

# NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

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Catherine Hindson

## **Theatre in the Chocolate Factory: Performance at Cadbury's Bournville 1900–1935**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.  
248 p. £85. ISBN: 978-1-009-27188-2.

Catherine Hindson's adventures in the Cadbury archives underpin this study of Quaker capitalism's provision and use of forms of recreational play and performance in the Cadbury's Midlands factory and surrounding village during the early to mid-twentieth century. Hindson identifies what she calls 'factory theatre' as central to the development of Cadbury's strategy of employer–employee relations, as well as their developing brand, which saw Cadbury products become an affordable luxury for lower-middle- and middle-class households into the mid-century. The book explores the dynamics of the theatre and performance culture developed at the factory, where workers, employers, and the public enjoyed performances in both ready-made outdoor as well as purposefully constructed indoor sites for performance: Cadbury's had their own theatre and various committees in charge of a suite of theatrical activities, some of which involved local theatre professionals such as John Drinkwater.

Divided into three sections on 'Factory Theatre', 'Theatre in the Factory Garden', and 'Theatre, Education, and Worker Well-being', Hindson explores the ways in which theatrical activity was designed and driven by Cadbury's 'business principles, organizational structure, and people and estate management'. Performance, she suggests, was interwoven with the firm's history and its approach to experimenting in the relationship between ethical business practice, social duty, recreation, and worker welfare. Hindson's approach allows her to delineate the interrelations between practices of capitalist accumulation and the shaping of bodies at work. Providing brief but informative comparative contextual overviews of Robert Owen's social-industrial experiments in New Lanark and the setting up of Port Sunlight's community frameworks for worker leisure, Hindson notes that while all were connected, such industrial endeavours cannot simply be grouped together. Whilst this is the case on some levels, a wider comparative history of industrial provision for worker leisure, specifically theatrical and performance-

based participation in factory settings, might be a useful further project.

A more politically nuanced critical engagement with the archive might have framed Cadbury's practices as somewhat coercive: a happy worker is a worker nevertheless. There is no question that Cadbury's were radical in their approach to employment, but Quaker capitalism is still capitalism at the end of the day, and Hindson is perhaps less critical in this respect than she might have been. One can't help but see, quite cynically, that part of the Cadbury project was to provide a compensatory framework for low-paid employment. There is also little mention of the underpinning colonialist project that enabled the low-cost extraction of cocoa, in what were often slave conditions in the late nineteenth century, until quite a way into the study. The Cadbury family, along with many others who offered new approaches to worker welfare on home soil, benefited greatly from the exploitation of workers elsewhere in the globe.

Where *Theatre in the Chocolate Factory* works best, however, is in its meticulous detail and attention to the interaction between Cadbury's ethical consideration of local worker welfare and theatrical leisure, on the one hand, and on the other, with their engagement with and contribution to civic arts development outside the factory grounds in the wider city of Birmingham. This is a useful study of a specific context for amateur theatre which will resonate more widely across new theatre and performance histories.

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Nicosia Shakes

## **Women's Activist Theatre in Jamaica and South Africa: Gender, Race, and Performance Space**

Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2023. 212 p. £23.99.  
ISBN: 978-0-252-08737-0.

From its Introduction, it is explicitly clear that this is a book that will make a major contribution to many disciplines: Theatre Studies, African and African Diaspora Studies, Black Studies, Gender Studies, Social and Political Sciences, and more. It opens with Shakes sharing her personal connection to her book's topic. Her early interaction with women's activism occurred when she 'watched