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Abstract

Review of Analola Santana. *Freak Performances: Dissidence in Latin American Theater*. U of Michigan P, 2018. 266 pp.

Keywords

theater, disability studies, queer studies

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Analola Santana's *Freak Performances: Dissidence in Latin American Theater* (2018) brings a critical analysis to the field of Latin American theater and performance, focusing especially on how the freak is socially, politically, and economically constructed as the Other in Latin America. In her detailed analysis, Santana maps the genealogy and evolution from the monster to the freak as a corporal variation in Latin American performance from the time of colonial rule through colonial rule to the neoliberal era. In doing so, Santana positions the freak as a modern image of the hegemonic political gaze and provides an analytical approximation of the freak through the lens of science and medicine. In addition, Santana's book also offers a sophisticated analysis of gender and the dictated roles of insanity in womanhood and deformation of physical bodies. The impact of dehumanization and disposal of bodies under state violence in her critical analysis also offers a new perspective of the violent treatment given to the Other. By categorizing the gender and social classes that define the normative expectations of the dominant discourse Santana constructs a framework to what is deemed normal behaviors and characteristics while proposing at the same time, a perverse and weird image of the Other. In doing so, Santana provides an understanding of how the modern world has produced ideologies based on race, sexuality, national identity, and class dynamics.

In *Freak Performances*, Santana proposes that the inescapable legacy of colonialism has helped to constitute the Other as an exclusive abnormal, freakish, and savage creature—while creating diverse images of the colonial freaks and their deformities throughout history and into twentieth and twentieth-first centuries theatrical spaces. Interestingly, Santana's colonial freak and her introductory genealogy of the freak, have made it possible for future dramaturgical directors to move beyond the colonial wound and create theatrical masterpieces depicting a vast majority of distinctive creatures. Needless to say, the genealogy and understanding of the colonial image of the freak has transformed the freak into a more present-day figure; that is, one that can be seen in the modern neoliberal era as an unproductive figure of society. Much like colonial rule, capitalism produces an entire category of people who are not only marginalized by social class, but also by race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sex, sexual orientation, physical and medical deformities, ultimately fostering an image of a newer and more modern creature—or freak. Santana's work, therefore, focuses on the abnormal/normal impact of globalization and the establishment of a neoliberal order in the twentieth century that established approved categories for belonging. What matters, according to Santana's analysis, is the utility and docility of the individual and their productivity as a fitting body in a market economy. This is what makes some individuals

valuable while others, who do not fit the working body, are discarded as an abomination within the political and marketable spheres. Therefore, in her brilliant attempt to categorize the freak in the modern world, Santana analyzes the freak through distinct and more modern characteristics—that is, by analyzing the ill, the neglected, the abused, the poor and the exploited, those with physical and abnormal deformities, and those marginalized by race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sex, and sexual orientation. In doing so, what we see in *Freak Performances* is the embodied image of the exaggerated, grotesque, deformed, disabled, and clinically and emotionally ill bodies, who capture the physical, emotional, and psychological horror of the Other. As a result, Santana presents the Other through a different lens—a lens that captures the physical abnormalities of modern freak, through their physical and emotional disabilities while constituting the image of a noncitizen.

The author draws on several theatrical pieces, from a wide range of Latin American countries including Mexico, Peru, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Argentina as well as the United States to incorporate a diverse image and the fate of the freakish Other. Sadly, as Santana illustrates in her book, this creature has been trapped within the shadows of colonization and has been objectified and devalued throughout the modern era. By providing a comprehensive inventory of playwrights and performances, the reader benefits from a broader textual corpus of narratives that center on the freak in Latin America. Therefore, with the inclusion of several theatrical pieces from distinct countries, Santana's work allows for an enhanced understanding and historical mobilization of the abject Other from monstrous creature (in the colonial era) to the unwanted, disposable body (under authoritarian dictatorships).

The study of performance has become an interdisciplinary field of study, encompassing a wide range of theoretical explorations examining the body and behaviors within the context of theater, speech, and performing arts. Mixed with performance studies, *Freak Performances* also makes a significant contribution to the fields of disability studies, queer studies, and gender studies as it provides a historical legacy of the embodied freak performer. Santana's rich discussion of freak in Latin America opens a promising exploration into modern and more deviant creatures.

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