

INTERTEXTUALITY IN AMERICAN DRAMA.
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MURPHY, EDITORS.

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The present volume takes on the fascinating and shape-shifting project of assessing the different concepts and manifestations of “intertextuality” in a number of American authors known for their dramatic merits. This book divides the task in two parts, each one subdivided in two sections. In this way, we find a first part devoted to literary intertextuality, with a section focused on poets’ imprint on dramatic texts and the other dealing with playwrights and the interconnection between performance texts. In the second part, under the heading “cultural intertextuality,” we find a more eclectic milieu distributed between “cultural texts” and “cultural context.”

This collection of essays is introduced by Drew Eisenhauer, one of the two editors, who opens by reflecting about the nature of the core topic, starting from the debate whether theatrical performance qualifies as a “text” at all. Eisenhauer explains that performances are often “cultural ‘texts’” as well as “linguistic ones.” Therefore, he elaborates on how dramatic texts are intertwined not only with the theatrical medium, but also with a vast number of cultural and social manifestations through aspects like language, aesthetics, history or technology. Then, the author offers a brief account of the history of the concept of intertextuality and how it has shifted through the years, from Julia Kristeva or Roland Barthes to post-structuralism. He concludes by targeting the resourcefulness of the term regardless of period, proving it to be a source of innovation that pushes the boundaries of the meaning of the text. Eisenhauer concludes by pointing out that it is precisely these different

approaches to innovative interrelation that will be represented by the different authors gathered in this volume.

The first section of the book begins with a revealing account by Herman Daniel Farrell III about Eugene O'Neill's time as an adapter rather than an original playwright, and how this period affected his style, his version of Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner* being the central example. Farrell takes a structuralist approach to intertextuality to illustrate how the experimental creativity in O'Neill's adaptation prefigures the postmodern concept of "devising" (where director, designer and playwright collaborate in a creative collectivity) and, at the same time, captures echoes of Japanese theatre and the abandoned tradition of American pageant drama. Taking on the same play, Rupendra Guha Majumdar examines the creative process behind the inception of the adaptation. Coinciding with Farrell, Majumdar minimizes the critical failure of the play, highlighting its lasting influence on O'Neill's work, drawing examples from plays such as *The Iceman Cometh*, *Where the Cross Is Made*, or, most prominently, *Long Day's Journey into the Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*.

Also about O'Neill but this time focusing on *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, Aurélie Sanchez analyzes how the comedic elements and the structure of the play itself hark back to William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and also how Romantic symbolism, mainly that of the moonlight, is a trait shared with John Keats's odes. The influence of these two sources, however, reaches even further, according to Sanchez. From Shakespeare's comedy we can see elements like "comic reversals and metamorphoses," "theatrical illusion" or a blend of comedy and tragedy. The tragicomic aspect brings about melancholy, which is a main nexus with Keats's poetry, and is directly present in the play with the quotation of "Ode to a Nightingale." More aspects are explored, but all of them, Sanchez concludes, can be a meaning-shifting multifaceted moon that illustrates a melancholic journey from sadness into liberation.

The last two essays of this first section shift the author discussed to Susan Glaspell, whether it is some of her prose or plays. Michael Winetsky's piece deals with the essential influence of Romantic texts and authors in Glaspell's references, using as examples the novels *The Glory of the Conquered* and *Judd Rankin's Daughter*, as well as her mid-career play *Inheritors* (1922). Through these works Winetsky elaborates on how Glaspell used Romantic discourse and ideology to reevaluate the idea of moral literature and the nature of

cultural hierarchies, mostly that of the urban against the rural. On the other hand, Noelia Hernando-Real chooses to talk about the intertextual relation between Glaspell's play *Alison's House* and the poetry of Emily Dickinson. The play, considered mostly by critics to be an adaptation of Dickinson's life, is dominated by the poet's "work and character." Aside from the plot being loosely biographical, there is a correlation between the use of symbols like the reclusive house, at the same time a source of protection and isolation, and the marble tea table, signifying death. Thus, the influence of the poems "The grave my little cottage is" and "They shut up me in Prose" proves essential in the presentation of domesticity, seclusion and mortality in *Alison's House*.

In the second section of the volume, the scope changes to examine the relationship between different dramatic texts, sometimes even by the same author. Such is the case of the first essay in this section, where Kristin Bennett explores the shared elements of female characters in Thornton Wilder's drama, more specifically *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *The Long Christmas Dinner* and *Our Town*. Inspired by his own mother and sisters, we learn how Wilder, although not strictly a feminist, tends to portray the struggle of women for identity in a constraining world, to the point of, according to Bennett, prefiguring Judith Butler's reflections about gender. The next essay, by Stephen Marino, also deals with Wilder's theatre, but this time in its role as an influence on Arthur Miller, especially in his early period. Marino points to *Our Town* as a running inspiration for Miller, especially when he put together his critical essay "The Family in Modern Drama" and the two versions of *A View from the Bridge*, also highlighting the contrast between "poetic" drama and "realistic" drama. The second section closes with a piece by Jason Shaffer on the different theatrical adaptations of Washington Irving's iconic short story *Rip Van Winkle*. Shaffer shows how a mostly descriptive story with little dialogue became one of the theatrical sensations of the 19th century thanks to melodrama.

The third section is dedicated to the analysis of cultural texts; the first essay, by Franklin J. Lasik, surveys the concept of "female utopia" in several of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's novels and Susan Glaspell's *The Verge*. Lasik examines how Gilman's ideas of an ideal female society shaped *The Verge's* protagonist's struggle for freedom. The next piece, by Sarah Withers, also talks about Glaspell, but this time about the play *Inheritors* and how it portrays the concept of frontier, while also observing the interactions between loss and

cultural inheritance. The third essay, by Annalisa Brugnoli, moves on to Eugene O'Neill, exploring how the trope of "divine hiddenness," God's deliberate absence, connects O'Neill's work with texts as diverse as the Bible, the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and those of Carl Jung. The final essay in the third section, written by Emeline Jouve, goes back to Glaspell's *The Verge*, with an assessment of the intertextual manifestations of insanity in this piece about women's emancipation.

The last section of the book is devoted to cultural context, and starts with an essay by Lisa Hall Hagen about the intersections of crime and gender in plays like Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*, Maurine Dallas Watkins's *Chicago* and Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*. Hagen illustrates how these subversive plays take elements from reality and drama to become durable works representative of their authors. Next is Jeffrey Eric Jenkins's piece about the roles of history, memory and nostalgia in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, and how they are conditioned by the author's underlying religious concern. After this essay, Ramón Espejo Romero offers his reflection about the perceived universal quality of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, brought about by his translation of the play. The next piece, by Graham Wolfe, examines the intertextual connections in John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* and its famous core motif, while the last text, written by Sharon Friedman, takes on Susan Glaspell's challenge to nativism when she adapted to the stage the short stories she wrote for *Harper's Monthly*.

This compelling volume proves to be a meaningful effort in showing the interwoven intricacies and multiplicities of the loom that is intertextuality, which are even more highlighted in a medium as polyphonic as drama. Indubitably, students of theatre and scholars alike may find this book alluring for its various explorations of intertextuality on the American stage. However, considering this book greatly focuses on early to mid-twentieth century in general and O'Neill and Glaspell in particular, it would have been interesting to see both earlier and more contemporary installments, as the pieces about *Rip Van Winkle* or *Six Degrees of Separation* demonstrate. Additionally, a little more cohesion in the distribution of texts would have been useful, but it could be argued that the hopscotch-like nature of some approaches to intertextuality calls for just such a winding road.