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The Women of Provincetown, 1915-1922

Cheryl Black

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Black examines the roles a remarkable group of women played in one of the most influential theatre groups in America, demonstrating their influence on 20th-century dramaturgy and culture.

Perhaps most notable for its discovery of two significant American playwrights--Eugene O'Neill and Susan Glaspell--and for its role in developing an American tradition of non-commercial theatre, the Provincetown Players collective has long been appreciated for its meaningful contributions to American drama. An outgrowth of the Greenwich Village community of politically minded artists and intellectuals, the group became convinced that theatre was essential to America's spiritual and social regeneration. The company ultimately produced nearly 100 plays by more than 50 American writers.

In this thoroughly engaging work, Cheryl Black argues that Provincetown has another, largely unacknowledged claim to fame: it was one of the first theatre companies in America in which women achieved prominence in every area of operation. At a time when women playwrights were rare, women directors rarer, and women scenic designers unheard of, Provincetown's female members excelled in all these functions, making significant contributions to the development of modern American drama and theatre. In addition to playwright Glaspell, the company's female membership included the likes of poets Edna St. Vincent Millay, Mina Loy, and Djuna Barnes; journalists Louise Bryant and Mary Heaton Vorce; novelists Neith Boyce and Evelyn Scott; and painter Marguerite Zorach.

A solidly researched and engagingly written piece of social history, this book offers new insight into the relationship between gender and theatre and will attract a broad readership, including students and scholars of theatre, women's studies, feminism, and American Studies, and members of the general public interested in any of these issues.

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