



Miranda

Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone /
Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-
speaking world

15 | 2017

Lolita at 60 / Staging American Bodies

Noelia Hernando Real, *Voces Contra la Mediocridad : la Vanguardia Teatral de los Provincetown Players, 1915-1922*

Rovie Herrera Medalle



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/10862>

DOI: 10.4000/miranda.10862

ISSN: 2108-6559

Publisher

Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès

Electronic reference

Rovie Herrera Medalle, "Noelia Hernando Real, *Voces Contra la Mediocridad : la Vanguardia Teatral de los Provincetown Players, 1915-1922*", *Miranda* [Online], 15 | 2017, Online since 20 September 2017, connection on 16 February 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/10862> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.10862>

This text was automatically generated on 16 February 2021.



Miranda is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Noelia Hernando Real, *Voces Contra la Mediocridad : la Vanguardia Teatral de los Provincetown Players, 1915-1922*

Rovie Herrera Medalle

REFERENCES

Real Hernando, Noelia, *Voces Contra la Mediocridad : la Vanguardia Teatral de los Provincetown Players, 1915-1922*, Valencia : Publicacions de la Universitat de Valencia, 2014, 366 p, ISBN : 978-84-370-9565-3

- 1 The Provincetown Players are known as the community that transformed the theatrical landscape in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century. Tired of and disappointed with commercial theater and the monopoly of Broadway, the Provincetown Players became a refreshing force that staged ninety-three plays by forty-seven American playwrights between 1915 and 1922. Noelia Hernando Real presents in *Voces Contra la Mediocridad : la Vanguardia Teatral de los Provincetown Players, 1915-1922—Voices against Mediocrity: The Provincetown Players' Avant-Garde Theater, 1915-1922*—the first comprehensive study in Spanish of the Provincetown Players' history and eight selected plays by various of their playwrights.
- 2 *Voces Contra la Mediocridad* is divided into two sections ; the first section includes nine chapters that explain in detail the beginning of this little theater community, its rise and success, but also its failures and fall, and the second section contains plays by George Cram Cook, Louise Bryant, Pendleton King, James Oppenheim, Bosworth Croker, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Susan Glaspell. Interestingly, the first section serves as a compilation of previous key works about the Provincetown Players published in English, such as those of Brenda Murphy's *The Provincetown and the Culture of Modernity* (2005), Cheryl Black's *The Women of Provincetown, 1915-1922* (2002), or Robert Károly Sarlós's *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players : Theatre in Ferment* (1982). As Hernando Real

explains in the Prologue, besides revisiting these works, she also uses different original sources, such as biographies and autobiographies of the playwrights, academic publications, and an extensive archive of original documents related to the Provincetown Players, including manifestos, circulars, leaflets, reviews, and letters.

- 3 The first chapter “Hacia un nuevo teatro norteamericano” (“Towards a New American Theater”) introduces the different factors that were key to the creation of the Provincetown Players. Hernando Real explores how the new European tendencies had no impact in American theater which—largely due to the power of the Syndicate—favored commercial theater. Hernando Real observes how the Theatrical Syndicate favored the Star System and produced musicals, melodramas, and plays that were realistic in style between 1900 and 1915. Many of the future Provincetown Players—such as Kenneth Macgowan, Robert Edmond Jones, Susan Glaspell, or Jig Cook—were very disappointed with those Broadway productions, which did not reflect the intellectual and bohemian life of Greenwich Village. Hernando Real explores interesting sociopolitical and artistic movements of the time, such as The Armory Show, The Patterson Strike and its Pageant, and the influence of the journal *The Masses*.
- 4 The second chapter, “El sueño de una noche de verano : Provincetown, 1915” (“A Midsummer Night’s Dream : Provincetown, 1915”) gives an account of the Provincetown Players’ first performance in Provincetown, at the very tip of Cape Cod, on 15th of July at the Hapgoods’ vacation house. They staged two plays, *Constancy*, by Neith Boyce, and *Suppressed Desires*, written by both Glaspell and Cook. The latter had previously been rejected by the Washington Square Players. After this first experiment and its success, the Provincetown Players decided to move to their second location : the Wharf Theater, where Jig Cook already envisioned what he named “his beloved community.” The work done by the Players this summer led to their second season in Provincetown. In the third chapter, “El sueño se consolida : la segunda temporada en Provincetown, verano de 1916” (“The dream consolidates : the second season in Provincetown, Summer 1916”) Hernando Real narrates the ventures of the Provincetown Players during the five bills that they produced. It is remarkable that she includes a translation of the original text of their constitution, where the members established themselves as a private club and set their goals for this association. This chapter also collects the different hypotheses about how Eugene O’Neill joined the Provincetown Players that summer of 1916. Jig Cook was part of the directive board as the President and he addressed the members of the club at the beginning of every season writing a circular ; most of these circulars have been translated and compiled in each of the chapters by Hernando Real, something no previous history of the Provincetown Players written in English had done before.
- 5 The fourth chapter is devoted to the Provincetown Players’ first season in New York. In “Los Provincetown Players en Nueva York : la primera temporada, 1916-1917” (“The Provincetown Players in New York : the first season, 1916-1917”), Hernando Real makes a chronicle of the plays produced ; it should be noted that she pays attention not only to the plots but also to some other essential aspects for the production such as the mise en scène of the plays and the difficulties that the Players overcame in terms of space and budget. This season, set in the theater of 139 MacDougal Street, is marked by the prominent figures of Glaspell and O’Neill who put on stage some daring and experimental plays, such as *The People* and *Before Breakfast*. The fifth chapter, “Sin miedo a fracasar : la segunda temporada, 1917-1918” (“With no fear of failure : second

season, 1917-1918”), includes the updated list of the members during this season and the circular where Cook states : “We promise to let this theatre die rather than let it become another voice of mediocrity” that gives the title to this book. Hernando Real makes interesting observations about the so-called “Other Players” and their contribution to radical avant-garde theater with plays such as Alfred Kreyborg’s *Manikin and Minikin* and *Jack’s House*, which was the first cubist play produced in New York, or Edna St. Vincent Millay’s *Two Slanterns and a King*, as well as a contribution of O’Neill to this season with the family tragedy *The Rope*.

- 6 The sixth chapter, “El nuevo teatro en el 133 de la calle MacDougal : la tercera temporada, 1918-1919” (“The new theater in 133 MacDougal Street : the third season, 1918-1919”), is characterized by this new space of the Provincetown Players, who were in need of a bigger theater, and which entitled new possibilities. This season is marked by a climatic decision ; they decided to send invitations to the critics which, as Hernando Real points out, some scholars have seen as the first sign of the Players’ future decline. The seventh chapter, “La temporada de la juventud : la cuarta temporada, 1919-1920” (“The youth season : the fourth season, 1919-1920”), gives room to the youngest playwrights of the Players, led by James Light, who were in charge of the bills with very innovative plays, such as Djuna Barnes’s *An Irish Triangle* or Kreyborg’s *Vote the New Moon*.
- 7 The eighth chapter, “Y Nueva York tuvo su cúpula : la quinta temporada, 1920-1921” (“And New York had its dome : the fifth season, 1920-1921”), featured two of the most relevant plays produced by the players : O’Neill’s expressionistic piece *The Emperor Jones* and Glaspell’s politically controversial play *Inheritors*, and could be considered one of the most successful seasons. One of the main achievements of this season, now from a technical point of view, is the fact that Cook gave the first cyclorama to a theater in New York. The final chapter of this section, “El fin de nuestra amada comunidad : sexta temporada, 1921-1922” (“The end of our beloved community : the sixth season, 1921-1922”), explores the last season and the internal fights between two opposite groups, one led by Light and the other by Cook. Nevertheless, the dramatists did their work and produced extraordinary plays, such as Glaspell’s *The Verge* and O’Neill *The Hairy Ape*.
- 8 The second section of the book includes an introduction and translation into Spanish of one representative play from each season : Cook’s *Change your Style* (*Cambia de estilo*) ; Bryant’s *The Game* (*La partida*) ; King’s *Cocaine* (*Cocaína*) ; Oppenheim’s *Night* (*Noche*) ; Crocker’s *El Cochecito de Bebé*) ; St. Vincent Millay’s *Aria da capo* ; Glaspell’s *Inheritors* (*Herederos*) and *The Verge* (*Al límite*), which, as Hernando Real points out, deal with contemporary themes such as war, art, the American dream, identity or the harsh realities of life. I would, however, recommend reading the plays before the introductions as the latter are very detailed and sometimes tend to disclose some of the surprising elements in the plays. It must also be noted that none of these plays had been translated into Spanish before and that the selection constitutes an excellent journey into the formal and thematic experimentations of the Players.
- 9 *Voces contra la mediocridad* is an essential work for those who research on the Provincetown Players’ history, as well as for those who are curious about the US little theaters in the early 20th century. As a journey into modern theater this volume presents a fascinating and thorough examination of the Players. Hernando Real

provides an extensive research that was not available in Spanish and will contribute to bring the Provincetown Players closer to new spheres, and hopefully to new stages.

INDEX

Keywords: early 20th century American drama, experimental theater, little theaters, Provincetown Players

Mots-clés: théâtre américain du début du 20è, théâtre expérimental, petits théâtres, les Provincetown Players

AUTHORS

ROVIE HERRERA MEDALLE

Substitute Professor

Universidad de Málaga (UMA)

rovie@uma.es