

José Juan Arrom (1910-2007)

Another pioneering figure has disappeared, a scholar with multiple interests who made his mark in every field he entered: the *cronistas de Indias*, ethnography, literature, linguistics – and of course his major contributions to Ibero-American theatre. José Arrom created a significant space for the study of Latin American theatre in the North American academy and trained and encouraged the first generation of theatre scholars who would be instrumental in mainstreaming the study of Latin American theatre and drama.

One of the first Latin American scholars to obtain a PhD from a North American university and to enjoy a long teaching career in the United States, Arrom played a unique role as a bridge between U.S. scholarship and Cuba from his earliest days as a graduate student at Yale. When Arrom began his studies in the US, his compatriot Manuel Pedro González and others were already strengthening the bridges between Latin American scholars and their US counterparts within US universities in established fields (poetry, fiction, the essay), but the full integration of dramatic literature into the academic canon was hampered by the lack of scholarly resources. Arrom's doctoral dissertation, a history of dramatic literature in Cuba (published by Yale University Press, 1944) opened a treasure trove of dramatic texts and did much to dissipate prejudices among the academic establishment regarding the study of Latin American theatre history. As honorary curator of the Latin American Collection of the Sterling Library at Yale, he actively sought to include dramatic works while enriching the holdings in other fields.

From the mid-1940s on he expanded his field of research into Venezuelan theatre and into Spanish American colonial theatre, on which he published the seminal *Historia del teatro hispanoamericano (época colonial)* (Havana, 1956; second edition, Mexico, 1967). Two critical editions of dramatic works also stand out: *El Príncipe Jardinero y fingido Cloridano*, by Santiago de Pita (Havana, 1951; reissued 1963) and *Comedia*

de San Francisco de Borja, by Matías de Bocanegra (Mexico, 1976). From 1948 to 1955 he authored the section on Spanish American Drama for the *Handbook of Latin American Studies*.

Arrom was awarded the Ollantay Prize in Latin American theatre research (1979) and honorary degrees by the University of Havana (1982), the University of Carabobo of Valencia, Venezuela (1991) and the Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, San Juan, Puerto Rico (1994).

José Arrom's legacy extends well beyond his scholarly books and articles, through the students he introduced to Latin American dramatic literature and theatre history. Because his passion in the classroom was contagious and his mentoring exemplary, the trails he helped forge with his curiosity and his meticulous and original research have become our own well-travelled paths. Gracias, maestro.

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