

that the circus repertoire was defined by acts originating only in Europe and North America. The East contributed at par in laying the foundations of the circus arts.

The following chapters on circus histories from the Americas, China and the Czech Republic narrate a significant dimension and politics of the global circus phenomenon. Each circus developed a distinct aesthetic modelled on the specific sociopolitical conditions of its evolution. Julieta Infantino's chapter on the Argentine experience of the Criollo Circus, which produced a localized subgenre of circus in the colonies, stands out. The legitimization of the circus theatre is historically contextualized and juxtaposed with the consolidation of the Argentine nation state (p. 69).

The book offers a crucial study of circus aesthetics that discusses highly popular yet unmapped circus performances. Kim Baston and Peta Tait critically engage with the evolution of animal acts while simultaneously acknowledging circus's roots as a colonial form which celebrated the colonization of the animals and territories through performances. Baston focuses on the evolution of equestrian acts, encompassing more crucial site-specific contemporary performances which emphasize the decolonial subjectivity of the human–animal relationship that inverts the original equation of master, superiority and control. Tait's chapter examines the representation of animals in war re-enactments and wild west shows that were geared towards creating an aesthetics of national glory and victory for the colonizers.

The following section explores contemporary and other alternative forms of circus, offering essential methodologies for researching alternative histories of circus arts. Catherine M. Young centres her chapter on the oft-ignored performances of variety theatre, which were neither included in the mainstream theatre nor popular entertainment forms. Agathe Dumont's chapter covers the political beginnings of circus within countercultural movements in the late 1960s and its influences in Europe today. She applies the lens of mobility 'as a way to gain legitimacy' (p. 197), an important framework to decode circus aesthetics and popularity which have shifted from virtuosity to sensitivity in the gesture and poetics of acrobatics.

The last section summarizes the preliminary thoughts which define one's approach to circus. Karen Fricker and Charles Batson detail the different methodological approaches in circus scholarship which make it inclusive in terms of disciplinary studies. Anna Sophie Jürgens writes about the seldomly used scientific lens for circus, and juxtaposes it with the humanities, where the aesthetic–semiotic tension turns a mirror on the performance itself.

Like circus, which demands intersectional discussions, emerging circus scholarship is necessarily multi-pronged and this book brilliantly collates the many voices beyond the Eurocentric perception of popular entertainment forms. With its wide-ranging methodologies and performances, the book will be especially beneficial to scholars in history, anthropology, sociology, environmental studies, gender studies and colonial and post-colonial studies, alongside circus and performance scholars.

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Samuel Beckett and the Theatre of the Witness: Pain in Postwar Francophone

Drama. By Hannah Simpson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. xi + 188. \$80 Hb.

Reviewed by Swati Joshi, Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar,

swati1992.joshi@gmail.com

Hannah Simpson's incisive critique of the representation and simulated presentation of wartime suffering onstage in the postwar francophone plays of Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, Eugène Ionesco, Pablo Picasso and Marguerite Duras invites the reader to reflect on the role and the

responsibility of audiences as the witnesses of the performance of pain. Simpson juxtaposes each play of Beckett with that of his contemporaries, who, like him, were 'non-combatant' (p. 81), non-French nationals residing in France during the Second World War witnessing Nazi violence and the forced deportation and painful deaths of their friends and/or family. The author clarifies that her work differs from David Houston Jones's *Samuel Beckett and Testimony* (2011) and Joseph Anderton's *Beckett's Creatures: Art of Failure after the Holocaust* (2016) for two reasons. First, she collocates Beckett's postwar plays with the works of his coevals to present a comparative analysis of the representation of pain. This comparison highlights how 'Beckett's postwar plays relentlessly refuse a redemptive perspective on the encounter with physical suffering' and differ from his francophone contemporaries who present 'a thread of a surviving redemptive impulse' in the face of suffering (p. 156). Second, the writer studies the efficiency of theatre as a medium to present the performance of pain as opposed to the mixed-media representation examined in preceding scholarship. This book could be particularly useful to the researchers of postwar theatre and performance studies, Beckett studies, the medical humanities and French theatre, and in general to any student pursuing theatre and performance studies.

Simpson's comparative analysis explores the spectrum of witnesses' response to the performance of onstage pain. The juxtaposition of Beckett's *Eleutheria* (1996) and Albert Camus's *Caligula* (1944), *Le Malentendu* or *The Misunderstanding* (1944), and *L'état de siège* or *State of Siege* (1948) studies 'the individual's refusal to sympathise with the spectacle of another's physical pain' (p. 31). From there on, the text proceeds to analyse the spectacle of pain as a contagion and the onstage performers of pain as bearers of the contagion who spread this infection to their spectators, thereby making the auditorium the shrine of contagion. The examination of this infectious spectacle then facilitates understanding of the tranquilizing effect of the aesthetic spectacle of pain in the comparative analysis of Beckett's *Endgame* (1957) and Pablo Picasso's *Le désir attrapé par la queue* or *Desire Caught by the Tail* (1944), and *Les quatre petites filles* or *The Four Little Girls* (1949). The anaesthetic effect of the aesthetic spectacle of pain paves the way to discussing whether pain needs to be or can be confined to the body while examining Beckett's *Happy Days* (1961) and *Play* (1964) alongside Eugène Ionesco's *Amédée, ou Comment s'en débarasser* or *Amédée, or, How to Get Rid of It* (1954) and *Le piéton de l'air* or *A Stroll in the Air* (1963). The penultimate chapter interrogates 'the affective transmission' (p. 142) of physical suffering from the actors performing onstage to the spectators while examining Beckett's *Not I* (1972) and Marguerite Duras's *L'amante anglaise* (1968). Both plays deny 'the reassuring boundary between stage and auditorium' (p. 142) to the spectators. This argument of blurring the boundaries and the audiences' response to it could use more space to discuss the translation of 'sympathetic identification' into the creative representation of 'corporeal empathy' (p. 133), as is discussed with reference to Duras's subjective experience of pain on her husband's deportation and his return home. It could provide a segue for the perusal of Beckett's *Breath* (1969) that studies the capability of the audiences as the witnesses to empathize with the performer's pain alongside drawing the distinction between their empathetic and empathic experience of the spectacle.

As a medical humanities and Beckett studies researcher, I believe the book provides innovative and strongly justified concepts of spectatorship that can help understand various nuances of the term.