
Elizabeth Maddock Dillon. *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649–1849*. Durham: Duke UP, 2014. Pp. x, 354. US\$94.95.

In *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649–1849*, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon reframes the study of theatre in Atlantic rather than national terms. *New World Drama* aims to remedy the gap in the study of eighteenth-century Atlantic theatre by highlighting the emergence of early American theatre as an independent cultural form. Throughout, Dillon calls for a broader consideration of representation as she examines how the

theatre serves as a space for reinforcing and contesting social belonging. In each chapter, Dillon draws on archival evidence to illustrate that Atlantic world theatres functioned as representational and inherently political spaces.

New World Drama begins by positioning the 1649 beheading of King Charles I and the 1849 Astor Place Riot as turning points in theatrical performance in the Atlantic world. Dillon introduces the commons as a collective that often challenged political, economic, and religious boundaries. She argues that this new performative commons emerged in the eighteenth century and functioned as a means of individual and collective representation. Central to Dillon's analysis is the concept of the colonial relation, which she defines as the "connection between the colony and the metropole in the Anglo-Atlantic world of the eighteenth century" (31). She explores this connection in works such as *The West Indian* and *Oroonoko*. Expanding upon Giorgio Agamben's concept of "homo sacer," or "bare life," Dillon contends that slaves exist as figures of "'bare labor'—labor stripped of the resources of social life and the capacity for social reproduction" (35). As Dillon suggests, the colonial relation was rendered visible through displays of belonging and non-belonging that reflected the racialized division inherent in colonial appropriation.

Chapter Two returns to King Charles I's execution as a moment of emerging popular sovereignty. Dillon views the theatre as a mobilizing force and asserts that the staging of tortured bodies in *Tears of the Indians* enabled the English public to witness the genocidal acts of the Spanish. She suggests that the performance of Spanish cruelty "generate[d] the identity of the Englishman as rightful occupant of the New World" (81). By establishing the staging of tortured bodies as symbols of sovereign power, Dillon calls attention to the links between theatre, nationalism, and empire. The third chapter continues the text's discussion of tortured native bodies in works such as *The Tempest* and *The Enchanted Island*. Dillon distinguishes between the seventeenth-century figure of the tortured Indian and the eighteenth-century image of the royal slave. I found this chapter illuminating, in part because it touches on the disruptive function of women's bodies. Since Dillon's text surveys eighteenth-century Atlantic theatre, the subject of women performing as men is outside the book's scope. Nevertheless, the reference to cross-gendered casting is a compelling addition to a chapter that addresses the erasure of indigenous bodies.

Dillon's fourth chapter investigates how slave bodies in Charleston were required to be both present (in terms of labor) and absent (in terms of political agency). As Dillon reminds readers, the staging of black bodies had very different meanings in South Carolina and Jamaica from those in London or

New York. She writes that the erasure of Native peoples on the Charleston stage functioned as a “‘second scene’ of colonialism” (133). Before analyzing *The Enchanted Island*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Harlequin Friday*, Dillon examines a 1797 letter that expresses rage at the Charleston Theatre’s perceived lack of integrity; the letter writer complains that the theatre manager failed to hide women of color from view. Dillon concludes that in joining spectators on stage to view performances, women of color participated in the collective performance as audience members and as “visible members of the Charleston polity” (147). The fifth chapter continues the book’s treatment of the theatre as a site of performed racial domination. Characterizing the sugar islands of the West Indies as dominated by an extractive regime (of sugar as well as labor), Dillon concludes that enslaved black peoples fashioned culture in light of discrimination. Returning to the concept of bare labor, she observes that “slavery worked to strip black women not just of clothing but of a fundamental aspect of social identity—namely gender itself” (186). In this chapter, Dillon considers the theatre scene in Jamaica and plays such as *School for Scandal* and *The Duenna or the Double Elopement*. In her discussion of the role of clothing as a form of kinship, she notes that slaves who donned elaborate dress were often ridiculed and “seen as performing failed imitations of whiteness” (198). She then turns to Jonkonnu performance, which she characterizes as disruptive because it enacts an African presence on colonial ground.

The text’s final chapter presents New York City’s Astor Place Riot as “emblematic of a desire for a nationalized American culture” (217). Specifically, Dillon is concerned with how Jim Crow figures illustrate a break in the Atlantic imaginary and contribute to United States nationalism by erasing a prior Atlantic history. In other words, in performing US national blackness, Jim Crow, in part, attains meaning through erasure. Drawing on scholarship by Philip Deloria, Dillon discusses the role of “playing Indian” in the construction of American identity. Looking at works such as *Richard III* and *Pizarro*, she develops the relationship between performances of indigeneity and anti-colonial/anti-racist performance.

In *New World Drama*, Dillon makes a significant contribution to the field of Atlantic theatre. Her analysis of theatres around the Atlantic world presents a thorough overview of the field and demonstrates how the performative commons was involved in acts of erasure as well as representation. *New World Drama* offers a valuable resource to scholars and students in literary, performance, and cultural studies. As the book reveals, “the history of the performative commons brings into visibility the colonial relations shaped by capitalism, colonization, and racialization, that structured the eighteenth-

Book Reviews

century Atlantic world” (260). Dillon offers a persuasive argument for dislodging the term “New World” from its oft-associated geographical and ideological binaries.

Jennifer Donahue