



A Spectacle of Suffering: Clara Morris on the American Stage (Theater in the Americas)

Barbara Wallace Grossman

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Once called "America's greatest actress," renowned for the passion and power of her performances, Clara Morris (1847-1925) has been largely forgotten. *A Spectacle of Suffering: Clara Morris on the American Stage* is the first full-length study of the actress's importance as a feminist in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Detailing her daunting health problems and the changing tastes in entertainment that led to her retirement from the stage, Barbara Wallace Grossman explores Morris's dramatic reinvention as an author. During a second robust career, she published hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles and nine books—six works of fiction and three memoirs.

Grossman draws on the fifty-four-volume diary that Morris kept from 1868 until 1924, as well as on the manuscript fragments and notes of journalist George T. MacAdam, who died in 1929 before completing the actress's biography. Grossman provides a dramatic account of Morris's life and work from her troubled early years, through an unhappy marriage, morphine addiction, and invalidism, to the challenges of touring, the decline of her artistic reputation, and the demands of the writing career she pursued so tenaciously. *Spectacle of Suffering* reveals how Morris, even after experiencing blindness and the loss of her home, livelihood, and family, did not succumb to despair and found comfort in the small pleasures of her circumscribed life.

A Spectacle of Suffering recovers an important figure in American theatre and ensures that Morris will be remembered not simply as an actress but as a respected writer and beloved public figure, admired for her courage in dealing with adversity. The book, which is enhanced by twenty-four illustrations, is the only published biography of Clara Morris. It is as much a tribute to the power of the human spirit as it is an effective means of exploring American theatre and society in the Gilded Age.

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