

Performing Neurology: The Dramaturgy of Dr Jean-Martin Charcot. By Jonathan W. Marshall. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Pp. xi + 277. £60.00/\$90.00 Hb.
Reviewed by Christina Wald, University of Konstanz, christina.wald@uni-konstanz.de

Performing Neurology discusses the theatricality of the medical training and treatment at the Parisian clinic Salpêtrière in the late nineteenth century, when Jean Martin Charcot attracted considerable attention for his work with patients suffering from hysteria. Employing Geertz's method of 'thick description', Jonathan W. Marshall offers a detailed reconstruction of the work done at the Salpêtrière as well as of the medical and artistic publications inspired by

Charcot's *oeuvre*. Marshall explores in great depth the dialectic relationship between theatre and medicine, which has been the subject of influential studies, most prominently of Georges Didi Huberman's *The Invention of Hysteria* (2003). Marshall's aim is to move 'beyond hysteria and psychology to describe the performative aesthetics of neuropathology itself' (p. 7), which means that he is not interested in excavating the 'true' ailments of the patients or in determining the efficacy of Charcot's classifications and treatments, but in reconstructing the multimedia, theatricalized practice at the Salpêtrière and its impact beyond the clinic.

Marshall structures his investigation in eight chapters that can be divided in three major sections. The first section, consisting of chapters 2 to 5, examines the scientific contexts and architectural sites that framed the performances of neurology. It introduces and amplifies Marshall's central argument that Charcot's work excelled because of its dramaturgical qualities, which made his lectures a hybrid spectacle between sober, rational medical teaching, theatrical stunts and museum exhibition: 'The museum acted as a vivified staging of the pathological body' (p. 53), which was presented as illustration of the disease's archetype identified and classified by Charcot. Marshall points out the paradoxical relation between theatre and medicine in Charcot's work: while dramaturgical and theatrical devices were foundational to Charcot's methods, his practice was at the same time characterized by 'distrust of the theatrical medium' (p. 71) and its charges of fictionality, make believe and potential disruption of the planned script.

The subsequent two chapters turn to the pathological performances themselves as represented in the Salpêtrière's influential publications. Discussing several case studies in detail, Marshall explores the complex relation between the live performances of hysteria and the published photographs and sketches. Marshall's reconstructions of the diagnosis, treatment and medical teaching at the Salpêtrière also point out how 'infectious' the hysterical performances were (chapter 7), as they spread to fellow patients and involved physicians and lay spectators.

The final part, which analyses the scientific and artistic epilogue to Charcot's work, will be of most interest to theatre scholars. Chapter 8 explores the criticism of Charcot's theatricality voiced prominently by his former students Axel Munthe and Léon Daudet. Munthe argued that the hysteric performances were stimulated and exaggerated in the Salpêtrière, 'a hyperbolic, performative environment contaminated by hysteria at every level' (p. 196). In his view, theatricality thus impeded rather than facilitated medical diagnosis. The right wing author Daudet criticized the empathy created between hysteric performer and medical/lay spectator, as well as among the audience members, whose mutual identification dissolved boundaries between nationalities and races.

In a brief section in the introduction, entitled 'French Medicine and the Classical Tradition', Marshall relates Charcot's political association with the Republican government to his aesthetic preference for neoclassicism and its adherence to Aristotle's *Poetics*. Throughout the study, Marshall sometimes contrasts this normative, highly regulated neoclassicist dramaturgy with the more unruly, often grotesque and disturbing neuropathological performances at the Salpêtrière, but these comparisons are brief and unrelated to the chapter's arguments. The link becomes productive in the final chapter on the sensational stage plays of the Théâtre du Grand Guignol, which Marshall interprets as 'the logical culmination of Charcot's practice' (p. 214). Here, he shows how contemporaries read (and experienced) the plays as a form of theatrical catharsis that prepared spectators 'to face the hysteria of modern existence' (p. 236).

Marshall describes his own approach as a 'chiefly hermeneutic ... discursive analysis of the Charcotian perspective in context' (p. 5), and the book offers a stunningly detailed, very well researched reconstruction of the practice at the Salpêtrière. However, there are some rather superficial references to theoretical concepts such as Butler's notion of performativity or Brecht's *gestus*, which weaken rather than reinforce the argument bolstered by Marshall's thick

descriptions. Despite this and some unnecessary repetitions, which might stem from the fact that a number of earlier publications were brought together for this monograph, *Performing Neurology* offers an illuminating, well written reconstruction of Charcot's practice and its repercussions beyond the walls of the Salpêtrière that will be of interest to theatre, dance and performance scholars as well as to historians.