

Book Reviews

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Bost, Suzanne. *Shared Selves: Latinx Memoir and Ethical Alternatives to Humanism*. U of Illinois P, 2019. 200 pp.

Anyone familiar with Latinx literary productions knows that autobiographies, memoirs, and artistic self-representations have always been at the center of Chicanx/Latinx authors' identity construction and political activism. Suzanne Bost's last monograph *Shared Selves* changes the way we look at memoirs shifting our attention to marginalized self-narrations and prompting us to question and reconsider our conception of human life. The book seeks to revolutionize how humans think about animality, nature, gender, body, and spirit exploring how these concepts are complex and interdependent.

The organization of the manuscript allows the reader to easily follow the innovative way Judith Ortiz Cofer, Irene Vilar, John Rechy, Aurora Levins Morales, and Gloria Anzaldúa propose new parameters of selfhood. The book is divided into four main chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. Throughout the volume, the author reveals a deep knowledge and understanding of multiple theoretical postulations. The chapters' content structure appears to be really dynamic with every section of the book emphasizing a different research approach: respectively, feminist theory (Judith Butler, Susan Stanford, Sidonie Smith, and Rosi Braidotti) in chapter 1, queer theory (Samuel Delany, José Esteban, and Tim Deane) in chapter 2, ecocriticism (Stacy Alaimo and Mel Chen) in chapter 3, and lastly disability theory (Robert McRuer) in chapter 4. The author opens up the introductory chapter acknowledging her early attraction towards the genre of the memoir and her background on Latinx, queer, feminist, and disability studies. Bost sets in motion clearly from the beginning the interconnectedness among species in relation to posthumanist theories and indigenous worldview. She reflects on the urgency of utilizing the term Latinx in her task of identifying the political and communal subject in life writing.

The two Latina memoirists, Judith Ortiz and Irene Vilar, are the protagonists of the first chapter in which the author establishes the foundations about the way selves get shared. The two Puerto Rican writers drawn upon themes such power inequality, girlhood, systematic patriarchal control, mental illness, suicide, abortion, pregnancy as a form of contagion, and the constant fear of death. Human life fragmentation is the main topic shared by Ortiz Cofer's *Silent Dancing* (1990) and Vilar's *The Ladies gallery* (1996) and *Impossible Motherhood* (2000). Bost discusses the endurance of the life experience that is translated into writing, the role of the reader and the seizing of control through her analysis of these women who live fragile and precarious lives. She doesn't forget to remind readers that all the texts she analyzes prompt us to participate "in making meaning as well as making community" (44). In Chapter 2, Bost attention shifts to John Rechy's portrayal of his own life in his memoir *About My Life and the Kept Woman* as well as the autobiographical content found in numerous of his fictional novels, his literary documentary *The Sexual Outlaw*, and ultimately his CD-ROM interactive memoir *Mysteries and Desire*. All of his work is proven to conventionally be associated with narcissism and exhibitionism and as a perfect representation of queer selves and the distorted depersonalization of a "ahuman" identity (56). The third chapter deals with the autobiographical writing of Levins Morales and in particular her concept of unbounded

ecosystem of the World Wide Web in which humans, plants, and animals found themselves strictly interconnected. We learn how her personal website turns into a new form of public archive through which her experience with illness became public domain. This chapter helps us understand how “bodies are intertwined with trans-species ecologies” (77) and how environmental works like Levins Morales’ turn into safe spaces for “transcorporeal collectivity and exchange” (91). Lastly, life and death is the main focus of the fourth chapter dedicated to Gloria Anzaldúa’s less-known memoir work. As other authors examined in the book, Anzaldúa overcomes in her writing traditional forms of identity, dismantling the boundaries that separates human life from non-human animals, plants, and spirits. This chapter includes some abstract visual images and doodles that were found among Anzaldúa’s writings, helpful aids that allow the author to point out how “imagination is an important tool to probe the limits of human life” (125). *Selflessness?* is the closing chapter which reveals the author’s reflections around the borderless and ever-growing subject in the field of Latinx Studies.

In this ambitious work, Suzanne Bost’s endeavors to ascertain the existence of innovative posthumanist theories that prompt us to rethink about the human condition today. However, she asserts as well some of the limitations of her own work emphasizing that none of the Latinx authors she analyzes would consider him/herself a posthumanist. The multiple theoretical approaches explored in the book meshes well with its organization and lends itself successfully to the study of different authors. Each chapter is broken down into titled sub-sections, which typically fit logically into the topic of the chapter and help the reader navigate all the works analyzed. This well-structured design allows us also to advocate for each of the several defining parts that maintain in this way a sense of continuity throughout the volume. Bost supplies an in-depth analysis of different kind of texts, nonetheless the four core chapters demonstrate a strong sense of unity in which every author analyzed is linked to each other by the fact that all of them “challenge the idea of a success story” (11) and transcending the Western culture mandates that reject any kind of nonbinary and unstable identity configuration.

Bost’s contribution to the autobiographical archive permits us to get familiar with unconventional understandings of selfhood while highlighting some less-known names in the field of Latinx cultural, literary, and critical studies. The author’s writing is eloquent, yet clear and understandable. This book represents ultimately an interdisciplinary resource for a wide range of scholars and exhibits Bost’s flexibility and mastery of a versatile agglomerate of theoretical approaches. *Shared Selves* is a must-read for academics who focus their research on post-humanist self-narrations, ethnic minorities, and Latinx identity and wish to further understand the epistemological connection between life writing and ethical action.

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