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Emeline Jouve, *Susan Glaspell's Poetics and Politics of Rebellion*

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Emeline Jouve, *Susan Glaspell's Poetics and Politics of Rebellion* (Iowa : University of Iowa Press, 2017), 260 p., ISBN 978-1609385088

- 1 “[T]he different elements in your book must not be detached things, but thread held together, as a weaving pattern” (44) : this quote by Susan Glaspell is taken to heart by Emeline Jouve, who offers a tightly woven “comprehensive analysis of the dramatist’s work, from the perspective of rebellion” (12). The choice to devote an entire monograph to Glaspell, a long neglected dramatist, “relegated to the margins of literary history” and “marginaliz[ed] from the canon” (10), constitutes in itself something of a bold — dare we say rebellious — scholarly gesture. All the more so as Jouve refrains from engaging in comparative tactics with better-known playwrights of the same era, including the overbearing figure of fellow former Provincetown Player Eugene O’Neill.
- 2 The guiding thread of rebellion is deployed over a series of nine chapters, each devoted to one or a couple of plays, and organized around the overarching categories of Denunciation, Resistance and Hope — or, in structural terms, “deconstruction, construction and reconstruction” (229). Jouve charts formal developments alongside evolutions in the political positioning of the playwright. The reliance on archival sources not yet explored combined with the author’s didactic, concise, jargon-free prose give this monograph a broad appeal, positioning it as both a potential text-book for undergraduates or post-graduates alike and as a useful addition to any fellow drama scholar’s reading list.
- 3 Biographical details and production history are reduced to a minimum, as the purpose of the book is to subject the playwright’s work to a laser-focused rhetorical analysis

aiming to demonstrate that Glaspell's drama resists oversimplification — quite an ironic turn for an author who strove to point out the damage and slippages exacted by stereotypes and biases. Jouve deftly contextualizes Glaspell's strokes of political incorrectness, showing how daring they were for their time, however innocuous they might seem today (“the playwright [...] under federal legislation, could have been accused of antinationalism by exposing the abuses of the past” (87) ; “With her subtle staging of the American past, Glaspell managed to bypass censorship despite the daring nature of this opening act that challenged official history” (88)).

- 4 The systematic exploitation of close reading techniques and rhetorical devices might come across as a somewhat outdated or pedantic approach at first sight. Yet this choice of treatment proves justified and ultimately convincing: assuming that Glaspell channels and frames her sense of rebellion through a complex web of dramatic and rhetorical figures, meticulous attention has to be paid indeed to her strategies in order to render their diversity and nuances. Jouve postulates that, as Glaspell's drama is no agit-prop or political theatre in the usual sense of the term, the playwright tends to stay away from obvious denunciation or moralization from a bully pulpit in favor of subtle portrayals — hence the necessity to offer well-crafted readings to dissect the ins and outs of Glaspell's methodological apparatus and expose its functioning. Critical references are generously — albeit never gratuitously — dispensed to frame and illuminate the playwright's approach and choices. The constant back-and-forth between detail and broader contextualization helps to maintain a sense of balance and avoid getting lost in the intricacies of the text while bypassing broad-brush generalities.
- 5 Although Glaspell does not deviate from her broadly-defined agenda, “the disintegration of American idealism and its replacement by pragmatic capitalism” (109), historical developments lead her to adapt and tailor her writing to pressing circumstances, as when she anticipates that her criticism of the ruling elites threatens to undermine the patriotic effort in war time. Jouve analyzes how Glaspell exposes the contradictions and hypocrisies at the core of the American democratic system, and its tendency to silence and isolate, if not downright obliterate, those deemed unable to or refusing to play along, especially along gender, racial, and social lines. Glaspell's brand of combativeness involves targeting actors across the ideological spectrum, including the left, as when she describes how the would-be rebel editors of the eponymous play *The People* care little about their target audience, that they betray by preferring to remain engrossed in the act of writing itself, detached from its assumed transitivity. The author also debunks the commonly accepted assertion that Glaspell is an “idealist”, revealing instead the individualistic drive underlying this search for a better future. For the playwright, the personal is political — another reason behind the difficulty to pin down her characters and reduce them to predictable archetypes.
- 6 As is the case of any monograph laying the groundwork for further research, directions are offered but sometimes only glossed over, in part due to the focus on rebellion, and analyses could be expanded. A case in point: the author introduces an unpublished play and archival find never mentioned anywhere before, *Wings*, without subjecting it to a full-fledged analysis and making the most of her discovery. As Jouve herself admits, stand-alone analyses devoted to Glaspell could use further development, even in article format, and more comparative work is needed — in that respect, following Jouve's analysis of Glaspell's treatment of female figures, intersectional approaches

involving the dramatic treatment of gender and race would be particularly pertinent, especially in European drama of the same era.

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Mots-clés: Susan Glaspell, théâtre politique, rébellion, Provincetown Players, justice

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