence to corroborate the idea that this practice was common among the Powhatan Indians. A
more reasonable explanation—though a bit less romantic—may be that Matoaka was the adult name of the woman who had as a child been known as Pocahontas and that she had kept this fact from the English so that before her captivity she could have moved throughout her father’s chiefdom undetected.

I therefore decided to treat Matoaka as Pocahontas’s real name and Pocahontas as her father’s nickname. For poetic effect, I added the element of Pocahontas’s mother having given her the name before having moved away (as would have been the custom, according to Helen Rountree). I dealt with the similar issue surrounding Powhatan’s name by using Wahunsenacah as his real name and Powhatan as his royal name, just as in Europe monarchs have often ruled under names quite different from their birth names. These decisions had the virtues of not only being quite possible, but also easy to explain quickly to an audience. The idea of renaming oneself was also consonant with the theme of self-revision that runs through the play.

Most renderings of the Pocahontas narrative forget that John Rolfe was Pocahontas’s second husband (and that she was his second wife). William Strachey tells us that she was married to a man named Kecoom, who is described as a “private captain” in Powhatan’s forces. We know nothing more about him, including what became of him by the time Pocahontas married John Rolfe. There are three justifiable theories: Pocahontas and Kecoom could have divorced before that time (which was not unheard of in Powhatan society), Kecoom could have died (he was, after all, a warrior of some sort), or Pocahontas’s abduction could have rendered their marriage null and void in Powhatan society.
One thing we can safely assume is that Pocahontas’s marriage to Kecoom was one of great mutual affection. Kecoom had no political power, so the marriage was probably not an arranged one, and with her high profile Pocahontas could probably have married anyone she pleased. With that in mind, I chose the option of widowing Pocahontas—not least of all because it was the easiest to explain quickly. I also liked the idea that Pocahontas and Rolfe were both widowed, which would give them a much-needed avenue of understanding. Grief, as it turned out, was also to be a key theme of the play, as I will discuss below.

The choices I made concerning Pocahontas’s marriage to Kecoom were especially relevant to my portrayal of her relationship to Rolfe. There have been several points of view on this relationship over the years. It has been portrayed as a great romance and also as the cruel exploitation of a captive and alternatively as a shrewdly judicious but dispassionate choice on Pocahontas’s part. The most extreme view, related by Linwood “Little Bear” Custalow and Angela Daniel, is that Pocahontas was raped by Thomas Dale, became pregnant, and married Rolfe to save face.

What little evidence we have on this front is an eight page love letter written by Rolfe explaining his feelings to Thomas Dale, whose permission he would have had to get in order to marry the captive. The letter is clearly written by a feverish and smitten hand, although we have no indication as to whether or not those feelings were reciprocated. Years later, when the couple were visiting London, several observers described their marriage as a happy one and Rolfe as a devoted husband.

Once I had accepted Pocahontas’s first marriage as one based on love and not political convenience, it made the most sense to come to the same conclusion about her
second marriage. Based on what I had come to believe about her character, it was unlikely that Pocahontas, as headstrong and forthright as she was in even the most dire circumstances, would have chosen anyone for a husband for any reason other than genuine affection. What’s more, if she had been forced into a marriage she would have made her unhappiness known, as she does at other key events such as her betrayal by Jopassus and her reunion with Smith.

Perhaps the most compelling reason I had for portraying the Rolfes’ marriage as genuine was the fact that it was simply more theatrically interesting and thematically viable. I felt that the play would be enriched if it showed Pocahontas in the moments of bliss, empowerment, and agony that are intrinsic to a marriage between members of starkly different, warring cultures. Furthermore, dramatizing their courtship allowed me the opportunity to explore some of the play’s key themes while bringing out the more human sides of two larger-than-life historical figures. I appreciated as well the challenge as a playwright of portraying a believable love story. The courtship scenes in the finished script are the scenes of which I am most proud.

There is one more element of my inspiration for this play that I want to address, and it has little to do with Pocahontas’s historically documented life. During the period I was working on this play, my stepfather was suffering from cancer. Much of my research was done reading books in doctors’ waiting rooms or sitting next to his bed while he cycled through chemotherapy treatments. This setting surely had an immutable effect on the way I internalized the information and on the ultimate tone of the play. By the time the main writing began, my stepfather was in the end stages and no longer able
to recognize me. I was understandably focused on issues of grief, parenthood, and abandonment.

I made a connection between grief and self-revision. When we grieve, we are in fact revising our world, albeit in a painful manner. As we learn to deal with a world that does not include a lost loved one, we are re-creating ourselves within that new world. This theme also gave me a new spin on the troublesome moniker “New World” that the English used to describe North America. In my play, the “New World” is a post-traumatic world, the world in which we have to deal with the loss of what was once important while navigating the sometimes oppressive presence of memory in our lives. Pocahontas is indeed a key hero of this figurative New World, having navigated the loss of her father, her family, and her culture.

The character I used as Pocahontas’s ally in this new world was Simon Van de Passe. Van de Passe was twenty-one years old when he did the only living portrait of Pocahontas, making him about the same age she was. Van de Passe came from a prominent family of Dutch engravers who had left the Netherlands as religious non-conformists (they were Anabaptists). Simon was a young foreigner who was swept up in the London social scene just as Pocahontas was, and his sympathy for the young lady can be hypothesized based on some features of his engraving.

The most striking element of sympathy in the engraving is the fact that he portrays her as forthrightly non-European. He does not try to soften her native features to match European tastes, as so many later portraits and even contemporary reproductions of this one would do. He also presents her as looking straight at the viewer, which was uncommon in portraits of women at the time. Typically, women would have been
portrayed as coyly looking down or to the side, and only men were portrayed in full-
frontal view. Pocahontas’s hat is also significant, as hats among women were rare and
usually relegated to the middle class. Surely this is not what the Virginia Company had
in mind when they commissioned a portrait of “Princess” Pocahontas. Most significantly,
however, is the caption Van de Passe puts at the bottom of the picture, labeling her as
“Matoaks” from “Attanoughskomouck.” These spellings are not close enough to the
usual spellings of those terms to suggest that he got them from anyone at the Virginia
Company. He probably got them from Pocahontas directly. If that is true, then Van de
Passe is the only person to have performed a simple and gracious gesture: he asked the
woman with four names what she would like to be called.
Chapter Four

Looking Back

_Matoaka_ premiered at Sycamore Rouge in Petersburg, Virginia, on April 20, 2007. It was directed by Beth von Kelsch. Pocahontas was played by Felisha Barnes, and the other characters were portrayed by a small ensemble including Ted Carter, Amy Wolf, John Witkiewicz, and Jeffrey Bass.

The play was not a success. The play was both disappointing financially to the board’s expectations and disappointing artistically to everyone involved. Reviews were unsympathetic. People hated the play; they hated me for writing it. I shared their sentiments.

At the remove of more than one year since the play was produced, I am in a position to be more dispassionate in my appraisal. I still think the play failed as a piece of entertainment, and I think that the blame for that failure is spread fairly evenly amongst everyone who was involved. Beth Denton, the head usher at Sycamore Rouge at that time, may have been the only person attached to the project who performed her job well.

The actors suffered from youth and inexperience. They played emotions rather than objectives, and most of those emotions were played inexpertly. In addition, they were all physically awkward and untrained, which ruined the effect of grace we were trying to establish in the Powhatan Indians. The managing director accomplished the staggering feat of failing to sell a play about Pocahontas in central Virginia during the height of the nation’s 400-year anniversary. Moreover, he failed to provide the media—and hence, the public—with a clear and unambiguous idea of the tone, intention, and
historical verisimilitude of the play. With Sycamore Rouge’s wide variety of programming options, the public had no reasonable way to know whether to expect a pageant or a Reconciliation Project-style deconstruction. Nor did they know whether to expect fact or fiction.

The dramaturg and the producer failed in those aspects of their roles that are relevant to fusing the visions of the playwright and the director. The producer, who should be responsible for the coordination and supervision of all other talents, took a hands-off approach to both the script-development process and the production rehearsal process. The dramaturg failed to maintain a presence in the director’s process or in the rehearsal hall in the interest of defending the author’s intent.

The director made several choices that worked deliberately against the script, a script she made no secret of hating. She played some scenes for broad comic effect, even re-interpreting Reverend Whitaker not as an intense young evangelist, but as a dotty old man. She portrayed other characters as over-the-top drunks. Upon Pocahontas’s arrival in Jamestown, she portrayed the settlers as jeering hyenas, which undercut the validity of her reasons for joining that culture just a few scenes later.

The soundscape idea was cut, as was the costume concept. The set was made of large, heavy pieces that swallowed the stage and left the actors very little room in which to move. The result was a play without texture, leaving little to excite the imagination.

Finally, of course, there are the failures of the script. Susan Haubenstock in her Richmond Times-Dispatch review on Sunday, April 22, described the script as unfocused, which is one of the few points on which I have ever agreed with her. I took too much interest in the historical details that I had chased down in my research and let
them cloud the story I was trying to tell. An early argument between Powhatan and Opechancanough, designed to explain why Powhatan did not attack the English while he still could have won, is especially cumbersome.

Much of the script was originally written in blank verse and later re-formatted into prose. I don’t know if the stilted cadences I heard on opening night were more the fault of the actors or the language itself, but I suspect both are at fault.

The script’s greatest sin is its historical accuracy. As a researcher, I became emotionally attached to the plight of these historical figures who had been greatly maligned by four hundred years of mis-truth. The play that I wrote was much more interested in presenting these truths than in telling a good story. I was too cautious in avoiding imaginative leaps, and the play ultimately failed from a lack of imagination. Although I blame the production for leeching the play of many of its charms, I understand that those charms, had they been present, could never have saved a critically flawed play.

Because of my attachment to contradicting historical misconceptions, I was particularly irritated at the director’s and producer’s insistence—both in program notes and in the media—that the play was not the true story of Pocahontas, but just our version. I had labored rather intensely to ensure that I had historical justification for every episode of the play, except for those elements which are unavoidably invented—such as dialogue or private interactions. The only incident in the script that could not have happened is Opechancanough’s presence when Pocahontas comes ashore at the end of Act Two. Everything else in that scene happens just as the historical record shows, and Pocahontas really did say such a thing to an Indian who was standing there and who was close to
Powhatan. But it was not Opechancanough, who was elsewhere at the time. Every other detail of the play is either clear in the historical record or a logical conclusion based on the existing evidence. The director’s and producer’s insistence on portraying the play as a work of invention was misleading to the public and insulting to me.

Looking back, it is obvious now that neither the director nor the producer were interested in the historical accuracy of the piece. Even more, I am not convinced that either of them ever had an interest in the story at all. I detected at the time an underlying hostility on their part towards historical drama. The director has since told me in conversation that she finds my interest in scholarship and academia effete and frivolous. There was clearly a fundamental dissonance between myself and my collaborators—not only of intention, but also of aesthetic values.

The director, the producer, and I all went to school together and have known each other for years. We were all instrumental in opening Sycamore Rouge and have continued our school-forged relationship in that capacity. We were—and still are—friends. But personal affection is no guarantor of artistic compatibility. The fealty and similarity of spirit that has enriched our personal relationships does not translate into similar views of the purpose, power, and possibilities of the theater. A convenient analogy might be to imagine Robert Wilson, JoAnne Akalaitis, and Robert Bolt collaborating on a piece—although it's hard to imagine those three personalities having a strong personal relationship.

The failure of a new play can be disappointing enough without the added dimension of personal relationships between the artists involved. Personal recriminations born of long-festering resentments all too easily bubble to the surface. A writer never
likes to see his or her work unappreciated, but that sting can become much more acute when it comes with the knowledge that one’s friends do not respect or appreciate one’s outlook on both art and life. It is one thing to tell a person that their work is sub-par; it is quite another to relate their artistic failings to their weaknesses as a human being. The experience of working on *Matoaka* left me personally bruised, not from the harshness of the critics or the indifference of the audience, but from the frank disregard of my friends.

As a result of working on this play, I have decided not to work on any more commissioned pieces for the time being. To date, all of the plays I have written have been commissioned works, which means I have yet to have someone produce one of my plays because they appreciated it for its own merits. Writing a commissioned play is a frustrating exercise in trying to give someone else (usually the director or producer) what they want whether or not they are able to clearly express what they want. It is not the same as writing the play that you want to write. *Matoaka* ended up as neither the play I wanted to write nor the play that Sycamore Rouge wanted to produce.
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Appendix

MATOAKA

A Play in Three Acts

By

Matthew Shifflett
ACT ONE

A silent film is projected on the screen depicting a fictional Pocahontas. Other images begin to appear as silent film fades out. Images are of Pocahontas and various other Indian female archetypes, ranging from Disney to Edward Curtis, if possible. As the slideshow continues, lights slowly rise to half on a table, center stage. On the table are several of the props that are to be used later in the production, such as Opechancanough’s club, Pocahontas’s portrait hat, an English helmet, etc. Actors are gathered in the background in silhouette.

SPEAKER: Pocahontas’s name is everywhere...

SPEAKER: Pocahontas Parkway. Eight-point-eight miles of asphalt and concrete, linking one side of the James River to the other and providing easier access to Richmond International Airport.

SPEAKER: Just off of Interstate 95 is Pocahontas State Park, a convenient getaway for swimming, boating, bicycling, and camping.

SPEAKER: Pocahontas Island is a small community of about 90 people in the middle of the Appomattox River. In the early 19th century, it was the largest community of free blacks in Virginia.

SPEAKER: Pocahontas, Iowa—population two thousand...Pocahontas, Arkansas—population sixty-five hundred...Pocahontas, Illinois—population seven hundred and twenty-seven.

SPEAKER: There are Pocahontas Counties in West Virginia and Iowa, as well as a Pocahontas Village in Oregon.

SPEAKER: Her face...well...someone’s imaginary idea of her face...is everywhere as well...

SPEAKER: The Henrico County seal first appeared in the early 1940’s and was designed by W. B. Wilkins.

SPEAKER: A statue of Pocahontas was erected at Jamestown in 1922, designed by William Ordway Partridge. In 1958, a duplicate of the statue was erected in the British cemetery where she’s buried.

SPEAKER: Disney’s animated film premiered in Central Park on June 10, 1995. The film follows the adventures of Pocahontas as well as her singing raccoon friend. Tired of living in the shadows, singing raccoons everywhere rejoiced.

SPEAKER: Pocahontas has become more than just a historical figure. She’s an emblem of our national identity. The Henrico County website even calls her “the ‘mother’ of our nation, the female counterpart to George Washington.” Throwing her
name around gives a sense of authority...of genuine American-ness. She’s even become a name brand...

SPEAKER: Pocahontas Foods, USA

SPEAKER: Pocahontas State Bank...A New Way of Banking with a Bank that Understands Tradition.

SPEAKER: There’s a website called Pocahontas Garden dot-com. It’s a woman who breeds kittens in Sweden.

SPEAKER: In fact, it seems the only group of people who don’t gain advantage from using Pocahontas’s name are the native tribes of Virginia. The people who, arguably, have the most legitimate connection with her.

SPEAKER: A more legitimate connection than, say...the Land O’ Lakes butter people.

SPEAKER: I see her everywhere, but I still don’t know who she is. I can’t imagine that she dreamed of one day providing easier access to the airport or starring in a Hollywood musical. And anytime I’m driving down something like “Pocahontas Avenue,” that doesn’t make me feel any better about...oh...stealing her people’s land. I know somewhere behind all of the road signs, the statues, and the food labels, there was once a real person.

While the actors have all been talking over top of one another, two more actors have approached the table as the slideshow has ended. They have just enough light to be seen.

SPEAKER 1: (picking up the club from the table) The story most of us know from grade school goes something like this...(Drums begin to beat faintly and gradually crescendo) In the early days of Jamestown, an English captain named John Smith was taken prisoner by the local Indians. He was brought before their great chief Powhatan. Powhatan looked John Smith over and turned his nose up in disgust. With a sneer and a smirk, Powhatan sentenced him to death. (grabs Speaker 2, who plays along as Smith) As the drums began to pound and Smith’s heart began to race, a large rock was dragged out before Powhatan. (They look around. Actors enter hurriedly with a tree stump, which is to be used as a large rock. Speaker throws speaker prone over the rock.) The Indians pinned John Smith down against that rock, and prepared to to do their worst. (Speaker 1 raises club above his head. The drums stop abruptly.) But just then...Powhatan’s beautiful daughter Pocahontas threw herself across the helpless stranger. She told her father that she loved this man and if he was to die, then she would just as well die with him. Powhatan...moved by his daughter’s love...set the stranger free and allowed him to go in peace.
SPEAKER 2: (Raising his head up from the rock) Of course...we can be pretty sure that never happened. (He rises to his feet and gives Speaker 1 a pat on the shoulder.) Nice storytelling, though...

SPEAKER 1: Thanks, man.

SPEAKER 2: You see...first of all, these Indians had a very specific way of executing people who were outsiders—and it didn’t involve getting brained on a rock. If they had wanted to execute John Smith, he would have been tortured to death with sharpened sea shells.

SPEAKER 1: (Shudders) Ugh...

SPEAKER 2: Second of all, it seems highly unlikely that Pocahontas—who was about ten—would have fallen in love with a thirty-year-old man who didn’t speak her language. And since the Indians bathed every day and the English thought bathing was unhealthy, she would have thought he smelled pretty foul, in addition to being hairy and stout.

SPEAKER 1: It’s a fair point.

SPEAKER 2: And third of all...Smith himself...who wrote extensively of his exploits at the time...never mentioned this incident until fifteen years later, when Pocahontas was already famous. Plus...according to his writings, the same thing happened to him in Turkey, in France...in fact, everywhere he went.

SPEAKER 1: The truth is that in 1607, Pocahontas was just a little girl...more interested in turning cartwheels than in saving Englishmen. While she probably did meet John Smith as a child...and may have even gotten to know him...he was just never that important a character in her life.

SPEAKER 2: (As he speaks, he begins to put on some small costume pieces, perhaps a necklace or a cloak. He is becoming Powhatan.) Pocahontas was the daughter of Powhatan, who was the governing chief of about twenty thousand people in the coastal plain of Virginia. Powhatan’s name had been Wahunsenacah, but he changed it when he took power. His name became Powhatan, and the people he governed became known as Powhatans. So Powhatan ruled the Powhatans.

SPEAKER 1: (Similiarly changing himself into Opechancanough.) Powhatan’s powers were mainly diplomatic and domestic. But once he declared military action, he had a cabinet of war chiefs that took control. The leader of these war chiefs was a man named Opechancanough. Opechancanough was probably either Powhatan’s younger brother or possibly an older cousin...we’re not really sure...but we do know that Opechancanough inherited Powhatan’s rulership after his death.
Fully costumed, the two bow to each other. Powhatan exits. Over the course of the next speech, two actors come onstage to strike the table and Pocahontas enters to sit on or near the tree stump.

SPEAKER 2: History is nothing more than a way of explaining what we know of the past from the perspective of the present. History has its value, yes...but history has its limits. History has a way of overshadowing memory, which is the present experience of the past. Memory is a living thing, a thing we try to control with history, just as we write to control language. To make it fixed and stable, as if under museum glass. The way we tell history will always say more about who we are now than who they were then. So while we will never know the truth about Pocahontas’s motivations, her dreams, her fears...we know enough to tell the story more truly than we have been telling it. And the most important events in her life happened several years after John Smith had left Virginia, when Pocahontas was a young woman. Imagine Virginia as it was...look past the buildings and the roads to the forests and rivers, the breezes and sunshine. Imagine a young woman sitting by a river in her father’s kingdom. A young woman once married and already once widowed.

Light change as Speaker 2 exits.

During the last part of Speaker 2’s monologue, we have begun to hear the sounds of a riverbank: birds, frogs...perhaps the whisper of running water. Dollies of tall grass might be used to suggest the outdoors. Pocahontas sits alone, looking out at the water. The light is golden, but over the course of the scene, the lights will gradually redden as befits a sunset.

There is a rustling from behind, and Pocahontas stiffens. On her guard, she perches on her feet and grabs a rock.

POWHATAN: Pocahontas?

POCAHONTAS: ...Father?

POWHATAN: Yes, only me. Winganuske said you would be down here.

POCAHONTAS: (Putting down the rock) You frightened me.

POWHATAN: Yes. Age robs us all of our grace.

POCAHONTAS: I didn’t mean to abandon my duties, father. I’ve been gathering saplings all day, and Winganuske said it would be alright for me to...

POWHATAN: I haven’t come to scold you.

POCAHONTAS: Yes, father. Forgive me, anyhow.
POWHATAN: That’s not like you...taking the path of least resistance. Where’s the wanton daughter I nicknamed Pocahontas...Little Mischief?

POCAHONTAS: I don’t know where that little girl has gone, father. Somewhere far away from here, I expect.

POWHATAN: You missed dinner tonight.

POCAHONTAS: I wasn’t very hungry.

POWHATAN: You haven’t eaten much these last few months.

POCAHONTAS: I will eat more, if it will please you.

POWHATAN: It would please me to see my daughter herself again. Ever since your husband died, it’s as if your spirit has left you.

POCAHONTAS: I do not wish to speak of Kecoom.

POWHATAN: You are still alive, Pocahontas. You did not die with him.

POCAHONTAS: Just the contrary. Pocahontas died with Kecoom. All of my mirth and mischief are gone, all laughter, all color...all gone. I feel like a pile of ash.

POWHATAN: Grief is like the winter. It seizes our joints...makes it hard for us to move. But move we must, or we will freeze and die where we stand.

POCAHONTAS: I...I don’t know how to move, father. It’s as if my body has forgotten. I kept some of his clothes...I know I shouldn’t have, but I couldn’t stand to give them away. I couldn’t bear to lose him all at once. I pull them out and hold them and...and I see that he is so much smaller than I remember. It’s as if he’s moving away from me little by little. Even in my dreams, he has no shape anymore.

POWHATAN: Look out there. Really look. See how rich the colors are just before the sun sets? Every tree, every blade of grass caked in color like red clay. Every bird has come out to make its show, and the surface of the water bristles and glistens in anticipation of swallowing the sun up into itself.

POCAHONTAS: I see it with my eyes, but my heart sees only a gray stillness.

As Powhatan continues, Opechancanough begins to creep up quietly behind them.

POWHATAN: The earth has brought out all of its colors to say goodnight, and they are at their brightest just before they fold into the darkness. Our feelings, too, are at their strongest just before they leave us. Your darkness is just about to break.
POCAHONTAS: Father, I—

Opechancanough makes the same sound louder behind them, thumping his weapon between them. Powhatan and Pocahontas jump.

OPECHANCANOUGH: (laughing) You jump like frogs.

POWHATAN: My cousin sneaks much more quietly than I do.

OPECHANCANOUGH: You were always an easy mark, Wahunsenacah. Even when you were a boy. I used to sneak up on your father all the time. I’d track him through the woods with nice slimy fish on the end of my stick. When he had his back turned...I’d reach that stick out...and squish! (Fakes a girlish scream) He’d take off running like a blinded loon.

POWHATAN: I’d say you were a perverse child, but nothing seems to have changed.

OPECHANCANOUGH: And I’d say you were a gullible child, but for the same.

POWHATAN: Have you come to reminisce over torments of the past?

OPECHANCANOUGH: I wondered if I might have a word.

POWHATAN: Of course. What’s on your mind?

OPECHANCANOUGH: A word alone, cousin.

Powhatan pauses.

POCAHONTAS: It’s all right, father. It will be dark soon anyway.

POWHATAN: Do you need one of us to walk you back?

POCAHONTAS: I can still take care of myself.

POWHATAN: (kissing her forehead) All right, then. I will see you at home. (As she walks off) Be careful your uncle doesn’t creep behind you with a fish.

OPECHANCANOUGH: How is she?

POWHATAN: Not like herself.

OPECHANCANOUGH: She should remarry. Arrange something for her this time.

POWHATAN: No...
OPECHANCANOUGH: A Potomac, perhaps...

POWHATAN: She’s too strong-willed to go around marrying strangers...

OPECHANCANOUGH: You know your daughter better than I do, cousin.

POWHATAN: I do. Which is how I know you haven’t come here to give me parenting advice.

OPECHANCANOUGH: Word is spreading that the English have been trading with the Potomacs.

POWHATAN: That is true.

OPECHANCANOUGH: The Potomacs have always been shifty subjects, cousin. And now they are getting cozy with the English.

POWHATAN: The Potomacs are not so stupid as to cross me, and they are certainly not stupid enough to trust the English. They’re just greedy for metal, is all.

OPECHANCANOUGH: Be that as it may, such generosity is certainly a boon to the English. In the future, they will expect higher prices from us as well.

POWHATAN: I am well aware of the vagaries of trade, cousin. Particularly with the English.

OPECHANCANOUGH: It is time for a War Council.

POWHATAN: All war would bring to us is death. There are other ways. Better ways.

OPECHANCANOUGH: You have exhausted the alternatives. War is all we have.

POWHATAN: I am the leader of my people. It is mine to decide what alternatives we have open.

OPECHANCANOUGH: And as your war chief, it is my place to make you see your alternatives as they are. The strangers will not leave of their own accord. We both know they intend to stay, and we give them no reason not to.

POWHATAN: They will still stay. More of them will come, and they will bring more guns, more swords. These strangers have fearsome weapons, but not the ability to grow even one ear of corn. Our best hope is to retreat to the woods, end trading...we will starve them out.

OPECHANCANOUGH: And they will attack the smaller towns. Stop trading with them and they will steal what they need, murdering your people in the process. Death
is inevitable, the only choice is between dying in battle or dying by the ambush of common thieves. Combat is our only future.

POWHATAN: How convenient that would be for you.

OPECHANCANOUGH: I’m sorry?

POWHATAN: I’m not as feeble as you imagine me to be. You’ve been shopping your ideas all over this land...gathering warriors, inciting hatred...rallying support for this great war in your mind. A war I have yet to declare.

OPECHANCANOUGH: I am only trying to anticipate your needs.

POWHATAN: You are “only trying” to gain the power that you lost in birth. Opechancanough, leading his people to freedom despite his soft and wishy-washy cousin!

OPECHANCANOUGH: You are jumping to hasty conclusions.

POWHATAN: You’ve always resented my power. You’ve always doubted me, never able to see me as anything but the younger cousin you used to tease and torment. You’ve always felt that you were the one who should lead, that you were the more clever, the more fearsome one. And the only way you can override my power is to plunge us into war.

OPECHANCANOUGH: Wahunsenacah...

POWHATAN: Wahunsenacah was a boy! A child in the woods, chasing squirrels and stalking birds...and running ever at your heels, cousin. I am Powhatan. Commander of my people. My dominion stretches from the sea to the mountains, and its because I made it so. Not you, cousin. Who brought peace to this land?

OPECHANCANOUGH: You did.

POWHATAN: And when the Chesapeakes resisted, who wiped them out?

OPECHANCANOUGH: You did, my lord.

POWHATAN: To a man! I have never blanched at the spilling of blood, Opechancanough.

OPECHANCANOUGH: I know, and I apologize. I meant you no disrespect. If I may enjoy your hospitality for the night, I will return to Pamunkey in the morning. But if I may...I have spoken to many of your subjects in these last few weeks. And some of them, I think, confuse Powhatan, the great leader, with Wahunsenacah...an old man that is too fond of his daughter.

POWHATAN: Too fond of his daughter?
OPECHANCANOUGH: You have always shown her great affection, cousin...more so
than a father usually shows to a daughter, especially one of so many. But she is
of age and a widow. For her to live with you now...it’s unseemly.

POWHATAN: My daughter is in a great deal of pain. She needs me right now.

OPECHANCANOUGH: Yes, of course. But I think many of your subjects are
wondering...if you don’t need her as well.

POWHATAN: That’s preposterous.

OPECHANCANOUGH: Perhaps. But it is what they say.

POWHATAN: Who says this? Tell me the man’s name!

OPECHANCANOUGH: With due respect...I am your war chief, not your spy.

POWHATAN: Well, from now on, you tell any man who says that he will smell his own
flesh burning if I get my hands on him.

OPECHANCANOUGH: Perhaps there is a better way...

POWHATAN: What would you have me do, turn her out? Exile my grieving
daughter—is that my people’s idea of seemly fatherhood?

OPECHANCANOUGH: A clear message must be sent to the Potomacs. They must stop
trading with the English.

POWHATAN: And you think I should send my daughter?

OPECHANCANOUGH: She grew up in your court. With all she’s seen and heard, she
was bred to be a diplomat. You never shied from using her with the English.

POWHATAN: She was a child then. Even the English would not harm a child.

OPECHANCANOUGH: And the Potomacs would not dare to harm the favorite daughter
of a fearsome lord. Unless, of course...what they say is right. That you need her
as much as she needs you. (Powhatan gives him a look.) Show them, cousin.
Show them you put your people first.

Drums begin to beat. Actors enter as Indians as set changes to the Powhatan Village.
There is the suggestion of a fire, perhaps the facade of a longhouse. One of the
actors carries a large bowl with food, which is placed before Powhatan, who sits
on a log or platform above everyone else. His cousin, Opechancanough, and his
wife, Winganuske, are dancing along with everyone else. There is music,
merriment, food, etc. Powhatan seems to be enjoying himself, but does not get up
and participate. Opechancanough and Winganuske collapse next to Powhatan as
the music and dancing become more subdued.
OPECHANCANOUGH: Winganuske, I’m dazzled by your beauty...you make my heart fall right out of my chest.

WINGANUSKE: (grabbing for the pipe) More with the smoking, less with the talking.

OPECHANCANOUGH: You married the wrong cousin, Winganuske.

POWHATAN: (receiving the pipe) You shouldn’t be so earnest in flirting with my wives, cousin. I might just fly into a jealous rage.

OPECHANCANOUGH: You should get up and enjoy yourself, cousin. It’s springtime!

POWHATAN: I am too old and too brittle for dancing.

OPECHANCANOUGH: Younger than me, still. Or are you finally willing to admit which of us is the stronger?

WINGANUSKE: He hasn’t done much dancing since Pocahontas left...

OPECHANCANOUGH: She’s been gone two months now...

POWHATAN: That’s not it. I’m just too old for all this...jumping.

WINGANUSKE: (To Opechancanough) See what you’ve caused?

OPECHANCANOUGH: Me? I’m nothing but a harmless old fool, too ridiculous for anyone to pay any mind.

WINGANUSKE: Oh, you sell yourself short. I would not say harmless.

A messenger enters breathlessly and hurries over to Powhatan. He bows respectfully and Powhatan beckons him over. The messenger, blanched and fearful, proceeds to whisper in Powhatan’s ear, apprising him of Pocahontas’s capture and the ransom she is being held for. Powhatan’s face gradually falls.

OPECHANCANOUGH: (laughs bristly at Winganuske’s joke.) Well, what would you say then?

WINGANUSKE: I’d say...you’re an old skunk with a wanton eye. A skunk who smells so strong...not even other skunks will come around with him. A lazy-eyed...loose-boweled...senile old skunk!

OPECHANCANOUGH: Who says I’m senile? I’ll have his eyes out...

WINGANUSKE: You’re hogging the pipe, old skunk.

POWHATAN: Stop!

The drums are silenced. Everyone stops where they are.
MESSENGER:  (Still breathless) It’s Pocahontas...they’ve kidnapped Pocahontas.

Tribespeople begin to murmur.

OPECHANCANOUGH:  (rising fiercely with his weapon in his hand) Who?!  Who’s taken her?

MESSENGER:  The English, sir.  On a great big boat on the Passapatawnzy.

OPECHANCANOUGH:  She got on an English boat?

WINGANUSKE:  Foolish girl!

MESSENGER:  It was the Potomacs, sir.  They tricked her.  They were allied with the English.

WINGANUSKE:  Where is she now?  Are they treating her well?

MESSENGER:  The ship stays still in the harbor.  The English are waiting for her father’s response.

OPECHANCANOUGH:  A ransom?

MESSENGER:  Yes, sir.

OPECHANCANOUGH:  Food and weapons, no doubt.

MESSENGER:  Yes, sir.  And the release of prisoners.

WINGANUSKE:  Prisoners?  We have no prisoners.

MESSENGER:  He wants the Englishmen who live among us returned, ma’am.  He says they’re prisoners of war.

WINGANUSKE:  They live here of their own free will!

OPECHANCANOUGH:  He wants to punish them.  Make an example of them so that he doesn’t lose any more fighting men.

WINGANUSKE:  Vile savage!

OPECHANCANOUGH:  We’ll get her back, cousin.  And the English will pay for this.  They’ll pay dearly.  We will bring such a rain of blood down on their heads—

POWHATAN:  Why did I send her away?  Foolish old man...

OPECHANCANOUGH:  The filth of this deceit will not go unmarked, cousin.
POWHATAN: You did this...you talked me into sending my daughter right into their hands.

OPECHANCANOUGH: I did this?! You think it was me?

POWHATAN: Winganuske...leave us.

WINGANUSKE: Powhatan...

POWHATAN: Go!

*Winganuske scurries off.*

OPECHANCANOUGH: You’re out of your head. You know I’d sooner die than join with the English!

POWHATAN: You taunted my pride and took advantage of my trust...so now I’m supposed to declare the war you always wanted? Is that how this is supposed to happen? Using my own daughter to usurp my power. *(grabbing Opechancanough by the collar)* You miserable...deceitful...mangy cur!

OPECHANCANOUGH: I would advise you to let me go.

POWHATAN: The trading was bait, wasn’t it? Tell me the trading was bait!

OPECHANCANOUGH: *(grabbing Powhatan at the wrist)* Cousin, I’m trying to talk sense into you. But if I have to beat it in, I will.

POWHATAN: I’ll peel the skin off your face, old man.

*Powhatan spits in Opechancanough’s face. Opechancanough swings at Powhatan with his club, which Powhatan blocks. The two scuffle, and Powhatan ultimately gains control of the club.*

POWHATAN: Who’s the great warrior now, Opechancanough? I never thought I’d live to spill the blood of my own cousin...but I never knew my cousin for what he was.

OPECHANCANOUGH: *(kneels with his head on a log.)* Go on then...kill me. Bash in my brains, it’s your right. If I’ve done as you said, then I deserve to die. If you know it in your heart to be the truth, then I accept my fate.

*Powhatan raises the club. He hesitates. He waffles for a moment and then drops the club, exhausted.*

POWHATAN: I’m sorry.

OPECHANCANOUGH: We will get her back, cousin.

POWHATAN: No. No, we won’t. The demands are too great.
OPECHANCANOUGH: Your concessions will mean nothing once they are defeated.

POWHATAN: And how are we to defeat them without guns? We will continue in the morning as planned. We will retreat to the woods, where we cannot be found. The settlers will starve.

SAVAGE: What about Pocahontas?

POWHATAN: I pray they will use her well.

OPECHANCANOUGH: Is this her father’s decision?

POWHATAN: Her father is dead now, forever frozen here in this moment...the last he called his daughter his own.

OPECHANCANOUGH: She will survive, cousin. Just as her father always has.

POWHATAN: I hope you are right. I hope she will do what she must. But I will do what I must. Survive though she may, I fear I shall never lay my eyes upon hers again. For me, she will live only in my grief. My heart is dried, my insides ash...my breath but a frail wind through a lifeless husk. My soul has left me, and from this moment, my body walks on without it.

_Lights down on Powhatan and Opechancanough._

_The messenger enters and transforms himself through a few small costume pieces into an Englishman. He picks up Opechancanough’s club and begins to use it as an axe, chopping at the log. Argall enters with Pocahontas, who is under guard. The axeman stops chopping, stricken with wonder. Argall begins barking orders at him in a nonsense language._

ARGALL: Nin stoond yon lukie tungyak. Gyetten et upbringen Thomas Dale. (Don’t just stand there looking stupid. Go and fetch Thomas Dale.)

AXEMAN: Iddy amo Bogahunnas? (Isn’t that Pocahontas?)

ARGALL: Hut dae yen mahttur. Gyetten, ur tikk cha coopiast! (What does that matter to you? Do as I say, or I’ll have you flogged!)

AXEMAN: Yon, sier. Nai gethed, sier. (Yes sir. Right away, sir.)

_The axeman runs off._

ARGALL: Wilcoomb im ons nik whome, Prinche. Har, har, har... (Welcome to your new home, Princess. Har, har, har...)

_Two Englishwomen pass and are shocked at the sight of Pocahontas._
ARGALL: Yon ist hanner Prinche Pookahoenas. Dootarr neft hanner sulwick krall. (This here’s the Princess Pocahontas. Daughter of the Savage king.)

1ST WOMAN: Luke immat shin klottes. Oonimataple! (Look at what she’s wearing! Unimaginable!)

2nd WOMAN: Shin luke comma ein kreethanim. Shin tutallawy sulwick. (She looks like an animal. She’s positively savage.)

ARGALL: Nin gyetten nie cluss. Shin kreethanim diengeruss. (Don’t get too close, now. She’s a dangerous animal.)

2ND WOMAN: Oh, iddy nik arrayble! (Oh, that’s too horrible!)

ARGALL: Ahns gween protuct ye. Neese ongs ist gut ferben brackatack...im ferben shnoozelbum. (I will protect you. These hands are good for fighting...and for loving.)

2ND WOMAN: Ist iddy soo? (Is that right?)

1ST WOMAN: Yon. Brackatack mammen et shnoozelbum mannken! (Yeah. Fighting women and loving men!)

The women twitter shrilly and walk off, giving Pocahontas a disdainful look.

ARGALL: Gyetten im fernoo. Neeshin nin mammen, nufwise. (You go to hell. She ain’t no woman, anyhow.)

Thomas Dale enters, having been summoned. Argall bows to Dale, as does Pocahontas’s guard. Dale steps up to Pocahontas and begins to inspect her physically, looking at her teeth and pawing her like an object.

DALE: Wass shin treenig vall um vikage? (Was she treated well on the voyage?)

ARGALL: Yon, en essellents. (Yes, your excellency.)

DALE: (so that we and Pocahontas can understand) Welcome here. You feel well?

POCAHONTAS: As well as can be expected.

DALE: Sorry...very sorry for...everything. We make you...welcome. We give clothes for you. Learn Bible. You have English?

POCAHONTAS: I...have?...oh, English? I remember just a few words from my childhood, not much.

Dale does not understand.

POCAHONTAS: Um...little. Little English.
DALE: Yes. You make more. Need we give clothes for you first.

_Englishwomen enter while the set is changed to Reverend Whitaker’s house. The women dress Pocahontas in a petticoat, a bodice, and an overskirt. Pocahontas is visibly uncomfortable in the clothes and has a hard time moving in them. Reverend Whitaker approaches her as his table is being set for dinner._

WHITAKER: Wilkoomb im mine whome. Et emmen luke sharabo en skurten. Nikstahg ons berjinnen en Bible. Onstahg, bid kumen and ett. (Welcome to my home. You really look lovely in that dress. Tomorrow we will begin our Bible study. In the meantime, won’t you sit down for dinner?)

_Pocahontas awkwardly stumbles over to the table and sits on a bench. Whitaker and his housekeeper remain standing and bow their heads. Pocahontas pops back up and tries to do the same._

WHITAKER: O tata, bleesen es etten, et bleesen es whome, et bleesen es lang. Bleesen ons, en decca, O tata, nik ons richefen en bleesentag et bleesen iddy, ons meeshun en ons Noofurld. Bleesen ons geest onstahg, fer luke ip ommen cootanenance et wulken en machump. Bleesen mein ongs et bleesen mein parse, farr to tick shin yoostly farr en bleesenhummel num. Allitid. (O lord, bless this food, bless this house and bless this land. Bless us, your children, O lord, that we might receive your blessings and bless this, our mission in our New World. Bless our guest tonight, that she may look upon your countenance and learn to walk in your path. Bless my hands and my mouth, that I may teach her justly in your holy name. Amen.)

HOUSEKEEPER: Allitid. (Amen)

_Pocahontas goes to sit. When Whitaker continues, she stands back up._

WHITAKER: Et bleesen ya mennen om Henrico et ya mennen om Jamestown, O tata, Farr to walken en machump farr to kumen wit yen im es Gloriestahg. Allitid. (And bless the people of Henrico and the people of Jamestown, O lord, that they may follow more closely in your path. Guide them away from temptation that they might sit with you on that day of glory. This we pray in your name. Amen.)

HOUSEKEEPER: Allitid. (Amen.)

POCAHONTAS: Allitid.

_Housekeeper shoots Pocahontas a scolding look, but Whitaker smiles benignly, if condescendingly._

WHITAKER: Et onstahg ons pryen ees en tickt ons pryen, sehlig: (And now we pray as you have taught us to pray, saying:)
WHITAKER AND HOUSEKEEPER: (in unison)

Ons tata
um kelf Winshara
Bleesenhummel baath en wah
En Konkreek yahn
En Akh bree doh
Nai Gingham ach fel Winshara.
Arnega ons dahg
Ons thithiol bara
Et vergeef ons adderwyth
Angzen adderwyth vergeefen ons schenden
Litt ons nitt fristelse
Onge matterbalch ons klondur
Mor entus breek hanner Konkreek,
Hanner balschder
Et hanner maken,
Omshara.
Allitid.

*Whitaker and the Housekeeper sit down, and Pocahontas follows suit. They begin to eat, all of them with their fingers. Whitaker and his housekeeper also employ metal knives in a way Pocahontas unsuccessfully tries to emulate. Whitaker pours drinks into everyone’s goblet from a glass pitcher in the middle of the table. Pocahontas tries to drink from her glass, but is unfamiliar with stemware and spills it on the table. The housekeeper bolts up in disgust, but Whitaker tries to calm her.*

WHITAKER: Pahchens, pahchens. (Patience, Patience.) (He begins to wipe up the spill with his napkin.) Ware too freeshed hire...gyetten et strattum ein flay. (It’s awfully cold in here...why don’t you go start a fire?)

*The Housekeeper casts a sidelong glance at Pocahontas and shuffles over to the fireplace. She builds a fire as Whitaker very paternally pours a glass of water for Pocahontas. With the fire lit, the housekeeper returns to the table. Pocahontas gazes at the fire.*

*As Pocahontas looks into the fire, the mantelpiece is removed to reveal Powhatan, Winganuske, and possibly other Indians sitting around the fire, eating. As they eat, they tell stories. Whitaker and his Housekeeper continue to eat quietly as Pocahontas drifts into her memory.*

POWHATAN: The English have released one of the prisoners, but they still have many more. I’ve decided to send an emissary first thing in the morning.

WINGANUSKE: Who?
POWHATAN: (Beat.) Pocahontas.

WINGANUSKE: But Powhatan...she’s only ten years old!

POWHATAN: And the English wouldn’t dare harm her. Besides, she picked up a little English when Captain Smith was here. She’s as good a choice as anybody.

WINGANUSKE: Jamestown is a dangerous place for our people...let alone a ten-year-old girl.

POCAHONTAS: (From the table) I would love to go, father!

POWHATAN: See there? She’s spunky.

WINGANUSKE: She’s a little girl. She doesn’t know what danger is. You’re an old man and you should know better.

POCAHONTAS: I’ll be careful, father.

POWHATAN: Yes, you will. Conduct yourself out in the open...don’t go into any of their buildings. And no matter what...don’t get on board any of their boats.

WINGANUSKE: What if something were to happen to her? What if they kidnap her, too?

POWHATAN: If they had every tree in the forest as their army, they could not keep my little girl away from me. I would move the earth to get her back.

*Whitaker begins speaking again, pulling Pocahontas out of her memory.*

WHITAKER: Yen nein etten? Etten, etten? (You’ve barely touched your food. Is there something wrong with it? Your food...is there something wrong?)

POCAHONTAS: (clutching her stomach, trying to communicate) I’m sorry. I’m not very hungry. Not hungry.

*Whitaker nods, seeming to understand. He motions for the housekeeper to begin clearing the plates, which she does. Before she can leave the room, Whitaker stops her.*

WHITAKER: Shultemesc. Ons marr pryen. (Wait. Let us have another prayer.)

*Whitaker takes Pocahontas’s hand and places his other hand on her forehead. All three bow their heads. As they do, lights come back up on Pocahontas’s memory, where Powhatan is giving a benediction.*
POWHATAN: The English have returned to these woods. We do not know why they have come nor how long they will stay. We do not know whether they intend friendship or violence. But we will trade with them...we will earn their trust as they earn ours. These friends may seem alien to us now...they are as strange as the future itself. But it is a new world they bring with them, a new power by which they may serve our people, and make greater our name throughout this land.

I am aware of the fear that a new world brings. Fear is nothing more than grief anticipated. Well, we need not expect grief. Everything lives as long as the last person who remembers it, and so long as our memory shall live, we should have no cause for grief. Although we would drown in the icy waters of grief, memory is like a flame that engulfs us without consuming us. Our memory and the memory of our ancestors walk beside us through this life, giving the world its color. Every time we love, every time we weep, smile, laugh, or hurt, it is memory that makes it so. The man without memory is worse than dead. He only enters and exits. He does not live; he only breathes.

And so, here is the question you must ask of your heart: Do I have the courage to live in a new world? By the names and the spirits of all who have brought me here, I am ready. For now, our dreams call us home to them and our heavy heads must answer. Goodnight, my children.

Lights down on the memory.

WHITAKER AND HOUSEKEEPER: Allitid.

Whitaker and Housekeeper exit.

POCAHONTAS: Allitid.

Blackout.

ACT TWO

Reverend Whitaker’s home.

Pocahontas sits alone at the table, reading the Bible. The housekeeper enters with a loaf of bread. She sets it on the table before Pocahontas, who begins to tear off chunks. The Housekeeper looks on disdainfully.

HOUSEKEEPER: Can you really read all that?
POCAHONTAS: Of course I can. Reading’s not so hard. I reckon anyone can do it.

The housekeeper is silent.

POCAHONTAS: Can you read?

HOUSEKEEPER: (She can’t read) I don’t need to play your childish little games.

POCAHONTAS: Because you can’t read?

HOUSEKEEPER: Because—I am a lady, not a wanton child, and I have no patience for games.

POCAHONTAS: Then why are you hovering over me? To make sure I don’t steal the knife? Try and slit your throat in the night?

HOUSEKEEPER: You don’t frighten me.

POCAHONTAS: Good. I’ve no reason to.

The housekeeper storms off, bumping into Reverend Whitaker, who is on his way in.

WHITAKER: I see you are continuing your campaign of charm towards my housekeeper. What, pray tell, have you put that woman through this time?

POCAHONTAS: Her stench was ruining my appetite.

WHITAKER: Your appetite, indeed, well...my dear girl, your barbed wit does not bother me, as you know. But you must be careful. Not everyone in this colony wishes you no harm.

POCAHONTAS: I understand my situation perfectly, Reverend. I am a prisoner. A well-fed prisoner to be sure, but not as free to roam even as the pigs in your streets.

WHITAKER: It’s blasphemous, my dear, to compare yourself to an animal. That’s exactly what the worst of them out there think of you. You’ll only...listen, you are my guest here. I don’t wish for you to feel imprisoned.

POCAHONTAS: Guest? You can’t be serious.

WHITAKER: My guest, yes. I intend for you to spend your time in this city learning English and studying the word of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Now, your studies have been going so very well, I don’t wish to see them break down now because...

POCAHONTAS: I am here because your countrymen believe—foolishly—that you can coerce my father into surrendering to the ludicrous demands you have placed on
him. I am a hostage, not a guest, and that makes your fascination with me no less degrading than your housekeeper’s disgust.

WHITAKER: I do not intend to argue with you, my lady. It is time we began our bible lesson.

_Whitaker slides the Bible over to his side of the table. The Housekeeper appears at the door._

HOUSEKEEPER: Reverend...pardon me for intruding, but High Marshall Dale is here.

WHITAKER: Oh my, yes. Show him up...please!

_Housekeeper exits._

POCAHONTAS: Reverend, I wonder if I might be permitted to retire for the afternoon.

WHITAKER: Retire? But Marshall Dale is on his way...

POCAHONTAS: Yes, sir, but I feel a touch of a fever coming on, and I feel I should lie down.

WHITAKER: Oh, no, we certainly don’t want you taking ill. I’ll make apologies for you, you go lie down.

POCAHONTAS: Thank you, sir.

_Pocahontas goes to exit, running into Dale at the doorway._

POCAHONTAS: Marshall Dale, how nice to see you.

DALE: You’re not leaving, are you?

WHITAKER: I’m afraid she’s not feeling well, Sir Dale.

DALE: Well, if the lady isn’t feeling well, then we should let her go. With my regrets...

POCAHONTAS: (stifling her resentment) Thank you, sir. (Exits.)

DALE: Reverend, thank you for having me. I am so sorry to drop by unannounced...

WHITAKER: Don’t be silly, Marshall Dale. You are always welcome here.

DALE: As you know, we have heard nothing from King Powhatan these several months.

WHITAKER: I can assure you, our young lady has not lost hope. She is a most persevering creature. She has dealt with the circumstances as well as she could be expected to and dare I say, better.
DALE: That...well, yes, I am certainly glad to hear that, but that is not my concern.

WHITAKER: Oh?

DALE: It would appear Captain Argall’s plan has not played out as he hoped. King Powhatan has called us on our bluff. It would behoove us to force a denouement to this situation as soon as possible, to maintain peace while avoiding losing face. In two weeks’ time, it’ll be March and the frosts will abate. At that time, I have ordered Captain Argall to sail up the river and deliver her at her father’s doorstep. If he wishes to refuse us then, he will have to do so blatantly, in front of his daughter and his people.

WHITAKER: Sail? On a boat? How many men strong?

DALE: One hundred, one hundred-fifty.

WHITAKER: That’s...I’m sorry, but do you think it’s anyplace for a Christian woman? Alone on a boat with one hundred and fifty men?

DALE: A Christian woman, reverend?

WHITAKER: Her lessons are going very well. She shows a great understanding of the subject. This is hardly the time in her education to be exposed to...

DALE: Forgive me, reverend, but I did not come seeking your permission.

WHITAKER: Forgive me, sir.

DALE: I expect you to make the proper preparations over these next few weeks. (Rising to go). The Lord keep you, reverend.

WHITAKER: Sir Dale...there is one more thing before you go. Her lessons have gone very well, and she has picked up English magnificently. But I fear the confinements of this house do dim her spirits a bit.

DALE: Yes?

WHITAKER: I was wondering if you might see fit...maybe just sometimes...if she could have...a little...freedom—to move around through the city and such.

DALE: It could present some problems...

WHITAKER: I assure you, she is the most civil of creatures. Why, even as a girl, she has always shown a great deal of charm towards the English.

DALE: Nevertheless, I do not believe she would be well-served by indulging in the idleness of wandering the town of Henrico.

WHITAKER: Yes, sir...of course.
DALE: On the other hand, if you wish to bring her into town with you on Sundays for prayer and catechism, that is entirely your domain. And if you saw fit to bring her to my plantation on Saturday evenings, a group of us gather for prayer and fellowship...I’m sure we could find it in our hearts to welcome her.

WHITAKER: Yes...thank you kindly, Sir Dale.

*Whitaker is left alone. He picks up his bible and begins to walk downstage.*

WHITAKER: Yes, yes. An excellent opportunity. An opportunity for us both. I think perhaps this week, I will mark it with a story of captivity...Daniel, perhaps...Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Or...ah! Yes, yes. “And they called Rebekah, and said to her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ She said, ‘I will go.’ And they blessed Rebekah and said unto her, ‘Our sister, be the mother of thousands of ten thousands; and may your descendants possess the gate of those that hate them.’

*Through this monologue, actors have struck the set of Whitaker’s house and replaced it with church pews. All are sitting and listening to him preach intently.*

WHITAKER: “She went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her: ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, and the elder shall serve the younger.’ When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came forth red, and they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came forth, and his hand had taken hold of Esau’s heel, so his name was called Jacob.” These are the blessed words of our Lord in his most holy scripture. Amen.

*The congregation rises and begins to disperse. Pocahontas remains seated. John Rolfe retreats to the corner and begins to pack a pipe.*

TOWNIE 1: Well, looky here. If it ain’t the great Princess Pokeyhonnas...

TOWNIE 2: Well, stuff me, brothah...she don’ look too much like a princess from here.

TOWNIE 1: A jaw an’ shoulders like tha’ an’ she migh’ pass for a prince. Hello, luv. Doin’ a spot o’ readin’ are ya?

TOWNIE 2: Fancy a girl wot can read!. Why don’ ya read us a little spell there?

POCAHONTAS: What’s the matter? Can’t read for yourselves? Not old enough?

TOWNIE 2: Tha’s right, luv. I’m not old enough for readin’! Too young an’ good lookin’.

POCAHONTAS: Well, what about him. Is he too young, too?

TOWNIE 2: Him? Naw, he’s jus’ stupid.
TOWNIE 1: Hey, watch yer tongue, mate, or I’ll nail it to your cod. Y’see, miss, it ain’t wot we can’t read, just as we’d love to hear the words comin’ out o’ yer lovely mouth.

POCAHONTAS: Oh, I see how it is. My mouth, then? You really think it’s lovely?

TOWNIE 1: Like a ripe strawberry it is.

POCAHONTAS: Ahh.

TOWNIE 2: You know, we never laid eyes on a strawberry ’till we was in Virginia.

POCAHONTAS: Is that right?

TOWNIE 2: Aye, love. Delicious little buggers. We was wondrin’ if all the native fruits of Virginia tasted quite so...sweet.

TOWNIE 1: An’ juicy...

*John Rolfe has lit his pipe and begins to cough fiercely.*

POCAHONTAS: Who’s that man over there?

TOWNIE 1: Who, him? No need to bother with him, love.

TOWNIE 2: Hm. No need. None.

POCAHONTAS: What’s his name?

TOWNIE 2: Tha’s John Rolfe, is who tha’ is. But he don’ tarry with nobody. Jus’ grows his tobaccer an’ don’ engage noways.

TOWNIE 1: And a righ’ foul lot o’ tobbacer it is. *(Calling)* Still tryin’ to smoke yer sotweed, Johnny?

*Rolfe ignores them.*

TOWNIE 2: See wha’ I mean, luv? He don’ talk to no one hardly. Keeps to hisself.

TOWNIE 1: I thought it were just the grief at first. A healthy period of whatcher call...bereavement. But it’s been almost four years now.

POCAHONTAS: Bereaved? Is he a widower?

TOWNIE 2: Bang on, luv. Lost his wife just after they got here. Lost a child, too. Name o’ Bermuda. The child didn’t even make it to Virginia.

POCAHONTAS: No?
TOWNIE 1: Tha’s right, luv. We was on the boat with ‘em ourselves. ‘At’s a hard journey for any man, let alone a woman wi’ child. Storm threw us up on an island in the Carribean. Months we spent there. ‘At’s where she had the child. Still buried there, it is.

TOWNIE 2: Now he thinks he can raise a fortune growing tall tobaccer here in Virginia. Out of his bloody head, if yer ask me.

TOWNIE 1: Sotweed, tha’s what me mum used to call it. Said it addles yer brain, like.

TOWNIE 2: Never bring a fortune so long as the king taxes it wot like he does. Tha’s my opinion. *(Calling)* Hey, Johnny...we was just telling the princess here abou’ yer sotweed. Tellin’ her abou’ the greaaaat fortune it’s gonna bring to ya.

*Rolfe continues to ignore them.*

TOWNIE 1: We was also tellin’ her what a master at conversation you is. Can’t never shut up, can yer?

ROLFE: A tree grows silently...and it comes to greater eloquence than any man I ever met.

TOWNIE 1: Oh, tha’s you alright, Johnny. A right craggy ol’ tree you are.

TOWNIE 2: What a foul git he is.

POCAHONTAS: I’m terribly sorry, gentlemen. I’ve kept you here so long. You must be itching to get over to William Percy’s house.

TOWNIE 1: William Percy? What would we want with a grotty bunghole like William Percy?

POCAHONTAS: Well, I heard he was opening some whiskey tonight for friends after prayers. Didn’t he invite you two?

TOWNIE 1: Well, don’t that bugger it? If that turd’s pouring whiskey an’ didn’t invite us...

TOWNIE 2: I’ll nail his goolies to the church door, I will...

TOWNIE 1: Lovely talkin’ with yer, yer Highness.

*They hurry off, mumbling.*

TOWNIE 2: Don’t call her “yer Highness.”

TOWNIE 1: Well she’s a princess, ain’t she?

TOWNIE 2: But she ain’t your princess, is she?
Pocahontas approaches John Rolfe.

POCAHONTAS: Hello. I don’t believe we’ve met.

ROLFE: Name’s John Rolfe. It’s a pleasure.

POCAHONTAS: My name is Pocahontas.

ROLFE: Yes, everyone knows your name, if you don’t mind me saying.

POCAHONTAS: I’m sorry...would you mind...it’s been an awfully long time since I’ve had a smoke.

ROLFE: You smoke tobacco, do you? Well...this is all but done. Let me pack you another.

POCAHONTAS: Oh, no—I didn’t mean for you to...

ROLFE: It’s no bother. Have a seat.

Pocahontas sits as Rolfe empties the pipe and begins to pack it fresh.

ROLFE: I must say, I’ve never known of a princess that smoked a pipe before.

POCAHONTAS: Oh, I’m...I’m not really a princess.

ROLFE: You’re father’s the King, ain’t he?

POCAHONTAS: Well...that’s...that’s not really how it works with my people.

ROLFE: Your father smoke a pipe?

POCAHONTAS: Oh yes. All of my uncles, too.

ROLFE: Saw you sitting over there with those two jackanapes. Didn’t give you any trouble, did they?

POCAHONTAS: Oh, I can take care of myself pretty well.

ROLFE: Yeah, I heard. Lovely bit about William Percy. Still, you should watch that you don’t come up with fleas from the likes of those two.

POCAHONTAS: Oh, no...fleas only live on dogs, never on other fleas.

ROLFE: Yeah. (Lights the pipe.)

POCAHONTAS: You grew this yourself, did you?
ROLFE: Yeah...I’m still trying to work out some minor problems, but...I think it’s coming along pretty nicely. *(Hands off to Pocahontas)*

POCAHONTAS: Well, let’s see. *(Inhales. Takes a beat and then coughs violently.)* Oh, that’s really pretty awful, isn’t it?

ROLFE: Well, as I said, it has some minor problems. *(Pocahontas keeps coughing.)* More than I thought, apparently.

POCAHONTAS: You’re cutting off the tips?

ROLFE: What, now?

POCAHONTAS: There’s a seed head, right up at the top. You’ve got to cut that off.

ROLFE: I’ve never heard of anything like that. They don’t do that in Spain.

POCAHONTAS: Well...I imagine they have more rainfall in Spain. Different soil, perhaps. But as long as the seed head is there, the leaves will never grow right. You’ve got to cut the top off so the water goes to the leaves. That’s what makes them sweet.

ROLFE: How do you know all this?

POCAHONTAS: Oh, I know a thing or two about growing plants. Especially tobacco.

ROLFE: How do I know it won’t just kill my plants? You could be trying to trick me.

POCAHONTAS: Oh, yes. It’s all part of a very elaborate bit of espionage. My father arranged to have me kidnapped so I could come here and ruin John Rolfe’s tobacco crop.

ROLFE: Tobacco seeds are not easy to come by, is all.

POCAHONTAS: Well, I guess you’re going to have to trust me.

ROLFE: Trust you?

POCAHONTAS: *(Sighs heavily.)* The English. Will you trust none of us?

ROLFE: It’s not that, I just...I’ve put all that I have into this venture and...I’ve lost a lot to get here.

POCAHONTAS: I understand that.

*She is silent for a moment.*

ROLFE: You know what? I’ll try it. I reckon at least two people around here ought to trust each other.
POCAHONTAS: Then I'll win over the English one man at a time. *(She reaches out to shake his hand, but he brings hers up to his lips and kisses it. There is a beat.)*

ROLFE: I’m sorry, I thought...

POCAHONTAS: No, no...

ROLFE: It’s just that we don’t ordinarily shake the hand of a lady and...

POCAHONTAS: Not even one who smokes a pipe?

ROLFE: Well...ha...there is that, I guess.

*Whitaker is heard approaching offstage.*

POCAHONTAS: Here comes Reverend Whitaker. *(Hands him the pipe.)*

ROLFE: Yes.

POCAHONTAS: It’s been lovely talking with you, Master Rolfe.

ROLFE: *(Whispers as Whitaker enters with Sir Dale)* Call me John.

WHITAKER: Well, I see our princess has met the illustrious John Rolfe. Talking her ear off about tobacco, I expect?

ROLFE: The princess was just reciting some of the Bible verses you taught her. I must say, reverend, your work has been extraordinary.

WHITAKER: Oh, thank you very kindly, sir. I do all that a sinful human can do and pray that God guides me through the rest. You see, Sir Dale, this is exactly what I had hoped. Her education is enriched by the fellowship of a good Christian man like Master Rolfe. And you worried that she would fall in with a bad lot.

DALE: I seem to have feared needlessly, reverend. It is very gratifying to see our young princess engaged in...”extracurricular” Bible study. Tell me, what book were you studying?

ROLFE: Um...

POCAHONTAS: Habakkuk.

WHITAKER: Habakkuk! Yes, well...an often neglected book of the Old Testament, but unfairly so, I’ve always felt. Of course, Job is a more well-known tale of suffering, but...Habakkuk has quite a poetry to it. “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and thou wilt not hear? Or cry to thee ‘Violence!’ and thou wilt not save?”
DALE: (eyeing Pocahontas suspiciously) Yes, reverend...a noble and humane sentiment. But perhaps a bit disspiriting given current circumstances. After all, we wouldn’t want our Princess to lose that hopeful nature you spoke of. Persevering, you called it?

POCAHONTAS: Yes, Sir Dale, but we must find peace in the Lord as he answers back...”Still the vision awaits its time. The arrogant man shall not abide. His greed is as wide as She’ol; like death, he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations, and collects as his own all peoples.”

John Rolfe is surprised that she can actually recite.

WHITAKER: What did I tell you? A prodigy in the Lord if ever I’ve seen one.

DALE: Yes. A very clever young lady. It is a great wonder why her father drags his feet so. I should think she would be a jewel of her people. It’s good to see she has not lost her spirit in the face of such...rejection.

WHITAKER: Well, I’m sure the whole matter will be resolved soon. In the meantime, the sun is almost set and we have several miles to go downriver. Come, my dear. (He takes Pocahontas’s arm and leads her towards the door.) Did you know, it was a professor of mine at Cambridge that did the translation of Habakkuk. He was a most pious fellow, really...a bit slovenly in dress, I’m afraid, but the rigors of the spirit kept him in constant distraction from worldly appearance—as you can imagine...

Lute and recorder music begins to play as actors change the set.

Reverend Whitaker’s home. Pocahontas is seated at the table, looking over Reverend Whitaker’s Bible. Enter Whitaker, with Rolfe.

WHITAKER: My dear, forgive the intrusion...but Mister Rolfe here has reminded me that I must not sacrifice the time I put into my own personal scriptural studies, or my sermons may suffer, and I think he is quite right about that. So if it is at all agreeable to you, I will let him lead your study this afternoon and we shall see how well it fits.

Pocahontas opens her mouth to speak.

WHITAKER: Don’t worry, my dear...I know how you treasure our time together. We will still have our study as planned in the mornings—

Pocahontas opens her mouth to speak again.

WHITAKER: Yes...I know that affairs of the soul are of the deepest importance, and must be undertaken with only the most trusted mentor. The...intimacy that you and I enjoy cannot be replicated with just anyone. A man of falseness or a vain pedagogue could lead you astray and possibly into eternal damnation. Well, I can
personally vouch for the virtue and humility of Mr. Rolfe, and I hope you will come to see him with—

POCAHONTAS: I was just going to say, reverend, that I would find it most agreeable.

WHITAKER: Oh...of course. Well as I was saying, I hope you will come to see him with the same warmth and...affection with which you regard me. And so...I suppose I shall...leave you to it!

*Whitaker pats Rolfe on the shoulder and exits.*

ROLFE: I see you are doing well.

POCAHONTAS: And yourself?

ROLFE: Oh, yes. Exceedingly well.

*Silence.*

POCAHONTAS: Well, come on...out with it.

*Rolfe pulls out a pipe and begins to pack it excitedly.*

ROLFE: You were right...the leaves are fatter and greener than ever. I must say I never would have thought of it...

POCAHONTAS: Every living thing cares more for its seed than for itself. Take the seed away from it, and it will look only after itself. Just ask my father.

ROLFE: I'm sure that's not the case. Why, even right now, your father is probably gathering his—

POCAHONTAS: I do not wish speak of my father.

ROLFE: Forgive me. I didn’t mean to—

POCAHONTAS: Well, come on, come on...

*Rolfe lights up. After drawing in a breath, he passes to Pocahontas. She draws in a breath and makes a pensive face.*

POCAHONTAS: Well...it’s better.

ROLFE: Better? It’s loads better. It’s like a whole different plant.

POCAHONTAS: How do you dry the leaves?

ROLFE: I cover them with some dry grass and leave them in the sun.
POCAHONTAS: All bunched together?

ROLFE: Yeah.

POCAHONTAS: No. You’ve got to hang them up, one by one.

ROLFE: That’ll take forever.

POCAHONTAS: Yes, it will seem to. It’s tedious work, but well worth it.

ROLFE: You’ve done this before?

POCAHONTAS: Oh, many times.

ROLFE: You should come with me then. I mean, I know it’s a lot of work to ask of you. But if I could show you the crop, perhaps you could give some more advice...

POCAHONTAS: Oh, I don’t think so...

ROLFE: I’m sorry, it’s too much for me to ask. Forgive me...

POCAHONTAS: No, no...

ROLFE: You’ve been so generous already and...

POCAHONTAS: No, it’s...it’s not that, it’s just...they don’t exactly let me roam freely through the colony.

ROLFE: Oh.

POCAHONTAS: I am still, for all intents and purposes, a prisoner.

ROLFE: I’ll talk to Marshall Dale. I’m sure we can work something out.

POCAHONTAS: I don’t think Sir Dale trusts me.

ROLFE: Well, the High Marshall Thomas Dale does indulge in a little bit of...*(points to the pipe.)*...if you know what I mean.

POCAHONTAS: Really?

ROLFE: Doesn’t like for word to get around, you know...might get back to his wife in England, but he and I have a bit of an understanding. Under the table if you will. He’s gonna be wild about this new stuff, and if there’s the promise of an even better crop...

POCAHONTAS: Take it to him.

ROLFE: I will, I will. In the meantime, we probably should...you know...
POCAHONTAS: Probably should...?

ROLFE: The scriptures, I mean. It is why I’m here. I mean officially.

POCAHONTAS: Oh, absolutely.

ROLFE: (opening up Bible) Now, I don’t know exactly where you—

POCAHONTAS: I wonder...if you don’t mind...if we could just close the book.

ROLFE: I don’t understand.

POCAHONTAS: I have the book with me, always. I can read it. But I want to learn about what’s not in the book.

ROLFE: How do you mean?

POCAHONTAS: I want to know how you tell the story.

ROLFE: There’s only one way to tell the story. It’s not something that can be changed.

POCAHONTAS: But you change it all the time!

ROLFE: I beg your pardon?

POCAHONTAS: Leviticus, for instance. The first seven chapters of Leviticus are all about animal sacrifices. Excruciating detail about how to make an animal sacrifice. Am I right?

ROLFE: I...I think so.

POCAHONTAS: But you don’t even make animal sacrifices! Not one. And you don’t wear robes, and you don’t anoint anyone’s head with oil. You worship in churches, not in temples. Your life is nothing like what’s in this book.

ROLFE: Well, that’s the history of it, you see. Those were just the customs of the time.

POCAHONTAS: Well, surely God is still a part of your lives today...

ROLFE: Absolutely.

POCAHONTAS: Then why do you look so closely for God in history books? Abraham and Isaac didn’t have a Bible...the stories they knew were told from one person to another. So tell me a story.

ROLFE: I’m sorry, I...I don’t have any stories to tell.
POCAHONTAS: The night we met, Whitaker was reading a passage from Genesis.

ROLFE: Isaac and Rebekah?

POCAHONTAS: There you go. Light another pipe and tell me the story of Isaac and Rebekah.

ROLFE: (reaches for the Bible) Well as you said, that’s from the book of Genesis...

POCAHONTAS: (blocks his hand) Don’t read me the story. Tell me the story.

ROLFE: (packing the pipe) Well...uh...it starts, I guess...you see, Abraham lived among the Canaanites, and the Canaanites were enemies of the Mesopotamians. After Abraham’s wife died, he commanded one of his servants to go find a wife for his son Isaac—but not a Canaanite woman. Abraham sent his servant to Mesopotamia. The servant stopped at a well just outside the city walls when a beautiful young woman named Rebekah came along. Rebekah was not only beautiful, but kind, and she gave water to the servant and to his camels.

POCAHONTAS: Camels?

ROLFE: Ohhhh...camels...um...(gets up and starts to mime a camel) Okay. All fours. Right? Big hump. Knobby knees. And he chews...he chews and chews and chews and then—(spits) he spits.

Pocahontas laughs at Rolfe’s charades and picks up the pipe. He gradually gets more and more caught up in his own story.

ROLFE: People ride them through the desert because they don’t have to stop for water as often as a horse. They make good pack animals, but they’re dumb as dirt and stubborner than anything. So...Rebekah takes the servant back to her family’s home so he’ll have a place to spend the night. But when the servant reaches her home he asks for Rebekah’s hand in marriage. For his master, of course. Well, Rebekah’s family tells him that the decision is Rebekah’s, not theirs, and they ask Rebekah what she wants to do.

POCAHONTAS: She would be marrying her people’s enemy.

ROLFE: Yes, but she decides to do it anyway. Because she knows that it will make peace.

POCAHONTAS: And did it?

ROLFE: Yes. Her family blessed her and promised that she would be the mother of a nation.
POCAHONTAS: Isaac was satisfied with his new wife?

ROLFE: Isaac had been deep in grief over the death of a loved one. He was meditating in a field, they say, despondent and withdrawn, when Rebekah first came to him. Across the field, their eyes met, and Rebekah leapt down from her camel. She turned to the servant next to her and asked, “Who’s that man over there?” The servant told her it was Isaac, and then he approached Isaac, telling him of his father’s wish and what he had done. So Isaac, he took Rebekah into his tent and...(smiles)...and...his grief melted away from him. He was forever changed.

_Pocahontas and John are lost in the story for a silent moment._

POCAHONTAS: It is a good story. They are brave people.

ROLFE: She is brave, certainly. I think...she is one of the bravest women I have ever met.

POCAHONTAS: Met?

ROLFE: Heard of, I mean.

POCAHONTAS: But he is brave, too. It takes a brave heart to cast off grief. My father once told me that grief is like the winter. It seizes our joints and makes it hard for us to move. But we have to move, anyway.

ROLFE: Rebekah is the one who moved.

POCAHONTAS: Rebecca came from a long way over land, true. But I think Isaac had to come a long way inside of himself. To let go like that.

ROLFE: I...I have to go.

POCAHONTAS: Oh.

ROLFE: I’m sorry, it’s just...I remembered the animals that must be fed before dusk, and I just want to be sure...

POCAHONTAS: I hope I haven’t caused you any pain.

ROLFE: What? Don’t be silly!

POCAHONTAS: I know about your wife, Mr. Rolfe. I lost my own husband, Kecoom. If you ever—

ROLFE: It’s...it’s just the dogs and pigs. Really.
POCAHONTAS: Okay.

ROLFE: Now I really must be...thank you. Thank you for a lovely afternoon, and I hope to see you well tomorrow. (Turns to go, but stops before leaving) Do you...ever feel...that the wrong person died. That the stronger of you left, while the weaker...the weaker person lives?

POCAHONTAS: Oh, yes. Sometimes, yes. But I think...surviving makes us become the stronger one. Don’t you think?

ROLFE: I’ll speak with Marshall Dale about you coming to assist me in the fields. That is...if it would please you to do so...

POCAHONTAS: I would find it most agreeable.

ROLFE: Very well, then. Until tomorrow.

Rolfe exits. Pocahontas turns to her Bible and fingers the leather cover with its embossed lettering. A light comes up on Powhatan, in a memory.

POWHATAN: You can’t stay with me forever, child...you need to understand that. Someday you may be called on to marry some great man a far way off from here, and you’ll have to learn to live in a town whose ways are completely different from your own...(Beat.) No, it’s not that I will try to get rid of you. You know I’d do anything to keep you here by my side. But people have to grow up and live their own lives. You just have to take the memory of those you love with you. Come sit with me. I’ll tell you a story.

Powhatan sits on a bench, facing downstage, and Pocahontas crosses to sit next to him, facing upstage but looking at him.

POWHATAN: There was a girl not too much older than you who lived down the river a long time ago. She was not so very different from any of the other girls her age, working and playing, tanning hides and turning cartwheels...not so different, that is, until the day she fell in love with a tree.

POCAHONTAS: She fell in love...?

POWHATAN: With a tree, yes. The largest and most silent tree in the forest. And the tree, in his own silent way, he fell in love with her as well. Well, every day after her work was done, she would sneak off into the woods to be with her tree. She would stretch her neck up to a knothole and whisper her secrets into his craggy ear. He would listen until the sun had fallen deep in the sky, and then he would respond with his most sincere silence. But every heart breaks given time enough. The chief of a powerful neighboring tribe wished to make peace and was offered
the young girl as his wife. The girl was heartbroken and she ran into the woods to find her beloved tree. The girl realized that her heart was of no more use to her, so one last time she ran her fingertips up the tree’s spiny bark, stretched her neck up to a knothole and whispered the last of her secrets into his craggy ear. When all of her secrets were spent, a part of her heart floated out in her whispers and lodged itself in the hollow of the tree. The tree gave the girl his silence, a silence to hold in her chest where her broken heart lay shattered.

POCAHONTAS: Did she die?

POWHATAN: Not then. She went on to have many children, and the tree fathered many young trees himself. They say that when she was old and death began to cloud her eyes, she wandered off from the tribe into the woods, to curl up in the tree’s twisted roots and die. But her children all carried in their hearts corners of silence, the silence that her tree had given her. Our memories grow like a silent tree in our hearts, Pocahontas, and when we close our mouths and enter into the silence around us, they whisper back like wind through the branches. They whisper secrets that can never be spoken aloud nor heard by any human ear.

Pause.

POCAHONTAS: Father? I want so badly to be with you, father. The English have treated me well, but they wish to control me, just as they wish to control everything. They want my hopes to be their hopes, my thoughts to come not out of my head, but out of their leather books. How long will this winter last? I thought nothing could devastate me more than Kecoom’s death, but...to lose my father, lose my town and my people? I’m even losing my language, father. I’ve begun to think in English. If you don’t, it will be war, and I...I don’t know what will become of me if that happens. (Pause.) Is silence all I will ever hear from you again? I would rather have died than have to endure your indifference. If my own father will not deign to save me, then I am lower than the pigs in these streets. You would kill me slowly with shame to save your own face.

Pocahontas rises to go.

POWHATAN: Matoaka...

POCAHONTAS: (Stops, turns.) What?

POWHATAN: You were born in the pale haze just before dawn, pink and proud, and screaming like the thunder. When your mother first held you in her arms she wept and stroked your forehead. She named you Matoaka. When I sent her away, I gave her loads of corn for her people and jewelry for herself, hoping it would assuage the grief of losing her daughter, but still she wept. You, on the other hand...you were all mischief. Spirited and wanton, that’s what I always liked about you. That’s why I couldn’t let you go. The life of a leader is heavy.
and solemn, but you always made me laugh. So I called you Pocahontas—*little mischief*. And I spoiled you in every way I could.

A father gives to his daughter whatever he can find, hoping to win her heart and never lose it. But what a mother gives to her daughter can never be taken away. You have been Pocahontas too long. Matoaka is the part of you that can never be taken, never changed. It is the memory of your mother, of her mother, of all that brought itself together in this world to put you here. Your name will change as you give your heart to new futures, new identities. But there is a corner of your heart that never changes. A secret self. And she is called Matoaka.

*The scene changes to an exterior. The sounds of birds can be heard and there is the impression of sunlight. There is a long clothesline-type apparatus suspended between two tall Y-branches.*

*Pocahontas and John Rolfe are hanging tobacco leaves up to dry on the line, each working from a different end towards the center. Pocahontas is on the upstage side, facing downstage, and Rolfe vice versa. They work in silence, with a playful and blithe air about them. Pocahontas is clearly glad to be out of the stuffiness of Reverend Whitaker’s house. She might part two leaves like a curtain to make a funny face, Rolfe might put two leaves to his ear like a donkey, etc. It is tedious work, but they are enjoying themselves and each other.*

*As they reach the center, they both go to put a leaf in the same spot. They might giggle, but neither of them move their hand away. After a moment, Pocahontas slides her face through the leaves, still holding on to the line. She leans over and kisses Rolfe, at first inquisitively, but when he doesn’t shrink away, more passionately. After a moment, he breaks away, fraught with doubt. Pocahontas looks after him for a moment, then goes about collecting the extra leaves. As she comes near him, Rolfe grabs her and kisses her passionately again. She drops her leaves and returns the kiss, the two of them sliding down to their knees. They break away and stare at each other for a moment.*

*Pocahontas smiles, leans in and pecks Rolfe on the lips, and then picks up the leaves again and exits. Rolfe watches her go and is left kneeling, in inner turmoil.*

*Scene change to Thomas Dale’s house.*

ROLFE: *still on his knees* I know you will say that it is wrong. You will say that I have been led into temptation by the devil himself, he who seeks and delights in mankind’s destruction. For a long time, I thought so. And I am destroyed, it’s true, but not by wickedness. I am destroyed by the beauty of the face of God himself, whose hand has pushed these last events forward.

DALE: The Lord has set forth his canon very clearly. The Book of Nehemiah cautions us strongly against “strange wives.”
ROLFE: “Shall we do this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?” Yes, I’ve read it many times these last few weeks. But...isn’t it possible...that God’s law then is not God’s law now?

DALE: You have been driven straight into the jaws of blasphemy!

ROLFE: Hear me, though...the first seven chapters of Leviticus are all about animal sacrifices right? But we don’t even sacrifice animals anymore. And we don’t worship at temples, and we don’t...what I’m trying to say is, we are not the Jews of ancient times. And if I take her to wife and...educate her in the ways of Christianity...isn’t that a greater glory to the Lord than to marry an Englishwoman?

DALE: She is a cunning woman, Rolfe. She is not the demure, pleasant woman you married before. She is at her heart subversive. Be wary that she has not led you into your own undoing.

ROLFE: I have come to ask your permission to marry her, because you are now Governor. Refuse me if you must, but you cannot convince me against what I know to be true. I think of her daily, hourly...even in my dreams, she is there. I have spent this last week at Jamestown, hoping that absence would run its natural course and wash this iniquity from my mind. But to my wonder, she only grew stronger in my thoughts. The only conclusion I can reach is that...God has clasped us together on this earth. It is God’s will that I should be with her.

DALE: (kinder) God does not will you to her, I’m afraid. She will return to her father at the end of this week. This situation has gone on too long. A resolution must be forced. I am sorry.

ROLFE: (getting up off of his knees) No, I...I am sorry, sir. I have behaved foolishly. I only ask...may I come? There is a party collected to escort her, I imagine...

DALE: Indeed.

ROLFE: I should very much like to be a member of that party.

DALE: (thinks) Very well.

ROLFE: Thank you for your kindness, sir. And thank you for your time. My most heartfelt congratulations on your governorship.

DALE: Thank you.

*Rolfe turns to go.*

DALE: Rolfe?

*Rolfe turns.*
DALE: Your wife. She was a good woman. A good, honest Englishwoman. When the time is right...you’ll find another.

ROLFE: Thank you, sir.

_Rolfé exits._

_Drums begin to sound as actors enter and transform the set to a Powhatan riverside (tall grass, outdoor light, etc.)_

_Dale and Opechancanough have entered from opposite sides. Pocahontas enters from Dale's side, accompanied by armed soldiers. _Rolfé is with them._

POCAHONTAS: Uncle...

OPECHANCANOUGH: My darling girl...

_He kisses her forehead._

POCAHONTAS: My father is here?

OPECHANCANOUGH: No, but he is scarcely a day away and eagerly awaits your arrival.

POCAHONTAS: I see.

OPECHANCANOUGH: The dangers for him here are too great.

POCAHONTAS: I understand. He has sent you here to negotiate a trade, I suppose.

OPECHANCANOUGH: Something like that. It does my heart good to see you again, even in such strange clothes...

POCAHONTAS: I can save you the trouble, uncle. I’m not coming back with you.

OPECHANCANOUGH: What?

POCAHONTAS: I have decided to stay with the English.

OPECHANCANOUGH: What are you talking about? You’ve gone mad...

POCAHONTAS: I have had occasion to think long on it, and have wrestled many hours with my doubts. But that is how it is to be.

OPECHANCANOUGH: Pocahontas, your father loves you. Your people love you.

POCAHONTAS: Is that so? I have seen little evidence of it.
OPECHANCANOUGH: You cannot blame your father for the demands these dogs have placed on him. He released the prisoners, so called...they all came back to us.

POCAHONTAS: I spent a lot of time wondering if my father truly valued me less than some old swords, broken guns, and axes. I may never know the answer, but I am tired of the question. I am tired of being seen as a thing to bargain for. Tired of being seen as a commodity, whisked around from owner to owner. It is time I made something of my situation, instead of languishing helplessly in it.

OPECHANCANOUGH: You would lie down with these dogs for the rest of your days? Stuff yourself into their ridiculous clothing-cages and coo wimpishly for their approval? That is not the young girl I knew. Where is your spirit, where is your bite?

POCAHONTAS: I have found love, uncle. I am loved by an Englishman, and not for being passive or coy.

OPECHANCANOUGH: You have been brainwashed, child. It’s common for hostages to fall in love with one of their captors.

POCAHONTAS: My decisions are my own, uncle. I act at my own desire. I have seen blood spilt in warfare, and I realize that you will never end it on your own. Not you, not my father, not Governor Dale...it is too much a part of your nature, and you would lead us all into destruction for it. You will give consent...on behalf of my father...for me to remain with the English...as a member of Governor Dale’s family...and to be thenceforth married to an Englishman named John Rolfe...*(turning to Rolfe)* at his desire. This marriage will be an emblem of the new and lasting peace between our peoples—the peace you are about to negotiate. That is my will, and I trust you to see it done.

*Pause.*

OPECHANCANOUGH: If that is your will...then I shall see to it.

POCAHONTAS: Goodbye, uncle. I will cherish your memory.

OPECHANCANOUGH: And I yours.

*They bow deeply to one another. Pocahontas collects her skirt and retreats toward the boat.*

DALE: It would appear you have gotten your marriage.

ROLFE: I swear to you, sir, I knew nothing of this.

DALE: You still desire to marry this woman? She is irredeemably headstrong.

ROLFE: Yes, sir. I do.
DALE: She will need to be baptized first. That is not negotiable.

ROLFE: I will take it to her.

DALE: You’re a braver man than I. But first, you’re coming with me. We have a peace to negotiate.

Blackout.
ACT THREE

In darkness, we hear singing and lute playing. A baby’s cry is heard over the singing.

Green grows the holly.
So does the ivy.
Though winter's blasts blow never so high,
Green grows the holly.

As the holly grows green
With ivy all alone,
When flowers can not be seen
And greenwood leaves be gone.

Lights up on the interior of the Rolfe home. Pocahontas is ironing. Her clothing is somewhat nicer than before, as is Rolfe’s. They have come into money. Pocahontas’s hair is pulled back and remains so until the end of the Act.

Enter Rolfe, with a bunch of fresh-picked wildflowers. He kisses Pocahontas on the cheek.

ROLFE: Hello, love.

POCAHONTAS: Did you pick those for me? Oh, you really shouldn’t have done that...

ROLFE: Tonight is a celebration. Do we have anything we can use for a vase?

POCAHONTAS: I’m not sure, you’ll have to look around. (Rolfe begins to search for a vase.) So what are we celebrating? Have the crops sold?

ROLFE: No, no...I’m still bargaining prices. Where’s Thomas?

POCAHONTAS: He’s sleeping in the other room. (Rolfe exits, still looking for a vase.) Don’t go in and wake him...He manages so well during the day. If only we could get him to sleep half as soundly at night...

ROLFE: (From offstage.) The news is not about the tobacco crop. It’s far more exciting than that. I tried to buy a bottle of wine off of Thomas Percy, but you know him...stingy bugger he is.

POCAHONTAS: (more to herself) I wish you wouldn’t shout between rooms...

ROLFE: (Re-enters with a clay jug.) Here we are then.
POCAHONTAS: (watching Rolfe put the flowers in the vase) What a strange custom you English have. To bring the flowers in and watch them die, when all you have to do is walk outside and see them anytime you want.

ROLFE: Now, now...don’t be cross. This is a big day for us. Is there any aqua vitae left?

POCAHONTAS: Aqua vitae?! It’s the middle of the day, John...

ROLFE: (exiting again) Just a toast is all.

POCAHONTAS: Don’t shout across the house at me this time...you’ll wake Thomas.

Rolfe comes back with three blue-and-white porcelain mugs.

ROLFE: (handing her a mug.) Here you go, then. Come on, Ononte...one for you as well.

POCAHONTAS: No, John...if Thomas were to wake up and need anything...

ROLFE: Oh, come now...one drink won’t hurt her...

ONONTE: Thank you, Master Rolfe. You’re too kind. (She gives Pocahontas a satisfied look.)

ROLFE: (raising his glass.) To our household...and to the many blessings God has bestowed upon us. And not least to my wife...the Princess Pocahontas, First Lady of Virginia...

POCAHONTAS: My name isn’t Pocahontas, anymore, John.

ROLFE: To Rebecca Rolfe. First Lady in my eyes and in the hearts of my countrymen...

They all drink, Pocahontas slowly and cautiously, Ononte eagerly, and Rolfe triumphantly.

POCAHONTAS: Ugh. (grimaces.) So what is this about?

ROLFE: (hands the cups to Ononte and takes Pocahontas’s hands.) Well, as you know, Governor Dale is stepping down from his post and returning to England...

POCAHONTAS: In April...

ROLFE: Right! Well, he pulled me aside this afternoon after our meeting. It seems the Virginia Company wants us to sail back to England with Thomas Dale.
POCAHONTAS: England?

Ononte, who has paused at the door to listen, gasps.

ROLFE: Yes. They’ll give a stipend of four pounds a week, for dresses and the like. Thomas Dale will make introductions on your behalf throughout society.

POCAHONTAS: What about Thomas?

ROLFE: He’ll travel with us, of course. Accomodations have already been made.

POCAHONTAS: He’s still an infant...

ONONTE: Lady Rebecca, I happily offer myself up to accompany you and aid in the care of your son.

ROLFE: See there? Ononte will be with us. And many others as well. The Virginia Company would not ask us to travel so far with no service.

POCAHONTAS: Ononte, would you excuse us, please.

ONONTE: Yes, madam. (Exits.)

Pocahontas turns away from Rolfe.

ROLFE: You seem strange. Thomas will be fine on the journey, you don’t have to worry about him.

POCAHONTAS: It’s not that, it’s just...

ROLFE: What?

POCAHONTAS: It’s a propaganda tour, John. A publicity stunt.

ROLFE: So what if it is? You’ll get to see London...I can take you to my father’s grave in Norfolk.

POCAHONTAS: Yes, I know, a trip to England would be lovely, but...I’m just not keen on being shuffled around as a curiosity through the streets of London.

ROLFE: They just want to meet you. You mean so much to them.

POCAHONTAS: They want Pocahontas, Powhatan’s princess. Another portrait for their posters. I’m tired of being a character in someone else’s story.
ROLFE: (moves to comfort her.) It’s fine. If you don’t want to go to England, we won’t go to England. We’ll stay right here.

POCAHONTAS: Really?

ROLFE: Really.

POCAHONTAS: It’s not that I don’t want to go to England with you. Someday.

ROLFE: I know. And who knows? Perhaps I can change your mind. We have a month and a half.

POCAHONTAS: Change my mind? John...

ROLFE: Come on, now. You’ve been working all day, you were up all night, you’re probably exhausted...

POCAHONTAS: I’ve made up my mind, John.

ROLFE: You’re tired is all.

POCAHONTAS: What is the use of talking with you, you never listen to me. And why should you?

ROLFE: I—

POCAHONTAS: You want to know the real difference between our cultures? My people speak to be heard, your people speak to talk. You think words have to come from a book to mean something, so you build great towers of words, you fill shelves with a mountain of babble...and all of it is completely meaningless to you. Your words are only a mask. So you lie and you lie and you lie.

ROLFE: Is this going to be another speech on how the natives are inherently better than the English?

POCAHONTAS: Natives?

ROLFE: Yes, natives. You were born here, weren’t you?

POCAHONTAS: Yes, I was born here. And so was your son. But you don’t call him a native, do you? Because when you say native, you don’t mean native. It’s just another word. You mean something else. And that something else is what you see everytime you look at me, isn’t it?

ROLFE: Are you going to tell me you’re any different? That you don’t look at me and see a hundred people who are not me in the color of my face?
POCAHONTAS: We’re different. That I can live with. What I can’t live with is being seen as an exotic curiosity...some alien thing that is to be kept like a pet. Let out for walks and paraded around for entertainment. I got enough of that in my childhood, thank you, from people I cared for a lot more than the English...

ROLFE: Pocahontas...

POCAHONTAS: Pocahontas was a child! A little girl at her father’s knee. I gave up that name two years ago, so why do you and your countrymen persist in calling me that? Is that what you all want? A little princess who adores the English? A naive child whom you can educate? Well, tell your people that I am not your child. And I am not their princess.

Thomas has begun to cry offstage.

ONONTE: (offstage) I’ll get him.

Pocahontas’s fight is exhausted. She goes back to her ironing. After a frustrated moment, she sets down her iron.

POCAHONTAS: The iron’s gone cold.

She puts her hand to her head.

ROLFE: Are you angry at me, or are you angry at the English? Or are you just indiscriminately angry?

POCAHONTAS: (fighting back tears) I’m sorry, I’m not angry at anyone. I’m just so tired. Thomas was up all night., and working all day, I...

Rolfe puts his hand on her shoulder. She leans against it.

POCAHONTAS: Is this what I am always to expect from the English? That they will put me on posters and sell me as the “good little Indian?” “The best of her people?”

ROLFE: (spinning her around) Who cares? It’s not what I see when I look at you. Is that what you see in the mirror?

POCAHONTAS: No, but...if that’s what they think of me...my father used to say that something only lives as long as the last person to remember it. When I’m gone...is this how the English will remember me? I don’t want to live on like that.

ROLFE: You won’t. You have Thomas.

POCAHONTAS: And I have you.
ROLFE: Don’t be silly. You’ll outlive me.

POCAHONTAS: I don’t really see you as a pasty Englishman.

ROLFE: I think maybe you do a little.

POCAHONTAS: Maybe.

ROLFE: I’m sorry, too. I won’t bring up England again.

POCAHONTAS: No, we should go.

ROLFE: No, you’re right...

POCAHONTAS: They see me as the Princess Pocahontas whether I go or not. At least if I meet them, I have a chance to show them I’m something more. I’m going to check on Thomas.

_Pocahontas kisses Rolfe’s temple and exits. Rolfe rearranges the flowers and puts them on the table._

_In darkness, the sound of waves, seagulls, the creaking of a ship. Perhaps a projection of the open sea. Projections change to images of London in the early 17th century._

_**Interior—Tudor Room. An Englishwoman is showing fabrics and clothes to Pocahontas.**_

ENGLISHWOMAN: It’s a canvas to hold out your skirt, Lady Rebecca. You’ll strike a remarkable figure in this, just trust me.

POCAHONTAS: The sleeves on this dress…I’ll barely be able to move my arms.

ENGLISHWOMAN: A good Englishwoman does not go flailing her arms about in company. It would look most ridiculous.

POCAHONTAS: *(Picking up a lace ruff)* Ridiculous, eh? Well, I wouldn’t want to look ridiculous.

ENGLISHWOMAN: Your allowance from the Virginia Company will take you pretty far, but not far enough. I don’t think they counted on having to clothe so many people.

POCAHONTAS: Well, perhaps we should economize. My servants can wear my dresses, and I’ll wear this canvas.
ENGLISHWOMAN: Now, we can get by cutting corners with the servants, but of course, you’ll need to have the best. Invitations will be pouring in before you know it.

POCAHONTAS: And what do these occasions entail, exactly?

ENGLISHWOMAN: Well, of course that depends on the occasion. Mostly you’ll be visiting the house of this lord or that lady...making charming conversation.

POCAHONTAS: (trying on the hat from the portrait.) Charming conversation, eh?

ENGLISHWOMAN: That’s a man’s hat, dear.

POCAHONTAS: Where are the women’s hats?

ENGLISHWOMAN: Only middle-class women wear hats, dear. Middle-class and Puritans.

POCAHONTAS: Oh.

ENGLISHWOMAN: Yes, charming conversation in house after house. There’s also a strong possibility you will be asked to the King’s masque.

POCAHONTAS: Masque? And what is that?

ENGLISHWOMAN: It’s a theatrical entertainment. Music, dancing, singing...and of course, acting. They’re always very lavish affairs.

POCAHONTAS: Will I be expected to perform?

ENGLISHWOMAN: Oh, no—mercy me! You just show up and present yourself to the king. Of course, half the court will be in costume...they’re always trying their hands at the stage.

POCAHONTAS: Do they actually wear masks?

ENGLISHWOMAN: Well...sometimes. But you don’t have to worry about that. You’ll just focus on your presentation to the king. You do know how to bow?

POCAHONTAS: There’s nothing very complicated about bowing.

ENGLISHWOMAN: Yes, but can you do a court bow?

Pocahontas looks puzzled.

ENGLISHWOMAN: Come, I’ll show you.
She takes Pocahontas by the hand and leads her center stage. She executes a full court bow. Pocahontas makes a clumsy attempt to emulate it.

ENGLISHWOMAN: No, no, dear. Your right leg goes behind, you see. Yes, now—ouch! Watch yourself. Put all of your weight on the left leg. That’s it...now, steady...graceful movement...yes. I think you’re getting it. Just needs a little practice. Now be sure to lower your eyes as you do...that’s right. Now when you’ve executed the full bow, that’s when you raise your eyes. The King will ask you some questions and you answer. (Pocahontas tries the bow again) I think you’ll do fine.

Pocahontas begins to cough violently.

POCAHONTAS: Excuse me. (Coughs) It’s the smoky air.

ENGLISHWOMAN: (going to retrieve a wooden board) Yes, I’m afraid it’s a fact of the city. Now you might as well put this on, so you can practice in it. You’ll have to move a little differently while you’re wearing it.

Pocahontas is mystified by the board, considering possible ways in which it could be worn.

POCAHONTAS: Wear it?

ENGLISHWOMAN: Yes, dear. Just right across here. To flatten your stomach. You wouldn’t want to let yourself sag out like that, would you?

She puts the board against Pocahontas’s stomach and lower breast.

POCAHONTAS: It’s like a cage.

Enter Sir Edwin Sandys with a book.

SANDYS: Lady Rebecca? A deep honor, your highness... (Bows.)

POCAHONTAS: Oh, that’s not necessary.

SANDYS: Sir Edwin Sandys, ma’am. Of the Virginia Company. It is under my charge to ensure that you are well looked after.

POCAHONTAS: That is too kind, sir.

SANDYS: I also bring news. We have just hired a young dutchman with a clever talent for engravings to do a commissioned portrait of you, my dear.

POCAHONTAS: A portrait? To what end?
SANDYS: Why, to celebrate the presence of so fine a lady in the court of King James. He’ll just sketch your portrait—it won’t take more than an afternoon, and then make an engraving from that. See? (offers her the book, open) Just like these here.

POCAHONTAS: (flipping through the engravings in the book) And you’ll find use for this picture, I suppose?

SANDYS: Oh, well...we would distribute some...memorabilia, of course.

POCAHONTAS: A year ago I saw some of your “memorabilia” in Virginia. A caricature of my countrymen used to sell a lottery. Is that what I am to be? Your lottery spokesperson?

SANDYS: Oh, no, my lady. We would never use you for so mean a task. You have my word on it.

POCAHONTAS: The women in these pictures...they all cast their eyes away.

SANDYS: (Proudly) Yes, ma’am. Only the most modest of women.

POCAHONTAS: Modest? I should say they look ashamed.

SANDYS: I assure you we will go to every length to show you as the mild and virtuous woman that you are.

POCAHONTAS: Well, that’s not quite what I had in mind, Sir Sandys. Where I come from, mildness is not necessarily the same as virtue.

SANDYS: Yes, my dear. But you must look at where you are.

POCAHONTAS: (A beat. Closes the book.) Of course you’re right, sir. I am a guest.

SANDYS: More than that, you are my guest. And you shall want for nothing. (Calls to Englishwoman while crossing and leading her offstage.) My good woman! Would you be so kind as to put Lady Rebecca’s account under the credit of the Virginia Company?

ENGLISHWOMAN: Credit? The Virginia Company?! You’re off your head. Can’t keep yourselves out of court a fortnight without someone’s takin’ yer to—

Court music begins to play over the last bit of dialogue, which is just enough to get them offstage. A group of masked courtiers enters.

COURTIER: Lady Rebecca, may I present to you John Chamberlain. Master Chamberlain, the Lady Rebecca Rolfe, First Lady of Virginia.
CHAMBERLAIN: (an aside to the courtiers) ...and a dubious distinction that is...

The courtiers twitter. Pocahontas awkwardly attempts a bow, and the courtiers twitter again, Chamberlain giving a high-pitched foppish giggle.

POCAHONTAS: Master Chamberlain, I am honored to make your acquaintance.

CHAMBERLAIN: And I yours, Lady Rebecca. You are a testament to your people. I’m sure you are the fairest in all of Virginia.

POCAHONTAS: Thank you, my lord.

Pocahontas turns to go, but overhears Chamberlain gossiping to his friends.

CHAMBERLAIN: Fairest in Virginia, to be sure, and no fair lot that is. With her tricking up and high styles, you might think her and her worshipful husband to be somebody.

The courtiers twitter and continue to murmur. They begin to dance. Another pair of courtiers enters on the other side of the stage.

COURTIER: Lady Rebecca, may I present the playwright Ben Jonson, the brightest star of the London stage. Master Jonson, the Lady Rebecca Rolfe.

Jonson bows deeply.

JONSON: The Princess Pocahontas, surnamed The Blessed. What an honor it is.

Pocahontas attempts a slightly more graceful bow.

POCAHONTAS: The honor is mine, sir.

COURTIER: Master Jonson has just had his collected plays published, Lady Rebecca.

POCAHONTAS: What an honor that must be for you.

JONSON: Not half the honor of taking your hand.

He takes Pocahontas’s hand and kisses it.

POCAHONTAS: You should take care, Master Jonson. I married the last man who kissed my hand.

Jonson pauses uncomfortably, then laughs politely.
POCAHONTAS: (recovering) I hear we are to be treated to one of your masques this evening.

JONSON: *The Vision of Delight*, my lady. So named in honor of you. Poetry and song from the bower of Zephyrus to the star-spangled chariot of Night. I hope it pleases.

POCAHONTAS: I am already entertained, my lord.

JONSON: And I can ask for no greater satisfaction.

*Pocahontas turns to go.*

COURTIER: The princess is pleasing, is she not, my lord?

JONSON: In her wit and her charm she is every inch a princess...

*Pocahontas smiles and starts to move on.*

JONSON: But in her visage...she has not the face of a princess. She has the face of one conceived in the womb of a tavern!

*Jonson and the courtier laugh, then begin to dance. Pocahontas is approached by two more courtiers.*

SANDYS: Lady Rebecca? Sir Edwin Sandys, of the Virginia Company.

POCAHONTAS: Yes, Sir Sandys, I remember.

SANDYS: I want you to meet Simon Van de Passe.

POCAHONTAS: It is the deepest honor, sir.

VAN DE PASSE: The honor is mine, my lady.

SANDYS: Master Van de Passe is our engraver, and one of extraordinary skill. Just over twenty-one, and already a master....

POCAHONTAS: Sir Sandys, I’ve been thinking about this portrait...

SANDYS: As I live and breathe—John Chamberlain! That old gossip...

*Sandys goes over to join the crowd of courtiers, who have now merged.*

VAN DE PASSE: Do not worry. I make a beautiful picture of you.
POCAHONTAS: That’s not my point, Master Van de Passe, I...I’m sorry, I’m sure that you’re very skilled.

VAN DE PASSE: I take none offence.

POCAHONTAS: Your voice...it’s very strange. If you don’t mind my saying.

VAN DE PASSE: (removing mask) Yes...I am Dutch.

POCAHONTAS: Oh...forgive me, I didn’t mean to make you feel—

VAN DE PASSE: Is all right, princess. I know how it is like to be out of place.

POCAHONTAS: The portrait they want you to make...it’s the portrait of a good quiet, Englishwoman. Not a portrait of me. You may as well model it after any woman in the street, and it would bear as much resemblance.

VAN DE PASSE: Then we make different portrait.

POCAHONTAS: Different portrait? Won’t the Virginia Company find that rather upsetting?

VAN DE PASSE: They want picture of a rich lady who wear rich clothings. Then they show they are not poor. We give them that. But we give them more, also.

POCAHONTAS: What’s more to give? They will only see what they want to see.

VAN DE PASSE: Maybe is true. But you show them something other. You are not a dog. Lay down. Roll over. Sit still for picture.

POCAHONTAS: Then why sit for a picture at all?

VAN DE PASSE: You can refuse it, but this I think is for children. For adult, you play their own games, but with your rules.

POCAHONTAS: So...we give them a lady in her fine clothing...

VAN DE PASSE: Ya.

POCAHONTAS: ...But we also give them me. Not looking away. Not demure and modest. Do you understand? (He nods.) I want to be looking directly at the viewer. I want them to know that I see them, too. I want you to draw me just as I am. Don’t try to make me look like an Englishwoman. Can you do that? Just as I am. I won’t have any of these jackals thinking I’m ashamed of not being English.
VAN DE PASSE: I like it very much.

POCAHONTAS: But it won’t say “Pocahontas.”

VAN DE PASSE: It says “Rebecca?”

POCAHONTAS: No. It says “Matoaka.”

VAN DE PASSE: Mat—

POCAHONTAS: Matoaka. It’s a part of me they can never change. A part that is my own.

VAN DE PASSE: I understand. Come. We go back to the masque now.

POCAHONTAS: Must I?

VAN DE PASSE: Is all right. You smile. You bow. You hate, perhaps, but you never show. Inside...you laugh back at them.

Van de Passe and Pocahontas return to the masque. Some of the courtiers have begun dancing. The music swells as the dancing becomes more and more grotesque. Pocahontas is sucked into the crowd and lost. The music begins to become dissonant. It stops abruptly.

COURTIER: His excellency James, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, and Defender of the Faith, I present to his majesty the Lady Rebecca Rolfe, daughter to the mighty Prince Powhatan, Emporer of Virginia, converted and baptized in the Christian Faith, and wife to the worthy Master John Rolfe.

The crowd parts into a line on either side, revealing Pocahontas. She is dressed in the costume of the Van de Passe engraving. She is dressed in the costume of the Van de Passe engraving. The courtiers bow deeply on either side. Pocahontas slowly but gracefully marches downstage. Light harp music may play. She executes a graceful and deep full court bow. When she raises her eyes, the Van de Passe engraving is projected on the cyclorama. The courtiers react to the image and freeze in their reaction. Light is now only on Pocahontas. She takes off her hat and lets down her hair. Throughout her monologue, she gradually sheds her English dress, passing off pieces to the courtiers as they exit the stage.

POCAHONTAS: The English air did not agree with Pocahontas, and it was more than just the smoke. The air was filled with tiny microbes against which Pocahontas’s immune system had no defense. Soon after their ship had embarked on its return trip, the Rolfe had to stop at a town called Gravesend. Pocahontas was too sick to continue. As her infected lungs filled gradually with fluid, her life slipped away little by little. Matoaka died at the end of March, 1617.
We can be sure that John Rolfe was devastated at losing another wife on a sea voyage. Whatever her last words to him were, he never wrote them down. He chose instead to carry them as a memory, and never commit them to the prison of the printed word.

If Matoaka died at Gravesend in 1617, history has kept Pocahontas alive, in whatever form was most convenient at the time. An Indian princess who loved the English...a converted savage who embraced Christianity...a hapless victim of imperial conquest. History has rarely left her much room for depth. But history is only an effort to control memory. History lives in books, in monuments, in plaques and libraries. Memory walks among us...it lives on our skin and in our senses. History is your grandmother’s birth certificate, the deed to her house, or the recipes in her kitchen. Memory is her food that you ate, or the feeling of her fingers through your hair.

There is an old saying that something lives only as long as the last person to remember it. Perhaps there is a tree of memory that grows in the silent corners of our hearts. But if you put yourself in the silence...break down the fortress of words, the cage of language by which we try to control our world...you’ll find the memory of a real person...an echo down the years of someone who once stood where we stand.

Pocahontas.
Rebecca Rolfe.
Matoaka.

*The sound of the forest as the lights fade.*