

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

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Catherine Hindson

London's West End Actresses and the Origins of Celebrity Charity 1880–1920

Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016.

222 p. \$65.

ISBN: 978-1-60938-425-8.

This is a much-awaited publication, following a number of terrific academic articles by Catherine Hindson that opened out questions of actresses, professionalization, celebrity culture and the labour of philanthropy in the theatres of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The book is thoughtfully divided into chapters focusing on different contexts and functions for actresses' charity work: fund-raising matinees, charity bazaars, theatrical tea parties and garden parties, and of course, both the Boer War and the First World War.

Setting her study overall within the framework of theatrical charity as the 'stand-and-deliver business', Hindson sees participation in charity events – themselves: 'complicated cultural, social, and political performance events' – as forms of labour which produced multiple benefits specifically for actresses. These professional benefits were not only related to the social kudos created through the generation of funds for charity distribution, but were also derived from modes of participation in the events which impacted on the professional profile of the actresses taking part. Such work bought them free publicity, embedded them further within particular professional networks that may or may not have impact on their career trajectories, and placed them firmly in the public eye as 'personalities' – as useful and productive citizens beyond the parts they played or were associated with on stage.

Hindson is also clear that many charity events built on the theatre's spectacular potential, as well as serving to embed theatre professionals more deeply within the proliferation of philanthropic activities of the middle and upper classes at the time. The potential of charity work derived from the excess of good business, as well as creating more cultural currency for that good business. The chapter on wartime charitable work is particularly interesting as it reaches across two radically different wars, but evidences the use of charitable labour to mark and establish a nationalist spirit, a galvanizing of public energy through forms of entertainment – recitation being key to

the Boer War, and concert party performance to the 1914–1918 conflict. Here actresses had a heightened role in the dynamic position the theatre industry adopted around fund-raising and support for the war effort.

Based in large part on archive holdings in the Bristol Theatre Collection, UK, earlier iterations of this research included more visual materials, and it is a shame that more of these have not been included in the book – although this may of course be out of the hands of the author. More analysis of the ideological basis of actresses' contributions would have been welcome, as would more contextual materials on the social and political function of philanthropic activity generally. However, in *London's West End Actresses and the Origins of Celebrity Charity 1880–1920*, Hindson makes a vital contribution to our readings of the ways in which theatre workers, and specifically actresses, contributed to the growing charity cultures of the period, and how indeed the theatre industry itself shaped and was shaped by the lived manifestations of charity culture.

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Kathryn Boshier, Fiona Macintosh,
Justine McConnell, and Patrice Rankine, ed.

The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 944 p.

£110.

ISBN: 978-0-19-966130-5.

This broad collection of essays is an important contribution to the new global turn in classical reception. Covering the Americas from 1800 to the present, the essays look at the different ways that ancient classical texts have been used to think through contemporary issues. In an interview in the collection, Argentinian playwright and director Héctor Levy-Daniel says: 'I will always want to stage a classic. Staging a classic implies a challenge.' He adds that classics offer 'an opportunity to undertake a series of reflections on theatricality'. The essays in this book probe the various ways in which such creative challenges have been used by practitioners across the continent, North and South.

The scope of the topics covered is immense, working through, among other things, feminism, race, nationhood, sexuality, and revolution. However, there are important threads that unite many