

SELF AND SPACE IN THE THEATRE OF SUSAN GLASPELL. Noelia Hernando Real. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011. ISBN 978-0-7864-6394-7. p.204

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Noelia Hernando Real is an assistant professor at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. She received her PhD from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, where she was a FPU scholar for four years. Noelia Hernando's commitment to the study of Susan Glaspell's literary production is reflected on the fact that she currently is the vice-president of the international Susan Glaspell Society. Some of Hernando's recent publications are: "Sane Enough to Kill: On Women, Madness and the Theatricality of Violence in Susan Glaspell's *The Verge*" included in *Violence in American Theatre and Drama* (2011), a volume edited by Alfonso Ceballos, Ramón Espejo and Bernardo Muñoz; and "On Closets and Graves: Intertextualities in Susan Glaspell's *Alison's House* and Emily Dickinson's Poetry", which was part of *Intertextual Exchanges* (2011) edited by Brenda Murphy and Drew Eisenhauer. In addition, Hernando Real has recently co-edited with Barbara Ozieblo, *Performing Gender Violence: Plays by Contemporary American Women Dramatists* (2012), a collection of essays that explores the different forms of violence exerted on women by analyzing the strategies that American female playwrights have developed in the last forty years to tackle with this social malady.

Noelia Hernando Real continues to conduct remarkable research on Susan Glaspell. *Self and Space in the Theatre of Susan Glaspell* is just another of her greatly welcome contributions to the field. Here, Hernando Real focuses on the discussion of spatial determinism in ten plays by Susan Glaspell that span from her early *Suppressed Desires* (1915), created in collaboration with George Cram Cook, and *Trifles* (1917) to *Allison's House* (1930) and *Springs Eternal* (1943). As stated in the introduction to *Self and Space*, Hernando Real has compiled information from her research trips to New York, London, Delphi and Dublin, consulting Glaspell's personal writings, along with primary and secondary sources. Her extensive research work is clearly reflected in the well-documented references she makes for each of the sections of the book.

In my opinion, one of the most significant additions that *Self and Space* does to the analysis of Glaspell's dramatic work is its theoretical standpoint. Hernando Real takes a materialist feminist approach, particularly following Michèle Barret's and Elin Diamond's theories, in the discussion of the identity construction process for Glaspell's female characters. Cheryl Black, Linda Ben-Zvi and Barbara Ozieblo,

among other critics, have already used a materialist feminist perspective in their analysis of Glaspell. In Hernando Real's text, however, this feminist approach is combined with Una Chauduri's singular theory of *Dramatic Geopathology*, which, as Hernando Real describes, consists of "the configuration of a stage space where place becomes a problem for characters. Two principles integrate the dramatic discourse of geopathology. The first one is *victimage of location*, a principle that describes place as the protagonist's fundamental problem" and "*heroism of departure*. According to this principle, a character gains full independence and fulfills the creation of their own identity by disentangling themselves from the oppressive place they were fixed to" (18, emphasis in original). Hernando Real uses Chauduri's theoretical framework as the matrix around which to structure her research.

Self and Space is divided into six main chapters: the first one, "Towards Geopathology in Glaspell's Modern Drama," reviews different theories that have been developed to analyze theatrical space and theatre space in modern drama, particularly focusing on McAuley's classification of space in the theatre, which Hernando Real considers the "most comprehensive and useful" taxonomy of spatial functions in the theatre to date (15-16). This section also introduces Chauduri's conceptualization of theatrical space as a problematic around which, as Hernando aptly argues, Glaspell's characters construct their identities. The second section of *Self and Space*, "American Geomythologies Revisited as Part of Dramatic Geopathology" scrutinizes the American Myth of Mobility, the Pioneer Myth, and the theme of displacement in American drama. Tropes such as the fear of solitude or the dramatic strategy of invasion are thoroughly studied in a variety of Glaspell's plays. I found the analysis of *Suppressed Desires* (1915) particularly insightful. The third chapter in this volume, entitled "Geodichotomies in the Configuration of Dramatic Geopathology" explores the seemingly paradoxical conceptions of the dramatic space as for example a place of isolation within a community, or the representation of home both as a prison and a shelter, or the spatial binary opposition of inside versus outside. The fourth section in *Self and Space* is devoted to the "The Burden of the Past in Dramatic Geopathology". Hernando Real illustrates the direct link between space and time in identity construction processes. In this sense, Glaspell, as the "mother of modern American drama" (*Self and Space* 1), anticipates this connection that will be explored by later (women) playwrights such as Suzan-Lori Parks, who confesses that "one of [her] tasks as a playwright is to locate the ancestral burial ground—dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it down" (*America* 4). Chapter five in *Self and Space* considers the "Imagery of Death in Dramatic Geopathology," particularly focusing on several important tropes in Glaspell's dramatic world, such as the representation of home as a grave, the theme of the buried child, or what Hernando Real calls "haunted rooms" (135). Haunted rooms here are theatre spaces that are dominated by off-stage characters, a

theatrical strategy that Glaspell uses in *Trifles* (1917), *Bernice* (1919) and *Allison's House* (1930). I personally found chapter six to be the most interesting, particularly because it moves beyond the theoretical framework proposed by Chauduri and it engages in an interesting reflection on the contradictory effects of departure, as for example in the case of Elsa in *Allison's House*. This section also studies several other forms of departure in Glaspell's drama, such as departure from what Hernando Real calls "power geometry", or the subversion of spatial (sexual) power relations; and also the discussion of the use of art or nature as a departure from a trapping location.

In *Self and Space*, Hernando Real proves that "Glaspell's fictional spaces are not decorative backgrounds to support a character's identity, as happens in realistic theatre, but an entity she makes her characters engage with in a verbal and kinesic dialectic" (176). The afterword of *Self and Space* also deserves close attention because it suggests interesting and original fields of study that could derive from the use of the concept of geopathology in the analysis of other texts, namely Glaspell's fiction, the Provincetown Players' texts, or even contemporary playwrights' works.

For its many strengths, *Self and Space* can be a great addition to the library of any American drama scholar in general, but particularly to those conducting research on Susan Glaspell. Brimming with rich, historically accurate references, denoting a meticulous research methodology conducted over several years, and with an insightful and skillful discourse, *Self and Space* by Noelia Hernando Real is a brilliant contribution to the revived criticism that has developed over the past decade on Susan Glaspell.

WORKS CITED

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