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Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi, eds., *Constructing Charisma: Celebrity, Fame, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010. 232 pp. Notes, illustrations, selected bibliography, index. \$70.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-845 45-694-8; \$29.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-85745-815-5.

Review by Willa Z. Silverman, Pennsylvania State University.

Our “celebrity-obsessed present” (p. 2) seems a propitious moment to investigate how notions of celebrity, fame and—most significantly for Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi, co-editors of *Constructing Charisma: Celebrity, Fame, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe*—charisma developed during the era that provided these terms with a modern inflection.[1] The rapid growth and democratization of mass printing and media, coupled with widespread public desire to seek out “new agents of authority to orient [individuals] in an uncertain world” (p. 2), spawned both ephemeral ‘celebrity’ and its more durable pendant, fame. It is Max Weber’s concept of charisma, however, that most interests the co-editors and the additional ten contributors to this volume. An often extra-legal—and also social and psychological—form of authority that results in the “ability to lead men in a transformative way” (p. 8), charisma, in Weber’s conceptualization of the term, endows its possessors with an extraordinary, quasi-divine quality and sense of vocation, which nevertheless require external legitimation.[2] In revising and broadening Weber’s original definition of charisma, for example by considering its gendered construction, the editors and authors bring together a range of innovative interdisciplinary perspectives drawn from history, literary studies, art history, and musicology, on “how fame, celebrity, and charisma functioned, what cultural needs they fulfilled, how they were produced—even self-consciously constructed—and what kinds of political and social authority they conferred” (p. 2). These perspectives provide a valuable template for the study of individuals “known for their well-knownness,” in Daniel J. Boorstin’s catchphrase, across cultures and historical eras into the present day, from Sarah Bernhardt to Lady Gaga.[3]

The volume’s division into three sections underscores the editors’ emphasis on the often constructed, performative, and political dimensions of charisma. As the three essays in the volume’s first section (“Constructing Charisma”) demonstrate, the burgeoning mass media of the second half of the nineteenth century—the product of technological advances, increased literacy, and the progressive lifting of restrictions on the press and book publishing—figured decisively in the raising up of charismatic figures such as the French and British imperial heroes examined in Edward Berenson’s compelling, original essay. Drawing on a wealth of little-known archival material, Berenson demonstrates how, “despite the futility and even the failure of much of what they undertook” (p. 22), Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Hubert Lyautey in France and Henry Morton Stanley in England generated “huge public enthusiasm” (p. 22). The perceived ‘gifts of grace’ (*charismata*) surrounding these figures—evocative of the reputedly disease-curing *toucher royal* associated with the medieval monarchy, studied by Marc Bloch—were legitimated both from below (in admirers’ letters to the explorers, published in the press) and above, through interviews, magazine covers, and the constant reportage of the crowds gathering to greet these

men.[4] The heroic, often Manichaeic narrative of the explorers' exploits cast them as exemplary figures, enabling ordinary people to identify with them as models of heroism and manliness in an uncertain time, when "British and French newspapers brimmed with reports of threats to their countries' safety and well-being" (p. 26). As Berenson himself acknowledges, the psychologically and emotionally "liberating role" (p. 26) of imperial heroes in eras of turbulence, akin to that of religious figures, may in the end be deemed largely "unprovable but worth considering" (p. 26)—surely charismatic heroes have also been adulated in eras scarcely as fraught as the end of the nineteenth century. More compelling an assertion is Berenson's identification of charisma as a force capable of mobilizing public opinion in support of colonial expansion, perhaps even more broadly and significantly than the range of economic, political and nationalistic arguments marshaled in defense of such policies.

That charismatic figures are made and not born is also the underlying thesis of essays by Eva Giloi and Martin Kohlrausch, focusing on the nineteenth-century German royalty. Both authors identify a paradox: the democratization of fame in the form of ephemera and other media in the end served to bolster—not attenuate—the mystique and "hereditary charisma" of the German Emperors.[5] The fan culture that developed around the German Kaisers burgeoned through the production of collectibles and ready-to-be-autographed cabinet photographs that functioned as modern-day relics, simultaneously allowing subjects to break down conventional barriers between ruler and subject while endowing the Kaisers with an aura conveyed by both their image and signature. Such "intimacy at a distance" (p. 184), as Kohlrausch shows, further intensified, in the case of Kaiser Wilhelm II, through the efforts of a sensationalized press, photography and film. These media sought to 'brand' the Emperor as simultaneously monarchic, militaristic and 'human,' as evidenced by images of him presiding over Imperial functions, donning an eagle-topped helmet, or vacationing. While the relentless publicizing and personalizing of the lives of royal families may seem a phenomenon unique to our media-driven age, these two essays highlight both the nineteenth-century roots of this phenomenon and the central role of the public in demanding and fashioning "charismatic, media-based leadership" (p. 66) to the detriment of authority based purely on heredity.

Charisma, as the three essays in the volume's second part illustrate, can also be self-constructed through performance. Dana Gooley, writing on Franz Liszt; Emily Apter in her analysis of Stéphane Mallarmé's indirect self-marketing; and Mary Louise Roberts in her consideration of nineteenth-century female celebrity, investigate the ways in which actual performers deployed a range of social and cultural signifiers to fashion charismatic personae. In the case of Liszt, many of these signifiers concerned social class. Despite his non-noble origins, Liszt deftly played up "patrician markings" (p. 71) such as the medals he wore onstage or the tousled, 'Romantic' hair that evoked the aristocrat Lord Byron, to manufacture an "aura of aristocratic grace and superiority" (p. 70) targeting both audiences and prospective aristocratic patrons. At the same time, Liszt—and his agent—relied on such modern methods of publicity as posters, pamphlets and biographical notices, demonstrating, as Gooley aptly shows, "just how compatible auratic authority and modern entertainment" (p. 85) can be. Embodying this paradox, Liszt, self-fashioned member of an "alternate aristocracy" (p. 83), might also have been "the first rock icon" (p. 69).

How did women 'perform celebrity' during a century in which the very notion of female stardom appeared self-contradictory? The eccentricity cultivated by such adored artists as Sarah Bernhardt and Rosa Bonheur, Mary Louise Roberts argues, was not a simple expression of rebellion (although it was this, too) but a more creative move, geared in part to "materialize the limits of normative behavior" (p. 110) within the increasingly democratic, individualistic society from which their audiences were drawn. Both women flaunted their oddness—Bonheur chain-smoked and openly lived with women (an anomaly

at the time) while Bernhardt slept in a coffin and kept wild animals at home. Such strategic manipulation of norms regarding gender, social class, religion, sexual orientation, and even human (as opposed to animal) nature allowed both women—as Roberts has also suggested in her work on the feminist journalist Marguerite Durand—to “lead inventive, creative lives even in a universe where female movement was radically proscribed” (116).^[6] At the same time, however, such willful outlandishness, as Robert aptly notes, sometimes transformed these talented performers into clichéd, even grotesque ‘types,’ a fate that may have ultimately doomed to marginality such contemporary eccentric performers as Michael Jackson. The perpetually adored Sarah Bernhardt, however, appears to have avoided such an end, perhaps through her embrace of the commodification of her image that may have proved distasteful to other performers.

Unlike Liszt and nineteenth-century French female celebrities, the poet Stéphane Mallarmé performed celebrity (although not charisma) indirectly, by establishing an entourage or “celebrity confraternity” (p. 87) of well-known authors and artists, united as designees of gifts from the poet or attendees of his weekly salon. The poetics (and politics) of gifting, involving “appending the properties of other names to his own” (p. 96), allowed Mallarmé to create a social network essential, in Apter’s view, to his celebrity. As a point of comparison, Apter might have investigated how other of Mallarmé’s contemporaries, Robert de Montesquiou, certainly a celebrity in his own right, or Edmond de Goncourt, also engaged in the social and literary practice of gifting to gild their self-image.

The volume’s final section, “The Politics of Fame,” in fact considers the role of not only politics but history more broadly in constructing and legitimating charismatic figures. As Stephen Minta contends in “Byron, Death, and the Afterlife,” the British poet’s much-publicized participation in the Greek War of Independence endowed him with both fame and charisma, yet these traits were interpreted in contradictory ways in England, whose government Byron had criticized but where he was nevertheless grieved publicly on his death, and in Greece, where “his fame still flourishes under a sign of freedom” (p. 133). While the fame of such modern-day activists as Bono, Angelina Jolie, and others may indeed depend in part on their (heavily-reported) missions to international trouble zones, the significance of their actions as vectors of celebrity, as Minta demonstrates, must be interpreted through the lens of not only history, but also historiography.

Peter Fritzsche’s fascinating chapter on the historical actor suggests that in the nineteenth century democratization encompassed not only political systems and the media but history itself, making ordinary witnesses—in this case, soldiers who had participated in the battle of Waterloo and left written accounts of it behind on the battlefield—into emblematic or “exemplary witness[es]” (p. 136). Continuing Fritzsche’s line of analysis, such contemporary examples of the “mass medium” (p. 135) of history as letters and emails sent home from soldiers in Afghanistan or transcripts of 911 calls from the September 11, 2001 attacks suggest how digital democracy confers dignity and value—and even a new type of ‘fame’—on historical actors, casting “the drama of ordinary, middling, and unlikely protagonists” as “poignant and telling” (p. 141). A more ample rhetorical analysis of the letters themselves in this essay might have proved revelatory of their writers’ self-awareness (or not) of their participation in an historical event of great magnitude.

The relationship among celebrity, patriotism, history and national identity frame the essays in part three by Kenneth E. Silver and Venita Datta. The famed stage actors Sarah Bernhardt and Coquelin channeled historical figures, both authors argue, to help galvanize among their audiences a sense of the Frenchness that these actors themselves had come to signify through their roles and activities (such as Bernhardt’s visits to the front during the First World War, forecasting to some extent the USO-

sponsored entertainment provided by celebrities from Bob Hope to Jessica Simpson). Bernhardt on stage, as Silver argues, skillfully deployed historical surrogates: Napoleon I's son 'l'Aiglon,' for example, became a stand-in for the Emperor, himself presented by Bernhardt as the heir to the Revolutionary and Republican tradition to which Bernhardt herself ascribed, especially during the paroxysm of the Dreyfus Affair.

Similarly, Coquelin, for whom Edmond Rostand wrote the fabled role of Cyrano de Bergerac, evoked for his audiences other unifying figures such as Jeanne d'Arc, who were theoretically capable of transcending the political and gender divides of the fin de siècle. It is tricky, of course, to identify concrete indicators of these charismatic figures' ability to engender durable patriotism and unity; in this sense the authors in this volume have chosen judiciously to focus on the production, rather than reception of charisma. The claim, for example, that Liszt's dramatic emoting in public allowed audiences to indulge in "bourgeois psychological flights" (p. 85) seems less tenable than arguments concerning individual agency in the fashioning of charisma; Ken Silver, for example, is convincing in his contention that the ability to successfully theatricalize and symbolically resolve political rifts "belonged only to those who could act the part" (p. 154).^[7]

Leo Braudy's concluding essay, "Secular Anointings: Fame, Celebrity, and Charisma in the First Century of Mass Culture," compellingly synthesizes the many lines of analysis explored in this volume, and suggests some new ones. Fame—or "the frenzy of renown" in Braudy's own well-known formulation—is a mutable concept, contingent on political systems, cultural ideals regarding human perfection, and the media available to produce and disseminate representations of famousness.^[8] The first century of fame, celebrity, and charisma, Braudy asserts, was marked by a broadened public sphere, the development of "anointed intermediaries" (p. 176) in the form of new media, and urbanization (and with it, a thriving theatre culture). Will the second century of this trio constitute a post- or "neocharismatic phase" (p. 182), with the proliferation of "petty charismas" spawned by the internet and social media and thus diluting and commodifying charisma into fleeting celebrity? Braudy's very question underscores the continued relevance of charisma as a category of analysis, and of charismatic individuals, in Emily Apter's phrase, as polysemic signifiers, "markers of historicity and cultural memory" (p. 89).

NOTES

[1] This volume stems from an April 2007 conference, "Constructing Charisma: Fame, Celebrity, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe," co-sponsored by New York University and Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey.

[2] As discussed in this volume, the notion of charisma as 'grace' or 'favor' dates back to the second millennium BCE. However, it is the concept elaborated by Max Weber in his posthumous *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (*Economy and Society*), published in 1921-1922 by his widow Marianne, that is the primary, yet not exclusive, object of interrogation in *Constructing Charisma*.

[3] See Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 57.

[4] Marc Bloch, *Les Rois thaumaturges: étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre* (Strasbourg: Librairie Istra, 1924).

[5] “In the case of hereditary charisma,” writes Weber, “recognition is no longer paid to the charismatic qualities of the individual but to the legitimacy of the position he has acquired by hereditary succession.” See Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*, ed. S.N. Eisenstadt (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 57.

[6] Mary Louise Roberts, “Acting Up: The Feminist Theatrics of Marguerite Durand,” in Jo Burr Margadant, ed., *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 171-217. For a further analysis of how French women drawn primarily from journalism and the theatre proved adept at fashioning and managing their own fame, see Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[7] The performative and political nature of Sarah Bernhardt’s fame is further explored in Carol Ockman and Kenneth E. Silver, ed., *Sarah Bernhardt: The Art of High Drama* (New York and New Haven, Conn.: The Jewish Museum and Yale University Press, 2005).

[8] Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

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Venita Datta, “Heroes, Celebrity and the Theater in Fin-de-Siècle France: Cyrano de Bergerac”

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