

ON HER SHOULDERS is supported largely through tax-deductible gifts from individual supporters and the generous volunteer and in-kind contributions of the producing team (individuals and institutions). **Cash donations are gratefully accepted at the box office to help defray the cost of artist stipends and refreshments.**

FOR THE 2015-16 Series, we are again asking friends and colleagues to send a check or visit PayPal to make a more substantial donation that will allow us to continue this vital work! Checks should be made payable to New Perspectives Theatre Company noting OHS as the beneficiary, and mailed to: New Perspectives Theatre Company, 456 West 37th Street, New York, NY 10018.

Credit Card donations may be made at <http://www.nptnyc.org/programs/ONHERSHOULDERS.htm>

THE 2015-2016 SERIES

DATE	PLAY	AUTHOR	DIRECTOR	DRAMATURG
9/23/15	<i>Overtures</i> (1913) <i>Fourteen</i> (1920)	Alice Erya Gerstenberg	Melissa Attebery	Mari Lyn Henry
12/4/15	<i>House of Desires</i> (1683)	Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz	Melody Brooks	Heather Violanti
2/17/16	<i>Blue Blood</i> (1926), <i>Plumes</i> (1927), <i>Blue-Eyed Black Boy</i> (1930), <i>Starting Point</i> (1938)	Georgia Douglas Johnson	Elizabeth Van Dyke	Arminda Thomas
4/13/16	<i>The Group</i>	Mercy Otis Warren	Kristin Heckler	Melody Brooks

About the New School for Drama

The creative home for the future of performing arts. **Agile. Engaged. Innovative. Multi-disciplinary.** The New School for Drama is home to a dynamic group of young directors, writers, actors, creative technologists, and award-winning faculty. With a core belief in rigorous creativity and collaborative learning, our programs embrace civic awareness across performance disciplines to create work imbued with professionalism, imagination and social context. For more information, please visit www.newschool.edu/drama

The Play in Context, the dramaturgical and scholarly presentation component for all of the readings, is sponsored in part by the League of Professional Theatre Women, a not-for-profit organization promoting visibility and increasing opportunities for women in theatre since 1982. www.theatrewomen.org



ON HER SHOULDERS
New Perspectives Theatre Company
and The New School for Drama
present

The Group

by
Mercy Otis Warren



Directed by Kristin Heckler
Dramaturgy by Melody Brooks

Wednesday, April 13, 2016
The New School

Wollman Hall, 65 West 11th Street
New York, New York



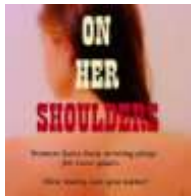
Women have been writing plays and contributing to the Western Theatrical Canon for 1,000 years.

How many of the plays or playwrights can you name?

Total plays by women produced in commercial and regional theatres in the U.S. have remained below 20% for most of the 20th Century and now into the 21st. Yet many of these plays have been the most successful of their time, earning greater awards and box office income than their male counterparts.

At the first reading of **ON HER SHOULDERS** in May 2013, we surveyed the audience about their knowledge of the play and/or the playwright. Given that our audience is generally composed of theatre practitioners and those with an interest in women in theatre, the numbers were still shocking: only 40% had ever heard of Rachel Crothers; just 21% had read any of her plays, and only 7% had seen a production of one of them.

With a general audience, we can imagine that these numbers would be even worse!



The goal of **ON HER SHOULDERS** is to remedy this situation. By presenting staged readings of plays from across the spectrum of time and place, with contemporary dramaturges adapting them for modern audiences, we are making it impossible to deny or ignore the great tradition and value of women's contribution to the theatrical canon.

Through our reading series we intend to motivate producers and directors to champion and produce these brilliant plays in New York and regionally, and to incite audiences to demand to see them.

In making history visible, we also shine the light on today's women playwrights and see their work as part of a continuum a thousand years long. They stand on the shoulders of giants--and in restoring our foremothers to their rightful place, we elevate all women playwrights.



ON HER SHOULDERS is also aligned with the goals and projects of 50/50 in 2020: Parity for Women Theatre Artists. This grassroots initiative was launched in August 2009 to work toward 50% representation for women playwrights and directors by the 100th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage in the U.S.

NEW PERSPECTIVES THEATRE COMPANY (NPTC) is an award-winning, multi-racial company performing in the Theatre District and in communities throughout New York City. Our mission is to develop and produce new plays and playwrights, especially women and people of color, to present classic plays in a style that addresses contemporary issues, and to extend the benefits of theatre to young people and communities in need. **Our aim is not to exclude, but to cast a wider net.** Now in its 25th season, notable NPTC productions have included *Richard III*, starring Austin Pendleton; *Exhibit #9* by Tracy Scott Wilson (1999 AudeLco Award); *Jihad* by Ann Chamberlain (OOBR Award for Best Production); *The Taming of the Shrew* (OOBR Award for Best Production), *Admissions* by Tony Velella (10 Best Plays Backstage); the U.S. premiere of *Visit* by renowned Argentinean playwright Ricardo Monti; and the New York Premieres of Vaclav Havel's *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration*, OBIE-Winner Stephanie Berry's *The Shanequa Chronicles* (produced with Blackberry Productions), *Lemon Meringue Façade* by Ted Lange, and *MOTHER OF GOD!* by Michele Miller (Finalist, Princess Grace Foundation Award). www.nptnyc.org



Warren did indeed use her "Powers" for the revolutionary cause. She wrote numerous letters and poems, which she published anonymously in newspapers and pamphlets. Her most effective efforts at propaganda were a series of satirical plays—considered the first written by an U.S. woman. They appeared serially in newspapers and as pamphlets, but were not performed, because Puritan Boston had laws against staging plays and did not have a theater until 1794.

In 1781 as the fighting ended, the Warrens were given the estate of their former nemesis, Governor Thomas Hutchinson (the "Rapatio" of *The Group*), but lived there only eight years before moving back to Plymouth, where Mercy continued writing. In 1790, she became the third American woman following Anne Bradstreet and Phyllis Wheatley to publish a significant collection of poetry in her own name. *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous* included poems written before and during the war. It began with a humble dedication to George Washington and contained two more plays, *The Sack of Rome* and *The Ladies of Castille*.

Both works dramatize historical analogues to the American Revolution and explore another important theme in Warren's satires and poetry: the issue of women as writers and revolutionary activists. And although the question of Warren's "feminism" has been a subject of much debate, these plays do cast women and mothers as public orators and rebel leaders, and give them the most stirring speeches.

In 1788 she published *Observations on the New Constitution* in which she expressed her displeasure at what she felt was a betrayal of republican ideals. As an anti-Federalist she opposed its ratification, specifically citing the lack of a Bill of Rights as a major problem. It would be rectified three years later, but Warren was forever disappointed in after years with what she felt was too centralized a federal government.



In 1805 Warren completed her three-volume master work, *A History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*. This was no after-thought. It was always her intention and she began writing the first female-authored account of the era back in 1765 when the Stamp Act was defeated. President Thomas Jefferson ordered copies for himself and his cabinet and wrote "her truthful and insightful account of the last thirty years will furnish a more instructive lesson to mankind than any equal period known in history." Her treatment of John Adams however, (whom she believed had been corrupted by his elevation to the heights of political power) led to a series of recriminatory letters between the two and a breach in their friendship which lasted until 1812.

Mercy Otis Warren died on October 19, 1814, at the age of 86 and is buried in Plymouth. A bronze statue of her stands outside the Courthouse in Barnstable County, her birthplace.

Mercy Otis Warren: No "Adulator"
by Melody Brooks



Mercy Otis Warren was a poet, dramatist, satirist, patriot propagandist, and historian who was one of the first U.S. women to write specifically for publication (even when her work was anonymous.). She was the third child of James Otis and Mary Allyne, of Barnstable, south of Plymouth, on Cape Cod. Otis was a farmer, merchant, and attorney, and was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1745. Not having an education himself, he wanted his two sons to attend college and hired his brother-in-law the Reverend Jonathan Russell to tutor them. When Joseph, the oldest, declined the education, Mercy was allowed to take his place. She studied the same curriculum as her brother James, except for

Latin and Greek, which she read in translation. She also appears to have shared in his studies for his Masters Degree. They were exceptional students and both became excellent writers and rhetoricians. It was the younger James who first uttered the phrase "Taxation without representation is tyranny," which became the battle cry for the American Revolution. Mercy's writing is filled with historical references and characters in classical literature, her two favorite subjects of study.

In 1754, Mercy married James Warren, a farmer from Plymouth and a Harvard classmate of her brother. They had a long, happy marriage and raised five sons. Like the Otis men, Warren was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives. He served from 1766 to 1778, eventually becoming Speaker and then president of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. A radical and outspoken activist, he was a leader in local revolutionary politics, and his wife was a worthy partner in his endeavors.



No other woman, with the possible exception of Abigail Adams, was as intimately involved with the politics of the day. Warren was continually at or near the center of events for more than two decades, from the Stamp Act crisis of 1765 to the establishment of the federal republic in 1789. Her Plymouth home was the gathering place of patriot leaders for ten years preceding the Revolution. These meetings laid the foundation for the Committees of Correspondence, the first organized efforts to form a unified resistance across the thirteen colonies to the so-called "Intolerable Acts" of the British Parliament.

The first Committees were temporary, such as that opposing the Stamp Act, and they were disbanded when the objective was achieved. But as the situation moved from resistance to revolution, permanent committees were established to inform the voters of the common threat faced by all the colonies, and to disseminate information from the cities to the rural communities where most of the people lived. The news was spread through letters and printed pamphlets, and promulgated the patriots' view and version of events.

In answer to a query by Mercy early on as to the appropriateness of a woman stepping into the propagandist fray, her ardent fan and cheerleader, John Adams, wrote to her husband:

"Tell your wife that God Almighty (I use a bold style) has entrusted her with Powers for the good of the World, which, in the Cause of His Providence, he bestows on few of the human race. That instead of being a fault to use them, it would be criminal to neglect them."

ON HER SHOULDERS

presents

The Group
by Mercy Otis Warren

directed by Kristin Heckler
dramaturgy by Melody Brooks

with

Sarah Raimondi
Cairo George*
Zoe Anastassiou†
Julia Schneiderman
Colie McClellan
John Lichtwalt†
Kristin Heckler†

Halzerod/Beau Trumps
Hateall/Collateris
Dick/Simple Sapling/Scribblerius
Secretary Dupe/Prologue/Epilogue
Judge Meagre/Humbug
Crusty Crowbar/Monsieur/Sylla
Stage Directions

†New School Alum

*Member AEA

Please join us after the reading for a Play in Context discussion and a glass of wine

KRISTIN HECKLER (*Director*) grew up in Sellersville, PA and graduated from Duke University with BA's in Women's Studies and Spanish. In 2014, Kristin started her theatre company, Recognize Theatre in order to create work which challenges society's persisting discrimination with regard to gender and sexuality. Kristin recently adapted the story of the Duke Porn Star into a theatrical piece, *#Pornstar University*. It is currently being workshopped in a devised fashion with Kristin as director and lead writer. Other favorite directing projects include *Paraphilia: Everyone Has A Sexual Disorder* (FringeNYC/Recognize), *How I Learned to Drive* (Recognize Theatre), *Stop Kiss* (Philadelphia Fringe Festival), and *Godspell* (Duke University). Her directing roots stem from Montgomery Theater in Souderton, PA where she assistant directed *Becky Shaw*, *The Prisoner of Second Avenue* and *Any Wednesday*. Thank you to her parents for endless support, friends for always coming, and Ash for always believing.

MELODY BROOKS (*Dramaturg*) is the Artistic Director of New Perspectives Theatre Company and director of it's Women's Work LAB, which develops original short and full-length plays by 8-12 female playwrights a year. She has been producing and directing new works and the classics for more than 30 years in NYC. As one of the co-founders of 50/50 in 2020: Parity for Women Theatre Artists, she is involved in a number of programs that are working to reclaim and restore the true history of women as theatre practitioners through the centuries. Melody currently serves on the Board of the League of Professional Theatre Women.

No Mercy From Mercy by Melody Brooks



Mercy Otis Warren's unexpected education uncorked, if not a genie then arguably a genius of the literary arts. She produced an enormous amount of writing. In addition to her plays and 1,300 page history of the revolution, there are dozens and dozens of letters and poems written to and sometimes at the behest of, a number of the most prominent men and women engaged in the cause of revolution. Warren's own engagement went beyond the written word. She hosted these leaders at her home in Plymouth where political strategy was discussed and determined and she contributed liberally to the conversations. When she talked, men listened. Among the surviving letters are many from the most prominent people of the day seeking Mercy's opinion and advice, or praising her literary talents.

John Adams took a particular interest in Warren, encouraging her to use her facility with verse to benefit their shared cause. She obliged. Combining her knowledge of classical history with a flair for the theatrical, she composed a series of dramatic satires: *The Adulateur*, *The Defeat*, *The Group*, *The Blockheads*, that she published anonymously in the patriotic press. It would have been foolhardy for her to publish this material under her own name, even if she were not a woman. These were no-holds-barred attacks on prominent supporters of Crown policy, most notably Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor Thomas Hutchinson, for whom she had a particular loathing, believing (as did many of her compatriots) that he had betrayed his American birth for the prospect of personal advancement. Hutchinson is thinly disguised as "Rapatio" of "Upper Serbia" in the first of these satires, *The Adulateur*; is killed off in *The Defeat* and referenced again in *The Group*.



The satirical farce was a popular dramatic form of the time and Warren wielded her pen like a knife. Although modern audiences might have trouble following the classical allusions and matching the play's characters to the local personages being skewered, Warren's contemporaries would have known exactly what was being communicated. After publishing *The Group* in 1775, she seemed to fear that she had gone too far. Both John and Abigail Adams reassured her. He noted that "...*The business of satyr is to expose vice and vicious men as such to this scorn...*" And from Abigail, "*I observe my friend is laboring under apprehension, lest the severity with which a certain Group was drawn, was incompatible with that benevolence which ought always to be predominant in a female character...satire in the hands of some is a very dangerous weapon; yet...when truth is unavoidably preserved, and ridiculous and vicious actions are alone the subject, it is so far from blamable that it is certainly meritorious.*"

Warren sent *The Group* in sections to her husband who it seems, had commissioned it! He didn't keep it to himself, writing on January 15, 1775 to John Adams:

"Inclosed are for your amusement two Acts of a dramatic performance composed at my particular desire. They go to you as they came out of the hand of the Copier, without pointing or marking. If you think it worth while to make any other use of them than a reading, you will

prepare them in that way & give them such other Corrections & Amendments as your good Judgment shall suggest."

John Adams did indeed think it worthwhile and the play was published in January 1775 in the Boston Gazette and the Massachusetts Spy. Montrose J. Moses in a 1918 collection of early American plays claims it was published "on the day before the Battle of Lexington" but in a letter to Adams in 1814 Warren reminds him that he "committed it to press the winter before Lexington battle". Moses is referring to the pamphlet version printed in Boston that April; the New York and Philadelphia versions contained only the two scenes that appeared in the newspapers. The Boston pamphlet cover attests "As lately Acted and to be Re-Acted to the Wonder of all Superior Intelligences, Nigh Head Quarters at Amboyne." This is the only indication that *The Group* might have been performed at the time it was written (as it was "near headquarters", it is fun to think that perhaps the Continental Army performed it for their own amusement.)

So well did her husband and his friends maintain Warren's anonymity that, long after the Revolution, when she had already published work in her own name, she was required to seek John Adams' help in proving her authorship. She wrote to him on July 10, 1814, only a few months before her death:

My next question, sir, you may deem impertinent. Do you remember who was the author of a little pamphlet entitled, The Group? To your hand it was committed by the writer. You brought it forward to the public eye. I will therefore give you my reason for naming it now. A friend of mine, who lately visited the Athenæum, saw it among a bundle of pamphlets, with a high encomium of the author, who, he asserted, was Mr. Samuel Barrett. You can, if you please, give a written testimony contradictory of the false assertion. Adams responded:

What brain could ever have conceived or suspected Samuel Barrett, Esquire, to have been the author of "The Group"? I could take my Bible oath ...That there was but one person in the world, male or female, who could at that time, have written it; and that person was Madam Mercy Warren, the historical, philosophical, poetical, and satirical consort of the then Colonel, since General, James Warren of Plymouth, sister of the great, but forgotten, James Otis.

In a subsequent letter to Warren, after she had sent him the original *Dramatis Personae* because he could no longer remember whom all the characters were representing, Adams, informed her that he had been to the Athenæum (a library in Boston), and written down the original names of the people satirized. This copy is still in the possession of the library.

The two plays included in her 1790 collection eschew the satirical and use Warren's classical knowledge to draw analogies to the American Revolution, and in particular to highlight women—virtuous, republican women at least—in the role of revolutionaries and activists. She apparently hadn't lost her touch, receiving a letter from Alexander Hamilton dated July 1st, 1791: "*It is certain that in the 'Ladies of Castile', the sex will find a new occasion of triumph. Not being a poet myself, I am in the less danger of feeling mortification at the idea that in the career of dramatic composition at least, female genius in the United States has out-stripped the male.*"



With a review like that, it is time to celebrate Mercy Otis Warren as truly the first U.S. female playwright, and not just a useful tool in the propaganda machine of the Revolution.