

University of Wollongong - Research Online

Thesis Collection

Title: Representing the belly-dancing body: feminism, orientalism, and the grotesque

Author: Virginia Keft-Kennedy

Year: 2005

Repository DOI:

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following: This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author. Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material.

Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Wollongong.

Research Online is the open access repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

University of Wollongong Thesis Collections

University of Wollongong Thesis Collection

University of Wollongong

Year 2005

Representing the belly-dancing body:
feminism, orientalism, and the grotesque

Virginia Keft-Kennedy
University of Wollongong

Keft-Kennedy, Virginia, Representing the belly-dancing body: feminism, orientalism, and the grotesque, PhD thesis, School of English Literatures, Philosophy, and Languages, University of Wollongong, 2005. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/843>

This paper is posted at Research Online.

<http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/843>

NOTE

This online version of the thesis may have different page formatting and pagination from the paper copy held in the University of Wollongong Library.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Representing the Belly-Dancing Body:

Feminism, Orientalism, and the Grotesque

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

VIRGINIA KEFT-KENNEDY BCA/BA (HONS)

Faculty of Arts

School of English Literatures, Philosophy, and Languages

2005

Thesis Certification

I, Virginia C. Keft-Kennedy, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of English Literatures, Philosophy, and Languages, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Virginia C. Keft-Kennedy

(16th, December 2005)

Contents

List of Plates	v
Abstract	ix
Acknowledgements	x
Introduction: Dance and Representation	1
Dance Studies, Feminism, and High Art/Low Bodies	8
Situating Orientalism and the Grotesque	20
Historical and Discursive Perspectives	32
1 The Oriental Grotesque and Nineteenth-Century Dancing Bodies	48
Travel Writing and Imperialism	56
Grant Allen's <i>What's Bred in the Bone</i> : 'Oriental' Dance as a Symptom of Racial Degeneracy	75
2 'Salomania': Imagining the <i>Danse du Ventre</i> and the Metamorphosis of a Literary Figure	99
The Transfiguration of Belly Dance to the West	104
Feminist Orientalism	141
3 <i>The Great American Belly Dance</i>: Ecofeminism, Fitness, and the 'How-to' Phenomenon	155
Ecofeminism, Goddess Religion, and Daniela Gioseffi's <i>The Great American Belly Dance</i>	161
Feminism, Fitness Discourse, and the 1970s 'How-to' Books	179

4 Controlling the Unruly (Soft) Body: The Grotesque and the Politics of Appearance in Young Adult Literature	208
Merrill Joan Gerber's <i>Also known as Sadzia! The Belly Dancer!</i> Discourses of Empowerment and Identity	228
Karen Mueller Coombs's <i>Samantha Gill, Belly Dancer</i> : Representing Incestuous Desire and the Belly-Dancing Body	238
Karen McCombie's <i>Boys, Brothers and Jelly-Belly Dancing</i> : Body Image, Appetite, and the Grotesque	261
 5 Beheading the Belly Dancer: (Dis)articulating the Female Body, Consumption, and the 'Postcolonial Exotic'	274
Reading the Headless Belly Dancer	278
Loubna Haikal's <i>Seducing Mr Maclean</i> : The Fetishisation of Cultural Authenticity	312
 Conclusions	333
Bibliography	337
Appendix	364

List of Plates

- Plate 1** Palmolive Soap. "Beauty from Trees" [Advertisement]. *Canadian Home Journal*, 1925.
- Plate 2** "Conquerors of a Wilderness" *The Shrine Magazine*, September 1926.
- Plate 3** Gerome, Jean-Leon. *Dance of the Almeh*. 1863. Oil on wood panel, 84.3 x 63cm. Dayton Art Institute, Ohio, USA
- Plate 4** Ashea Wabe as *Little Egypt*. c.1897. Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library.
- Plate 5** Moreau, Gustave. *The Apparition*. c.1874-76. Oil on canvas, 142 x 103cm. Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris.
- Plate 6** Moreau, Gustave. *Salome*. 1876. Oil on canvas, 54 x 44cm. The Armand Hammer Collection, Los Angeles, California.
- Plate 7** Joyce, Archibald. *Vision of Salome*. F. Zeigfield Jr. The Folies of 1910. New York: T. B. Harms & Francis Day & Hunter, 1910.
- Plate 8** Gertrude Hoffmann *Salome Dance No. 1*. 1908. Photograph. F. C. Bangs.
- Plate 9** Miss Maud Allan as *Salome*. c.1909. Photograph. Reutlinger, Paris & London.
- Plate 10** Duncan, Raymond. *Isadora Duncan at the Theatre of Dionysus, Athens*. 1903. Photograph. Blair Collection.
- Plate 11** "Ruth St. Denis in Costume" c. 1910
- Plate 12** Gioseffi, Daniela. *Earth Dancing: Mother Nature's Oldest Rite*. Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1980.
- Plate 13** Gioseffi, Daniela. *The Great American Belly Dance*. New York: Dell, 1977.
- Plate 14** Gibson, Charles Dana. *No Time for Politics*. 1910. Drawing. Available: 1 December 2005:
<http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/386/truewoman.html>

- Plate 15** "Flapper Styles Will Prevail." *Flapper magazine: Not for old fogies*, October 1922.
- Plate 16** Wilson, Serena, and Alan Wilson. *The Serena Technique of Belly Dancing: The Fun Way to a Trim Shape*. New York: Drake Publishers, 1972.
- Plate 17** MacNelly, Jeff. "In the Something Has Gone Terribly Wrong Department". c1995. Cartoon. *Chicago Tribune*, Chicago.
- Plate 18** *Terminator II: Judgment Day*. Dir. by James Cameron. Perf. Linda Hamilton; Arnold Schwarzenegger. Universal Studios. 1991
- Plate 19** Fonda, Jane. *Jane Fonda's Workout*. VHS. Karl Video, 1982.
- Plate 20** Newton-John, Olivia. *Physical*. VHS. MCA Home Video, 1981.
- Plate 21** Disney, Walt. *Minnie-Mouse*. Cartoon. Walt Disney. Available: 25 November 2005.
<<http://www.disney.go.com/disneyrecords/Song-Albums/mousercise/>>
- Plate 22** Mishkin, Julie Russo, and Marta Schill. *The Compleat Belly Dancer*. New York: Doubleday, 1973.
- Plate 23** Vali, Gus. *Belly Dance Navel Academy Vol. 2*. Peters International, PLD-2003, 1977.
- Plate 24** Coluccia, Pina, Anette Paffrath, and Jean Putz. *Belly Dancing: The Sensual Art of Energy and Spirit*. Rochester, Vermont U.S: Park Street Press, 2005.
- Plate 25** Dallal, Tamalyn. *Belly Dancing for Fitness: The Ultimate Dance Workout That Unleashes Your Creative Spirit*. Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 2004.
- Plate 26** Mekjian, Eddie & Ensemble. *Belly Dance Music from the Middle East Vol. 2*. Fiesta Records, FLPS-1742, Date Unknown.
- Plate 27** "Bel-Sha-Zaar" with Tomee & the Grecian Knights. *The Art of Belly Dancing*. Gateway Records, GSLP-3527, Date Unknown.
- Plate 28** El-Bakkar, Mohammed & His Oriental Ensemble. *Port Said: Music of the Middle East Vol. 1*. AudioFidelity Stereodisc, AFSD-5833, 1958.
- Plate 29** El-Bakkar, Mohammed & His Oriental Ensemble. *Music of the African Arab: Music of the Middle East Vol. 3*. AudioFidelity Stereodisc, AFSD-5858, 1958.

- Plate 30** Colorado. "Loosen the Button: Indulgent New Looks for Men and Women." [Advertisement]. Autumn 2004.
- Plate 31** Magritte, René. *Le Viol* [the Rape]. 1934. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels-Paris, Belgium.
- Plate 32** Sharif, Ketii. *Bellydance*. St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2004.
- Plate 33** Dolphina. *Bellydance: Get Fit and Feel Fabulous with This Unique Workout for the Mind and Body*. New York: DK Publishing, 2005.
- Plate 34** Kouyoumjian, Udi Joseph - Orchestra. Beautiful Belly: Music for Listening and Dancing. Federated Records, FR-1000, 1975.
- Plate 35** "The Sultan's Caravan" featuring Gus Vali. *Belly Dance to Great Navel Music*. RCA Records. APL1-1820, 1976.
- Plate 36** *Playboy Magazine*. New York: Playboy Press, February, 1971.
- Plate 37** Karayanni, Stavros Stavrou. *Dancing Fear and Desire: Race, Sexuality, and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance*. Ontario, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2005.
- Plate 38** Haikal, Loubna. *Seducing Mr Maclean*. Australia: Macmillan, 2002.
- Plate 39** Gizira Band. *Modern Belly Dance from Egypt*. HMC-1241.
- Plate 40** Mrad, Said. *Remixes - One Thousand and One Nightsone*. ACSM-Ark 21, 2003.
- Plate 41** *Bellylicious*. Virgin Records, ACC-BEL, 2003.
- Plate 42** Oojami. *Bellydancing Breakbeats*. Mondo Music & Ark21, MM-502, 2002.
- Plate 43** *Belly Dance: Le Meilleur De La Danse Du Ventre*. Atoll, 747752, 1999.
- Plate 44** Galactic Caravan. *Intergalactic Bellydance*. Mondo Melodia, MM-832, 2004.
- Plate 45** Schill, Marta. *Belly Dance: Fine Art of the East*. VHS. Rosemead, CA: U.S. Rubayat, 1983.
- Plate 46** Sami Nossair Orchestra. *Cairo Classics*. Hollywood Music, HMC-1297, Date unknown.

Plate 47 "Sami Nossair Orchestra." *Beyond the Desert*. Hollywood Music, HMC-1215, 2002.

Plate 48 Kassab, Youssef with Hamouda Ali. *Belly Dance: A Gift from Cairo!* Peters International, PLD-2061, 1980.

Plate 49 Hobin, Tina. *Belly Dancing: For Health and Relaxation*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1998.

Plate 50 Young, Louisa. *Baby Love*. Hammersmith London: Flamingo, 1998.

Plate 51 Agby, Naif & his Orchestra. *El Debke: Music of the Middle East*. AudioFidelity Stereodisc, AFSD-5980, 1962.

Plate 52 Agby, Naif & the Lebanese Radio Orchestra. *An Evening with Uncle Tanous*. AudioFidelity, AFSD-6268, 1974.

Plate 53 Vali, Gus & Caravan. *Let's Belly Dance*. P.I. Records, PI-LPS-93, 1973.

Plate 54 El-Bakkar, Mohammed & His Oriental Ensemble. *Exotic Music of the Belly Dancer: Music of the Middle East Vol. 6*. AudioFidelity Stereodisc, AFSD-6154, 1966.

Plate 55 El-Bakkar, Mohammed & His Oriental Ensemble *Navel Maneuvers* AudioFidelity AF-2415, 2 record set, 1974

Plate 56 Soffee, Anne Thomas. *Snake Hips: Belly Dancing and How I Found True Love*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2002.

Plate 57 Amari, Raja. *Satin Rouge*. Advertisement Poster. Zeitgeist Video, 2002.

Abstract

This thesis traces the genealogy of the discursive construction of belly dance in literature and culture in the West from the late nineteenth century to 2005. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from literary studies, cultural studies, and dance studies it takes an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of representations of belly dance. It explores how this dance has been shaped by major socio-cultural shifts in ideologies of race, gender, and embodiment. The solo improvised Middle Eastern dance, also known as belly dance, is a highly recognisable and strikingly pervasive dance form in Western popular culture, yet the topic of belly dance has remained significantly under-analysed in any academic field. This study brings the belly-dancing body into focus as a legitimate object of analysis that exposes how social meanings are produced through performance, and how dancing bodies are inscribed with, and read through, markers of race, sexuality, and gender. In examining the politics of gender and race in the representation of belly dance, this study brings to bear three key theoretical formations: feminism, Orientalism, and the grotesque. It is concerned with the complex ways in which belly dance has been mythologised, represented, and constructed in a range of texts such as colonial travel writing, fiction, and images from popular culture. In addition, this thesis also explores the intersections of (neo)colonialism, commodification, consumer culture, sexuality, and notions of female embodiment in representations of belly dance.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr Louise D'Arcens for her constructive guidance, supervision, and support, as well as for always approaching my project with patience, enthusiasm, and humour. I wish also to thank Associate Professor Paul Sharrad for his generous offer to read and comment on my work, and especially for his ongoing friendliness and academic encouragement, not only during my postgraduate research but also throughout my undergraduate studies. In addition, I wish to acknowledge the University of Wollongong for the research funding I was granted through an Australian Postgraduate Award. My biggest debt of gratitude goes to my family; my sister, Rebecca, and especially my mum and dad who have tirelessly encouraged, supported, and inspired me on the many occasions when I have grumbled and procrastinated about this thesis. Finally, I am tremendously grateful to my husband, Justin, who has uncomplainingly endured so many years of my study and whose love and support has helped me immeasurably, and especially, for always saying "you're nearly there", even when I wasn't.

Introduction: Dance and Representation

Any history of dance, even if it simply be a tracing of the changing imagery of the body's deployment in space and time, will contain fragments of a political history of the body.

(Elizabeth Dempster *Women Writing the Body* 1995: 25).

The role and the meanings attached to the solo improvised dance known as belly dance have, for both the women who perform it and their spectators, undergone radical change since the dance was first introduced to the West at the series of World Exhibitions in the late 1800s. Western representations of it have variously condemned it as gratuitous sexual display, or fetishised it as a sign of the "Orient's" sensuality and abandon; it has been deemed immoral, and has been censored or banned altogether. In the nineteenth century, Middle Eastern dancers were enmeshed in the political machinery of colonialism, exploited as anthropological curiosities and used for erotic titillation at the World Fairs. The intense interest in belly dance was further advanced by the growing travel industry where descriptions of the dance became an indispensable component of countless travel writings (Mabro 118). An important shift occurred, however; which will be traced in the course of this thesis: in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Western women began to emulate, appropriate, and transform the dances of the Middle East. This shift, I argue, was a critical moment in the history of Western representation of belly dance because it marked the beginning of the dance's deployment in the service of feminist politics. The chief aim of this thesis is to trace the complex genealogy

of ideological constructions of belly dance in relation to the major waves of feminism in the West from the late nineteenth century to the present. By tracing the genealogy of Western representations of belly dance, this thesis also traces the complex relationship between feminism and Orientalism. The uncomfortable alliance between feminism and Orientalism, I argue, constitutes one of the key tensions in representations of belly dance and recurs throughout the thesis as a major point of continual negotiation. Through the examination of these concepts, this study hopes to open up new questions concerning the ways in which the body of the belly dancer is inscribed with, and transformed by, political, gendered, social, racial and sexual meanings.

Following Foucault, I understand and use the term 'genealogy' to describe "the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today" (1994: 42). In other words, this thesis is a genealogy rather than a history as such, and as a result I am not following one unitary and linear path. Rather, this thesis identifies important moments in the representation of belly dance in the West. In particular, it contextualises the representation of belly dance in relation to its various historical and cultural contingencies, as well as its ideological intersections with the socio-cultural agendas of feminism, imperialism, Orientalism, and consumer capitalist culture. In this way, a set of recurring, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory relationships emerge between discourses of sex, race, gender, and embodiment.

The original conceptual aim of this study was to explore how textual constructions of belly dance constituted important moments of feminist empowerment. However, my research revealed that many of the authors that

attempt to redress the negative stereotypes attributed to the dance form most often end up reinscribing the very stereotypes they attempt to remedy. In recognising rather than obscuring the discontinuities and contradictions in the cultural history of belly dance, this thesis hopes to explore the implications, consequences, and ideological meanings embedded in representations of the belly-dancing body in Western culture. Along with the theoretical conceptions of Orientalism, some key areas of investigation also include the development of popular feminist discourses on belly dance in relation to changing cultural concepts of female body image, embodiment, weight loss, and exercise/fitness culture.

One of the key focuses of this thesis is to explore how representations of belly dance might be read through the critical concept of the grotesque to designate a rupture both in conventional standards of female propriety and in normalised notions of beauty. Entering into the current discussions on the grotesque, I consider the implications it has for analysing representations of the belly-dancing body.

I draw on a wide range of sources in analysing the representations of belly dance, and am concerned with both literary and visual culture. In this way, this thesis can be seen as an interdisciplinary project drawing on literary criticism, performance studies, cultural studies, as well as art history. The texts I address range from the mid-1800s through to 2005 and include travel writings, art, fiction, reviews and newspaper articles, as well as popular advertising. Furthermore, I examine the specific visual codes and conventions surrounding the representational practices of belly dance commodities by examining artworks and photographs, as well as the front cover of record albums,

Compact Discs, and books. John Fiske has argued, “[i]n popular culture, the text is not an object of reverence to be understood in all its coherence and completeness, but a resource to be used [...] it remains at the level of cultural potential until it is selectively taken up and inserted into the social circulation of meanings” (1990: 332). If, as Fiske suggests, cultural meanings are created “out of the conjuncture of the text with the socially situated reader” (1987: 80), then by examining a range of images and representations of the belly-dancing body alongside, or against, cultural ideologies, we can produce a broader understanding of what these images might mean as variable symbols and not as static objects.

While my focus in this thesis will be on significant texts that coincided with times of increased feminist agitation, this is not to suggest that I have included all of the major works, or indeed, even the most important writers. Rather, the texts analysed in this thesis comprise previously unexamined representations of belly dance by little-known authors.

Although this thesis is loosely chronological, it is not designed to be an exhaustive or definitive work on the history of belly dance in the West. Rather, as stated earlier, my aim is to trace the genealogy of the dance as it has been taken up by feminism and to present a reading of the ways in which belly dance has been used to enact a range of ideological constructions and performances of gender, sexuality, and cultural difference. In order to do this, I borrow from Ellen Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy’s methodological approach in their attempt to foster a dialogue between the fields of dance and literary studies. In particular, I investigate the representation of belly dance in two distinct but interrelated ways: first, belly dance must be read as *text* for the

theoretical/cultural/political concepts embedded (or embodied) in its performance. Secondly, I critically consider the meanings and significances of representations of belly dance *in* texts – for example, the ways in which the belly dancer is ideologically and discursively constructed in texts in Western literary and visual culture¹.

This introductory chapter is divided into two main parts: the first section gives a brief account of belly dance as a genre, and offers a review of the current work in the field, followed by discussions of the concept of Orientalism and the grotesque respectively, as well as to draw out how my study intersects with these discourses. In the second section, I wish to explore some background information on belly dance. Considering the relative newness of belly dance as a topic for critical analysis, it is necessary that I dwell on some material that, though familiar to some readers, may be new to others. In particular, the West's pervasive Orientalising tendencies have given rise to numerous popular mythologies surrounding the dance. In order to situate the reader it is essential that I rehearse the key moments of the history of belly dance in the West and explore some of the common mythologies surrounding it. This will allow me to demonstrate the ways in which the meanings that arise out of social constructions of belly dance are specific to certain socio-historical periods.

¹ For further work that utilises this methodological approach to dance studies, see Goellner and Shea Murphy's edited book *Bodies of the Text* (1995).

Theory and Practice

The contemporary stereotype of the voluptuous belly dancer in sequined costume, gauzy veils and bare midriff, is a highly recognisable symbol used with striking frequency to signify Eastern exoticism and uncontrolled female sexuality. For centuries a myriad of texts from popular culture have represented the figure of the belly dancer, from colonialist travel accounts to mainstream movies, in literature, Orientalist art, popular television series such as *Xena Warrior Woman*, *The Simpsons* and *Star Trek*, as well as advertising and music videos by popular acts such as U2, The Tea Party, Prince, and more recently Shakira, Beyoncé Knowles, and Britney Spears. Recent representations of belly dance by some of these popular singers signal a current increase in the public recognition of the dance. These are only a few examples to help demonstrate the pervasiveness of belly dancing imagery in popular culture. Practitioners of belly dance in both its traditional and contemporary forms have at different moments throughout history been repudiated and treated with distrust. Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, belly dance has developed into not only a truly worldwide dance phenomenon, but also into a powerfully enduring and resonant strategy in the production of counter-knowledges concerning the display of women's bodies.

Despite, or perhaps on account of, the various oppositions to the performance of belly dance, women have consistently been drawn to it for a number of significant reasons: for its sensual movement vocabulary, its link with a kind of female empowerment, as well as its appealing costume. Since the mid-nineteenth century the popularity of belly dance in the West has steadily increased, with a particular upsurge in the 1970s. Indeed, a single search on

the world-wide-web reveals the extent to which this dance has been taken up in the West by women as a popular feminist activity².

Belly dance is becoming an increasingly familiar sight in the community at large: classes are advertised in local papers, belly dancers perform in restaurants, on university campuses, and at community fairs; and belly dance and neo-natal belly dance classes are held in gyms, health clubs, and community centres across the world³. The last decade has seen the Internet enable considerably greater access to specialised information and to previously marginalised communities. This technology has vastly facilitated the expansion of popular discourse on belly dance. Intricate networks – belly dance cyber-cultures – promote the dance and its teachers, dancers exchange information about style and technique as well as aspects of its history, costuming, and cultural and gender issues. Although the styles and contexts of belly dancing can differ enormously, the majority of web-sites and on-line organisations devoted to belly dance actively construct and promote this dance as a feminist performance art.

² A search on www.google.com, for example, revealed 5,430,000 hits using the search term “belly dance” (25 November 2005). Even the most cursory review of websites surrounding the topic of belly dance reveals the extent to which it is constructed around discourses of female empowerment, the politics of women’s embodiment, and issues about autonomy and independence. Whilst I acknowledge the diversity and heterogeneity of feminist discursive positions, I also consider the shared focus of many belly dance sites on the abovementioned issues, as representing an agreement amongst practitioners that the dance is generally understood to be a feminist activity.

³ Shira’s comprehensive website “The Art of Middle Eastern Dance” includes a directory that lists belly dance classes and teachers on every continent of the globe. See, for example, <http://www.shira.net/directory.htm> (1 December 2005).

Paradoxically, however, despite the ubiquity of the image, and the conspicuous increase in numbers of women taking up the dance, as well as its central concerns with feminist conceptions of empowerment, scholarship has been until recently relatively silent on the topic of belly dance. While a number of scholars have from the mid-1960s approached the topic of belly dance and its related issues, it has rarely been the subject of any extended research in performance studies, literary studies, or feminist scholarship. This relative silence surrounding the topic of belly dance is particularly remarkable given that since the introduction of Middle Eastern and North African dance to the West in the nineteenth century, it has consistently asserted a presence in the histories of the dancing body. Finally, a century and a half after its introduction to the West, an academic interest in the study of Middle Eastern dance and its derivative, belly dance, is beginning to appear on the academic landscape of dance studies⁴.

Dance Studies, Feminism, and High Art/ Low Bodies

In the last two decades there has been a significant increase in scholarly interrogations into the meanings, significance, and 'value' of bodies. In particular, feminist scholars have addressed issues of embodiment with specific attention to ideology, social categorisation, representation, and power. Indeed, scholarship on 'the body' has become an increasingly sophisticated and

⁴ See especially Shay and Sellers-Young's edited anthology *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy* (2005).

complex area of investigation, albeit an internally differentiated one⁵. These works have opened up new and important dialogues with a range of disciplines across the humanities and have enlivened discussions in areas such as popular culture studies, gender and queer theories, literary studies, postcolonialism and, of particular importance to this thesis, the critical analysis of the field of dance.

Despite developments in research on the body, however, cultural studies have been relatively slow to recognise the place of dance as a productive arena for the investigation of embodiment, identity, and representation. Dance theorists Goellner and Shea Murphy suggest that the hindrance to dance gaining respect as a scholarly discipline is in part because of its “grounding in physical bodies” (4). They suggest that dance is further marginalised as a legitimate subject of philosophical and critical inquiry through the gendering of the mind/body binary: “the ‘feminine’ and irrational body is set against the loftier ‘masculine’ mind” (4). Consequently, because dance is both a body-centred and ostensibly ‘feminine’ discipline, it is one that has been relatively easy to dismiss.

Only since the mid-1980s has dance studies emerged onto the academic terrain as a legitimate approach to the analysis of how social meanings are produced through performance, and how dancing bodies are inscribed with and read through markers of race, sexuality, gender, and class. Prior to the 1980s, as Jane Desmond suggests, dance scholarship tended to focus on autobiographies of dancers, the aesthetic assessment of dance styles, or to provide a sense of the historical context in which specific dance forms flourished. They did not, however, “investigate the operations of social power” underpinning the aesthetic practices of dance (Desmond 1997: 1). Frequently

⁵ See, for example, Conboy *et al* (1997).

these histories concentrated on the most elite dance practices such as ballet, and discounted the role played by less visible or minority forms of bodily movement in cultural history⁶. As a result, classical ballet and theatre dance have enjoyed the privilege of the inscription of “high” art, while popular dancing is overlooked as “low”.

The last decade, however, has seen a new wave of more critically-oriented and analytical scholarship on dance, and the production of some prominent dance texts that examine the ideological functions of dance as well as the broader relationships of dance to other disciplines in the arts. Some influential texts include Desmond's edited book *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (1997), as well as Susan Leigh Foster's two edited books *Corporealities: Dancing, Knowledge, Culture, and Power* (1996) and *Choreographing History* (1995)⁷, and *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*, edited by Goellner and Shea Murphy (1995). These texts incorporate a more complex engagement with issues of ideology and cultural concepts of embodiment, identity, and representation than in previous decades.

Even though to some extent dance studies have successfully established an institutional grounding in the humanities, its residual bias against ostensibly “low” forms has not only left a sizeable gap in critical perspectives of popular dance forms, but continues to encumber the development of the field. As Carol Martin and others have noted, one of the defining tenets of modernism was its clear polarization of “mass culture” and “high art” (324-325). Postmodern theorists have, however, long since maintained the significance of popular

⁶ See, for example, Koritz (1995: 15).

⁷ See also Foster's book *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (1986).

culture⁸. Until recently, though, dance criticism has been theoretically and historically inscribed within the “narrow purview of late modernism’s formalist concerns” (Martin 320). Belly dance is one such marginalised dance within cultural studies generally and dance scholarship specifically. Most critical collections and encyclopaedic dictionaries of dance either provide only the most cursory mention of belly dancing, or fail to include it at all. For example, while the *International Encyclopedia of Dance* circumvented the term belly dance in favour of the French colonialist term *danse du ventre* (Vol 2, 1998: 344), the online edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* fails to include an entry for belly dance at all⁹. Goellner and Shea Murphy call attention to the limited cultural writings about the “transformation and commodification of the Hawaiian Hula [and] of belly dancing” (2), yet they do not elaborate further on the topic.

There are, however, a number of disparate works on the topic of belly dance; but these have tended to attract the exclusive interest of only a handful of scholars working on the topic¹⁰. One of the first serious attempts at scholarly interrogation of belly dance was by Morroe Berger in an article he wrote in 1961 called “The Arab Danse Du Ventre”¹¹. Morroe followed up this work with another article in 1966 called “The Belly Dance”. Another early scholar on Middle Eastern dance was American dancer La Meri who published articles on

⁸ See, for example, Jean-François Lyotard (1979).

⁹ www.britannica.com (Accessed 7 December 2005).

¹⁰ See, for example, Shay (1999), Sellers-Young (1992, 2005), and Shay and Sellers-Young (2003, 2005). See also Deagon (1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2005), Karayanni (2005), Najwa Adra (2005), and Donnalee Dox (1997, 2005).

¹¹ For a critique of Berger’s discussion of Middle Eastern dance see Shay (2005) and Karayanni (2005).

the subject during the 1960s and 1970s¹². While an academic interest in belly dance has been slowly emerging since the late 1970s, this research has tended to be either overly concerned with historicising the dance, or is fixedly occupied with issues of authenticity and classification. Such approaches have resulted in much hair-splitting over the differences between belly dance in the East and its counterpart in the West¹³. The recent release, however, of Anthony Shay's and Barbara Sellers-Young's edited anthology of essays on belly dance marks a landmark publication in scholarly work on belly dance. This book, according to its editors, considers "the changing social position of belly dance in the twentieth century within the framework of orientalism and discourses on the body to explore the social, cultural, and economic factors involved in the formation of a transnational belly dance community" (2). This anthology, along with other significant works such as Stavros Stavrou Karayanni's book *Dancing Fear and Desire* (2005) and Penni AlZayer's *Middle Eastern Dance* (2004), indicates the timeliness of scholarly work on the dancing body generally, and the need for further theoretical and critical exchanges concerning the belly-dancing body specifically.

While the existing research on belly dance to date is invaluable to ongoing discussions in dance theory and criticism, as well as to cultural studies, a significant gap persists in the research. Specifically, there have been no scholarly attempts to explore the meanings and significance of contemporary Western textual representations of the belly-dancing body. In particular, critical

¹² See, for example, La Meri (1961). For a detailed examination of the life and works of La Meri, see Nancy Lee Ruyter (2005).

¹³ See, for example, articles by Morroe Berger (1961), La Meri (1961), Leona Wood (1980), and Wendy Buonaventura (1998).

inquiry into the ways in which the performing body is inscribed with racial, sexual, and cultural ideologies in written narratives, represents an important yet undervalued area of exploration in current scholarship on belly dance. Furthermore, no scholarly works have examined the interconnections between belly dance, literature, and feminism. With this thesis I attempt to fill these gaps as well as to provide ingress for further work by others on this topic. My research departs significantly from previous studies on the topic in that it attempts to analyse the ways in which literary and visual texts represent belly dance. I wish to briefly outline some of the previous research pertaining to belly dance before contextualising these works in relation to the broader research areas of this thesis.

Constructing a Belly Dance “Herstory”

Wendy Buonaventura’s 1998 book *Serpent of the Nile: Women and Dance in the Arab World* is one of the most cited texts on belly dance and is currently the only attempt at a comprehensive history of belly dancing. Buonaventura’s book consists of an assortment of historical accounts by travellers and artists as well as myths and the author’s personal anecdotes. While the subtitle to the book implies that it will examine “Women and Dance in the Arab World”, the majority of the book actually records Western Orientalist representations of Arabic dance in the West during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Inconsistencies such as this, as well as insufficient support documentation for her claims, have led many scholars on Middle Eastern dance to question the veracity of Buonaventura’s historical details. Karayanni, for instance, argues that Buonaventura relied on constructs of “the alluring, mystifying “Orient”, [...] to

lend authority and stature to her performance work and her project *Serpent of the Nile*" (162). Furthermore, Shay and Sellers-Young criticise the book for its "romantic projections" of the Orient as well as its reproduction of "common orientalist trope[s]" (2005: 17-18).

While Buonaventura's book purports to be a history of Middle Eastern dance, it is actually engaged in the complex deployment of essentialist feminism, Orientalism, and idealised visions of the female solo dancer as the embodiment of a – now lost – goddess-oriented culture of ancient matriarchal societies. Buonaventura writes,

In order to establish themselves, both Christianity and Islam had to destroy the rituals connected with goddess worship. Thus, they attempted to eradicate female dance related to the celebration of sexuality and fertility (34-35).

A number of recent books claiming to be historical reconstructions of belly dance also draw heavily on the brand of cultural essentialism found in Buonaventura's book. Some examples include: Tina Hobin's *Belly Dance: The Dance of Mother Earth* (2003) and Iris J. Stewart's *Sacred Woman, Sacred Dance* (2000). Another text which supports these themes of belly dance as goddess ritual through a blend of "personal memoir with the history and theory of the dance" is Rosina-Fawzi Al-Rawi's book *Grandmother's Secrets: The Ancient Rituals and Healing Power of Belly Dancing* (1999)¹⁴. However,

¹⁴ Al-Rawi's book was first published in German in 1996 and republished in English in 1999, and again in 2001 under the new title *Belly Dancing: Unlock the Secret Power of an Ancient Dance*. For a discussion of the relationships between belly dance and spirituality in the contemporary American context see Dox (2005).

Donnalee Dox, in her discussion on the spiritual components of Western practices of belly dance, reminds her readers that “the ‘herstory’ is as much a construction as the history it contests” (2005: 336). Underlying these revisionist histories of Middle Eastern dance is the assumption that the Orient holds a greater degree of corporeal and spiritual freedom than does the West, an idea that is closely aligned with Said’s version of Orientalism.

Nineteenth-century travel accounts have been one way in which critics have explored the complexities of the colonialist vision of Eastern dancing. In her 1996 book, *Veiled Half Truths: Western Travellers’ Perceptions of Middle Eastern Women*, Judy Mabro devotes a chapter to travellers’ descriptions of dancing¹⁵. She states that “Dancing produced strong reactions from travellers [...] European tradition led them to expect a romantic and voluptuous performance; European prudery led them to damn it; Eurocentrism led them to ridicule it” (118). The majority of Mabro’s book is made up of excerpts from the colonialist travel accounts, the author only intruding in the text to introduce the traveller and the context of the writing. In this sense, Mabro’s text offers less a critical analysis of colonialist representation of dance, and more a clear demonstration of the pervasiveness of the theme of dance in nineteenth-century travel writing. In particular, Mabro’s collection of dance narratives reveals the persistence of stereotypical notions of Eastern femininity and sexuality expressed through dancing that is perceived as uncontrollable and uncivilised movement. Furthermore, the strikingly similar descriptions of dance by these travellers reveals the extent to which they brought to their encounters with

¹⁵ See chapter 6 “The Voice of Sex Crying in the Wilderness” in Mabro (1996).

Eastern dance the long history of Western notions about the dance¹⁶. In this respect, Mabro's anthology is a valuable text in bringing together previously ignored accounts and showing how the exaggerated imaginings of Eastern dance coalesced to generate a kind of topos on Eastern femininity¹⁷. Mabro's collection demonstrates how Middle Eastern dance became another trope of 'otherness' and a way in which women of the Middle East and North Africa could be subject to denigration.

Other notable works dealing with the topic of colonialist representation of dance are Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem* (1986)¹⁸, Rana Kabbani's *Myths of the Orient* (1994), and Emily Apter's essay, "The Dance of Colonial Seduction" in her book *Continental Drift* (1999). Apter's essay is significant because it deals with how meaning is generated through the language used in descriptions of Eastern dancing in colonialist accounts and fictional texts. In her Lacanian reading of Flaubert's *Salammbô*, Apter draws a parallel between the language used to describe 'Oriental' dancing and colonialist desire for domination. She notes that in Flaubert's descriptions of Salammbô dancing, there is a marked repetition of words relating to serpentine and undulating movements of the dancer's body. These descriptions, she suggests, "encrypt what Lacan would call the 'line of desire' cathecting colonial looking to its exoticist visual object" (168). The rhetorical repetitions of "undulation and serpentine" (168) in descriptions of 'Oriental' dancing are, according to

¹⁶ Chapter One of this thesis explores these issues in relation to nineteenth-century traveller's representations of dance.

¹⁷ Scholars who discuss this intertextual borrowing include, for example, Ruth Bernard Yeazell (2000), and Reina Lewis (1996).

¹⁸ Alloula's text examines photographs of Algerian women by colonialist travellers in the form of postcards.

Apter, manifesting a desire through the evocation of waving, bending lines “grounded in the long and complex decorative history of the Moorish arabesque” (169).

Much of the critical inquiry surrounding belly dance ignores contemporary manifestations of the dance, which effectively (and erroneously) isolates the phenomenon of belly dance representation squarely in the nineteenth century. This thesis will analyse the ways in which belly dance is envisaged, enacted, and written about beyond the nineteenth century, demonstrating that neither belly dance itself, nor the colonialist sexual fantasy of the ‘other’, is confined to the historical past.

Belly Dance in Sociological and Anthropological studies

Most of the research on belly dance has been carried out in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and ethnology. Many of these studies explore the socio-political concerns of the lived experiences of women who perform belly dance. Karin Van Nieuwkerk’s book *‘A Trade Like Any Other’: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (1995) examines the ongoing discrimination against female entertainers in Egypt. Nieuwkerk notes the paradoxical situation wherein on the one hand performances by female singers and dancers at Egyptian family gatherings, weddings and other celebrations are considered essential to promoting the host’s prestige and status, but on the other hand female entertainers are considered disreputable – a stigma that is directly related to the display of women’s bodies. Drawing on extensive fieldwork, Nieuwkerk posits the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as crucial to the prejudices that exist in Egyptian society against women. She raises some important issues concerning

the socio-cultural anxieties that surround the belly-dancing body in public in the Egyptian context. Furthermore, she articulates the idea that societal attitudes toward belly dancing are ambivalent at best, and disapproving at worst, an assertion that few writers on belly dance are willing to make.

Donnalee Dox in her essay "Thinking Through Veils" (1997) also uses participant observation and interviews to critically examine the complexities of the belly-dancing body in performance. Dox's essay, however, extends to include the West, and North America in particular, where she examines the tensions between belly dance in the Middle East and its counterpart in the West. Using case studies, she conjectures that the live performance of belly dance in the West attempts to present a 'realistic' East for the benefit of a Western audience.

In contrast to both Dox's and Nieuwkerk's anthropological approach, my research investigates belly dance using a literary critical method with particular emphasis on discourses of representation rather than live performance. While these works raise some important issues about the gendered body in performance, an exclusively anthropological view of belly dance precludes the notion that belly dance as a concept is as much a socially-constructed fantasy of a particular kind of femininity as it is a real dance form. Indeed, it is this lack of inquiry into contemporary representations of the dance outside of the arena of live performance that has partly limited the advancement of research on belly dance. This is not to suggest however, that the lived dancing body is unimportant to my study; but there is much to be gained from examining how the belly-dancing body may be read in other ways.

Specialty Magazines and Journals

One of the most notable and enduring publications on belly dance is *Arabesque*, a magazine devoted to Middle Eastern Dance in the West and to the specific belly dance culture that was emerging during the 1970s in America. *Arabesque* was established by the American-Lebanese dancer, teacher, and researcher Ibrahim Farrah in 1975 and ceased publication with his death in 1997. In 1978 Farrah stated that *Arabesque* magazine sought to “go beyond the exoticism and color of this particular ethnic dance form to reveal the subtleties, symbolism and the cultural climate that produces a certain dance tradition” (3). Another notable magazine with an international readership, and that publishes high quality scholarly works, is *Habibi*. Scholars working in the field of Middle Eastern dance studies such as Laurel Victoria Gray, Andrea Deagon, Anthony Shay, Karayanni, and Barbara Sellers-Young have published their works in *Habibi*. There are numerous popular magazines all over the world that are dedicated to belly dance¹⁹, but *Arabesque* is the only one listed as an academic/scholarly publication with Ulrich’s Periodicals Directory.

Unlike other belly dance publications, *Arabesque* maintained the philosophy that it should treat all dance forms as equal and that its purpose was to provide its readers with knowledge about ‘ethnic’ dance and culture. In the ‘Statement of Purpose’ in the first issue, Farrah stated, “It is the purpose of our publication to unravel some of the mysteries of the Middle East and to bring our readers more knowledge of the culture, the customs, the traditions of this vast and diversified part of the world” (3). While *Arabesque* constructs belly dance in

¹⁹ For a fairly comprehensive list of Middle Eastern dance related publications see web page <http://www.davina.org/CNSpring2002/TheList.html>

positive and diverse ways, it nevertheless relies on Orientalist discursive constructions such as the “mystery” of the East²⁰.

Situating Orientalism and the Grotesque

Any discussion of Western representations of Middle Eastern dance inevitably takes place against the backdrop of the concept of Orientalism, as defined by Edward Said (1979). In his seminal work, *Orientalism*, Said outlined the ways in which Western colonialists produced a manufactured version of the Middle East as “a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (1). This construction of the Orient and its people served to preserve hegemonic rule of the West over the East. Orientalism sets up binary categories, with the West as civilised compared with the uncivilised East, moral versus immoral, proper versus improper, and so forth.

Drawing on Foucauldian assumptions that knowledge is productive of power, Said demonstrated the inextricable relationship between colonial power and discourses of Western knowledge about the “Orient” that enabled Europe to dominate it through a process of textual representation and archival consolidation. Said’s notion of Orientalism describes a strand of colonialist discourse which he locates especially in academic writing, travel literature, and

²⁰ In addition to specialty magazines, belly dancing has been the subject of several unpublished theses and conference papers: Judy Alves-Masters (1979), Magda Saleh, (1979), Kathleen Wittick Fraser (1991), Rebecca Stone (1991), Iman Abdelmohsien (2000), Michelle Forner (1993). Conferences held: *1st International Conference on Middle Eastern Dance* 1997 held at Costa Mesa, California 1997 and the *2nd International Conference on Middle Eastern Dance* 2001 held at Orange Coast College, Los Angeles 2001.

novels as the embodiments of the ideologies of Western nations – especially those of Great Britain, France, and the United States – for representing the colonies and cultures of North Africa and the Middle East²¹. Orientalism can be distinguished from the larger discursive focus of colonialism by its concentration on the perceived threat that Islamic cultures of North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean presented to Western Europe. Said argues that Orientalism discursively cast Islam as a symbol of “terror, devastation, the demonic” imposed by “hordes of hated barbarians” (59-60)²².

Said’s model has, however, been criticised for its monolithic nature, as well as its assumptions that Orientalism is an impermeable and fixed knowledge system. Said responded to his critics in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Despite the criticisms his text received, *Orientalism* remains a valuable text in which cultural theorists and feminists have extended Said’s model to include questions of how sexuality and gender might be imbricated in Orientalist discourse²³. The implications of feminist reassessments of Said’s *Orientalism* are of particular concern in this thesis. Scholars such as Helen Callaway (1987), Billie Melman (1992), and Reina Lewis (1996) have challenged Said’s premise

²¹ Said identifies Orientalism as “a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the three great empires – British, French, American – in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced” (14-15).

²² Said also notes that Orientalism attempts to construct Islam as “a misguided version of Christianity (61).

²³ Critic Homi Bhabha (1983: 18-36) extended Said’s formula through Lacanian psychoanalysis where he conceived that racial stereotype is akin to sexual fetish in its ambivalent identification with both similarity and difference of the other. For recent considerations of the gender politics of Said’s model see Reina Lewis’s two books *Gendering Orientalism* (1996) and *Rethinking Orientalism* (2004).

that imperial cultural production was the province of the “paradigmatically male, colonial subject” (Lewis 1996: 3). Lewis, for example, focuses on the ways in which white European women contributed to the imperial cultures of the nineteenth century (1996).

In drawing on Said’s model of Orientalism as well as the feminist reassessments of his work, I argue that the imprisoning discourse of Orientalism has been appropriated by Western women to function, however uneasily, to serve the liberatory purposes of feminism. Their empowerment, in other words, is inextricably bound up with Orientalist discourses and the appropriation and consumption of Orientalist notions of the exotic feminine. With these issues forming the background of this study, and drawing on feminist theory, performance theory, and Orientalist discourse, this thesis opens up new questions concerning the meanings and significances of representations of the female body in belly dance.

Concepts of the Grotesque

One of the consistent problems faced by writers on the subject of the grotesque is the dilemma of definition (Yates 2). Many scholars from the late eighteenth century onwards have attempted to define and locate the meaning of the grotesque, yet the sheer number of theoretical variations on the subject reveals the slipperiness of this fundamentally ambiguous and changeable concept. Frances S. Connelly acknowledges “any attempt to define the grotesque is a contradiction in terms” (2) and that “the grotesque identifies a class of imagery that has never fit comfortably within the boundaries traditionally set by either aesthetics or art history” (5). The elusiveness of the grotesque as an aesthetic

and critical category means that many scholars have either become bogged down in pedantry over the terms and definitions of the grotesque, or have risked evacuating the concept of all meaning. What follows is a brief discussion of the trajectory of the grotesque in order to situate the concept in relation to my study²⁴.

The term 'grotesque' is thought to have first appeared as early as the fifteenth century with the discovery of designs and images found in Roman underground caves, or *grotte* (Garland Thompson 112). The designs depicted hybrid figures where human bodies were fused with those of strange plants and animals. Over the decades following the discovery of these designs the use of the grotesque as a decorative style became extremely popular with artists and writers across Italy, France, England, and Germany, and was subsequently developed in the artworks and frescoes of the Renaissance. In particular, the works of Hieronymus Bosch, such as his renowned *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1500-1505), *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1500), and Pieter Brueghel's *Peasant Wedding Dance* (1566) and *The Feast of Fools* (1568), were identified as grotesque art (Wilson Yates 9). This identification broadened the scope of the grotesque beyond the decorative pattern work of the original cave-bound images.

According to Connelly, following the Renaissance the grotesque was "conceived and expressed in significantly different ways from the Enlightenment onward" (6). Artworks that are characteristic of the grotesque tradition of this

²⁴ The subject of the grotesque has an immensely long and complex history, and for this reason an extended history of the grotesque is outside of the scope of this thesis. For more on the grotesque see, for example, Thomson (1972), Harpham (1982), Kuryluk (1987), Garland Thompson (1997), and Yates (1997).

period include Francisco Goya's *Capriccios* (1799) and Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781). Barbara Maria Stafford argues that the grotesques of the Enlightenment saw the emergence of the monster: "for the eighteenth century, looking at monsters developed into an indoor sport" (88). The monster "presented the distorted portrait of the primal universe as deregulated *ars combinatorial*, an immense chaos" (82). Dangerous, uncontrollable and most troublingly, unable to be categorised, the monster "reminded the beholder of [their] active need and responsibility to make sense of the world" (82).

Despite the growing recognition and popularity of the grotesque style in art, it was always controversial. Its association with subterranean depths, its hidden and secret fantasy beasts and bodies, meant that many critics condemned the grotesque. Indeed, many artists refused to have their art identified with the grotesque. Subsequently, the emergent tradition of the grotesque came to take on profound social, religious, and moral meanings (Yates 9). Its seemingly monstrous mixing of human and animal, and its fantastical use of space and form seemed to violate the order and harmony prized by the classical arts. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the nineteenth century an increasing and productive body of art and literature had created a rich genre of grotesque imagery and forms (Yates 10).

During the Romantic period of the nineteenth century, the output of grotesque in art and literature was extraordinary with prominent literary works by E. A. T. Hoffman and Edgar Allan Poe appearing, as well as well-known artworks such *Monstrous Man* (1808) by Nicolas-François Regnault and etchings by George Cruikshank. It was around this time that a substantial body of theoretical considerations of the concept of the grotesque also became

available. The grotesque became the subject of major critical attention when writers such as Georg W. Hegel, Victor Hugo, John Addington Symonds, and John Ruskin, fascinated by its strange and outwardly contradictory nature, attempted to explain the philosophical, social and aesthetic significance of the grotesque (Yates 1)²⁵. Ruskin, for example, in identifying a kind of “noble Grotesque” in his book *Stones of Venice*, wrote that “in all ages and among all nations, grotesque idealism has been the element through which the most appalling and eventful truth has been wisely conveyed” (134). Throughout the twentieth century a number of well-known exponents of the theme produced complex theories on the concept of the grotesque. Some of the works representative of this period are Wolfgang Kayser’s *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (1957), Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World* (1968), Geoffrey Galt Harpham’s *On the Grottesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (1982), Ewa Kuryluk’s *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex: The Grottesque: Origins, Iconography, Techniques* (1987), and Mary Russo’s *The Female Grottesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (1994). Of these, the work produced by Mikhail Bakhtin has arguably been the most significant contribution to theories on the grotesque, with his concepts of grotesque realism, carnival and the carnivalesque continuing to influence contemporary writers. Bakhtin’s work on the grotesque body is of particular importance to my theorisations on the construction of gender and difference in Western representations of the belly-dancing body.

In his famous study of carnival and the carnivalesque in *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin makes a distinction between the ‘classical’ and the ‘grotesque’

²⁵ For a summary discussion of major nineteenth-century theorists of the grotesque see

body. According to his analysis, the upper body is the classical body; it is predominantly secure and intellectual, and maintains its integrity. The lower bodily stratum, on the other hand, is the site of the grotesque body, which has orifices, genitals, and protuberances. The classical body emphasises the impenetrable, the ideal, and the spiritual; the grotesque body foregrounds its penetrability and excrescences, sexuality, and bodily excess. The grotesque body refuses fixed definitions and problematises the boundaries between the self and other. As Bakhtin argues, the carnivalesque grotesque body is one that “figures in all the expressions of the unofficial speech of the people” (319). Furthermore, in grotesque imagery there is a tendency to “efface the confines between the body and surrounding objects, between the body and world, and to accentuate one grotesque part, stomach, buttocks, or the mouth” (354). As we shall see, representations of belly dancers consistently emphasise the lower bodily strata – these are bodies that refuse to stay in their proper place, that twist, undulate, and transgress the boundaries of the closed, smooth, and harmless classical body. I am not suggesting, however, that belly-dancing bodies are actually grotesque, rather that the visual and verbal language used to describe them renders them as such. I intend to transfigure the grotesque beyond the usual framework of aesthetics to the critical arena of literary criticism and dance studies in order to reveal the ways in which the grotesque functions to variously denigrate, eroticise, and pathologise female bodies, as

well as to disrupt dominant ideological constructions of proper femininity and embodiment²⁶.

Why use the grotesque as a category for feminism?

In the twenty-first century the grotesque has been given renewed critical attention in diverse fields such as art, literary theory, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and more recently, feminism²⁷. Before the publication of Russo's book *The Female Grotesque*, a fully articulated feminist discourse on the grotesque did not exist. While there has been a growing interest in the feminist possibilities and significance of such imagery in art and literature²⁸, there is still much work to be done by feminists in reconstituting knowledges about the grotesque female body in performance.

The viability of Bakhtin's concepts of the grotesque body for a feminist agenda has been questioned for a number of reasons. One of the most consistent criticisms levelled against the usefulness of Bakhtin's theories for feminism is that his philosophies leave the language and ideologies of gender unexplored. Many critics argue that despite the centrality of the body in his work – particularly the female body – a treatment of gender is absent from his writing.

²⁶ In her book *Extraordinary Bodies*, Rosemarie Garland Thomson proposed that the concept of grotesque was an important category for exploring the politics of social constructions of disability. She focused especially on the nineteenth-century American 'freak show' (1997: 15).

²⁷ For discussion of the grotesque in art see, for example, Connelly ed. (2003), and Vanska (2002). For more on the feminist reassessments of the grotesque female body see Pitts (1998). For a discussion of the uses of the grotesque in postcolonial studies see Bernard-Donals (1998), and Cassuto (1997).

²⁸ See Pitts (1998), Garland Thompson (1997), and Rowe (1995).

Ironically though, for Bakhtin one of the strongest expressions of the grotesque can be found in the image of the “senile pregnant hag” (25). The assertion that senility, maternity, and old age are the quintessence of the grotesque is clearly contentious to feminism (a contention Bakhtin never explores), yet Bakhtin sees this visibly gendered image of the grotesque as deeply positive.

Russo is responsible for pioneering a place for the grotesque in the language of feminist theory. Other theorists have discussed the role of the grotesque in gender presentation and construction, but few have developed a specifically feminist discourse of the grotesque²⁹. Mary Russo notes that feminism in the 1990s has “stood increasingly for and with the normal” (vii) which has “led to a cultural and political disarticulation of feminism from the strange, the risky, the minoritarian, the excessive, the outlawed, and the alien” (vii). As Russo has argued, the grotesque has the potential to be deeply subversive, and in this sense Bakhtin’s theories offer an invaluable conceptual tool through which to examine and interpret the often-contradictory discourses at work in representations of belly dance.

For Russo, the concept of the grotesque is both productive and problematic for feminism. She suggests that representations of the feminine grotesque involve the “ambivalent redeployment of taboos around the female body as grotesque (the pregnant body, the aging body, the irregular body), and as unruly when set loose in the public sphere” (Russo 56). This investigation takes up Russo’s invitation to examine the “odd sisterhood” that feminism shares with the grotesque. My work on the subject aims to exceed the

²⁹ Another notable feminist work is Kathleen Rowe’s book *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (1995).

Bakhtinian grotesque by making connections between the grotesque body and performance, and by examining the conflicts between feminism, orientalism, and the grotesque in representations of the belly-dancing body. As I will show in this thesis, it is the exposure and movement of the abdomen in belly dance which consistently emerges as the locus of the bodily grotesque. The question that begs to be asked, and one which Bakhtin failed to adequately address is, what is it about the belly that makes it a site of the grotesque? I wish to argue that the navel – a bodily detail crucially overlooked by Bakhtin in his model of the grotesque – is, perhaps more so than the belly itself, the site which in part underlies the ambivalence surrounding the discursive construction of the belly dancer.

Navel Exposure³⁰

In most belly dance costumes the midriff of the dancer is exposed; this part of the body is effectively framed above and below by the decorative brassiere and belt. The central focus of the belly is, of course, the navel. While merely a universal human scar, the site of the redundant stump of the umbilical cord cut at birth, the navel is an anatomical detail fraught with semiotic significance. Though it serves no purpose and leads nowhere, the navel is often privileged symbolically as the centre of our human existence. Yet, as Elisabeth Bronfen has noted, despite the navel's importance as a conceptualising symbol of centred-ness and human existence, it has rarely been the subject of informed

semiotic or cultural analysis, as have other parts of the human body (3). The navel has, though, at various moments historically, been at the centre of controversy and censure, where its exposure (especially by women) has been considered obscene.

During the 1930s the navel proved to be such a powerful site of anxiety that a woman's exposed navel was prohibited from appearing in film. This rule was part of the notorious Hays Code of 1930, which censured, among other things, the representation of sexual relations, violence, nudity, profanity, drug trafficking and white slavery (Black 33; Shohat 1997: 45). The rules of the code were strictly enforced; however Hollywood filmmakers found ways in which to circumvent the restrictive policies of the code. Belly dancers, for example, were instructed to glue a jewel or ornament to their navels, thereby strategically covering the offending indentation. The effect of the Hays Code ruling on navels was long lasting: for example, actress Barbara Eden was still not permitted to show her navel on the 1960s NBC series *I Dream of Jeannie*. Perhaps even more enduring, however, is the erroneous yet widespread belief that contemporary belly dancers continue to wear jewels in their navels. Indeed, most dancers strongly oppose the practice of covering the navel with a jewel partly because it does not correspond with any aspect of traditional costuming

³⁰ My discussion of the symbolic significance of the navel in relation to representations of the belly-dancing body is an extension of research published in an article entitled 'How does she do that?' Belly Dancing and the Horror of a Flexible Woman", in *Women's Studies An Interdisciplinary Journal* (Keft-Kennedy 2005: 279-300).

for Middle Eastern dance, and also because of its anti-feminist implication that women's navels are obscene³¹.

Despite the central location of the navel on the surface of the body, it remains strangely absent from Bakhtin's model of the grotesque body. I would suggest that the navel is a potent site of potential disruption, existing in a kind of liminal space between the upper and lower strata of the body. In the language of the grotesque and on the brink of abjection, the navel is evidence of the point of rupture between mother and baby; the literal mark where bodily integrity was once broken. Once outside the womb, when baby takes its first breath, the navel has no continuing function in human development; it simply ceases to be of use. Nonetheless, it is there; a kind of universal (and at birth non-gendered) mark confirming the time when baby was joined with its mother.

While an anatomical difference between the navels of men and women is non-existent, this site, nonetheless, has a meaningful gendered implication. Specifically, the navels of women are historically more troubling than those of men. Bronfen notes that the navel "fascinates even as it repels"; the navel marks an earlier opening in the body, and "seems to echo the vagina as well as the anus", transforming the belly into an erotic yet culturally taboo zone (3). Paradoxically, though, even the most cursory glance at fashion magazines reveals that the navel is absolutely in vogue. Indeed it could be said that the navel itself has become a fashion accessory. This phenomenon of navel exposure has not, however, diluted the ambivalence surrounding it. For

³¹ See for example, (<http://www.shira.net/dear2.html>). Islamic laws in Egypt periodically require belly dancers to cover their midribs, either with a netted body stocking called a *Shabaka* or by wearing costumes that would conceal the navel (Nieuwkerk 59).

example, when the online website of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* featured an article on the “semiotics of Britney Spears’s belly button”, the site became so jammed that it had to be shut down after 17 million people attempted to download the picture of Spears’ navel (Uhlig 2001). The navel repeatedly appears throughout my analysis of the representation of the sexualised, racialised, and gendered body of the belly dancer.

Historical and Discursive Perspectives

From the mid-nineteenth century the belly-dancing body has been continuously present in the cultural imaginations of the West, and can be traced across time and culture in an array of historic, literary, performative, and artistic genres. However, the diversity of genres used to describe belly dance – ranging from the documentary and realist genres at one end of the spectrum, to the fictional and the imaginative at the other – presents complications for the analysis of the history of cultural representations of belly dance. The notion of ‘belly dance’ must be conceptualised in two distinct yet paradoxically overlapping ways. Firstly, the solo improvised dances of the Middle East and North Africa, which came to be known as ‘belly dance’ in the nineteenth century, were actually part of a group of dance movements and traditions which varied from region to region and from culture to culture. Secondly, belly dance has functioned as a powerfully enduring conceptual tool for imagining an exotic, Orientalised female ‘other’. In other words, belly dance is as much a Western fantasy as it is a complex set of actual dance practices.

It was during the nineteenth century that the actual dances performed by Middle Eastern and North African women became inseparable from the fantasy of the exotic belly dancer. Many scholars have noted the impossibility of locating a fixed origin and exact movement vocabulary of the dances of the Middle East³². Barbara Siegal writes that *Raqs al Sharqi* (Eastern dance) “is one of the world’s oldest documented dance forms” (11). Morroe Berger noted in 1961 “no one can say exactly how much the Oriental dance of today resembles that of earlier eras” (7). This idea of the dancing body as always elusive negates the possibility that any amount of searching will uncover a ‘true’ version of the dance or, indeed, the possibility that a single history of belly dance exists. However, to assume that the dancing body is inconsequential in the analysis of dance representation is to risk obliterating the dancer altogether and to further silence the often already voiceless dancing subject. This dilemma is perilously circular. One way to approach this problem is to understand the cultural history of belly dance as existing on two parallel discursive paths: on one side is the dance as it is performed and experienced in all its variations, and on the other side is the rich and complex fantasy of the dance. Rather than remain separate, I suggest that these pathways continually collide and intersect. These points of collision might be thought of as the significant moments in the history of the dance where the Orientalist Western fantasy of belly dance actually begins to transform the practice of the dance in both the East and the West. Belly dance has evolved into a complex and multi-faceted dance form, in both the countries of its origin and in the West, by incorporating various aspects of the Western fantasy of the dance.

³² See for example Deagon (1998), Sellers-Young (1992).

Belly Dance: Western Discourses

The typical image of the voluptuous belly-dancing woman, in sequined costume with bare midriff and undulating torso, is a highly recognisable figure in popular culture across the world. This particular visual construction of the dancer is, however, less a representation of an “authentic” or traditional Middle Eastern dance than evidence of the complex hybridisation and exoticisation of the dance form as it was taken up by modern dancers of the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth³³. This version of belly dance is the result of a long-term and complex blend of intercultural interpretation, Orientalist fantasy, Western invention and appropriation, as well as the inevitable evolution of the dance.

It was not until the nineteenth century that belly dance became strongly connected with sexual excess and seduction. Stories and myths about the dancers and the dance were circulated by colonial travellers, artists and writers who invariably described a performance of depraved immorality³⁴. This reputation of the dance is one that has been remarkably enduring, and one which Western cultural discourse continues to perpetuate. Especially from the nineteenth century onward, the exotic fantasy of the belly dancer has fused into the popular imagination of the West as an iconic representation of Middle Eastern femininity and sexuality. The Western Orientalist stereotype of the belly dancer as a sexually available, morally questionable, exotic unveiled dancer was the assumed antithesis (but equally as stereotypical a notion) of modest,

³³ See Chapter Two of this thesis for an extended discussion of the relationship between modern dance, Middle Eastern dance, and the New Woman.

³⁴ For example, see Judy Mabro's anthology of Western travel accounts of the Middle East (1996). See also Yeazell (2000).

restrained and veiled Muslim womanhood. This is, perhaps, the kind of stereotypical binary opposition regarding Middle Eastern women that Nawal El Saadawi was talking about when she said that “veiling and nakedness are two sides of the same coin” (1980: 140). Edward Said characterised the fixity of Orientalist tropes and stereotypes – their capacity to merge into consciousness as credible stand-ins for reality itself – as “radical realism” (72). Said’s notion of radical realism is particularly useful in looking at Orientalist assumptions and misconceptions about belly dance. One such belief readily assimilated into the popular discourse on belly dance is that all dance had religious significance. Curt Sachs’ influential text *World History of Dance* (1937), suggested that all dance, including “Oriental” dancing, originally had religious significance:

In the ecstasy of the dance man bridges the chasm between this and the other world, to the realm of demons, sprits, and God [...] Inherited from savage ancestors as an ordered expression in motion of the exhilaration of the soul, [dance] develops and broadens into the search for God (4).

Shay and Sellers-Young have argued that while popular history continues to locate the origin of belly dance with religious practices, there is “no evidence that solo improvised dance ever had religious significance” (21). They suggest that belly dance’s supposed link with religion has been indiscriminately taken up by writers such as Buonaventura without examining its implications or sources (Shay *et al* 21). This is not, however, to suggest that Middle Eastern dancing is disconnected altogether from religion³⁵. Rather, it is to point to the essentialist

³⁵ See, for example, Penni AlZayer (2004) who presents an even-handed and well researched account of secular and religious Middle Eastern dances.

misconceptions about the “Orient”, which Said argues was overdetermined for its spirituality (150).

Many popular myths proliferate about where and how belly dance originated. One pervasive legend recounts how belly dance began when the women of Islamic harems were forced to develop seductive dance techniques in order to compete for the attentions of the Sultan or “master”³⁶. Other similar myths abound in popular discourse and usually suggest that the dance was designed solely for the titillation and voyeuristic pleasure of men³⁷. While the nineteenth century did see the dancing of Middle Eastern as well as North African women become the popular entertainment for a mostly male audience of Western colonials and foreign tourists, many scholars suggest that traditionally this dance was usually performed in front of other women as part of family celebrations (Nieuwkerk 12, AlZayer 73). Another theory about the dance’s origins, but one that explicitly counters the sexual excesses that accompanied many other origin theories, is that it began with women-centred birthing rituals³⁸. The distinctive undulatory and circular motions of belly dance, combined with its focus on the pelvis, are reasons often cited for connecting the

³⁶ See for example Ruth Bernard Yeazell for an extended account of Orientalist myth-making by European travellers (2000:108). See also Deagon (1998).

³⁷ Recent research by Pettigrew and Wort (2003) shows that female interviewees engaged in the practices and communities of belly dance viewed their dancing as a specifically female-oriented practice that “fulfil[s] their own needs for femininity and sensuality, rather than being an activity designed for the male gaze” (4). See also Deagon (1998) and Lorus (1996).

dance with birthing and goddess religions. Scholars are, however, especially divided on this particular aspect of the socio-cultural history of the dance. Renowned dancer-scholar Carolina Varga Dinicu, also known as 'Morocco', argues that "Oriental dancing [...] is one of the oldest forms of dance, originating with pre-Biblical religious rites worshiping motherhood and having as its practical side the preparation of females for the stresses of childbirth" (1964). Varga Dinicu, describing eyewitness accounts of women's birth-dancing rituals in the Middle East, explains that

In this ritualistic form men are not allowed to watch it. The purpose here is to hypnotize the woman in labor into an imitation of the movements with her own body. This greatly facilitates the birth and reduces pain from womb contractions. It helps the mother to move with instead of against the contractions.

(<http://www.casbahdance.org/bdance+childbirth.html>).

Other scholars, however, have opposed such definitions of the dance's meaning and social significance to women. Barbara Siegal, for example, argues that while "archaeological evidence (from about 2200 B.C.) indicates there were women's travelling dance troupes who also were expert in women's health matters and functioned as midwives [...] there is little evidence that that they actually danced to facilitate birth (11). Andrea Deagon argues that as "positive as these images are", particularly in their rejection of "the notion that women's

³⁸ See Varga Dinicu, Carolina "Morocco", "Belly Dancing" and Childbirth." *Sexology* 2.3 (1964): 18-19. Varga Dinicu's article was later published as "Giving to Light: Dancing the Baby into the World." *Habibi* 15.1 (1996). Varga Dinicu's article is available at <http://www.casbahdance.org/bdance+childbirth.html>. See also Shira's website <http://www.shira.net/debunking.htm>.

physical expression, especially when it is fertile or sensual, is performed primarily in service of men”, they are “no more solidly grounded as the origin of dance than are the harem fantasies” (1998)³⁹.

The myths surrounding this relationship between birthing rituals and belly dance took on particular significance during the revival of belly dance in the West in the 1970s. Daniela Gioseffi addresses this theme in her novel *The Great American Belly Dance* (1977) and in her non-fiction book *Earth Dancing, Mother Nature’s Oldest Rite* (1980), which draws connections between belly dance, ancient goddess and fertility cultures. These feminist advocates of belly dance worked to redefine the sexualised stereotypes previously associated with the dance, and instead promoted belly dance as a celebration and awakening of feminine creative forces⁴⁰.

The Western commodification of Middle Eastern dancing was initiated long before the revival of the dance in second-wave feminism. In particular, the nineteenth century saw a plethora of representations surrounding female dancing bodies. In the nineteenth century Middle Eastern dance had become another exotic commodity in the Orientalist market for culturally ‘other’ products. The successful exploitation of Middle Eastern dance by the West is reflected in the visual saturation of belly dance imagery in the popular and consumer culture of the nineteenth century⁴¹. Eroticised descriptions and images of belly dancing by travellers were filtered back to the West to contribute to the growing and lucrative industry in what Irvin Schick has called “ethnopornography” (82).

³⁹ See Deagon (1998) http://people.uncw.edu/deagona/raqs/origins.htm#_ftnref2

⁴⁰ These issues will be explored in detail in Chapter Three.

⁴¹ Buonaventura’s book *Serpent of the Nile* (1998) demonstrates the pervasiveness of the Western fascination with belly dance.

Constituting a significant part of that industry were eroticised photographs of “Oriental” women often posed as belly dancers and *Almehs*, and distributed as postcards⁴². Reina Lewis argues that during the nineteenth century Oriental “dancers came to be fetishized into an isolated female sign of the Orient’s erotic and passionate potential” (173). The Orientalist movement in the visual arts was well underway by the mid-nineteenth century⁴³. Paintings such as Jean Leon Gerome’s *The Almah* (1873) and *Dance of the Almah* (1863) are significant examples of the representation of Eastern dance in Orientalist art. By the early twentieth century images of belly dance were also used pervasively in advertising and fan magazines for Hollywood film⁴⁴ (See Plates 1 and 2). The circulation of this complex manufactured vision of belly dance solidified the fantasy of belly dance as the epitome the unbridled, feminised and decadent Orient (Studlar 105).

⁴² For a revealing, if problematic, interpretation of the popularity and status of Orientalist postcards see Alloula (1986). See, for example, Apter’s comments on Alloula’s text (1999: 176-177).

⁴³ For a discussion of the Orientalist art movement see, for example, MacKenzie (1995), and Benjamin ed. (1997).

⁴⁴ See Bernstein and Studlar (1997).



Plate 1 Palmolive Soap. "Beauty from Trees". Advertisement. *Canadian Home Journal*, 1925.



Plate 2 "Conquerors of a Wilderness" *The Shrine Magazine*, September 1926.

Belly Dance and Cinema

When Hollywood took up the image of the belly dancer from the early 1920s, the function and meaning of the dance changed again. The Hollywood film industry imbued Eastern dance with the erotic excess that was directly linked to

Orientalist notions of Eastern culture and the topos of the harem, but it also attached to the female dancer a vampish defiance and sexual assertiveness that was contemporaneously associated with the 'New Woman'⁴⁵. The visual spectacle of belly dance – with its abundant possibilities for scantily clad 'harem' girls and seductive stripteases in the vein of the 'Dance of the Seven Veils' – provided Hollywood filmmakers with a powerful (and profitable) model for visualising Orientalism⁴⁶. Ella Shohat writes that "already in the silent era, films often included eroticized dances, featuring a rather improbable mélange of 'Spanish', 'Indian dances' and 'belly dancing'" (47). Early Hollywood films such as *The Dance of Fatima* (c.a. 1903), D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), *Salome* (1918), *The Sheik* (1921), and *Son of the Sheik* (1926) set the tone for the abundance of Orientalist film productions which flourished throughout the twentieth century. The major thematic and narrative concerns of these films centred on romantic notions of the East as a place of magic, barbarity, and unleashed sexuality⁴⁷. These melodramas (set in appropriately far-away exotic places) demonstrated the nineteenth-century cultural anxieties that were implicated in staging interracial relationships. The Orientalist mise-en-scène allows for the relatively safe exploration of socially proscribed power dynamics of race, sexuality, and gender⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ For an extended treatment of the relationship between dance Orientalism in Hollywood film and the 'New Woman' see Studlar (1997).

⁴⁶ See Studlar (1997).

⁴⁷ See John C. Eisele (2002).

⁴⁸ Ella Shohat explores the rhetorical tropes of rape and polygamy in Orientalist films such as *The Sheik* (1921). These scenarios of rape and female enslavement by a "black/Arab" man were constructed as legitimate erotic interaction between the races and could be safely acted out vis-à-vis Orientalist and colonialist narratives (41).

Films of the 1950s and 60s such as *David and Bathsheba* (1951), *The King and I* (1956), and *Harum Scarum* (1965), as well as the Bond movies such as *From Russia With Love* (1963) further popularised the sexualised iconography that had become virtually inseparable from belly dance. Film reigned supreme as the most pervasive way of distributing and representing the myth of the East as a tantalisingly forbidden world of licentious eroticism. Many of these Hollywood films portrayed belly dance as an exotic striptease – an idea engendered by Oscar Wilde’s version of *Salomé* and her “dance of the seven veils”, and which has remained firmly cemented in the Western consciousness⁴⁹. Indeed, so pervasive is the association of belly dance with salaciousness and striptease that the Chambers Dictionary continues to cite the word “exotic” as “pertaining to striptease or belly-dancing” (1994). The sexualised representation of belly dance in Hollywood films of the twentieth century helped to secure the already salacious reputation that belly dance had been developing since the mid-nineteenth century.

Terminology

The question of what to call belly dance has, especially since the mid 1970s, been a hotly contested issue for practitioners of the dance not only in the Middle East but also in countries of the West. Aside from “belly dance” other names have included ‘Middle Eastern Dance’, ‘Oriental Dance’, ‘*raks sharki*’ (a transliteration of ‘oriental dance’ in Arabic), *danse Orientale*, *danse du ventre*,

⁴⁹ Contrary to popular belief there is no link between the Biblical Salome and a dance called the “dance of the seven veils”. This dance, which has been so effectively

baladi (of Egyptian origin meaning dance of the country), and Turkish variations such as *tsifteteli*. Karayanni sums up the dilemma of nomenclature when he writes that “few moments caused me as much discomfort” in writing his recent book *Dancing Fear and Desire*, “as the attempt to provide a glossary” (25). The term ‘belly dance’ has been especially criticised. This debate surrounding terminology of belly dancing stems from two main issues: firstly, that the “belly dance” was not the original name of the dance but was dubbed as such by American entrepreneur Sol Bloom who brought Middle Eastern and North African dancers to the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair⁵⁰. Bloom capitalised on the suggestiveness of the name ‘*danse du ventre*’ (the French translation of ‘belly dance’) that he hoped would spur the curiosity of nineteenth-century audiences. Thus, the name is fraught with the politics of the nineteenth-century sexualisation and denigration of the belly-dancing body. Secondly, the blanket term ‘belly dance’ homogenises the vast range of dance traditions, thereby negating the cultural specificities and differences of the dance. The term “Oriental dance” evokes the imperialist politics of colonial stereotypes, although it is frequently deployed by dancers in the Middle East. In *Orientalism*, Said argues that to “speak of someone as an Oriental, as the Orientalists did, [...] was often meant as a derogatory expression signifying a lesser breed of human being” (341).

Other categories of the dance take into consideration the variations in style and transformations of the dance such as folkloric, tribal fusion, or cabaret

conjoined to the myth of Salome, is solely the accomplishment of Wilde. See Bentley (2002: 30-31). See also Deagon (2005).

⁵⁰ Chapter Two of this thesis includes an extended discussion of “belly dancing” at the Chicago World’s Fair. See also, Alzayer (2004) and Carlton (1994).

solo. Traditional dance movements, style, music, costume, reception, and function of the dancer, as well as the context of the dance, are enormously variable, and can differ not only from country to country but also from region to region. The transmission of Eastern dancing into the United States in the mid-nineteenth century and the subsequent appropriation of the dance by Western women meant that ideas of authenticity and Orientalism have great bearing on what can appropriately be called Middle Eastern dancing. Indeed, even the term 'Middle Eastern dance' overlooks the significance of Western women's practices of the dance and the long-term appropriations of traditional Middle Eastern dance forms by the West. For these reasons there is a powerful argument for calling this dance 'belly dance' despite its diverse origins, since the dance as it is practised today in the West is the result of extensive transculturation.

For the purpose of this thesis, three main terms will be used in different ways: 'Middle Eastern dance', 'Oriental dance', and 'belly dance'. In Chapter One, I have chosen to use the terms Middle Eastern and North African dance to talk about the dances described in colonial travel accounts. It would be erroneous to refer to these dances as "belly dance" because of the term's nineteenth century American provenance. In Chapter Two, however, I have chosen to use the term 'Oriental' or 'Orientalist' dance to indicate a shift in my discussion from Middle Eastern dancers in the East, to the Western dancers' appropriations of Eastern dance in the West. For these reasons, it cannot be unproblematically approximated with traditional folk dances of the Middle East. From Chapters Three onwards I adopt the term 'belly dance'. Many dancers and scholars insist that using the name belly dance, originally intended as a

pejorative expression, acts as a kind of reclamation (Deagon 10). Furthermore, by 'belly dance', I refer to the largely improvisational, solo form of the dance⁵¹.

Chapter Organisation

Chapter one examines nineteenth-century travel descriptions surrounding Middle Eastern and North African dance through the lens of what I have termed the 'Oriental grotesque'. Specifically, it explores the ways in which these descriptions ideologically encode Victorian anxieties about race, gender, and sexuality. In doing so, this chapter combines Orientalism and Bakhtinian conceptions of the grotesque as a dual framework within which to explore the significance of Middle Eastern dancing bodies in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cultural imagination of the West. Furthermore, this chapter examines Grant Allen's novel *What's Bred in the Bone* (1891) in order to explore the extent to which constructions of the grotesque non-Western dancing body are grounded in the pervasive hierarchies of nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific racism. Through the exploration of the fetishised body of the Middle Eastern and North African dancer as mediated through Western fantasies of 'otherness', this chapter examines the convergence of discourses of gender, race and sexuality and explores the ways in which these are mapped onto the body of the Middle Eastern and North African dancer.

Chapter Two traces the transfiguration of Middle Eastern dance to the West by means of the series of World Fairs in the late nineteenth century, and

⁵¹ The extended terms of this debate are outside the scope of this thesis. See further discussion of terminology Sellers-Young (1992), Barbara Siegal (1995), and Deagon (1999).

the subsequent appropriation of the dance by Western female dancers in the context of the first-wave feminist politics of the New Woman. Specifically, this chapter analyses the contradictions that abound in the cultural production of Middle Eastern dance; while literary texts produced the Eastern dancer as a dangerous or degenerate femme fatale, women also performed the dance on the public stage as a source of empowerment and self-expression. The appropriation of Eastern dance – especially through the figure of Salome – at this time marked, I argue, the beginning of the belly dance’s productive, yet uncomfortable, linkage between feminist cultural politics and Orientalist discourse.

The issue of Western appropriation of belly dance, and in particular, the co-optation of the dance into feminist practice, is again taken up in Chapter Three. This chapter, however, traces the next significant wave of feminism with the massive increase in interest in belly dance in the 1970s which subsequently led to a major output of instructional manuals on belly dance. Through an analysis of a number of these ‘how-to’ manuals, such as, for instance, Julie Russo Mishkin’s and Marta Schill’s *The Compleat Belly Dancer*, and Serena and Alan Wilson’s *The Serena Technique*, along with Daniela Gioseffi’s novel *The Great American Belly Dance*, this chapter explores the relationship between belly dance and the emergence of ‘goddess feminism’ in the 1970s. Informing my exploration of these texts are ecofeminist theories, as well as issues of body image, and, in particular, weight control, and exercise.

Chapter Four extends my discussion of body image through a theoretical engagement with the concept of the grotesque in a close analysis of three Young Adult fictional texts produced between 1980 and 2000. These include,

Merrill Joan Gerber's *Also Known as Sadzia! The Belly Dancer!* (1987), Karen Mueller Coombs's *Samantha Gill, Belly Dancer* (1989), and Karen McCombie's *Boys, Brothers and Jelly-Belly Dancing* (2002). In particular, I decode the ways in which the belly-dancing body functions in these texts to engage with 1980s discourses on fitness and socio-cultural constructions of fatness and thinness. Moreover, I examine how these constructions of physical appearance attach moral significance to the young female bodies in these texts. Adding another dimension to this discussion, I interrogate how the construction of the 'soft' body versus a 'hard' body articulates into this dualistic equation. Integral to my discussion of these texts is the extent to which ideological constructions of sexuality, desire, and femininity intersect with representations of belly dancing.

Chapter Five undertakes a close analysis of the marketing of belly dance through visual representations across a range of popular texts. In particular, this chapter explores the semiotics of the belly-dancing body through the prevalent image of the dancer's headless torso which is often featured, for example, on the covers of books, record albums, and in advertising. Fundamental to this discussion is the role of Orientalist discourse in representations of exotic femininity. Furthermore, this chapter undertakes a detailed reading of Loubna Haikal's novel *Seducing Mr Maclean* (2002). I question the extent to which Haikal's novel presents an ironic use of belly dance to challenge the stereotyping of Lebanese Australians within contemporary Australian sentimental multiculturalism, or whether, indeed, it ends up reproducing the stereotypes it sets out to challenge. Following these discussions I draw some conclusions about belly dance's relationship to both feminism and Orientalism and indicate fruitful directions for future research on this subject.

The Oriental Grotesque and Nineteenth-Century Dancing Bodies

The great desire of gentlemen who come to Egypt is the dancing-girl. If it were put to the vote, most of them would prefer her to the Pyramids, if not to the Nile. Even the moral and pious, the oldest and coldest, cannot forego this bit of temptation.

(Charles G. Leland *The Egyptian Sketchbook* 1873: 130)

One of the most significant and sustained ways in which Middle Eastern and North African dancing was imagined and re-imagined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was through the accounts of Western travellers moving through the Middle East and surrounding regions. By the mid-nineteenth century there was an explosion of English and European travel literature in the form of published memoirs, journals and letters, as well as visual images in the form of painting, postcards, and photography. Accounts of dancing were often a staple ingredient of many of these texts, with travellers actively seeking out the notorious “dancing-girls” of the East (Leland 130). It was during this time that the dancing of Middle Eastern and North African women emerged as an ambivalent, albeit powerful, sign of the Orient. In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said acknowledged that for the West the “Orient” seems to “suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies” (188). However, despite Said’s observation of these ideological conceptions of the Orient, he does not elaborate on the important implications of their formulation in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalist travel writings. “Alas”, Said writes, “it is not the province of my analysis here”

(188). In taking up this absence in his work, this chapter examines the corpus of travel writings that, to use Said's term, "produced" Middle Eastern and North African dance for the West (3). However, I wish to expand Said's original observation by firstly suggesting that female Middle Eastern dancers often functioned in Western travel accounts to embody the object of both "erotic promise" and "threat", and secondly suggesting an alternative way in which to look at this embodiment – that is, through the language of the grotesque¹.

The "grotesque", Frances S. Connelly argues, "is in constant struggle with boundaries of the known, the conventional, the understood" (5). Orientalism, a discourse which also struggles with these boundaries, has, I argue, much in common with the discursive concepts of the grotesque. The tradition of the grotesque, although heterogeneous and complex, is identified as a type of imagery that is deeply ambivalent; a mode of representation that is always "transgressing, merging, overflowing, [and] destabilizing" boundaries (Connelly 4). Furthermore, grotesques are typically "characterized by what they lack: fixity, stability, order" (4). Orientalism, too, is characterised by an oxymoronic attempt to impose fixity, stability, and order onto an "Orient" that is perceived by the West as excessive and confusing. Read in conjunction, then, Orientalism and the grotesque offer points of possible overlap and contradiction. I agree with Lisa Lowe's revision of Said's monolithic conception of Orientalism, when she writes that although Orientalism may "represent its objects as fixed or stable, [its] contradictions and noncorrespondences [...] ultimately divulge the

¹ While there is evidence to suggest that men also participated in the solo improvised dancing of the Middle East, my discussion is limited to the much needed critical analysis of the representation of female dancers in colonial travel literatures. For a discussion of the representation of male dancing bodies in travel writing, see Karayanni (2005: 67-97). See also Shay (2005: 51-84).

multivalence and indeterminability of those fictions” (x). The grotesque, like Orientalism, is “profoundly heterogenous” (ix). The usually female dancing bodies in Orientalist travel writings continually struggle, shift, and transgress – on the one hand, refusing to be positioned and fixed as knowable Oriental subjects, and on the other, domesticated through the familiarity of the language used to describe them. The contradictions and slippages that occur in this struggle provide fertile ground for furthering debates surrounding imperialism, postcolonialism, and feminism. In this chapter I argue that the shared engagements of Orientalism and the grotesque with excess, distortions, and boundaries might usefully be deployed in the exploration of Western representations of the dancing body in nineteenth-century travel writings.

The grotesque as a mode of representation is a particularly pertinent means of exploring the political terrain of dancing bodies in colonial travel literature because it begins to describe what is patently missing from the theoretical language of Orientalism: the racial politics implicit in the deeply ambivalent expression of both desire and horror for that which is constructed as grotesquely ‘other’, “misshapen, ugly, exaggerated, or even formless” (Connelly 2).

Repeatedly, non-Western dancing bodies were depicted using the same familiar paradigmatic descriptions: bodies that are strange, formless, obscene, and unruly. Especially, as we shall see, it is the twisting, undulating female bodies that for Western spectators seem to merge human with animal, and blur with the other dancing bodies around them. The grotesque becomes, in this sense, a highly suggestive category for exploring the politics of the gendered and raced embodiment of the Middle Eastern dancer. I have called this category

the “Oriental grotesque” and argue that like Orientalism, the grotesque also exceeds fixed and discrete definitions. Through my reading of the Oriental grotesque, this chapter proposes and develops a previously unnoticed relationship between the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century expressions of the grotesque in the corporeal torso articulations of Middle Eastern dancing, and the manipulation of these grotesques to demonstrate the imperial “cultural strength” (Said 40) of the West. My conception of the Oriental grotesque begins to unravel the particular gendered and racial connotations of non-Western female bodies that quiver and twist, convulse and writhe; that, in the words of American journalist George William Curtis, are “profound, oriental, intense, and terrible” (142).

Using the theoretical tools of Bakhtin’s concept of the grotesque and Said’s concept of Orientalism, combined with an investigation of colonial discourses of race and embodiment in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel narratives, I will demonstrate the ways in which representations of non-Western dance can be seen to epitomise both the fantasies and desires, and the fears and anxieties of the Western travelling subjects. Fundamental to my discussion of these issues is the important role that medico-scientific discourses such as hysteria, as well as socio-scientific discourses such as Social Darwinism, came to play in the construction of gender and race during the nineteenth century. In order to explore these issues surrounding the dancing body in Western narratives, this Chapter also undertakes a close analysis of Canadian-born London-based Grant Allen’s greatly neglected novel *What’s Bred in the Bone* (1891).

Allen's novel, I argue, constructs Middle Eastern dance as a metaphoric expression of racial otherness. More specifically, the uncontrollable "Oriental" dancing of the female protagonist, Elma Clifford, functions metaphorically as the symptom of an invisible contagion: the racial pollution of a woman with "mixed-blood". The anxiety surrounding this metaphor of racial infection, and its subsequent discovery by Elma, raises issues about nineteenth-century politics of racial 'passing'. Allen's novel, while deeply connected to Orientalist discourses of racial otherness prevalent in Western travel narratives, also represents a distinct and important shift, in which Orientalist anxiety has travelled from the margins to the centre. The travelogues and memoirs I discuss in this chapter, which express the anxieties of the imperialist white who gained access to the East, were naturally circulated back to British and European audiences at home, who could then receive the "otherness" of the Oriental settings and characters safely, that is, from a physical and geographical distance. In Allen's novel, however, the otherness of the East does not remain 'over there' but rather infiltrates the West in the most disturbing fashion: through the contamination of British womanhood by the Oriental 'other'. As we shall see in later chapters of this thesis, Allen's book which was written in 1891 can be seen as a precursor to the threat that 'Oriental' dance seemed to pose to British and European society when it was taken up *en masse* by Western dancers in the early twentieth century.

Allen's novel self-consciously draws together socio-cultural conceptions about Middle Eastern dance, that had been prevalent through nineteenth-century travel writing, and elements of the pervasive racial hierarchies of nineteenth-century scientific racism. The pathologisation of dance as racial

contamination in *What's Bred in the Bone*, I argue, is illustrative of my conception of the Oriental grotesque. In order to uncover the ideological work entailed in the travel accounts and in Allen's novel, I explore the socio-cultural context that engendered such intense anxieties about non-Western dance. This chapter provides an important foundation for the ongoing issues in this thesis and will underscore the social, racial, and gendered meanings that, as later chapters will show, have come to be attached to the 'belly-dancing' body.

Embodying Difference

Even the most cursory examination of the ways in which the traditional dances of the Middle East have been represented in the cultural history of the West reveals a long-standing and persistent ambivalence toward this dance form². Travel writers have often characterised the dancing they witnessed as improper yet tantalisingly erotic. The result of this interpretation of the dance was an image of the non-Western dancing body as profoundly (and captivatingly) 'other'. Rana Kabbani writes that during the nineteenth century, Middle Eastern dance "became invested with an exhibitionism that fascinated the onlooker [...] it often became a trope for the Orient's abandon, for it seemed to be a dramatically different mode of dancing from its Western counterpart" (68). The persistence with which many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western texts simultaneously demonise and eroticise both the dancers and the dance exposes the extent to which Middle Eastern dance functioned as an ambivalent site of sexual desire and of racial anxiety.

² For a detailed examination of the ambivalence felt toward belly dance in the Egyptian context see Karin van Nieuwkerk (1995).

In understanding the intersection of these sites of desire and anxiety, it is imperative that the dancing bodies in the accounts of travellers be viewed as discursive constructions. In other words, I suggest that these non-Western dancing bodies are not inherently exotic, unruly, and grotesque, but rather are interpellated as such through these discourses. Graham Huggan concisely sums up this distinction in his definition of the exotic as a “mode of aesthetic *perception* – one that renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them” (13). Writing in 1911 Emma Burbank Ayer, for example, recounts her experience of watching an Ouled Naïl woman from Algeria dance:

there was a fascination in watching her. Her movements suggested to the lookers-on, unaccustomed to this strange and rather uncanny dance – the mystery, the undisciplined voluptuousness of the Oriental, as well as the ferocity that might break out into murderous revels at any moment.
(Burbank Ayer *A Motor Flight through Algeria and Tunisia* 1911: 286).

Not only does Burbank Ayer perceive the dancing as ‘other’ in relation to herself, but she also speaks for the other “lookers-on” by assuming that the non-Western dancer is only comprehensible from a position of Western fascination, suspicion, and fear. Burbank Ayer’s conception of the Ouled Naïl is closely related to Mary Russo’s conception of the ‘uncanny grotesque’. In her feminist application of Bakhtin’s work, Russo identifies two kinds of grotesque. The first is the Bakhtinian model of ‘grotesque realism’ which relies heavily on the material bodily principle. The other type is the ‘uncanny grotesque’ which relates strongly to a psychological register of the grotesque. With the image of the uncanny grotesque body there is an emphasis on the “*reception* of the grotesque as an alien experience” (9). The uncanny is registered as alien

because it is the familiar (*heimlich*) which appears as strange (*unheimlich*)³. For Burbank Ayer, the uncanniness of the Ouled Naïl dancer may represent a projection of the self and something alien at the same time. Despite the tensions implied in the reception of the dance as uncanny, the construction of non-Western dancing body as the grotesque helps to sustain and consolidate the fantasy of a stable Western cultural identity.

Despite the constructedness of the Middle Eastern dancer as a complex symbol of disorder, eroticism, and otherness in the memoirs and travelogues of the Western traveller, this figure was nevertheless a tangible reality for the Western tourist. Thus, an acknowledgement that many travel accounts describe real people is essential. Moreover, scholars such as Berger (1961), Karayanni (2005: 44), and others have pointed out that colonial descriptions of Middle Eastern dancing often relay, through their interpretations of the movements of Middle Eastern dance, an idiom of dance motion that is strongly reminiscent of contemporary belly dance movement⁴. However, the extent to which their accounts are accurate or misguided interpretations of the dance idiom of Middle Eastern dance is less my concern than are the ideological consequences of how they depict them. Travel accounts of Middle Eastern and North African dancing slide from the tangible to the fanciful easily and regularly. As such the

³ Freud "The Uncanny" in Strachey, trans. and ed. Vol. 17.

⁴ Edward Lane's account of the dancing of the Egyptian Ghawazee is often cited as an example of the unmediated connection between literary descriptions and actual dancing. "[T]he chief peculiarity", he writes, "being a very rapid vibrating motion of the hips, from side to side" (384). This description, along with others, such as, for example, Roman writer Juvenal, whose account describes dancers who "sink to the ground and quiver" (quoted in Buonaventura 43), have been taken as evidence of the contemporary dance movement known as the "shimmy" (384). See for example Buonaventura (1998).

construction of the dancing figures in these accounts must necessarily be viewed as the work of imagination. It is this tacking back and forth between the imaginative fetishisation of non-Western dance and the actuality of the dancing body that makes the imagery of Middle Eastern and North African dance a veritable palimpsest of contradictory Orientalist myth-making. I wish to dwell briefly here on the relationships between travel writing, the representation of Middle Eastern dancing, and imperial politics.

Travel Writing and Imperialism

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of unprecedented European colonial expansion and imperialism, and travel writing often functioned to articulate these growing Western colonial preoccupations with Empire. Lowe suggests that travel writing during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries served as more than mere documentation and personal expression, arguing rather that the “utopian geographic expansion implied by travel literature addressed national anxieties about maintaining hegemony in an age of rapidly changing boundaries and territories” (31). In particular, it was the major colonial campaigns in the Middle East and North Africa that stimulated an explosion of Orientalist writing throughout the nineteenth century. The French invasion of Egypt by Napoleon’s troops in 1798 had been, according to Said, the “very model of a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another” (42). Although only lasting a few years, Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt meant that large numbers of foreign tourists entered Cairo variously in search of romantic, spiritual, and sexual exchanges, and experiences with the exotic Orient. Also of

particular significance was the occupation of the French in Algeria, where by 1870 vast numbers of French settlers had established colonies. In addition, Tunisia became a French colony in 1881, and in 1882 the British occupation began in Egypt. As a result of these large-scale foreign occupations, travel writing emerged as an influential means through which to disseminate colonialist ideologies, and thus functioned as an intellectual extension of imperial power structures.

The longevity of imperialist ideologies disseminated through travel literature is demonstrated in the account of Hendrik de Leeuw, travelling through Algeria during the mid-twentieth century. de Leeuw's travelogue exposes the enduring imperialist and patriarchal attitudes towards the colonised subjects – particularly the dancers⁵. de Leeuw recounts his stay in the French occupied region of Biskra:

I had spent part of the afternoon browsing along Biskra's streets before keeping an appointment with a French official. [...] We had some aperitifs, and as they became more plentiful we both waxed more eloquent, and decorum soon melted like wax. Thus fortified, and after a good deal of weighty palaver, we were completely ready for an assault on the lair of the Ouled-Nails in the Rue Sainte.

(de Leeuw *Crossroads of the Mediterranean* 1954: 154).

Couched in the terms of colonial conquest ("assault") and using the language associated with a hunt ("lair"), de Leeuw's account depicts the dancers as simultaneously animalistic and subordinated as prey. This corresponds with

⁵ de Leeuw's account was written in 1954, eight years before Algeria achieved independence in 1962 (Joffe 1987).

Shohat and Stam's argument that "colonialist/racist discourse renders the colonized as wild beasts in their unrestrained libidinousness, their lack of proper dress, their mud huts resembling nests and lairs" (137). In de Leeuw's account, moreover, a sense of camaraderie is established through the men's sense of shared superiority. de Leeuw's homosocial drinking with the French official functions as a kind of motivation – or foreplay, perhaps – for the hunt and attack on the Ouled Naïl dancers.

Indeed, in the nineteenth century travel writing was so closely tied up with the ideologies of empire that it would seem the whole genre was intrinsically implicated in the exercise of imperial power. In Britain, travel abroad and the production of travel books were inseparable from the expansion and consolidation of empire. Reina Lewis in *Gendering Orientalism* points out that travel writing, like Orientalism, is necessarily concerned with 'viewing' the 'other' (117). The very principle of travel writing relies on the binary opposition of the active 'observer' and the passive 'observed', which most often corresponds with the hierarchy of coloniser and colonised. The colonial traveller was in a situation to 'view' the non-West from a position of superiority and domination.

James Duncan and Derek Gregory suggest that travel writing is an "act of translation" which "constantly works to produce a tense 'space in-between'" (4). They argue that:

just as textual translation cannot capture all of the symbolic connotations of language, [...] the translation of one place into the cultural idiom of another loses some of the symbolic loading of the place for its inhabitants and replaces it with other symbolic values (5).

Following Duncan and Gregory's argument, it could be said that the transfiguration of the moving dance body into writing is also problematised by the same complications of translating place into travel writing. In the same way that writing cannot easily translate place, neither can it translate dance. The dancing body remains elusive despite the efforts of spectators to capture it on paper, in paint, prose or even photography; all of these media ultimately fail to adequately enlighten the audience on the context, meaning or nuance of the dancer's motion. Furthermore, nineteenth-century travel writing cannot be separated from discourses of imperial power that inform the colonial subject. As Duncan and Gregory argue, the space of translation in travel writing "is never innocent: it is shot through with relations of power and of desire" (5). The translation of dance in travel writing, then, is perhaps a doubly complex and symbolically fertile space of representation. While Duncan and Gregory's idea that travel writing is an "act of translation" is a useful one in relation to thinking about the dilemma of reading the dancing body, it does not sufficiently convey the extent to which travel writers are notorious for producing works that engender misunderstanding, misrecognition, and distortion about the (usually) subjugated peoples they represent. Orientalism, according to Said, is a "system of knowledge about the Orient" (6), which exists outside of "any such *real thing* as 'the Orient'" (21). In this way travel literatures offered Western non-travellers access to questionable perceived 'truths' about non-European people. Stereotypical as well as mythical representations of 'the East' were perpetuated and appropriated, often by artists and writers who had never actually travelled to the Orient at all, but relied intertextually on the accounts of those who had⁶.

⁶ See for example Reina Lewis (1996:129) and Ruth Bernard Yeazell (2000).

This is certainly true of the descriptions of Middle Eastern dancing by colonial travellers, which are caught in the mesh of imaginative projection and can never be unproblematically assumed to be a neutral medium through which simple 'truths' may be read.

Representations of Middle Eastern dance can be seen to constitute a sub-genre within travel writing. While scholars of travel writing have often discussed the individual accounts of the most famous writers' experiences of Eastern dance (such as Flaubert's famous descriptions of the Egyptian courtesan Kutchuk Hanem⁷), few have ventured to analyse in any depth the meanings and significances of images of non-Western dance that populate travel writing as a genre. This sub-genre, replete with its own narrative conventions and thematic concerns, concentrates on the traveller's experience of seeking out, observing, and recording his or her encounters with the usually female dancers of the Middle East and North Africa⁸. For example, the account by French author and traveller Charles Didier characterises the quest to see Cairene dancers in the mid-nineteenth century:

I was consumed with a desire to see them. God knows how much I had searched, how many inquiries I had made into the matter. I had asked the help of others, some of them very important, powerful people, but all I had received were a lot of beautiful promises, not one of which had been fulfilled.

(Didier *Nuits De Caire* 1860: 329).

⁷ See Flaubert's "Voyage En Orient: 1849-1851" in Francis Steegmuller, trans., (1980). For a discussion of Flaubert from a psychoanalytic perspective see Emily Apter (1999: 167-179). See also Karayanni (2005, Chapter 2) and Judy Mabro (1996: 118-276).

⁸ For discussions on the representation of the male dancing body, see Karayanni (2005: 67-97) and Shay (2005: 85-114).

Didier's account exemplifies the topos of the Eastern dancer as mysterious, romantic and sexually alluring, yet out of reach. The search for and the subsequent 'discovery' of non-Western dancers by the traveller constitutes a significant component of many Orientalist travel narratives. Once discovered, however, some travellers were often less than impressed with what they found. William Cowper Prime, for example, writes:

The Ghawazee have been celebrated by Egyptian travellers in numberless chapters; and there is scarcely a book on Egypt that does not contain more or less poetry on their beauty and gracefulness [...] but this [...] is very much in the imagination of the traveler.

(Prime *Boat Life in Egypt and Nubia* 1857: 400).

Carl B. Klunzinger also found that the "much-admired dances" of the "celebrated bayaderes of Egypt" were

generally quite inartistic [...] Whatever of art is displayed consists in movements of the trunk and hips - impossible to imitate - the limbs being almost at rest.

(Klunzinger 1878: 338).

In characterising the body of the Egyptian dancer as inartistic, Klunzinger explicitly distinguishes it from Western aesthetics of neoclassicism which valued the "order, clarity, and reason of Greek and Roman art" (Chilvers *et al* 352). Furthermore, the Middle Eastern dancing body emphasises not the movement of the limbs as in Western forms of dance, but the "trunk and hips" – those

grotesque parts of the body that in Western aesthetics must remain still and contained.

The Oriental Grotesque

Middle Eastern and North African dance, with its specifically pelvic-oriented emphasis and its forcefully vibrational torso movements, was constantly characterised in the terms of the grotesque. Middle Eastern and North African dancers were unfailingly described as “wriggling”, “open”, “jerking”, “quivering”, “contorting”, and “undulating”⁹ – especially in relation to the hip and abdominal region. The regular use of these kinds of descriptive terms points to the unease that is evoked by the movement of the grotesque lower bodily stratum. By the early 1890s the anxiety around Middle Eastern and North African dance had been located on the anatomical surface of the dancer’s body. It was the torso generally, and her belly specifically, that seemed to epitomise all that was grotesque about the dancer and the dance. Time and again, as we shall see, it was the accentuation of the waist/abdomen/belly which was the locus of nineteenth-century anxieties concerning Middle Eastern and North African dance.

Edmond de Goncourt’s 1889 description of Middle Eastern dancing illustrates the erratic and unpredictable grotesque belly in specifically gendered terms: “The belly dance performed by a naked woman interests me [...] making me aware of how her feminine organs move house, of how the parts of her belly

⁹ See, for example, Judy Mabro’s (1996) collection of colonial travel writing.

change neighbourhoods" (quoted in Apter 173)¹⁰. de Goncourt's account demonstrates the extent to which the 'belly' and its mobility was central to the simultaneous horror and titillation produced by the sight of these dancing bodies. de Goncourt's metaphorical image of the belly as uncannily detached presents the disturbing element of the grotesque: the possibility of the body as unfinished, uncontained, in flux, overflowing. The dancer in de Goncourt's description embodies Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque body as one that "transgresses its own limits" (26). This idea of migrating "feminine organs" also evokes the notion of hysteria in which, according to Elaine Showalter, "[c]lassical healers [...] believed the uterus travelled hungrily around the body, unfettered – Monday in the foot, Tuesday in the throat, Wednesday in the breast, and so on – producing a myriad of symptoms in its wake" (1997: 15). The specifically gendered metaphorical image of the itinerant female organs also points to anxieties about female domesticity, evoking the spectacle of women's bodies that refuse to stay put.

Moreover, it was the overt emphasis on the seemingly uncontrolled abdomen, hips and pelvis performed by a racial 'other' which suggested the threat of female sexuality generally, and a sexualised 'primitive' body specifically. Theophile Gautier's description of the dancing of Algerian women in his 1845 travel book *Voyage pittoresque en Algerie* encapsulates the conventional features of the chaotic grotesque dancing body: "perpetual undulations, twisting loins, shaking hips, body in an impossible spiraling rotation, body like a caterpillar upright on its tail, neck bent back" (76). Gautier's

¹⁰ Goncourt, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt. *Journal: Memoires De La Vie Litteraire* (1887-96). Vol. 3. 3 vols. Aylesbury, Great Britain: Editions Robert Laffont, 1889 (quoted in Apter 173).

language, like the body he describes, is spasmodic and disjointed. The dancer's body, paired with the caterpillar, is rendered grotesque through the potentially monstrous mingling of human with insect, a fusion that is crystallised with the grotesque in the dancer's "impossible" movement (ibid 76). Likewise, Frederick Courtland Penfield's 1889 description of Egyptian dance exemplifies the violence with which the grotesque body emerges: "With her whole soul and body she appeared to keep time with the music, turning from right to left with gradually increasing rapidity, and bending backward until her spine was in danger of dislocation" (349). The dancer's display of virtuosity to the point of spinal injury reveals the ease with which the grotesque slips into the disturbing realm of the monstrous.

While the ways in which indigenous Middle Eastern and North African dance were constructed in nineteenth-century travel accounts can be read in terms of Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque, it is also my intention to show that this characterisation of the dance as grotesque is also inculcated by Orientalist conceptions of race. It is through the representation of the non-Western dancing body as grotesque that nineteenth-century anxieties around both colonial conceptions of race and the female body coalesce. Following this argument, the grotesque, as it resonates through Orientalist travel narratives, takes on a certain 'racist' characteristic that was not present in Bakhtin's original theorisation of the concept. For Bakhtin, rather, the "bodily element" of grotesque realism is "deeply positive" (19). When this "deeply positive" element of the image of the grotesque body is embedded within the relations of power and of desire integral to Orientalist travel writing, the result, I argue, is a deeply ambivalent and often threatening – but not entirely passive – conception of

Middle Eastern femininity. I wish to draw out these issues of how the grotesque might be usefully engaged in a discussion of Orientalist representations of threatening sexuality in order to articulate alternative understandings of racial difference and embodiment.

The “sexual promise (and threat)” of the Oriental Grotesque

Although the condemnation of Middle Eastern and North African dancing during the nineteenth century tended to focus on its supposed indecency, it is clear that the public denigration of the indigenous dancers was also intimately linked to broader colonialist anxieties concerning Eastern women as dangerous, exotic ‘others’¹¹. Belly dance was firmly anchored in the popular consciousness of the nineteenth and early twentieth century as a culturally essentialised stereotype of Eastern sensuality and depravity. Penfield’s description of an Egyptian dancer in 1889 illustrates this sexual potential of the Oriental dancer:

A young girl advanced to the center of the platform [...] She was the Ababdeh premiere danseuse, fascinating, graceful, and famed throughout every mile of desert where her race ventured. Her garb of clinging stuff, falling from shoulders and hips, marked a graceful contour. Eyes, lips, every feature was perfect, although she was very dark

(Penfield *Present-Day Egypt* 1889: 349).

However, while representations of Eastern dancing frequently focussed on the erotic aspects of the dance, a close reading of many colonial travel narratives reveals an intense ambivalence about the nature of the dancers’ erotic appeal.

¹¹ For an extended treatment of the intersections between gender and cultural imperialism in dance see Jane Desmond (1991).

In many accounts, the spectator constantly vacillates between responses of repulsion and desire. Vivant Denon, who accompanied Napoleon on his expedition to Egypt, demonstrates this tension between erotic desire and revulsion in his 1803 description of Egyptian dancers:

The movement they displayed in striking [the cymbals] against each other gave infinite grace to their fingers and wrists. At the commencement the dance was voluptuous; it soon after became lascivious, and expressed, in the grossest and most indecent way, the giddy transports of the passions. [...] The disgust which this spectacle excited, was heightened by one of the musicians [...] who, at the moment when the dancers gave the greatest freedom to their wanton gestures and emotions, with the stupid air of a clown [...] interrupted by a loud burst of laughter the scene of intoxication which was to close the dance.

(Denon *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt* 1803: 232-33).

In Denon's account the dance becomes progressively more grotesque yet also intoxicating sexual excess. This ambivalence, I would argue, is the synthesis of ideological projections of the erotic (emblematic of nineteenth-century representations of Middle Eastern and North African dance), of racial otherness, and of the grotesque onto the body of the dancer. It is the mixture of the erotic with the seemingly uncontrollable movement in the non-Western dances, combined with popular notions of the 'Orient' as culturally inferior, which lead to cultural constructions of the non-Western body as an Oriental grotesque body. Moreover, what is even more provocative and threatening than the spectacle of non-Western sexual excess, is the carnivalesque gesture of the musician's laughter. Denon's contempt for the Egyptian he characterises as a "clown" also reveals his non-comprehension of the man's laughter. Underlying Denon's

simultaneous erotic desire and revulsion for the female dancer is also his fear of Egyptian masculinity embodied in the derisive laughter of the Egyptian musician.

Another contradiction emerges in the colonial representations of dance examined thus far: on the one hand the non-Western dancer appears to be an uncontrolled and uncontrollable symbol of limitless Oriental sexuality, and on the other the dancer is the embodiment of an almost inhuman bodily and muscular control. In other words, while the dancer's body exhibits seemingly uncontrollable movements – contortions, vibrations, and spasms – the authors often insist that the dancer has absolute control in executing the movement. Bayard Taylor, for example, in his account of Egyptian dance in 1854, constructs an uncontrolled body on the one hand:

Their frames vibrated with the music like the strings of the violin, and as the song grew wild and stormy towards its close, the movements, had they not accorded with it, would have resembled those of a person seized with some violent nervous spasm.

(Taylor *Journey to Central Africa* 1854: 135).

and a perfectly controlled body on the other:

As the dancers became animated, their motions were more rapid and violent, and the measure was marked, not in pirouettes and flying bounds, as on the boards of Frank theatres, but by a most wonderful command over the muscles of the chest and limbs

(Taylor 135).

This contradiction between the apparently uncontrolled versus the controlled dancing body exposes one of the central threats posed by non-Western dancer: that what appears to be an uncontrolled, disorderly, and uncontained body is, in fact, a deliberate and conscious execution of movement. The sense that the corporeal movements of the non-Western dancers are calculated and controlled suggests that what is in fact most dangerous about these dancers is their choice to move their bodies in this way.

Despite the exploitative and hostile accounts of non-Western female dance in Orientalist travel narratives, a sense of the dancer's agency consistently, and subversively, emerges. As Kathleen Rowe has argued, through "acts of spectatorial unruliness we might examine models of *returning* the male gaze, exposing and making a spectacle of the gazer" (12). In de Leeuw's account, for example, the dancer resists the passivity expected of the object of the colonial gaze:

One girl who had been chosen and who had good looks and a striking mane of dark hair slowly turned her graceful head and, regarding her audience with what looked to me like scorn, leaped cat-like into the air and dropped down again with a thud as her body began to contort. [...] her onyx-black eyes became ablaze with mocking laughter and a glint of dazzling teeth showed through her pouting red lips.

(de Leeuw 156).

This resistance is produced in the narrative through the combination of the dancer's ability to look back at the spectator, and in her defiant and mocking use of her body in the dance. Again, as I discussed earlier, the derisive laughter of the Oriental other is invoked by the Western traveller as a site of anxiety and

desire. Contesting the binary of the passive dancer versus the active spectator is not, however, intended to produce a redemptive reading of colonial travel narratives which, with a predicable degree of misogyny, continually record revulsion for the dancing they witness. Rather this interpretation aims to resist a reading of the dancing body in travel writing as always compliant, inactive, and powerless. In agreement with Kathleen Rowe in her book *The Unruly Woman*, it could be argued that “visual power flows in multiple directions” and that “the position of spectacle isn’t necessarily one of weakness” (11). The dancer described here is a knowing participant in the sexualisation of her body. Through this element of resistance the grotesque might retain, as Bakhtin insisted, its “deeply positive” element even when, I argue, it is embedded within the uneven relations of power and of desire contained within Orientalist travel writing.

Troubling Boundaries

Leonard Cassuto, in his analysis of the category of the grotesque as a system of racial objectification, argues that the “grotesque is born of the violation of basic categories. It occurs when an image cannot be easily classified even on the most fundamental level: when it is both one thing and another, and thus neither one” (6). The grotesque troubles the boundaries between human and animal, between animate and inanimate, between real and unreal. Grounded in the anti-feminist and racist ideologies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Middle Eastern and North African dancers troubled the boundaries between beauty and ugliness, artistic and primitive, and even, as we shall see, between human and inhuman. Accordingly, they were constructed as grotesque

because they seemed not to fit into neat categories. Furthermore, although many of the dancers were female, they were set firmly outside of Western ideals of femininity. The following passage describing Tunisian dancers, written by Douglas Sladen in his 1906 travelogue, demonstrates the inextricable link between gender and racial otherness in relation to the dancers:

Their eyelashes are blackened and their eyes brightened with kohl till they stare like a house to let. Their fingers are reddened with henna – I think even the gums of their large, open, man-hunting mouths are picked out with something to make their teeth gape at you. You want to get away from them, as you want to get away from a red-eyed bull, seeking what he may destroy. They are huge, hideous, wicked, terrifying images of Moloch, waiting for men to be roasted alive in the brazen arms of their lust. [...] the rolling about of this uncontrolled mass of obesity is too ungraceful.

(Sladen *Carthage and Tunis* 1906: 480-4).

The Tunisian dancers described here are unequivocally threatening. For Sladen, this threat is manifested most explicitly through the combination of monstrous femininity and racial otherness. The symbolic implication of the dancers' "man-hunting mouths" is, for Sladen, an indication of their emasculating potential. Bakhtin has suggested that "the most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth. It dominates all else. The grotesque face is actually reduced to the gaping mouth" (317). The dominant image of Sladen's account is the dancer as entrapping and devouring *vagina*

*dentata*¹². Sladen's gaze is drawn to the dancer's mouth, to glimpses of its interior; his narrative eye focuses then recoils at the image. Here the image of the dancer's open mouth evokes terror in the male viewer and functions as an abject symbol of the female body. The mouth signifies, for Sladen, both the inevitable and terrifying sexual union between viewer and dancer and the death that this union implies: "waiting for men to be roasted alive in the brazen arms of their lust".

Embedded in Sladen's representation of the dancer as devouring monster is also the implication of discourses on cannibalism, which, as argued by Malchow, were discourses deployed primarily in the service of nineteenth-century colonialist ideologies of race (80). The mobility of widespread fantasies of cannibalism rests, according to Malchow, "on the interchangeable nature of the racial primitive anywhere as inherently cannibal" (82). Furthermore, Malchow writes that the fear of cannibalism was often couched in specifically anti-Semitic terms (55). Sladen evokes the image of the cannibal through his reference to "Moloch" and being roasted alive. Moloch was an ancient Canaanite deity in the image of a bull or calf believed to be malevolent unless appeased through the ritual sacrifice of children to fire¹³. The reference to Moloch thus links Sladen's account to nineteenth-century anti-Semitic discourse. Sladen's representation of the Semitic dancer as monstrous 'other', combined with the explicitly sexual element of the dancer's mouth, amounts to a

¹² Levi-Strauss reads the image of the *vagina dentata* as the inverted mythological form of the "near universal" understanding of the male as devourer and the female as devoured (1962: 141).

¹³ This theme was adapted and explored through Fritz Lang's cinematic classic *Metropolis* (1926).

graphically female image of what Mario Praz has termed “sexual cannibalism”¹⁴.

Sladen’s account negates the importance of the dance altogether and instead focuses on the construction of the dancers’ bodies as terrifying in their difference (female and non-Western) from his own dominant position as both male and Western. The seemingly excessive use of eye make-up and henna suggests a ruse for female entrapment of men, an idea made explicit in Sladen’s remark about the dancer’s use of kohl on their eyes “till they stare like a house to let”. The architectural metaphor of the house for lease was also a common Victorian metaphor for prostitution¹⁵. The dancers’ eye makeup also functioned to construct the women as dangerous, as Charles Dudley Warner reinforces when, in 1881, he muses “I don’t know what it is in this kohl, that it gives woman such a wicked and dangerous aspect” (*My Winter on the Nile* 1876: 213). The bodies of these dancers are rendered conspicuously non-Western by their excessive dress (makeup, henna decoration and “costume”) and by their excessive weight.

Emerging throughout Sladen’s narrative (and common to many colonial travel writings) is a particular aversion to the dancer’s physical weight. The dancer’s physical “obesity” calls to mind the disruptive potential of the grotesque. At various points he describes the uncorseted dancers not only as “mountainously fat” (120), but also as “human sows”, “female walruses”, “elephants”, and “hippopotami” (119, 120). In 1914, M. D. Stott, another traveller

¹⁴ See Praz (1970: 215-16) cited in Malchow (84).

¹⁵ See for example Joann P. Krieg (1995) for a discussion of the image of the house as metaphor for the prostitute in Walt Whitman’s poem “The City Dead-House” (*Leaves of Grass* 1860).

to Algeria, claimed that the majority of dancers he saw were “old and fat, and more resemble an obese porpoise in their movements than a diabolic priestess of Astarte” (Stott 200). The convergence of the discursive constructions of fatness and the animalisation in both Sladen’s and Stott’s accounts places the dancers within the realm of the grotesque. Bakhtin argues that the “transformation of the human element into an animal one” is one of the most ancient of grotesque forms (316). There is no differentiation between human and animal; Sladen’s struggle with the non-Western difference of the dancers results in their grotesque transformation into devouring hybrid human/animals.

Sladen’s tone concerning the performers’ physical size is accusatory and hostile. Their bodies are seen as uncontrolled and uncontrollable. The revulsion with which he describes their weight points to their presumed inability (by virtue of their racial difference) to properly adhere to acceptable standards of feminine decorum and beauty. In the representation of the dancers as overweight, predatory, sexual animals, Sladen implies that the ideal by contrast is a Western ‘feminine’ body: one that is controlled, and in particular, one that is slim and corseted. If, following Bakhtin’s theories, the Eastern dancers may be read as representative of the grotesque (large, sexually aggressive, animalistic and uncontained), then the ideal Western feminine body may be understood as representative of classical aesthetics (small, passive, firmly contained). The problem, of course, is that just as the ‘feminine’ is a cultural and social construct, so too is the idea of a classical body, “isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies” its “protuberances and offshoots” removed, its “apertures closed” (Bakhtin 29). The anxious desire for the enclosed, tightly managed and impenetrable classical body, then, reveals some of the deeper ideological

imperatives at work in relation to nineteenth-century politics of Western female embodiment¹⁶.

Unlike the classical body, which is predictable and contained, the grotesque body in many narrative descriptions of belly dance seemingly refuses to remain in its typical vertical alignment, continually moving out and away from itself in disjunctive and vibrational movement. The twisting, undulating and writhing body is registered as a physical modification from the body's original or 'normal' shape. In his novel *Askaros Kassis the Copt* (1870), Edwin De Leon describes the grotesque nature of the *Ghawazee* dance:

they writhed and twisted their lithe bodies and sinuous limbs in strange muscular contortions – into almost impossible positions [...] in sheer breathlessness they ceased – divested almost entirely of the voluminous wrappings with which they had begun the dance – dusky models of Eastern Venus.

(De Leon *Askaros Kassis the Copt* 1870: 104).

In his description De Leon constructs the dance as a spectacle of uncontrolled (and uncontrollable) grotesque contortion. Without distinguishing between individual dancers, De Leon perceives a mass of bodies which unpredictably and grotesquely transgress their own limits. In De Leon's description it is not the fat female body that is registered as grotesque but rather, the grotesque is the uncontrolled female dancing body per se. Likewise, Fred Burnaby, in his travelogue of 1877, imagines the bodies of Turkish dancers as so fiercely entwined they actually seem to fuse: "The girls snapped their castanets, and

¹⁶ See Chapter Two of this thesis for an extended discussion of the politics of nineteenth-century women's dress and physical culture.

commenced wriggling their bodies around each other with such velocity that it was impossible to recognise the one from the other” (129). De Leon and Burnaby fail to see any skill or artistic merit in the dancing and instead picture a conglomerate of grotesquely moving, racially ‘other’ bodies. The consolidation of a discourse of the grotesque specifically in relation to non-Western dance exposes the politics of a racial fetishism embedded in the tropes of orientalist travel writing and fiction. The section to follow will suggest more fully how the notion of dance as pathology is deployed in nineteenth-century fictional discourse.

Grant Allen’s *What’s Bred in the Bone*:

‘Oriental’ Dance as a Symptom of Racial Degeneracy

Canadian-born author Grant Allen (1848-1899) was one of the most prolific writers of the Victorian age¹⁷. Allen published some thirty works of fiction and poetry, as well as an extensive collection of non-fiction works¹⁸. Allen’s literary oeuvre was as diverse as it was prolific, and he presented his ideas and theories in a profuse output of articles on literature, travel, culture, criminology,

¹⁷ *Register of the Grant Allen Literary Manuscripts and Correspondence, 1872-1937* (Penn State, <http://www.libraries.psu.edu/speccolls/FindingAids/grantallen4.html>).

¹⁸ Peter Morton suggests that while Allen is thought to have produced hundreds of articles, the actual output of Allen’s work is unknown given that he wrote under a number of pseudonyms and that many of his weekly contributions to magazines and newspapers were anonymous (2005: 3). For an extremely detailed and well-researched index of Allen’s published works see Morton’s online Annotated Bibliography (<http://ehlt.flinders.edu.au/english/GA/NFBibliography.htm> last revised 24 June 2004).

anthropology, and sexual psychology as well as natural history, social commentary, women's issues, and eugenics¹⁹. From 1884, Allen published numerous novels on the themes of romance, crime, and adventure. In 1890 Allen won a hefty £1,000 prize for *What's Bred in the Bone* from the London publication *Tit-Bits*, in which the novel was published serially²⁰. According to Peter Morton this was "one of the largest literary prizes ever awarded in Britain" (Morton 2005: 2). The novel, consequently, sold extremely well in its first year of publication, was translated into several languages, including Danish and Icelandic, and was made into a film in 1916 (*ibid* 25). Yet, despite the popularity Allen's novel achieved in its own time, *What's Bred in the Bone* has not, to date, been the subject of any detailed critical discussion. I wish to explore here, the ways in which Allen's novel reveals the nineteenth-century preoccupations with the 'New Woman', female sexuality, and racial atavism through the representation of Eastern dance. In particular, I wish to focus on the construction of social anxieties surrounding the notion of an Oriental "mixed blood" woman passing for white.

Allen was a vocal opponent of women's rights to education. In an article called "Plain Words on the Woman Question" (1889), he wrote that "many of the most cultivated and able families of the English-speaking race will have become extinct, through the prime error of supposing that an education which is good for men must also be good for women" (455-456). Allen deals with these ideas in his best-known novel *The Woman Who Did* (1895). In this book Allen's heroine, Herminia Barton, is characterised as a free-thinking 'New Woman' who, ironically, is constructed as having an atavistic feminine need to conform to

¹⁹ See Morton (2004) and (Greenslade 27).

²⁰ See McDonald (1997).

social mores²¹. Rather than engage with the emancipatory possibilities and politics of the New Woman, Allen's novel suggests that women who attempt to challenge the status quo are ultimately doomed to failure – a notion which is made clear when Herminia eventually suicides.

While Allen staunchly opposed women's education, it was his emphasis on eugenics, and in particular his ideas of responsible parentage, that surface most strongly in his ideological construction of nineteenth-century womanhood in *What's Bred in the Bone*. Sally Ledger suggests that the "crisis of Victorianism at the *fin de siècle* centred not just on gender issues, but also on the interconnections between gender roles and contemporary anxieties pertaining to the continuation of the 'race' in the best interest of the British Empire" (31).

Allen was a well known proponent of Social Darwinism and wrote on various aspects of evolutionary theory and eugenics. In 1880 for example, he asserted, that "the beautiful *must* be defined as the healthy, the normal, the strong, the perfect, and the parentally sound" (quoted in Morton 2004: 12)²². Furthermore, Allen claimed that only "the noblest, the purest, the sanest, the healthiest, the most able among us" merit the "moral obligation to fatherhood and motherhood" (quoted in Morton 2004: 71)²³. The nineteenth-century anxiety surrounding the survival of the family and the quality of its "bloodline" has been observed by Michel Foucault and others. Foucault argues that although there had always been an "aristocratic obsession with caste", for the nineteenth-

²¹ For an extended treatment on the significance of the category 'New Woman' at the *fin de siècle* see, Ledger (1995).

²² Allen (1880: 430-64).

²³ Allen (1894).

century bourgeoisie, this obsession took on profound meaning in terms of “biological, medical, or eugenic precepts” (124). Foucault argues:

The concern with genealogy became a preoccupation with heredity; but included in bourgeois marriages were not only economic imperatives [...] but the menaces of heredity; families wore and concealed a sort of reversed and sombre escutcheon whose defamatory quarters were the disease or defects of the group of relatives – the grandfather’s general paralysis, the mother’s neurasthenia, the youngest child’s phthisis, the hysterical or erotomaniac aunts, the cousins with bad morals.

(Foucault 1990: 124-5).

Allen’s preoccupation with notions of heredity and racial purity emerges strongly in *What’s Bred in the Bone*. Indeed, the nineteenth-century “concern for genealogy” pointed out by Foucault is inscribed in the title Allen gave his novel – familial degeneracy is “bred” in the very bone.

What’s Bred in the Bone is a complex story of interweaving secrets, with disgraceful heritages, illegitimate births, regretful intermarriages, mistaken identities, erotic secrets, and worst of all, the inheritance of “gipsy blood” through miscegenation. Allen’s novel is indicative of what Howard Malchow has called the “late Victorian panic over ‘bad blood’” (173). Allen articulates in his novel a politics of the ‘blood line’ where the central threat is posed through the metaphoric representation of racial infection. It is the heroine of the book, Elma Clifford, whose body (unbeknownst to all but her mother) carries the contagion of race as though a hereditary disease. Elma is the descendent, on her mother’s side, of Madame Esmeralda, an “Oriental gipsy” (57). This racial

infection, significantly, is only passed from mother to daughter, functioning to mark the infection of race as a specifically female pathology.

The reader is alerted to the notion that Elma and her mother are in some way aberrant compared with other “English” ladies (7) when early in the novel we learn that both women share a mysterious ability to read the intentions, thoughts, and actions of other people just by observing them. This ability presents a source of discomfort for the other, especially male, characters in the novel. At several moments throughout the book Elma’s love interest Cyril Waring and his twin brother Guy Waring are troubled by her intuitive knowledge: “Cyril half drew away from her with a faint sense of alarm” (132). Allen’s emphasis on feminine intuition also operates to promote his anti-educational views. In particular, Allen constructs the Clifford women’s unerring “feminine instinct” (10) in such a way that suggests that women have no need for education: “That’s one of the many glorious advantages of being born a woman. You don’t need to learn in order to know. You know instinctively” (3). The source of Elma’s intuition is, however, inborn in more ways than we suspect.

Elma’s intuitive abilities, like those of her mother, are the manifestation of her “gipsy heritage”. Elma’s ancestors, Allen writes, were “Roumanians” who belonged to “some tribe of far eastern serpent charmers” (57). However, as one of the novel’s characters, Colonel Kelmscott, corrects: “they call it Roumanian, because it sounds more respectable; but I believe, if you go right down to the very bottom of the thing, it was much more like some kind of Oriental gipsy” (57). The hierarchical discourse of Social Darwinist thought is invoked here, with the “Oriental gipsy” at the “very bottom” of the scale.

The novel details the atavistic return of Elma's repressed gipsy heritage through her strange and sudden compulsion to perform the ancient Gypsy snake dance:

It was an instinct within her over which she had no control. Surely, surely, she must be possessed. A spirit that was not her seemed to be catching her round the waist, and twisting her about, and making her spin headlong over the floor through this wild fierce dance. It was terrible, terrible. Yet she could not prevent it. A force not her own seemed to sustain and impel her (36).

The snake-dance, we are told, is the curse of the Clifford women which lies dormant until the dawn of womanhood or when the girl may happen to see a "real live snake" (59). When this "fit" finally "break[s] out" the women are compelled to shut themselves in their rooms and dance with "anything they can get their hands on to represent a serpent" (59). The central concerns of the novel depend on the familiar late-nineteenth century problem of "fatal inheritance", whereby social evil and deviation is reduced to biological determinism (Malchow 169). Thomas F. Gossett suggests that in the nineteenth century, the notion of "heredity" was considered "more important than environment in conditioning the development of society, and to many of the social theorists heredity meant mainly race" (144). It is, however, Elma's and her mother's ability to pass for white that signifies the most dangerous and invisible threat which links the story to the larger issues of racial identity and social anxieties at the late nineteenth century.

Informing Allen's construction of Elma's racial atavism is his assertion of the "fatal taint of madness in her blood" (Allen 65). Emily Apter suggests that

ideas of social pathology, clinical research on mania, hypnosis, hysteria, and in particular, the rise of psychiatry as a new scientific discipline, deeply informed the literature of the late nineteenth century (Apter 1998: 964). The hereditary nature of Elma's dance represents a link between the pervasive associations of madness with femininity in nineteenth-century culture. Showalter suggests that the connections between madness and the feminine is prevalent "within our dualistic systems of language and representation" and that "madness, even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine: as malady" (3-4). Elma's compulsion to dance is represented in terms of the contemporary medical discourse where women's behaviour is connected to the supposedly disruptive nature of the female body.

Moreover, this concept of race as it circulated in metaphors of blood is also linked in Allen's novel with nineteenth-century cultural anxieties about the New Woman. Specifically, it was the perceived sexual forwardness of the New Woman that presented a potentially dangerous threat to Victorian femininity. Ledger writes "[w]hilst medico-scientific discourse, for example, concentrated on the threat [the 'New Woman'] apparently posed to women's role as mothers, anti-feminist fictional discourse frequently constructed her as a sexual decadent" (23). The New Woman was perceived as a "threat to the dominant moral, socio-sexual and aesthetic codes of the Victorian age" (24). The two central threats in the novel, then, are racial otherness and the threat of female sexuality. This fear of female sexuality, however, slips uneasily into the idea of racial degeneracy. The threat of sexuality and race are at times indistinguishable, each flipping unexpectedly onto the other.

Physical Appearance, Shame, and Racial Ambiguity

The taint of Elma and her mother's "gipsy" heritage is manifested not only through the compulsion to dance but also in their physical characteristics. Allen tells us that there are three main symptoms of their heritage: "olive-brown complexions, creamy and soft, but clear as crystal", "extraordinary intuition", and most significantly the desire to perform "the eastern snake-dance" (59). The snake-dance is inherited from the family's matriarch, Madame Esmeralda, and emerges "sooner or later" in all the female descendents (of whom all are named Esmeralda, or Elma for short). The suggestion that the female characters inherit their names along with their questionable "gipsy" blood is of particular significance to nineteenth-century constructions of Middle Eastern dance: it is surely no coincidence that Allen chooses the name "Elma" for his heroine, a name that is linguistically similar to that of "Alma". The Arabic word *Almeh*, which means "a learned woman" (Said 186)²⁴, is a term "widely used to designate a class of female entertainers" (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005: ix). The *Awalim* (plural) were skilled in poetry, music, singing, and dancing. However, by the mid-nineteenth century the word *Almeh* had collectively come to signify dancers who were also prostitutes²⁵. Gustave Flaubert's travel writings about the famous Egyptian dancer and courtesan Kuchuk Hanem were instrumental in connecting Egyptian dance with sexual excess and prostitution. In naming his characters Elma, then, Allen relies on the nineteenth-century

²⁴ Edward Said notes the significance of Joseph Conrad's naming his musician heroine in *Victory* (1915) – a woman who was both irresistible and dangerous – "Alma" (Said 186). Another example is George Gissing's novel *The Whirlpool* (1897) whose heroine, Alma Rolphe, is also, importantly, a musician.

²⁵ See Steegmuller (1980: 99-139).

readers' familiarity with the conceptual linkage of the *Almeh* with Oriental dance, sexual excess, and racial 'otherness' (See Plate 3).



Plate 3 Jean-Leon Gerome. *Dance of the Almeh*. 1863. Oil on wood panel, 84.3 x 63cm. Dayton Art Institute, Ohio, USA

In the novel, Elma and her mother share a deep sense of shame concerning their hereditary pathology, the chief symptom being the shameful propensity to dance. For Elma the desire not to give in to the temptation to dance, a temptation she frequently cannot repress, is an ongoing process of self-surveillance:

Ashamed and terrified with her maidenly sense, overawed and obscured by this hateful charm, yet unable to stay herself, unable to resist it, in a transport of fear and remorse, she danced on (38).

Drawing on the widespread constructions of the Eastern dancer as an uncontrollable body, Allen figures Elma's struggle as one between her sense of English feminine propriety and her inability to control the symptoms of her racial heritage.

Allen's characterisation of dance as the ultimate transgression of feminine propriety not only highlights the responsibility of women to order and

regulate the social body, but also underscores the moral panic associated with the dancing body. Elma's failure to conform to the feminine ideal is explained and inscribed in her predilection for both snakes and dancing. Elma is first confronted with a snake when she meets Cyril for the first time on a train and, in a moment of barely veiled sexual symbolism, she almost sits on his pet snake: "I beg your pardon, but – excuse me for mentioning it – I think you're going to sit down upon – ur – pray don't be frightened – a rather large snake of mine" (4). Against all feminine decorum Elma is unafraid of Cyril's snake, Sardanapalus. Rather, she is so captivated by it that she experiences the moment at an inexplicable visceral level:

Elma couldn't say why, but that creature fascinated her [...] Not that she was one bit afraid of him, as she might reasonably have expected to be, according to all womanly precedent. On the contrary, she felt an overwhelming desire to take him up in her own hands and stroke and fondle him (6).

Elma's immediate familiarity and desire to handle the snake suggests two things: that Elma is not an ordinary English woman (which is later confirmed when we discover her gypsy heritage), and that Elma, as a woman, is linked to Eve. During the nineteenth century Eve and the snake became equivalent²⁶. Pamela Norris in her book *The Story of Eve*, suggests:

Eve's association with the serpent became one of the most fruitful strands in the many fantasies that proliferated about her, branching off

²⁶ See for example Bram Dijkstra (1986) for an extended account of the implications of the synthesis of Eve with the snake in nineteenth-century representations.

into multiple stories about reptilian monsters as well as snaky seductresses, manifestations of the female in her most repulsive and alluring forms, but having in common the troubling notion of menacing carnality (319).

This connection was often an erotic one. It was, perhaps, Flaubert's representation of the snake dance in his novel *Salammbô* (1862) that crystallised the erotic focus of the relationship between dancer and snake:

her whole body swaying, chanted her prayers, and her clothes, one after another, fell around her. [...] the python's head appeared. [Salamambo] came forward; the python fell back, and putting the middle of its body round her neck [...] Salamambo wound it round her waist, under her arms, between her knees; then taking it by the jaw she brought the little triangular mouth to the edge of her teeth and half shutting her eyes threw herself back beneath the rays of the moon (174).

Bram Dijkstra notes that during the nineteenth century, the inclusion of actual snake dancing in theatres, circuses, and burlesque shows was extremely popular (306). The link between Eastern dance, Eve, and the serpent is one that was taken up in the cultural imagination of the *fin de siècle* and remains strong in contemporary culture²⁷. The motif of the snake in relation to representations of Middle Eastern and belly dancing is a recurring one that

²⁷ A notable popular reference to this triangulation of Eastern dance, Eve, and the snake can be found in Ridley Scott's science fiction film *Blade Runner* (1982). The film featured one of its "Replicants", Zhora (Joanna Cassidy), as a strip-tease dancer who is introduced as "Miss Salome", performs with a live snake. Although the viewer is denied the visual representation of the dance itself, the hawkers are heard saying "Miss Salome and the Snake! Watch her take the pleasure from the serpent that once corrupted men".

carries with it assumptions about women's sexuality as dangerous. Furthermore, as we shall see in later chapters, the rhetoric surrounding the serpentine movement of belly dance permeates contemporary representations of the dance, which continue to draw on ideological constructions of woman-as-snake popularised in the nineteenth century.

Skin and the Rhetoric of the Blush

As mentioned earlier, Elma's 'otherness' in relation to the novel's English characters is signalled early by her physical appearance, especially the colour of her skin. That Elma's skin is other than white is a signpost to the reader that she belongs to the category of the dangerous and the foreign. The colour of Mrs Clifford's and her daughter Elma's skin is repeatedly brought to the attention of the reader. Skin colour – which is essential to the construction of race in the novel – becomes fetishistically and repeatedly displayed for the reader's pleasure. The author is specific about the colour of their skin being variously "olive-brown", "creamy-brown" but also "delicate" and "clear" (5). These distinctions of hue are significant because they indicate the ways in which the women, to borrow from Frantz Fanon, are made "palatable" (114). Homi Bhabha, in explicating Fanon's theory, writes that:

Skin, as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype, is the most visible of fetishes, recognised as 'common knowledge' in a range of cultural, political, historical discourses, and

plays a public part in the racial drama that is enacted every day in colonial societies

(Bhabha 30).

However, Allen's construction of the subtleties of hue in the English women's skin marks a tension between this "common knowledge" of otherness described by Bhabha, and the fear associated with racial passing. Allen simultaneously moves towards imperialist constructions of Elma's appearance as desirably exotic beauty, describing her "piercing dark eyes" and "glossy black hair that fringed her forehead. Not an English type of beauty at all" (5) and withdraws from the threat posed by this exotic beauty by declaring that her skin is neither white nor black, but "creamy brown". In Allen's book, the "creamy brown" skin of Elma and her mother can paradoxically be read as a sign of their hereditary racial otherness, but also the troubling success of miscegenation. Allen emphasises the nineteenth-century preoccupation with decline of the white race as a direct result of intermarriage. Elma's almost, but not quite, white skin colour complicates the notion of racial otherness. Indeed, the "creamy brown" hue of her skin – her inbetweenness – does not seriously threaten the dominant power relations in the novel, but marks her as the pleasurably exotic object of the male gaze.

However, while their exoticism marks Elma and her mother as desirable, it is important that their otherness is carefully measured. Central to this negotiation of the politics of "mixed blood" is their ability to blush, which prevents the two women from sliding into the space of absolute abjection through their infectious racial otherness:

Elma's skin was dark – a clear and creamy olive-brown complexion, such as one sometimes sees in southern Europe, though rarely in England; and the effect of the blush through it didn't pass unnoticed by Cyril Waring's artistic eye (5).

Throughout the novel Elma and her mother frequently blush through their creamy-brown skin: "Elma blushed faintly pink through that olive-brown skin of hers" (32). In a particularly telling moment Allen writes: "Elma blushed again, and Guy noticed in passing that she blushed very prettily" (29). Here Allen indicates clearly the significance of the blush in the novel. The ability of Elma and her mother to blush signals their capability to 'pass' for white. In 1799 British physician Charles White demonstrated the ideological link between the idea of blushing and the eugenics project:

Where shall we find, unless in the European, that nobly arched head, containing such a quantity of brain, [...] the perpendicular face, the prominent nose, and round projecting chin? [...] In what other quarter of the globe shall we find the blush that overspreads the soft features of the beautiful women of Europe, that emblem of modesty, of delicate feelings, and of sense? Where, except on the bosom of the European woman, two such plump and snowy hemispheres, tipt with vermillion?

(White cited in de Rooy 21).

White suggests that it is the blush of European women that marks them as racially pure. Ironically, while, Elma fears that her frequent blushing will give away the secret of her private snake-dancing, the blush actually serves to hide it, confirming her familial tie to a patriarchal white bloodline.

In another sense, Elma's ability to blush – and therefore to pass – also marks her as dangerously able to fool an unsuspecting man such as Cyril into marrying her. Apart from Elma's tell-tale "creamy olive-brown complexion" (5), she appears, on the surface, to remain within the boundaries of proper and respectable femininity. Within the symbolic lexicon of Victorian femininity, Elma is presented as befitting her status as a lady of the leisured classes. For example, when Elma meets Cyril on the train, he fails to disembark at his intended stop in order to continue talking with her. In the proper English "stiff style" (8) she feigns annoyance: "Elma [...] felt half inclined to be angry at this queer avowal. That is to say, at least, she knew it was her bounden duty, as an English lady, to seem so; and she seemed so accordingly with the most Britannic severity" (7-8). However, it is significant that Elma's Englishness is represented as pretense, whereas her "Oriental" heritage is constructed as natural compulsion. Elma's femininity is split between the public proper self and the shameful, wild 'other' self. The fact that her condition is constructed as deeply ingrained at both a biological and psychosomatic level suggests that the feminine and the Eastern are duplicitous. Behind the beautiful façade of Elma's physical appearance lies a hidden threat – the pollution of blood.

The idea of transmitting the "infection" of race by producing children in marriage is presented as taboo. Despite being in love with Cyril, Elma recoils at the idea of marrying him: "She knew she loved him. But to marry him – oh no. That was quite another thing. There duty interposed. It would be cruel, unworthy, disgraceful, wicked" (67). The taboo of intermarriage is also made clear with Elma's mother, Mrs Clifford, who has managed, despite her tell-tale skin, to hide the shameful gipsy heritage from her husband. The enthusiasm with which Allen

represents the stereotype of hypersexual Eastern femininity has, paradoxically, the effect of portraying Elma – the improper, uncontrollable and sexually desiring belly dancer – as highly desirable. Malchow suggests that in Victorian fiction the combination of the “beauty and innocence of the fated mixed-race heroine” is a male fantasy that seeks to “invest the object of desire with an exciting element of forbidden fruit” (174). Malchow states that “behind the innocence (her whiteness) lies the temptation of the sexually exotic (her blackness)” (174). In Allen’s book this duality between Elma’s compliant Victorian innocence and her ‘other’ side, the uncontrollable and ‘primitive’ Oriental, is played out through the motif of dance. These two aspects are presented through Elma as an internal struggle between her Englishness and her Oriental-ness – a struggle which is metaphorically translated into dance.

When Elma first performs her snake-dance she uses a feather boa as a substitute snake. The feather boa functions as a sartorial symbol of erotic femininity and, on a cruder level, as a penis substitute signalled by the desire for a snake. The image of the snake in the novel is central to the thematic idea of hypersexual femininity, but the snake’s metonymic function as a penis is repressed within the narrative.

Dancing Solo

In Allen’s novel the internal struggle between Elma’s sense of English propriety and her genetically inherited Oriental “degeneracy” is strongly overlaid with ideas of sexual “unnaturalness” which were flourishing during the mid-nineteenth century. In particular, female masturbation figured highly as an act of moral degradation. The moment when Elma first dances alone in her room

occurs immediately after a period of reflection on the day's encounter with Cyril. Fantasising about the events of the encounter, "with her hands crossed on her lap" (36), Elma becomes sexually aroused: "a tender blush came back to her brown cheek [...] her bosom heaved. She was conscious of a new sense just aroused within her" (36). The ensuing dance can be read as a thinly veiled metaphor for masturbation. The correlation is made explicit through the description of the "solitary orgy":

[...] she danced on irresponsibly. Check herself she couldn't, let her do what she would. Her whole being seemed to go forth into that weird, wild dance. She trembled and shook. [...] She had hard work to restrain herself from crying aloud in her horror (36).

The masturbatory connotations of Elma's dance signal the connection between the feminine and the corporeal. Dijkstra argues that in the nineteenth century women's indulgence in the "solitary vice" of masturbation was inevitably represented not through the act itself but in the subsequent exhaustion of the woman²⁸ (78):

At last, a lull, a stillness, a recess. Her limbs seemed to yield and give way beneath her. [...] she flung herself upon the bed [...] in three minutes she was asleep, breathing fast but peacefully (Allen 38-39).

The lengthy passage describing Elma's snake dance stages the performance for the voyeuristic pleasure of the reader. The reader is granted access to a

²⁸ Dijkstra traces the trajectory of representations of sleeping women in nineteenth-century art. According to Dijkstra many painters exploited the theme of female masturbation through images of collapsing and sleeping women (64-82).

young woman's erotic awakening and her monstrous desire for a snake as prop to her sexual performance. Elma's dance is constructed as both an irresponsible act of depraved sexuality and a symptom of her racial ancestry. Contradictorily, Allen indulges his readers with the representation of active female sexuality and yet withdraws from the potential danger of this representation by constructing a heroine who is ultimately a passive and disgraceful object in the narrative.

James Prichard coined the expression "Moral Insanity" in the early nineteenth century to describe a condition wherein patients recognised good and evil impulses, but were unable to resist the latter²⁹. Elma believes her impulse to dance to be wrong but is unable to resist after a second confrontation with Sardanapalus:

Beautiful Sardanapalus [...] came up clear in her mind [...] so sleek and smooth and glossy, if only she had him here now – she paused and hesitated. In a moment, the wild impulse rushed upon her once more. [...] She must get up and dance; she must obey the mandate; she must whirl till she fell in that mystical ecstasy (71).

However Elma, in an attempt to remove the temptation to dance, cuts up the feather boa:

With a violent effort she steadied herself, and looked round for her scissors. [...] she took them up with a fixed and determined air. 'If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off,' she thought to herself. Then she began ruthlessly hacking the boa into short little lengths of a few inches each (71).

²⁹ See Porter & Wright (2003: 268).

The link between the dance and female masturbation is made explicit in Allen's quotation from the Bible, a passage often interpreted as an admonition against masturbation. The nineteenth-century fear of female masturbation is made explicit in Elma's savage attack on the feather boa³⁰. Allen suggests that if the boa is destroyed (and it loses its serpentine form) it can no longer function as the apparatus for Elma's erotic play. This notion, that Eastern women are such slaves to their passion that they will utilise any object within reach to satisfy their sexual desire, is not new to Orientalist constructions of female sexuality. As early as 1650, traveller Ottaviano Bon wrote of Turkish harem women:

It is not lawfull for any one to bring ought in unto them, with which they may commit the deeds of beastly, and unnaturall uncleannesse; so that if they have a will to eat, radishes, cucumbers, gourds, or such like meats; they are sent in unto them sliced, to deprive them of the means of playing the wantons: for they being all young, lusty, and lascivious wenches, and wanting the society of men.

(Bon cited in Schick 216)³¹.

This was reiterated by Alexander Pope in 1716, who, in a letter to Lady Montagu, wrote of Turkey as "the land of Jealousy, where the unhappy Women converse with none but Eunuchs, and where the very Cucumbers are brought to

³⁰According to Dijkstra nineteenth-century medical and psychological discourse frequently cited masturbation as a common cause of female 'nymphomania' (1986: 248-249).

³¹ [Bon, Ottaviano] Robert Withers. Trans. *A Description of the Grand Signor's Seraglio, or Turkish Emperours Court*, (Ed) John Greaves. London, Jo. Martin and Jo. Ridley, (1650: 59). Cited in Irvin C. Schick (1999: 216).

them Cutt” (Pope cited in Schick 217)³². Both statements emphasise the often repeated notion that it was, in particular, the Oriental woman who possessed a natural and uncontrollable sexual desire. So while the sexualisation of Elma’s dancing and subsequent cutting of the boa to remove temptation provides an erotic aspect for the reader, this sexualisation also serves to reinforce the connection between racial ‘otherness’ and hyper-sexuality.

In the final episode of dance in the novel, Allen adds the suggestion of a lesbian subtext. Elma becomes acquainted with the new owner of a nearby estate, Miss Ewes, who, the reader is told, lives alone and is a “strange and eccentric musical composer” (149). It is significant the Miss Ewes lives alone. Alison Oram has shown that nineteenth-century discourse frequently characterised spinsters as deviant and pathological: “In the mid-nineteenth century ‘redundant old maids’ were scorned for having failed at the main business of a woman’s life, the marriage market” (414). Furthermore, according to Oram, these discourses also categorised “lesbian sexuality” as having an “ambiguous overlap with spinsterhood” (415). Miss Ewes, who was a “distant cousin of Mrs Clifford” (149), is described as “a handsome woman for her age, but very dark and gipsy-like” (150). The composer is at her piano when Elma enters the room and is struck by the “penetrating melody” (150):

Lightly she ran her hand over the keys with a masterly touch, and fixed her glance as she did so on Elma. [...] It was a tune that waxed and waned and curled up and down sinuously, and twisted in and out and – ah yes, now she knew it – raised its sleek head, and darted out its forked tongue, and vibrated with swift tremors, and tightened and slacked, and

³² Pope, Alexander. *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*. Ed. George Sherburn. Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon: Oxford University Press, (1956: 368) cited in Schick (217).

coiled resistlessly at last in great folds all around her. Elma listened [...] her heart throbbed fast and her nerves quivered fiercely. Oh, it was wrong of Miss Ewes to tempt her like this! It was wrong, so wrong of her! (150).

At the end of this episode Miss Ewes kisses Elma on the forehead. Through Elma's strength of will, she has overcome her temptation not only to give in to erotic desires, but also, significantly, to control the physical manifestation of her gypsy-ness, the impulse to dance:

If she had followed her own impulse, to be sure, she would have risen on the spot and danced that mad dance once more with all the wild abandonment of an almeh [...] But she resisted with all her might. And she resisted successfully (150).

The success here is, on a deeper level, the threatening success of miscegenation. Although Elma has not overcome her gypsy heritage she has learned to control it and to keep the secret without regret as her mother had done. Allen's book, with its mass of mistaken identities, contributes to a larger novelistic tradition popular in Victorian fiction of "foundling" or bastard plots, in which the hero or heroine of indeterminate or questionable origins discovers him or herself to be the child of a well-born or aristocratic parent. This is the case with the novel's twin brothers, Cyril and Guy, where they eventually discover their father to be the wealthy and well-bred Colonel Kelmscott. However, unlike Cyril and Guy, Elma's parentage is unchallenged – there is no mistake, she remains the descendent of gypsies. Once Elma has learned to suppress the tendency to burst into "fits" of ancient gypsy snake dancing, the

apparently aberrant aspects of her gypsy-ness are redirected. In particular, Elma's powers of intuition inherited from the gypsy line (and her gender, it would seem) are amplified to the degree that she can both read minds and enforce her power just by looking at them:

He didn't half care for this uncanny young woman. A girl who can read people's thoughts like that, a girl who can play with you like a cat with a mouse, oughtn't to be allowed at large in society. She should be shut up in a cage at home like a dangerous animal (170).

Indeed, by the end of the novel Elma's gypsy inheritance has taken on a far more sinister (and public) power than the private 'Oriental' dancing performed alone in her room. When Elma intuits that the man guilty of murdering Montague Nevitt is Judge Gilbert Gildersleeves, she catches his eye with "deadly contempt" (169):

Elma was in the room [...] prettier than ever [...] in the pale red ball-dress which exactly suited her gipsy-like eyes and creamy complexion. [...] People said the Ewes women were the descendants of a witch. And there was something truly witch-like in the way Elma Clifford looked straight down into his eyes. She seemed to see into his very soul (169).

So deadly, in fact, is Elma, that under the eyes of the gipsy-like woman, the Judge begins to choke: "something within was evidently choking him" (193). Elma with her dark eyes and creamy skin, now dressed in red, a colour associated with sexuality and seduction, has become not only the marginal figure of racial otherness but also a mysterious and dangerous witch. This disturbing aspect of Elma's newfound control over her powers is, furthermore,

emphasised when she finally agrees to marry Cyril. Earlier in the novel, as I showed previously, Elma is horrified at the notion of marrying Cyril, believing that to do so “ would be nothing short of wrong” (65). However, at the end of the novel Elma is unconcerned by the “profoundly moral” (64) beliefs she possessed in the beginning, and decides to marry Cyril and keep the secret of her “bad blood” from him just as her mother had done before her. Ultimately, the novel sustains its initial and central assumption, in what amounts to an ideologically unsettling conclusion: “What’s bred in the bone, comes out in the flesh”. The racial ‘otherness’ of the Orient that had been on fringes, is now at the heart of imperial society, infecting the imperial body politic without compunction or restraint.

Middle Eastern and North African dance has been represented in a myriad of nineteenth-century texts, from travel writings to cabaret dance hall performance, theatre and opera, to journalistic reviews of these dance performances, early film, visual arts including photographic representation, advertising as well as the popular and political press, fiction, poetry and even medico-scientific discourse of the period. During the nineteenth century, and continuing into recent times, travel writing has been an important means by which Orientalist ideologies and myths have been perpetuated and circulated throughout the world. The evocative power of the movement of non-Western dance took on significant meaning in the late nineteenth century. The shaking, jiggling, and convulsive corporeal agitations of the dancer, signified not only the lower order – the inferiority of the other – but a lack of control. As I will go on to discuss in later chapters, the substantial legacy of what this chapter has called the Oriental grotesque, and the important role played by Middle Eastern and

North African dance in the period of the late nineteenth century, extends from travel writings and other popular cultural media into the major film movements of the twentieth century, and beyond. Over a century later the accumulation of nineteenth-century descriptive representations of belly dancing remains suggestive of the ambivalent desires and anxieties that surround the Eastern female body in motion.

‘Salomania’: Imagining the *Danse du Ventre* and the Metamorphosis of a Literary Figure

From all the parts of her body shall shine radiant intelligence, bringing to the world the message of the thought and aspirations of thousands of women. She shall dance the freedom of women.

(Isadora Duncan, *The Dance of the Future* 1903: 129)

The role of New Woman politics in the gender debates of the nineteenth century has been well researched by feminist Victorianists. Elaine Showalter (1991) and Sally Ledger (1995), for example, have written about the nineteenth-century campaigns of the New Woman for recognition and change on issues of suffrage, increased medical care, education, employment, marital rights, as well as on the subjects of women’s embodiment, sexuality, and dress reform. Furthermore, scholars such as Lyn Pykett (1992) and Ann Heilmann (2000) have undertaken studies on the important role of New Women’s writing and fictional discourse in the service of nineteenth-century feminist cultural politics. However, while these aspects of first-wave feminist intervention have been analysed in detail, the place of dance in the women’s movement has been both undervalued and under-discussed. Only in the last fifteen years or so have works by scholars such as Amy Koritz (1990, 1995), Elizabeth Dempster (1995), Gaylyn Studlar (1997), and Toni Bentley (2002) explored the significance of women’s performance arts of the nineteenth century. While the contributions of these writers are invaluable, none discusses the role that Middle Eastern dance (or its antecedent belly dance) played in the emerging dance culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As such,

there is still much work to be done in this arena. The scarcity of research on the topic of nineteenth-century women's dance studies in general, and belly dance in particular, has ensured the ongoing marginalisation of women's performance, as well as the denial of belly dance as a meaningful social and political practice for the New Woman. I wish to redress this by arguing that women's dance, especially those dancers whose performances drew on Orientalist aesthetics and the movement vocabulary of Middle Eastern dancing, can be seen as valuable contributors to first-wave feminist explorations of the politics of embodiment, sexuality, and appearance.

This chapter not only recognises the importance of dance in the history of the women's movement, but specifically examines the significant role that nineteenth-century Orientalist discourse in dance played in relation to the rise of the New Woman. I will argue that modern female soloist dancers such as Maud Allan, Isadora Duncan¹, Loïe Fuller, Mata Hari, and Ruth St. Denis (often cited as the founders of modern dance) drew on the aesthetic and movement vocabulary of Middle Eastern dance to enable a reorientation of traditional Western notions of femininity that included ideas about sensuality, sexuality, and autonomous female identity. A number of these dancers achieved international fame, touring their Orientalist concert dances in theatres across

¹ While Isadora Duncan's (1878-1927) inclusion here is essential given the significant place of her dancing in the modern dance movement, it is also important to note that she emphatically refused to have her dancing linked with the 'Orient'. See Bentley (2002: 67), and Cohen (1992: 118-123). Duncan's work, nevertheless, demonstrates some clear similarities to the Orientalist modern dance movement. The contradictions of Duncan's oeuvre will be examined in this chapter.

the United States, Europe, and Britain². For many dancers at the *fin de siècle* it was in particular the figure of Salome, with her peculiar combination of legendary seduction, autonomy, sadism, and exoticism, that seemed to embody in movement the newly realised social and sexual freedoms of women. Through this exploration of turn-of-the-twentieth-century women's usage of Eastern dance, especially through their employment of the figure of Salome, this chapter initiates the discussion of one of the key concerns of the thesis: the uncomfortable alliance between feminism and Orientalism in dance.

As discussed in Chapter One, the objectification of Middle Eastern and North African dancers by nineteenth-century Western travellers moving through the Middle East and surrounding areas can be understood through discourses of Orientalism and the 'Oriental grotesque'. Furthermore, it traced an important geographical and ideological transition via Grant Allen's literary discourse: from Western travellers' representations of the Eastern 'other' at a distance to the incursion of the Oriental other into the West via the "mixed blood" metaphor in *What's Bred in the Bone*. This chapter continues to trace this shift by interrogating Western representations of Western women performing the imaginative renderings of Eastern dances in the West. In doing so, I identify two important and interconnecting historical moments that contributed to changing cultural perceptions about Middle Eastern dance in the early twentieth century.

² As a result of the cross-fertilisation of Oriental dance by the touring dancers, as well as the dissemination of the dance via performances at the series of World Fairs staged throughout the nineteenth century, Oriental dance appeared simultaneously across a broad geographical area at roughly the same time. Thus, this chapter is not limited to the study of the dance in one particular geographical area but considers the clear links between the meanings and treatments of Orientalist dance across Europe, the United States, and Britain during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

First, during the late nineteenth century, Middle Eastern and North African dancers were brought from their homelands and moved to the West to perform in the ethnographic exhibits of the World Fairs. Second, around the same time, and into the mid-twentieth century, a number of well-known, and countless lesser-known, Western female dancers were imitating and staging the impassioned solos of 'Oriental' dance.

With this shift the gendered, racial, and sexual associations that had become attached to belly dance from the mid-seventeenth century changed for Westerners and were transfigured and appropriated by Western women. In particular, I argue that the relatively uncomplicated Western fantasy of the excess of racial otherness was ruptured when, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scores of middle-class Western women removed their corsets and their shoes, and publicly performed the seemingly foreign and disorderly movements of Middle Eastern dance. The 'Oriental' dancer could no longer be viewed unproblematically as racially other and inferior when the dancer was a white woman. As such, the conventions of the 'Oriental grotesque' outlined in Chapter One were, for turn-of-the-century Westerners, no longer uncomplicated as a motif for racist 'othering'. In spite of this, the grotesque remained an important category in the representation of Eastern dance; but, I argue, the rules governing this discourse changed. When Eastern dancing was performed by Western women it became less connected with nineteenth-century ideas about an inherent biological racial degeneracy, and more about notions of cultural and moral corruption. It is arguably the uncorseted Western female body in motion that begins to emerge as grotesque

in the early twentieth century, as well as the spectre of autonomous female sexuality expressed in dance.

In other words, as the century progressed, anxieties about otherness shifted away from the threat of the 'Oriental female other' and towards the threat of the 'New Woman' and the danger she represented to Victorian conceptions of femininity and domestic stability. Thus, it is my intention in this chapter to explore the function not only of the connections of Oriental dance with gender issues, but also the place of Oriental dance in the dialogue between cultural anxieties about the New Woman and gender. In particular, I argue that the New Woman dancers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, through Orientalist performance, prised open a discursive space for women to express a range of desires and identities that were otherwise circumscribed by dominant ideological constructions of feminine propriety. These dancers promoted their causes through the appropriation of Middle Eastern dance, and in doing so they produced a complex slippage between Eastern dancing as a symbol of female empowerment on the one hand, and Orientalist figurations of Eastern otherness linked to colonialist discourse on the other.

The exhibition and reception of non-Western dance at the series of World Fairs in the nineteenth century was a significant point in the history of belly dance in the women's movement. Thus, it will be useful to sketch the background of belly dance as it was introduced to the West for the first time in the late nineteenth century.

The Transfiguration of Belly Dance to the West

Colonial travel accounts and Orientalist art and postcards depicting Eastern dancing were, as discussed in Chapter One, immensely popular and widely circulated throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries (Mabro 118, Alloula xiv). However, it was not until the series of World Fairs staged throughout the nineteenth century that Americans and Europeans witnessed for themselves the notorious belly dancing that focused so explicitly on the female abdomen, pelvis, and hips. The World Fairs were elaborate instruments of cultural production designed to showcase the West's developments in science, technology, art, culture, and industry. As Reina Lewis has suggested, apart from their function to provide a sociable atmosphere for cultural exchange, the World Fairs also provided a vehicle for asserting and maintaining colonial power through the dissemination of imperial ideologies (1996: 73). Beginning with London's Crystal Palace Exposition in 1851, through to the Universal Expositions in Paris in 1867, 1889 and 1900, the display of imitation ethnographic habitats had become integral to the Fair's events. These displays presented non-Western people as anthropological curiosities in a kind of human diorama. In the words of Jan Nederveen Pieterse, non-Western people signified the colonial "trophies of victory" (95).

The 1893 Chicago World's Fair was the first exposition to feature a separate area for amusements known as the Midway Plaisance. The ethnographic displays on the Midway featured Oriental themed cafés, villages, bazaars and theatres. Non-Western entertainers were brought from their homelands to populate these colonial exhibits. In the exaggerated Orientalist spectacle of the Midway the highlights included separate displays such as the

“Cairo Street”, the “Turkish Village” and the “Algerian Village”, a “Moorish palace”, an “Algerian coffee-house”, and Turkish and Persian theatres. The colonial exhibits catered to the imperialistic voyeurism of the West and attempted to transform the non-Western other into a passive and unthreatening spectacle. The Oriental dancing in these exhibits was a major drawcard for the fair. However, the exhibition of the Oriental dances – presented for the first time under the label *danse du ventre* or belly dance³ – was deemed anything but unthreatening; indeed, they generated widespread panic at the Chicago World’s Fair.

The dances presented in the Orientalist exhibits at the Chicago World fair were met with loud opposition by members of the public. In particular, the Ouled-Naïl women from Algeria, the Ghawazee from Egypt, and the Cengi from Turkey created a sensation with their dancing when the late nineteenth-century public was shocked by the costumes and the overtness of the pelvic movements of the dance (Carlton 47). The public objection to the dancers was often motivated by the specific ways in which they moved their bodies, and as a result they were condemned as immoral. In particular, the press at the time chose to focus on the dancers’ ability to “contort” and vibrate the abdominal muscles: “Their abdominal muscles were the only portions of anatomy or mind which showed any cultivation, while these, to their shame, were displayed to serve the basest uses” (Carlton 46). Julia Ward Howe, writing in the nineteenth

³ Other frequently used names for these dances included: the “muscle dance”, “Oriental posture dance”, “contortion dance”, “nautch dance”, and “Hootchy-cooch” (Carlton 1994: 40). The dancers themselves were often called “bayaderes”, “Almees”, or simply, “dancing girls”. For further discussion of the conventions of naming, see Carlton (Carlton 17, 56-57).

century, described the Oriental dancing as “simply horrid, no touch of grace about it, only the most deforming movement of the whole abdominal and lumbar region” (quoted in Bentley 40). A public protest was lodged by the Board of Lady Managers in the form of a petition to have the public performance of belly dancing banned (Carlton 47). The *Chicago Tribune* supported the protest:

The style of movements practiced by these so-called Algerian and other women is something too objectionable for people of refined taste to countenance. It is a depraved and immoral exhibition. It may well be styled an outrage to allow such an exhibition and rate it under the head of dancing.

(“Dancing Masters Enter a Protest” 1893: 10).

Despite the frequent outcry that the pelvic movements of Eastern dance were a display of “suggestively lascivious contorting of the abdominal muscles” that were “shockingly disgusting” (Desmond 1991: 36), they proved immensely popular with the paying public. Indeed, the furore over the dancing only served to make it more popular, with an average of two thousand spectators flocking to see the belly dancers every day the fair was open – that is, more than two and a half million people in the first six months of opening (Carlton 15, Çelik *et al* 1990: 24). As Donna Carlton suggests, the exhibits with Eastern dancing were by far the most popular places in the entire fair (92). Indeed, a popular mythology emerged that it was “Little Egypt” and her dancing that single-handedly saved the Chicago Worlds Fair from financial insolvency (92) (See

Plate 4)⁴. Carlton suggests, however, that it was less “Little Egypt” on her own, and more accurately the ‘Street of Cairo’ exhibit that “undoubtedly helped keep the exposition in the black” (92).



Plate 4 Ashea Wabe, *Little Egypt* c.1897. Harvard Theatre Collection, the Houghton Library.

As a result of its success the *danse du ventre* became a regular exhibit at most World Fairs. Its success did not, however, assuage the widespread ambivalence that many members of the public felt for the display of Middle Eastern dancing. It was firmly argued by critics and commentators at the time that the dancers on the Midway presented a danger to the morals of the public. As one commentator wrote: “No ordinary Western woman looked on these performances with anything but horror” and that it was a “matter of serious debate [...] whether the customs of Cairo should be faithfully reproduced, or the morals of the public faithfully protected” (*The Dream City*, 1893). On August 5

⁴ In her informative study on the history of Middle Eastern dancing at the Chicago World’s fair, Carlton argues that although an elaborate and longstanding mythology exists around the dancing of a woman called “Little Egypt”, there is no evidence to suggest that a single dancer by that name existed (52). Carlton claims that with the widespread burlesque appropriations and imitations of the *danse du ventre* combined with the controversy surrounding the dance, it is likely that a number of dancers capitalised on the name “Little Egypt” (52).

the same year, Anthony Comstock, the renowned founder and President of New York's Society for the Suppression of Vice, denounced the dancing as "defiling" in its "nastiness" and declared that "the very lowest places of public amusement in New York would not tolerate it one day" (18).

The very presence of the dancers at the World Fairs presented another danger aside from the threat they posed to public morals – that of encroachment of the racial other. On August 6, 1893 the *Tribune* reported "People have gone dance-crazy since the World's Fair brought to our Western city the accumulated rottenness of the Orient [...] the essence of its debauchery is displayed on the Midway Plaisance"⁵ (cited in Carlton 49). While the notion of Westerners travelling to the East to record their experiences and encounters with dancers was a well established expression of nineteenth-century colonialist power, the relocation of these dancers into the West was relatively new. Subsequently, this shift unsettled colonialist assumptions about the West as the pre-eminently mobile, active, and influential counterpart to the East, which by contrast, was usually figured as inert, unchanging, and passive. By the turn of the century, the advent of the modern dance movement with its distinct borrowings from Middle Eastern and North African dance saw the ubiquitous *danse du ventre* have a significant and lasting influence on the West. The physical relocation of Eastern dancers to the West, combined with the adoption of Orientalist dance by Western women, marks a new set of cultural anxieties about non-Western dance: the incursion of the exotic 'other' into the West, and anxieties about the physical and moral degeneration of the white race. Before turning our attention to these issues, however, it will be useful to discuss some

⁵ "Is Gone Dance Crazy." *Chicago Tribune* 6 August (1893: 28).

of the problems of representation that trouble the study of dance history and dance *in* history.

The Problem of Representing Dance

The chief difficulty with the study of dance is that once a dance, whether improvised or choreographed, has been executed, it vanishes⁶. Even if a dancer repeats the same choreography, the performance will never be exactly the same as the last. Dancing, which relies on human bodies moving through space and across time, is an ephemeral art form. While these may seem obvious points to raise, acknowledging the ephemerality of dance is crucial to an understanding of the problems associated with the reconstruction and investigation of marginal dance histories. Given that dance is fleeting, the details of particular dances can never be verified, not only because the audience's experience of any particular dance performance is going to vary from person to person in a highly subjective way, but also because the available media for recording and documenting dance cannot possibly hope to 're-tell' the dance and the associated experiences of the dancing body. Thus, dance histories often exist as fragmented accounts in the form of secondary materials. As Goellner and Shea Murphy have suggested in *Bodies of the Text*, "interesting theoretical and practical issues arise when the ephemerality of

⁶ The development of recording technologies such as video and film has enabled, to some extent, the visual preservation of dance texts. These technologies, however, have their limitations: video does not allow for variation of the viewers perspective, nor can it convey sensations such as smell, temperature, or audience mood, and as Goellner and Shea Murphy have suggested, "the flattened quality of video distorts the choreography and significantly diminishes the impact of live dancers" (14).

dance gets caught up in the ‘permanence’ of the written word” (5). For example, dance is described in written reviews, autobiographies, memoirs, and essays, it is represented in static photographs and artworks such as paintings and sculptures, or in film. It is through these fragments, or what I have called the ‘textual traces’ of the dance, that it may be possible to reconstruct dance history. Isadora Duncan described the dilemma of reconstruction when she wrote about the hopeless task of creating a coherent literary account of her life and art:

As I advance in these memoirs, [...] I often ask myself desperately, what reader is going to be able to clothe with flesh the skeleton that I have presented?

(Duncan, *My Life* 1927: 230).

Duncan’s statements encapsulate not only the difficulties of writing an autobiography, but also the particular difficulties facing the dance writer. If the “flesh” of dance is the body’s varying shades of movement, its intensity, its sense of abandon or restraint, its relationship to the ground or surroundings, the sounds, sights, colours, and actions of the live body in space, then the written description of dance can only hope to present its skeleton.

In addition to the practical issues relating to the problems of recording dance histories, the other problem is the marginalisation of women’s dance specifically in women’s histories. The marginalisation of women’s performance arts of the nineteenth century is evidenced through their exclusion and denial. David W. Menefee argues that some of the greatest losses to women’s arts are

associated with the history of women in the early cinema⁷. Menefee has argued that, as a result of the devaluation of women's performance arts, many of the earliest filmic representations were of women dancing but because of their supposedly 'low' subject matter were deliberately destroyed by their producers (Menefee xi-xii)⁸.

The mind/body dualism that has long underpinned Western culture has meant, as Londa Schiebinger argues, that historically men have been "the guardians of culture and the things of the mind", while women have been associated with the supposed "frailties and contingencies of the mortal body" (1). Furthermore, as Elizabeth Dempster has argued, when it comes to dance, this duality is also gendered: "in the Western theatrical tradition [...] dance has been closely associated with the female body" (23). Dempster goes on to argue that "if dance is the space of 'the feminine' and 'the maternal', it follows within the logic of patriarchal social order that its power and the power of the body must be controlled, constrained, disguised, or denied" (24). This impulse to ideologically control and constrain the female body is at the crux of the problem of reading nineteenth-century female dancing bodies. In short, although during the nineteenth-century women were, as Janet Wolff has shown, the dominant innovators, performers, and producers of modern dance (95), it was mostly men (through novels, art, reviews, and essays) who (re)produced the widespread publicly accepted view of these female dancers. Male representations, though not always negative, often functioned to exclude or obscure the body of the

⁷ There are no known filmic representations of Duncan's dancing. See Cooper Albright (1999: 182).

⁸ The American Film Institute estimates that more than 80 percent of films made before 1930 were destroyed or lost by the studios that produced them (Menefee xii).

dancer (and its potential for empowerment) by foregrounding the dictates of the largely patriarchal and racist culture of the nineteenth century.

Aside from the outright exclusion of women's performance arts from dance history, women's dance has been, and continues to be, marginalised through the systematic trivialisation and devaluation of dance (especially dance that is ostensibly popular, "low", and/or sexualised) in scholarly and cultural discourses. Patrick Bade in *Femme Fatale* (1979), for example, writes that the "actresses, dancers or singers" of the late nineteenth century "had no other goal than notoriety" (32). Bade suggests that the female performers who embodied the popular image of the *femme fatale*

were a great inspiration to the artists of their age, but it was a case of life inspired by art. The actresses, dancers and singers enthusiastically adopted an image which had been created for them by artists and poets
(Bade 32).

According to Bade, the performers of the late nineteenth century were merely ciphers; they presented no personality or identity of their own, only the pre-digested image of the *femme fatale* as she was created and seen by the 'real' artists of the time – that is, male "artists and poets". Implicit in Bade's assessment of women's use of the *femme fatale* figure in performance is the assumption that women saw themselves only as a reflection of the way men saw them. Furthermore, Bade privileges the more 'concrete' forms of art and writing (assumed to be male-authored) over the more insubstantial (assumed to be the derivative and feminine) bodily practice of dance. Bade's ready assumption that nineteenth-century women's performances were merely

imitative, rather than subversive or original, reveals some of the difficulties of analysing the cultural significance of performance art in general, and women's performance art specifically. It also highlights the various prejudices at work in scholarly discourse about dance, and how easily and simplistically the body of the dancer can be 'written out' of dance history.

The main problem associated with reconstructing nineteenth-century women's dance history, then, is determining how the traces of minority dance histories are to be read when the prevailing legacy of these dances, as we have seen, was produced by the largely hostile dominant culture – one which happens to be both anti-feminist and racist? For a scholar of a minority dance such as belly dance, the problem posed is one of exposing the elements of feminist liberation of modern dance through the textual traces of their dances. Doing so, however, requires us to challenge the premise that the dance text – such as the 'review' – constitutes a 'truthful' document of the dance. Randy Martin (1999) has argued that

the dance review's presentation of its material as a simulation of the performance suggests a relation of universal powers of appropriation to a particular event, with critical attitude being tied not to evaluation but somehow objective orientation to the object [...] ("I was there. Let me tell you how it was").

(Martin 324).

Given the instability of the traces left by dance performance, these claims to 'truth' become all the more tenuous. The field of dance writing and documentation is not, as it would seem to be, a seamless and neutral space; therefore the documentation of the dance cannot be read as an objective

reflection of the dance performance. One possible way around this problem is posed by Ann Cooper Albright via Nancy Miller's theorisations about women writers' autobiography⁹. Cooper Albright writes that Miller calls for a "double reading" of autobiography in which she proposes "an intratextual practice of interpretation" (Miller in Cooper Albright 179). According to Miller, "the historical truth of a woman writer's life lies in the reader's grasp of her intratext: the body of her writing and not the writing of her body" (ibid 179). However, as Cooper Albright asks, "what if the 'author' is a dancer?" (180). Cooper Albright reads Isadora Duncan's autobiography *My Life* by exploring the ways in which the "performing body physicalizes the autobiographical voice to produce a representation of subjectivity that is at once whole and fragmented" (182). Few of the female modern dancers recorded their lives and works in autobiographies, with the notable exceptions of Maud Allan's *My Life and Dancing* (1908), Isadora Duncan's *My Life* (1927), and Ruth St. Denis's *An Unfinished Life* (1939)¹⁰. However, what happens to Cooper Albright's notion of the author-as-dancer when, as I have been suggesting here, the dance exists as a textual trace left not by the dancer, but from the perspective of an audience member, spectator, critic, or reviewer? If we look at the problem this way, suddenly the dancer is no longer author or subject, but a socially and historically constructed dancer-object: an object that is culturally moored to the socio-

⁹ Miller, Nancy. "Writing Fictions: Women's Autobiography in France" In *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988 (quoted in Cooper Albright 179-205).

¹⁰ While dancers such as Duncan, St. Denis, and Allan are largely credited with single-handedly pioneering modern dance, they did not do it alone. There were many lesser known dancers of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who contributed to the revolution of dance during this time.

political implications of historically specific gendered, racial, and sexual ideologies. What I wish to suggest, then, is a kind of “intratextual” reading in the vein of Miller’s “double-reading” but with the exact opposite objective: to explore the meanings of women’s dance history not through “the body of her writing” as Miller suggests, but through “the writing of her body” (Miller 179).

My intention here is not to attempt to articulate the ‘true’ nature of these dances, but to question the undergirding racial, gendered, and Orientalist discourses that percolate through the textual traces of women’s modern dance. This project of interposing feminist constructions of dance involves reading the female dancing body as a palimpsest, a surface on which contradictory ideological impulses are inscribed and reinscribed. Without this kind of scrutiny we unproblematically accept the truthfulness of textual documentations of dance, and disallow the disruptive potential of women’s dance practices. The evidence for this empowerment, I will argue, is broadly locatable in the counter-cultural emphasis on the dancers’ movement and their costuming choices.

“Salomania”: Allegories of Disease

Recalling Chapter One’s discussion of Grant Allen’s novel *What’s Bred in the Bone* (1891), Elma’s predisposition to wild and primitive gypsy dancing was imagined as a direct consequence of latent racial characteristics that had resurfaced as the young woman came of age. However, when Western women actually dressed up as Salome and performed their versions of the “Dance of the Seven Veils”, it was not imagined as an inevitable and atavistic return to an Oriental or gypsy bloodline; it was a choice. As such, the phenomenon of the Western-woman-as-Oriental-dancer was often conceptualised in popular

discourse not as a symptom of her biological racial otherness (as in the case of Allen's Elma or in colonial travel accounts); rather, it was symbolically reconfigured as disease. Undoubtedly, the most emblematically infectious of the Oriental dances was that of Salome's "Dance of the Seven Veils". On the 16th of August 1908, the *New York Times* published a warning about the threat of Oriental Salome dancers:

At the present rate it is probable that Salome dances will invade the fashionable drawing rooms of New York during the coming Winter, as they have of the London Great World [...] From the presentation of the Salome dance in English homes and the lionization of the performer as an honoured and gushed-over guest, to the appearance of some of these feminine enthusiasts of rank and lineage in the same role, is but a step. It is bound to come unless a halt is called.

(Cited in Bentley 68-69).

The author conjures the image of "the Salome dance" as a form of contagion that has already contaminated Britain's women (regardless of their social position), and calls for immediate action to prevent the transmission of the dance to the United States.

Imagined as both virgin and whore, available yet unattainable, horrible and desirable, Salome represented the epitome of the nineteenth-century androcentric fear of female sexuality. Originally an obscure and unnamed Biblical figure in the gospels of Mark (6: 14-29) and Mathew (14: 6-8), by the last two decades of the nineteenth century renewed interest in Salome had transformed her from the relatively compliant child of Herodias into a powerful *femme fatale* – a striptease dancer with an insatiable and perverse desire for

the head of John the Baptist¹¹. Artists and writers of the *fin de siècle* depicted Salome so often that the “little Jewish princess”, according to Philippe Jullian, “may be regarded as the goddess of the Decadence” (108). In particular, it was the erotic fantasy of Salome’s mythic Dance of the Seven Veils, and the decapitation of John the Baptist that resulted from her dance, that most strongly captured the nineteenth-century imagination.

The metamorphosis of Salome into a brazen *femme fatale* was both potent and lasting, with her image marking almost every aspect of popular and high culture of the *fin de siècle*. Salome was represented in a vast array of cultural media such as art, literature, dance, theatre, opera, fashion, and advertising. Some of the most influential representations of Salome include Heinrich Heine’s poem *Atta Troll* (1847)¹², Gustave Moreau’s two paintings *The Apparition* (1875) and *Salome* (1876) (See Plates 5 and 6), Gustave Flaubert’s short story *Herodias* (1877), Karl Joris Huysmans’s novel *A Rebours* (*Against Nature*) (1884), Richard Strauss’s operatic version of *Salome* (1905) and Oscar Wilde’s play *Salomé* (1891), which was published in English in 1894 accompanied by Aubrey Beardsley’s famous illustrations¹³.

¹¹ For further critical accounts of the proliferation of the Salome myth in art and writing see Zagona (1960), Kuryluk (1987), Meltzer (1987) and Ellis (1995).

¹² In the texts of Heine and Flaubert, it is Salome’s mother Herodias who demands the beheading. For an interpretation of the changeability of Salome/Herodias, see Bettina Knapp (1996-1997).

¹³ See for instance Zagona (1960), Dijkstra (1986), Meltzer (1987), and Ellis (1995).



Plate 5 Gustave Moreau. *The Apparition*. c.1874-76. Oil on canvas, 142 x 103cm. Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris.



Plate 6 Gustave Moreau. *Salome*. 1876. Oil on canvas, 54 X 44cm. The Armand Hammer Collection, Gift of the Armand Hammer Foundation.

While these representations of Salome have furnished the symbolical imagery on the theme, it was Oscar Wilde who gave Salome, for the first time, a more developed personality than her previous depictions, an active sexual

desire, a voice; and – the vastly underestimated detail – he named her dance¹⁴. Before Wilde wrote his one-act play in late 1891, the notion that Salome had a specific dance called the Dance of the Seven Veils simply did not exist. Neither Mathew's nor Mark's passages name either the girl or her dance. Yet Wilde's cryptic stage direction: "[*Salome dances the dance of the seven veils*]" (Foreman 570) has prompted writers, artists, and especially the female dancers of the turn of the century to put in motion a dance that never was. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Dance of the Seven Veils had been co-opted into Orientalist mythology as an exotic striptease.

Indeed, the concept of the Dance of the Seven Veils has been so deeply ingrained in popular knowledges about the origins of Salome that Megan Becker-Leckrone has termed the phenomenon the "Salome Effect" (239). At the turn of the century, the myth of the Dance of the Seven Veils came to take on a range of complex meanings incorporating gendered embodiment, striptease, and Orientalist notions about Islamic veiling. In a corruption of the discursive construction of impenetrability of the Islamic veil in Orientalist iconography, the image of the Dance of the Seven Veils was refigured in the early twentieth century as the erotic spectacle of the Orientalised female body unveiled¹⁵. Furthermore, the mythology that surrounded the Dance of the Seven Veils

¹⁴ Due to the ban of Wilde's play by the Examiner of Plays Edward Pigott, it was not performed before the Parisian general public until 1896, (Wilde was in Reading Gaol at the time) (Finney 57). It was not until 1900, after the author's death, that *Salomé* was performed publicly in England (Bentley 27).

¹⁵ Showalter points out that the association of the veil with women was originally connected with female sexuality and the symbolic veil of the hymen (1991: 145).

signalled its inextricable entanglement with the development of belly dance in the West¹⁶.

The list of influential Salome writers would seem to indicate that it was only male artists and writers that dominated the artistic market for the subject of Salome. She was not, however, an exclusively male fantasy – on the contrary, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, even amidst the string of bans and prohibitions that dogged the mythic character¹⁷, women were appearing as Salome dancers in theatres, vaudeville, burlesques, and private drawing rooms all over Europe and the United States. In 1895, and again in 1900, Loïe Fuller (b.1862 – d.1928) presented several Salome dances¹⁸. The Orientalist dance craze was in full force when Maud Allan (b.1872 – d.1956)¹⁹ debuted in 1906 with “The Vision of Salome” at the Carl-Theater Vienna, and toured for the next two years in Europe and Britain where she enjoyed top billing at London’s Palace Theatre²⁰. Mata Hari (b.1876 – d.1917) was also performing Salome in 1906, and Ruth St. Denis (b.1879 – d.1968) presented

¹⁶ The prevalent misconception that the origins of belly dance can be traced to the “dance of the seven veils” continues to be the chagrin of many members of contemporary belly dance communities. See, for example, Deagon (2005). See also, Shira’s website *The Art of Middle Eastern Dance*.

¹⁷ In 1892 the plans were laid for the British production of Wilde’s *Salomé* which was to have starred Sarah Bernhardt. The production was halted at the last minute when the Lord Chamberlain’s Examiner of Plays, E. F. S. Pigott, banned the play on the grounds that to represent a biblical figure (John the Baptist) on the stage was forbidden (Hoare 73). See also Showalter (1991: 150).

¹⁸ See, for example, Garelick (1998)

¹⁹ There is some discrepancy about the year of Allan’s birth – Bentley notes that her death certificate incorrectly records her birth as 1880 (see Bentley 83).

²⁰ Cherniavsky (1983: 139), See also, Walkowitz (2003).

her Orientalist dance production of *Radha* the same year²¹. In 1907, Florenz Ziegfeld opened a show titled “The Vision of Salome” (borrowed, no doubt from Maud Allan) with Mlle Dazié (Daisy Perterkin from Detroit) starring in the leading role as part of the New York Theatre’s *The Follies of 1907*²². Mlle Dazié’s performance, which was based on Aubrey Beardsley’s drawings for Wilde’s *Salome*, was, according to Bentley, the Follies’ most successful act (39) (See Plate 7). It was so successful, in fact, that Dazié opened her own school for Salomes at the *Jardin de Paris*, an outdoor theatre on the roof of the New York Theatre (Kendall 74-75). By 1908 the dance school produced no fewer than one hundred and fifty Salomes a month (Bentley 39). In 1908 Salome dances were also being performed by a number of other renowned dancer/actresses including Ida Rubenstein (b.1885 – d.1960)²³ and Gertrude Hoffmann (Kitty Hayes, b.1886 – d.1966)²⁴. Rubenstein and Hoffmann both debuted Salome dances in 1908; Rubenstein’s opened in St Petersburg (a role which led to her being cast as Cleopatra in Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in Paris the following year) (See Plate 8). Wearing the same Salome costume designed by Bakst, Rubenstein performed Cleopatra as a pseudo-Salome – veils and all, albeit increased from seven to twelve (Bizot 82). Rubenstein played the part again in

²¹ While St. Denis’s *Radha* was not a rendition of the Salome theme, Desmond has argued that the dance was heavily indebted to the “oriental icons and popular images of the late Victorian era, such as the femme fatale” (1991): 32. Richard Bizot has argued that while rumours of a St Denis-*Salome* were circulating around 1909, there is no record of such a dance until 1931 (74).

²² Among the many others who performed Salome routines during 1907 were Lotte Faust in New York, and Eva Tanguay (Bentley 39).

²³ Rubenstein’s (Lydia Lvovna Rubinstein) performance of Salome debuted at the Grand Hall in the St. Petersburg Conservatory on 20 December 1908 (Bentley 139).

²⁴ Hoffmann’s Salome dance debuted at the Victoria in New York 1908 (Bentley 39).

1912 when she danced Fokine's choreography of the Dance of the Seven Veils as the title role of Wilde's *Salome* at the *Théâtre du Chatelet* in Paris.



Plate 7 Archibald Joyce. "Vision of Salome." F. Zeigfield Jr. The Folies of 1910. New York: T. B. Harms & Francis Day & Hunter, 1910.



Plate 8 Gertrude Hoffmann *Salome Dance no. 1*. 1908. Photograph. F.C. Bangs.



Plate 9 *Miss Maud Allan as Salome*. c. 1909. Photograph. Reutlinger, Paris & London.

The Canadian-born dancer Maud Allan achieved both notoriety and success with her depiction of Salome. Allan's Vienna debut of the dance that she called *The Vision of Salomé* (1906) provoked both rapture and moral outrage from her audiences (Hoare 77-78) (See Plate 9). Following a performance of *The Vision* in 1908, the *New York Times* reported on the alarming growth of Oriental dance in the United States and in England. The author warned: "English gentleman" should guard "the sanctity of the fireside" and ensure that it is "inviolable from the invasion of people whose notions of decency and respectability are of a distinctly inferior, and sometimes even the lowest, order" (quoted in Hoare 81-82)²⁵. The explosion of Oriental dance onto

²⁵ 16 August *New York Times* (1908).

the popular dance culture in the late nineteenth century meant that women – and women’s bodies – were on display outside the home in a public arena in a way that threatened contemporary notions of domestic femininity. The visible female dancing body in the public arena of the social dance scene and on the theatre stage was not only viewed with suspicion but often provoked moral outrage from self-appointed purveyors of moral respectability. In direct relation to Maud Allan’s representation of Salome, the author writes that “[Maud Allan] is not only accustomed to gyrate in a state of almost absolute nudity but has moreover inaugurated a fashion of dancing which has unfortunately found innumerable imitators on both sides of the Atlantic” (quoted in Hoare 81-82)²⁶. The modern dancer’s choice of costuming was a vital expression of sexual subjectivity and was an important factor in both their rise to fame and their vilification.

So prolific was the fantasy of Salome for women during the first decade of the twentieth century that President Theodore Roosevelt was asked to intervene should an outbreak of “Salomania” occur in the United States, as it had apparently done in Britain (Studlar 1997: 106). During the height of the “Salome Craze” in the United States the press seized the opportunity to satirise the anxieties presented by the disturbing number of Salomes appearing on the public stage. The *New York Times*, for instance, reported in 1908:

The management [at the New Amsterdam Theatre] has been exceptionally active in guarding against outbreaks of Salomania among members of the company [...] As soon as any chorus girl shows the very first symptoms of the disease she is at once enveloped in a fur coat – the

²⁶ 16 August *New York Times* (1908).

most efficacious safeguard known against the Salome dance – and hurriedly isolated.

(*New York Times*, 16 August 1908).

Underlying the facetious tone of this commentary are deeply embedded fears concerning the pervasiveness of the Oriental dance and its increasing influence on Western women.

The many theatre and burlesque productions of *Salome* that were staged throughout the early twentieth century provoked an international discussion about Eastern dance that deployed the medical lexicon of contamination and infection. After its opening night at Covent Garden in 1910, Richard Strauss' operatic version of *Salome* was, for example, described as a "pathological study of a most unhealthy specimen" of "erotomania" (*Daily News* 9 December 1910). G. E. Morrison's review of Maud Allan's performance of *The Vision of Salome* makes this link between Oriental dance and disease explicit when he described the play as "a bizarre melodrama of disease" (*Morning Post* 13 April 1918). According to Morrison the play engendered an "atmosphere" that "people who are healthy and desire to remain so would do well to keep out of" (*ibid*). At the same time, however, he writes that "high praise is due [...] to Miss Maud Allan for her excellent reproduction of the symptoms of *Salome*" (Morrison quoted in Hoare 97). Reviewers and critics were both disturbed and intrigued by the social significance that was routinely attributed to Western women's representations of *Salome's* dance.

The "symptoms of *Salome*" – especially her capacity for unsettling gender norms – resembled those exhibited by the late nineteenth-century New Woman. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, with the influx of new

medico-scientific discourses on sexuality, especially on supposedly ‘abnormal’ female sexualities, questions of marriage and women’s responsibilities as wives and mothers had come to the fore in new and confronting ways²⁷. It was, thus, no coincidence that the vogue for Salome materialised alongside the growing prominence of the ‘New Woman’ of the first wave women’s movement.

The emergence of the New Woman at the *fin de siècle* was indicative of the ongoing challenges to the ideologies of mid-Victorian cultures. The final decades of the nineteenth century were fraught with both the anxiety and the anticipation of changes to the politics of gender, class, empire, as well as recent developments in science, medicine, and technology. As Ledger has suggested, it was “gender” in particular that was “arguably the most destabilizing category” (22). The late nineteenth-century New Woman, who was seen by the conservatives of the period as a challenge to the dominant moral, socio-sexual, and aesthetic conventions of the Victorian age, was seized upon by the writers of the period as an icon of threatening femininity. The popular press characterised the New Woman as “mannish”, amoral, and decadent. Heilmann argues:

The New Woman conjured up an army of unmarried ‘Odd Women’ [...] [b]y her very ‘oddness’ she raised the spectre of sexual deviance, her difference from other (‘normal’) women, her ‘odd’ rejection of men, her own rejection *by* men (hence her redundancy) all pointing to her transgressive potential.

(Heilmann 16).

²⁷ In particular, studies such as Havelock Ellis (1904), and Richard Krafft-Ebing (1893) were especially influential. See Caine (2001: 134) and Showalter (1991).

Orientalist dance provided a locus of release where fantasies of sexual excess and power could be, as Gaylyn Studlar has argued, “safely acted out with pagan abandon” (106). In her article “Out-Salomeing Salome”, Studlar has argued that the power of the figure of Salome on the stage filtered down to middle-class women who began to hold regular “all-female private theatricals to imitate Maud Allan’s version of Salome’s dance of the seven veils” (106-107). The idea that women were banishing men from their private parties and engaging in group Oriental-dancing evoked the stereotype of the harem and raised the spectre of lesbianism, both of which instilled horror and fascination in the Western public. In the context of these all-women gatherings, the home was refigured as women’s territory, not in the usual sense of homemaking, motherhood, or wifely duty, but as a place for experimenting with individualist sexual expression that was unavailable to men, and for exploring the kinaesthetic pleasure of dance.

In the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century imagination the only thing more disturbing than the notion of women dancing for other women was a woman who dances for herself. The threat of the solo female modern dancer was, in part, her ability to dance alone without the lead of a man. Emile Zola, a prominent author of the decadence, characterised the image of the unseemly female dancer through his heroine Nana:

Gazing attentively in the mirror [...] Slowly she spread out her arms to set off her figure, the torso of a plump Venus, bending this way and that to examine herself in front and behind, lingering over the side-view of her bosom and the sweeping curves of her thighs. And she ended up by indulging in a strange game which consisted of swinging right and left,

with her knees apart, and her body swaying from the waist with the continuous quivering of an almeh performing a belly-dance.

(Emile Zola, *Nana* 1880: 220-22)

The self-love apparent in Zola's description of Nana draws attention to nineteenth-century fears about women's self-absorption as a dangerous auto-eroticism. The male gaze is both co-opted into and rendered redundant by Nana's own self-gratifying gaze. The extent of Nana's narcissism is epitomised when her indulgent "game" becomes a "belly-dance". Zola's description of Nana echoes the ambivalence present in late nineteenth-century popular commentary on Orientalist dance in which a voyeuristic attraction to the apparent otherness of the dance is counterweighted by a fear of women's corporeal self-awareness and sexuality expressed through it. It was through the combination of Eastern exoticism and the seemingly dangerous sense of independent sexuality present in the figure of Salome that the modernist dancers aligned themselves with an ambiguous sense of feminine power.

Studlar argues that the imaginary Orient afforded women "a place where personal identity is liminal, where identities are lost, transmuted, recovered" (106). While Studlar's notion of Orientalist dance as a space for liminal identity is persuasive, I wish to argue that the construction of an Oriental identity through dance functions less as a process of effacing or transmuting identity than as a vehicle through which a sense of sexual identity, that would otherwise be improper, could be enacted. For many turn-of-the-century dancers the myth of Salome's erotic power and subversive emasculating potential could be exploited in such a way that it enabled traditional conceptions of femininity to be refigured and inscribed onto the "white middle-class female body" of the dancer

(Desmond 1991: 30-31). Orientalism for the female dancers of the late nineteenth century was not only indicative of the growing aesthetic fashion for the exotic, but was conspicuously political: many of the modern dancers were cognisant of the messages that Orientalist dance communicated in relation to gender politics. The connection between the politics of modern feminism and the dance of Salome is made clear when Mme. Acté, dancing in Richard Strauss's 1910 production of *Salome* at Covent Garden, was quoted by the *Morning Leader*: "Come and see my dance [...] and you may learn something of what really is in us – the modern woman!" (quoted in Walkowitz 367).²⁸ Acté insisted that "Salome" was "essentially a modern part" and that "there is more than a piece of Salome in every modern woman" (ibid 368). Stressing her individuality, Acté added as a final note that the dance was all her own: "The music is Strauss. The words are Oscar Wilde; but the dance is Acté" (ibid 368). The personification of the sexually assertive and independent Salome clearly subverted stereotyped notions of white womanhood as modest, passive, and asexual.

Debates: Orientalist Dance as Feminist Strategy

While it is true that the iconographic movements of Middle Eastern dance, when integrated with the figure of Salome, did afford turn-of-the-century women a certain degree of agency and self-empowerment, it should be stressed that this empowerment was achieved largely through the inscription of the markers of Eastern exotic other. The symbolic East functioned as the instrument through

²⁸ "Madame Acté as Salome." *Morning Leader* 7 December (1910) quoted in Walkowitz (367).

which the New Woman-as-dancer broke with Western patriarchal expectations of feminine dress and decorum. The modern dancers achieved this empowerment by utilising familiar Orientalist assumptions about the East and Eastern women as not only excessively erotic, mysterious, and thrillingly dangerous, but also more liberated than women in the West. In this way they simultaneously embodied the exotic other and linked their practices to a sense of female empowerment.

There is little doubt that the feminist aspirations of the modern dance movement are problematised by the Orientalist positioning of women's appropriations of Middle Eastern belly dance. However, Orientalism does not, contrary to what some critics have suggested, automatically nullify its feminist possibilities. As an ongoing premise of this thesis, I argue that Western women's Orientalist appropriations of belly dance were (and are) problematic, but not unworkable, for feminism. For example, Jane Desmond in her article "Dancing Out the Difference" (1991) and Amy Koritz in her article "Dancing the Orient for England" (1993) have criticised the performances of Ruth St. Denis and Maud Allan respectively for their fetishistic engagement in the agendas of cultural imperialism. However, neither critic attempts to read the image of the female dancing body through the lens of female empowerment. Both Desmond and Koritz's articles ideologically strip the dancer of the possibility for empowerment by focussing on the racist rhetoric and Orientalist overtones present in their performances. Conversely, Deborah Jowitt in her book *Time and the Dancing Image* (1989) idealises the feminist politics of the modern dancers whilst ignoring their use of the racialised stereotyping on which Orientalism relies. Although Jowitt persistently points to the Orientalist thematic

in nineteenth-century Western women's dance, she does not evaluate the socio-cultural context of the Orientalist discourse, nor does she acknowledge the play of power and desire central to Orientalism. Susan Manning has argued that the either/or terms of the debate over whether the practice of women's modern dance subverted or upheld dominant conceptions of race, gender, and nationality, inevitably results "in a dead end" (163). However, I suggest that it may prove more productive an approach to see the problem not as a "dead end" but rather as a 'dead-lock'. That is, the more pressing question lies in how the modern dancers might have done both, enacting new forms of gendered and racial identities while simultaneously reinforcing dominant notions of femininity and race. By accepting, rather than attempting to arbitrate on, the contradictions of women's Orientalist discourse through dance, I argue that feminism and Orientalism are not diametrically opposed but are complexly interlaced and mutable components of nineteenth- and twentieth-century women's dance practices. It is precisely the contradictions and multifaceted ideological underpinnings of race, sex, and gender in women's solo appropriations of Eastern dance that merit serious scholarly attention and require us to broaden our understanding of feminist histories.

Mary Louise Pratt, in *Imperial Eyes* (1992), argues that the idealisation of "worlds of female autonomy, empowerment, and pleasure" (167) in women's travel accounts are examples of what might be called "feminotopias" (166). Pratt explains that such a "feminocentric perspective" (166) constructs women in so called "primitive societies" (166) as variously having greater sexual, spiritual, and personal freedoms compared with Western women. In particular, clothes feature highly in this construction of foreign women's freedom and

independence. For example, Islamic women are constructed as being free from the restrictive Western dress conventions of corsetry and tight shoes. Other freedoms, according to Pratt, include the anonymity of the Islamic veil, being able to wear excessive jewellery, the choices to smoke, gamble, and go out unaccompanied without stigma, as well as to engage in forms of physical exercise (167)²⁹. This notion of unrestricted and free primitive female bodies, especially in relation to Oriental fashion and dance, was taken up strongly by Western women and was an important facet of women's cultural consumption in the early twentieth century³⁰. In 1911, fashion designer Paul Poiret, as Peter Wollen points out, was at the forefront of the populist iconography of the Orient, his designs embracing, along with style and colour redolent of the East, the sexualised iconography of the harem as place of sex, sadism, and power (1987: 17). The evocation of a discourse of freedom surrounding the 'Oriental woman', however, required that another dominant Orientalist discourse be circumscribed: that is, the discourse which, using the Islamic veil as its central trope, saw Eastern women as the oppressed victims of the sinister and barbaric dominion of Islamic nations. These contradictory discourses of freedom and oppression constructed around the fantasy of the 'Oriental woman' worked together in many of the modern dance performances of Oriental femininity to produce what Daphne Grace has called an "illogical configuration of colonialist reductionism [that] saw both veiled and unveiled women in terms of sexual

²⁹ Pratt also explores the important role of the Islamic veil and other head covering styles of dress in women's travel accounts. In these accounts the unrecognisability of veiled women was constructed as a powerful instrument of their freedom (166-167).

³⁰ For a detailed account of the significance of clothes in Orientalist discourse, see Lewis (1999, 2004). See, also, Bernstein & Studlar (1997).

symbolism" (39). These discourses converged uneasily in the cultural mythology of Salome's Dance of the Seven Veils.

For many of the female dancers of the period Oscar Wilde's evocative creation of Salome's dance was a key symbol for the transgressive interweaving of the early-twentieth-century nexus of the politics of sex, gender, race, and imperialism. Significantly, while Salome is unveiled for the gaze of the public, she is also, as Elliot L. Gilbert observes, the "unveiler" of her body, and thus an active participant in the spectacle rather than a passive object (158). For turn-of-the-century women Salome's dance functioned as a sign of liberation, of symbolic sexual revelation, independence, and a refusal to conform to conventional notions of femininity, morality, and the rules of patriarchy. Oriental dance and the tropes of veiling and unveiling could be borrowed, refigured, and exploited for Western women's construction of Eastern otherness as a site of power and autonomy.

Contradictions: Complicity and Resistance

While critics have (rightly) pointed out the ways in which many nineteenth-century women's performances were complicit with the imperialist ideologies of the time³¹, few have noted the ways in which they challenged those ideologies. For the modern dancers, their use of Oriental themes, and in particular, their association with the Middle Eastern belly dance, presented an ideological predicament. While they embodied the sexualised imagery of the Orient in dance, it was also a necessity that they stress the superficiality of that Oriental identity. Although it is true that they broke with conventional notions of

³¹ See Desmond (1991: 28-49).

femininity, it would be incorrect to suggest that they rejected these conventions altogether in favour of the East's otherness – an otherness which, after all, deeply threatened Western domestic seamliness. Such an immersion in the otherness of the Orient would have presented these women with the stigma of disrespectability. Consequently, in order to successfully subvert dominant conceptions of Western femininity as passive and asexual by drawing on the sexual symbolism of the East, they needed to work within the established conventions they were challenging. In this way, belly dance for Western women was ideologically unstable, always risking a dangerous overlap or slippage between the cultural otherness of the 'Orient' and the supposedly secure construction of gender in the West.

Specifically, it was an ideological necessity that racial otherness (always already presumed present in Middle Eastern dance) be situated paradoxically within the discursive construction of 'proper' femininity. Thus, the dancers' personifications of the sexually voracious Salome needed to be constructed as relatively innocent role-playing, merely Western-woman-masquerading-as-Eastern. One way around this predicament for Ruth St. Denis, for example, was to mix her "Oriental dance" works into "Suites": in a single evening an audience might witness St. Denis personified as Ancient Greek, Japanese, East Indian, Persian, Siamese, Chinese, and Egyptian (McLean 134). St. Denis's impressive pastiche of ethnicities and dance traditions exposed the ease with which otherness – homogenous and undifferentiated – may be both easily put on and, crucially, readily cast off. In this sense the Western-woman-as-Oriental-dancer does not use Oriental dance movement and costume in order to divest herself of her Western-ness; rather, the performance of Oriental-ness is revealed to be

at once transparent, symbolically loaded, and transitory. Such a “performativity”, to borrow from Judith Butler (1993), of Oriental identity relies implicitly on the audience’s knowledge of the Western dancer’s whiteness.

In Homi Bhabha’s schema of colonial mimicry, the colonial subject that imitates the Westerner is “at once an object of desire and derision” (1983: 19), and thus a source of ambivalence. I argue that the Western-dancer-as-Oriental registers a similar ambivalence in the viewer. Yet the terms of this ambivalence are inverted, since the Salome dancers were not Eastern women as ersatz Westerners, but were Western subjects performing otherness. They were, nevertheless, objects of “desire and derision” (19). On the one hand the dancers were objects of colonial desire because they staged the colonial fetish object of the sexualised Oriental woman. On the other hand, they were objects of derision because they problematised the colonial gaze by being inauthentic in their Oriental-ness: they were white. Furthermore, Western women performing the dance movements of non-Western dances complicated nineteenth-century Orientalist ideologies that conflated racial otherness with excessive sexuality. Shohat and Stam argue that nineteenth- and twentieth-century Orientalist discourse constructed Eastern women as “perpetually in heat” (157) and white women as “virginal” and “innocent” (159). The notion of a white women belly dancing, then, caused a crisis within the sexual politics of colonialist discourse. In effect, their transgressions were twofold: they complicated the imperialist and masculine objectifying gaze by their cross-cultural identification with the Eastern other, and then returned that gaze through Salome’s symbolically castrating and dangerous desire. While the dancers performing Eastern dance frustrated the play of power at work in colonialist discourse, they also reinforced the colonial

system of cultural mis-representation. Specifically, the performances of the modern dancers were tightly underpinned by a racist discourse structured around the fundamental Orientalist dichotomies between East as other, and West as self. Desmond argues, for example, that Ruth St. Denis's 1906 dance production of *Radha* "projects a vision of the East as a site of imaginary pilgrimage both for sensual indulgence and physical awakening" (1991: 40).

While the modern dancers undoubtedly created a new discursive space for the freedom of women, their practices were neither consistent nor without contradiction. Throughout their careers many of these female dancers were compelled to negotiate the difficulties that confronted them concerning dominant nineteenth-century ideologies of separate spheres for men and women. Thus contradictions arose in their representations of Eastern-styled dancing as liberation. It was understood that a woman's place was in the home; accordingly, public dancing for money was considered morally suspect – even, for some, tantamount to prostitution. Careful to maintain a distinct appearance of respectability worthy of her middle-class upbringing, Isadora Duncan (b.1878 – d.1927) refused to dance in music halls, insisted on the elevation of her dance as 'art' not entertainment, and avoided any sexual display in her performances. Ironically, however, while she rejected the depiction of sexuality in her performances, she frequently appeared semi-nude onstage. After one Boston performance, she defended her state of undress on the grounds that "To expose one's body is art; concealment is vulgar. When I dance, my object is to inspire reverence, not to suggest anything vulgar. I do not appeal to the lower instincts of mankind as your half-clad chorus girls do" (Duncan cited in Koritz 1995: 51). Duncan's philosophies and performances reveal a tenuous attempt

to strike a balance between dominant patriarchal ideologies on the one hand, and the empowerment of women through public display on the other.

In attempting to align her art with the dominant Western tradition and produce an image of dancing women as nothing but pure, de-sexualised beauty, Duncan rejected the representation of Oriental characters such as Salome, favouring instead neo-classical dances inspired by the Greeks and Romans. Many dancers, however, including the renowned Mata Hari, Ida Rubinstein, Loïe Fuller, Maud Allan, and a plethora of unknown vaudeville dancers, embraced the 'Salome Craze' of the early twentieth century and wholeheartedly participated in the fervour of "Salomania" (Bentley 83). Loïe Fuller presented her version of *Salomé's Dance of the Seven Veils* at the Comédie Parisienne in 1895. Combining new technologies of electric lighting and long diaphanous veils, the short, plump, thirty-three-year-old woman (the antithesis of the ballerina) became the "toast of Paris" and one of the most imitated performers of her day (Bizot 73; Bentley 44). Her first performance of *Salomé* was not, however, an unqualified success. Jean Lorrain, the symbolist writer, gave Fuller's rendition of the Salome theme a scathing review:

[...] the unfortunate acrobat is neither mime nor a dancer: heavy, awkward, sweating and with her makeup gone after ten minutes of little exercises, she plies her veils and her heap of material like a washerwoman running amok with her paddle.

(Lorrain cited in Bizot 73).

Lorrain's derisive assessment of Fuller's performance highlights the difficulties faced by the female performer: she is expected to effortlessly and naturally

present a particular kind of feminine body – that is, classical, light, contained, as opposed to the grotesque body; open, expressive, uncontained. When Fuller returned to the theme twelve years later in her production of *La Tragédie de Salomé* (1907) at the Théâtre de Arts, the forty-five year old Fuller no longer played the adolescent and innocent child she had depicted in her earlier version, but a *femme fatale*, “proud, haughty, and scornful” (quoted in Bizot 77)³². By this time the major cities across Europe and the United States were witnessing the peak of Salomania³³.

Koritz notes that many of the reviews of Maud Allan’s dancing focused on the relationship between her dance and the “authentic” dances of the East (39). In a *Times* review, one critic reveals an attempt to place Allan’s performance of “The Vision of Salome” within the acceptable standards of feminine propriety:

It is of the essence of course, of Eastern dancing to show rhythmic movements of the body round itself, so to speak, as a pivot, which means [...] that it may become, as in the notorious case of the *danse du ventre*, something lascivious and repulsively ugly. Now it is obvious that this dancer could make no movement or posture that is not beautiful, and, in fact, her dancing as Salomé, though Eastern in spirit through and through, is absolutely without the slightest suggestion of the vulgarities so familiar to the tourist in Cairo or Tangier.

(“The Drama: The New Dancer” 1908: 102).

³² A.V. “Une tête à cent expressions” *Feminia*, 15 November (1907: 507) quoted in Bizot (77).

³³ See Bizot (74); and Bentley (44).

While acknowledging that Allan moves her body in the provocative style of Eastern dancing, the critic carefully evades the spectre of sexual license associated with the East (Koritz 39). Allan's dance is imagined as simultaneously Eastern (in spirit) and refined in body – two ideas that are antithetical in the Orientalist ideologies of the period. Furthermore, in the terms of the grotesque, this struggle to portray the “spirit” rather than body is particularly compelling. For the commentator, the feminine Western body has everything to do with maintaining the norms of conventional classical appearance – a body that does not twist or “pivot” around itself is especially important in order to differentiate it from the grotesque. The positioning of Eastern dance as tasteful and beautiful when it is performed by a Western woman effectively neutralises the racial and sexual threats that were seen to be embedded in the dance's original form. This neutralisation is necessary so that the erotic and exotic could be projected with impunity. This Western deployment of the figure of Salome was often contradictory: while the dancers wanted the dangerous and threatening element embodied by Salome, they also wanted to domesticate her.

In the discourse surrounding Oriental dance, the grotesque and its opposite, the classical body, began to take on a series of dichotomies: the grotesque is associated with ugliness, the body, and the East, while the classical is allied with beauty, spirituality, and the West. Mary Wigman, who was also influenced by the dancing of the Middle East, was described by Von Delius in 1922:

She dances in Oriental style. The original impulse is the belly dance: the coarsest offering of the flesh. And in her soul this coarseness becomes the tenderest, sweetest, loveliest turning. She transforms Eros, she allows the earthly to become ethereal.

(Quoted in Odom 89).

In this description Von Delius denigrates the belly dance while he simultaneously cites its influence on the dancer. In this passage, however, the dancer has managed to transcend the belly dance altogether. In doing so, Wigman transforms the apparently bodily grotesque element of the belly dance into the supposedly spiritual, ethereal Western dance (classic ballet). Von Delius's description of Wigman's dance actually effaces the body altogether: "she allows the earthly to become ethereal".

The American burlesque dancer Millie De Leon, dubbed "the Girl in Blue" was, however, not as successful as some of the modern dancers such as Allan and Wigman in melding her representation of Oriental dancing with Western aesthetics. As a result De Leon appeared before the courts between 1903 and 1915 on numerous occasions for her dancing³⁴. In 1904, the *Morning Telegraph* reported, under the headline "The Girl in Blue Too Much for Indianapolis", that De Leon's performances were forced to be cancelled because her dances were "too close to the Little Egypt style". Predictably, the notoriety surrounding De Leon's dancing generated publicity. In 1915 the Philadelphia *North American* reported the spectacle of her dance:

From neck to knee she was convulsive. Every muscle became eloquent of primitive emotion. Standing suddenly erect, with a deft movement she

³⁴ See Fliotsos (1998: 1-8).

revealed her nude right leg from knee almost to waist. A strut to the right a long stride back, and the 'abdominal' dance was resumed [...] her hands clasped and unclasped spasmodically under the strain of the stimulated emotion. Streaked and sweaty, her face took on the aspect of epilepsy. She bit her lips, rolled her eyes, pulled fiercely at great handfuls of her black, curly hair.

In this description, the apparent dissolution of classic Victorian conceptions of femininity seemed to suggest not only the threat of anarchy between the sexes, but also, as seen in the description of her Sephardic "black, curly hair", in the politics of racial purity.

Feminist Orientalism

As we have seen so far, as a result of the largely negative publicity that surrounded belly dance at the *fin de siècle* the dance became fetishistically fixed to the Orientalist stereotype of sexual excess and degeneracy. Why, then, did so many Western women choose, as the symbol of their emancipation, a dance form that had been so consistently denigrated as salacious, improper, and grotesque?³⁵ How and why did the dances of the Middle East assert such a strong appeal to women? And what pleasures did Western women gain from the embodiment of Orientalist fantasies of otherness for a Western gaze? The answer to these questions lies in the subversive potential that the fantasy of the Oriental dancer lent to women at a time when questions of women's place in society were a topic of intense debate not just in the United States, but also in Britain and Europe. The second half of this chapter changes tack slightly to

³⁵ See for example, Chapter One.

unravel some of these questions. In particular, I identify two key issues that I see as productive arenas of investigation: the first is the notion of Orientalist ‘costuming’ as it relates to nineteenth-century women’s debates about “rational dress”³⁶ and femininity, and the second is the notion of Eastern dance as ‘free movement’ as it relates to changing notions about female corporeality, exercise culture, and sexuality.

Dancing Barefoot: The Spectre of Nakedness

In 1926, artist and author André Rouveyre recalled his earlier impressions of Colette’s 1907 performance in *La Chair* (The Flesh):

She danced pantomime, and she danced naked. It was a sorry sight. Although Colette already possessed wings of the spirit, they were not in evidence on her body in the theatre [...] there was nothing aerial about her [...] after each jump, her naked feet would hit the floor with a thud.

(*Mecure de France*, 1 June 1926³⁷).

The Parisian writer, actress, and dancer Colette first performed in *La Chair* as the drama’s beautiful heroine, Yulka. Following its opening, the play, or more accurately Colette, became the centre of a scandal on the grounds of her nudity. In the play, Hokartz a smuggler, played by Georges Wague, discovers that his beautiful wife Yulka is having an adulterous affair. Enraged, Hokartz

³⁶ According to Penelope Byrde, (1992), the late nineteenth century saw the emergence of a women’s dress reform movement popularly referred to as the movement toward “rational dress”. By 1881 the *Rational Dress Society* was formed under the presidency of Florence, Viscountess Harberton (Byrde 174).

³⁷ Rouveyre cited in Sarde (246).

attacks his wife with a dagger; but instead of killing her he rips her dress and reveals her breast. According to Toni Bentley, this was the first time that nudity of this extent was used in a serious drama (188). In the play, following the exposure of the heroine's breast, Hokartz is overcome by her beauty and kills himself – Yulka is triumphant. The play, which explored the power of female nudity, was an unqualified success and after its run in Paris, Colette toured Europe with the production for the next four years³⁸.

Rouveyre's commentary on Colette's dancing is significant because it is suggestive of the widespread changes that were occurring across the cultural landscape of the Parisian dance scene in the early decades of the twentieth century. Specifically, the late nineteenth century saw the rise of women's solo modern dance and the demise of the Romantic ballet. Rouveyre's disdain for Colette's dancing, I argue, owes less to her nudity (he does not even mention her famous bare breast) than it does to her rejection of the balletic emphasis on creating the illusion of bodily weightlessness. In Rouveyre's account, Colette's apparent failure to present the balletic dancing body – "there was nothing aerial about her" and her "feet hit the floor with a thud" – suggests a kind of troubling and excessive corporeality. The taboo that Colette breaches is not merely the nakedness of her body, but the nakedness of her feet – or more precisely, the absence of the ballet shoe. Like many of the modern dancers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Colette refused to stage the fantasy of the classical ballerina *par excellence*, in which femininity is idealised as passive, dependent, ephemeral, and controlled. Instead, the modern dancers experimented with different forms and styles of movement such as aesthetic

³⁸ See Sarde (264).

gymnastics and Delsartism,³⁹ as well as drawing on the exotic fantasy of Eastern sexuality offered by the growing fashion for Orientalism. In doing so, the New Woman dancers exploded conventions of both femininity and movement by self-consciously using their bodies in space in new and confronting ways. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century commentaries on modern dance, including Rouveyre's, often expose the sense of unease associated with modern dance's oppositional stance concerning ballet on the one hand, and its close parallels with Oriental dance on the other.

In order to understand the significant impact of modern dance on the changing direction of theatre dance in the latter half of the nineteenth century, we need to turn our attention briefly to the ballet, a dance which Ann Daly has identified as "one of [Western] culture's most powerful models of patriarchal ceremony" (16). As Susan Leigh Foster notes, the mid-nineteenth century in Paris saw the ascendancy of a "distinct genre of spectacle, known as the Romantic ballet" (1996: 3). The Romantic ballet, especially in Paris, engendered major innovations in ballet technique, as well as important technological advancements in dance as a theatrical spectacle. It was in Romantic ballets such as *La Sylphide* (1832) and *Giselle* (1841) that themes of the supernatural and the exotic became engrained into the lexicon of the ballet tradition. Furthermore, ballet technique had become highly codified in the ballet class.

³⁹ Named after François Delsarte (1811-1871). Delsarte, according to Leigh Foster (1986), formulated "a new system for analyzing movements on the belief that human physicality directly manifested human spirituality" (156). Delsarte's system was widely used in the growing physical culture movement in the United States. Both Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, in particular, were strongly influenced by the Delsartian emphasis on the "natural body" and the relationship between emotion and bodily gesture (Leigh Foster 156-158).

Leigh Foster explains that the elaborate productions celebrated distinct movement vocabularies for male and female dancers; for example, “dainty and complex footwork, the *developes* of the leg and extended balances” were developed for women and “high leaps, jumps [...] and multiple pirouettes” (4) were established for men. At the same time the unique and iconic costume for the ballerina was developed – the close fitting bodice with a short stiff skirt of gauze, which came to be known as the *tutu*⁴⁰.

The Romantic ballet promoted new codes for partnering, which, as Leigh Foster observes, “always [involved] the male dancer supporting, guiding, and manipul[at]ing the female dancer as she balanced delicately and suspensefully in fully extended shapes” (4). Modern dance, by contrast, initiated significant changes to the dominant dance conventions of costuming, movement vocabulary, and partnering. Unlike the ballerinas of the Romantic ballet, who were, according to Leigh Foster, always defined in relation to the male dancer, the modern dancers were often onstage alone. It was, in part, the presentation of female autonomy in the spectacle of a woman dancing solo in many of the modern dance performances that provoked contempt from conservative members of society. Canon Newbolt of St. Paul’s, for example, preached, with reference to Maud Allan’s representation of Salome in 1908, that “the current evil is the indecent dance, suggestive of evil and destructive of modesty”⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Carol Lee, in her book *Ballet in Western Culture: A History of Its Origins and Evolution*, notes that as the century progressed and ballet technique became more complex and refined, the ballerina’s skirt became shorter to allow the full leg to be seen. Lee writes that it is generally believed that the word “tutu” became assigned to the shortened costume as a corruption of the infantile reduplication of the French word *cucu* (coming from *cul*, meaning bottom or backside) (2002: 14, 154).

⁴¹ Newbolt quoted in Hoare (1997: 84).



Plate 10 Raymond Duncan. *Isadora Duncan at the Theatre of Dionysus, Athens*. 1903.
Photograph. Blair Collection.

The complexity of societal ambivalence about women alone on the stage is made apparent in Duncan's perplexing statement: "When I have danced, I have tried always to be the Chorus [...] I have never once danced a solo" (Duncan *My Life* 96). Again, Duncan conjures the tropes of neo-classicism rather than those of Orientalism. Duncan's insistence that her solitary dancing body might be read as a chorus reveals an attempt to negotiate the contradictions of pioneering changes for women's place in the social order while maintaining her sense of integrity under the eye of a critical and masculinist society. Despite the implausibility of Duncan's claim to be dancing "the chorus", it seems her discourse on the femininity and purity of the female form in dance allowed her a level of respectability that some of the other dancers did not achieve during their lifetimes. As a result, Duncan is arguably the most celebrated of the modern dancers and is often credited with the moniker "mother of modern dance" (See Plate 10).

The ballerina of the Romantic ballet embodied the ideal yet unattainable woman: she was evasive, mystical, and yet capable of great feats of strength and skill, all the while with the appearance of dependence, frailty, weightlessness, and sensuality. New techniques of increasingly strenuous pointe work were introduced for the female dancer (Leigh Foster 4), enabling her to appear ethereal, enigmatic, and unearthly, seeming to defy the laws of gravity by floating, flying, and hovering. The freedom of the New Woman dancer, by contrast, is symbolised again and again by the image of unfettered feet planted firmly on the ground (See Plate 11).



Plate 11 "Ruth St. Denis in Costume" c. 1910

Alfred Günther's 1921 description of the dancing of Mary Wigman emphasises the groundedness of her modern dance:

She dances with the body, with the arms, with the hands, with her very presence and with her existence. [...] Her dark hair flows, her red mouth is open, her eyes are burning, her face is white, her legs are of unimaginable power, When she stands she is rooted.

(Günther cited in Odom 85)⁴².

It was the earthbound nature of the modern dance and the stationary footwork that strongly aligned it with the dances of the Middle East. C. F. Volney, in his descriptions of dancing while travelling through Egypt in 1787 wrote:

It must be realised that in the Orient, dance is not [...] a combination of pleasing attitudes and movements, as in our country, but a lewd representation of the most audacious love [...] It is enough to say that the dancer, arms outstretched, with a passionate air [...] *stands in one place* and performs movements of the body that even passion takes care to hide in the shadow of the night.

(Volney cited in Mabro, emphasis mine 120-121).

As late as the influential Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (popularly known as the Hays Code) one finds the active attempts to prohibit the representation of traditional Middle Eastern dance. The following specification appeared in the Code:

Dancing in general is recognized as an art and as a beautiful form of expressing human emotions. But dances which suggest or represent sexual actions, whether performed solo or with two or more; dances intended to excite the emotional reaction of an audience; dances with *movement of the breasts, excessive body movements while the feet are stationary*, violate decency and are wrong.

(emphasis mine, quoted in Stone 257).

⁴² Günther, "Der Tanz der Mary Wigman", *Neue Schaubühne*, Vol 4, No. 3, 1921.

The reference to “movement of the breasts” and movements of the body “while the feet are stationary” clearly indicts belly dance⁴³.

Toward the latter part of the nineteenth century the primacy of the Romantic ballet as the epitome of high art dance was beginning to wane. At the same time the late nineteenth century saw an explosion of ‘barefoot dancers’. In a direct rejection of the balletic ideal of pointe shoe, Isadora Duncan’s bare feet became her trademark. Duncan recalls her first ballet lesson where she refused to go *en pointe*:

When the teacher told me to stand on my toes I asked him why, and when he replied 'Because it is beautiful,' I said that it was ugly and against nature, and after the third lesson I left his class, never to return. The stiff and commonplace gymnastics which he called dancing only disturbed my dream. I dreamed of a different dance.

(Duncan 1927: 22).

Duncan, along with other modern dancers such as Colette, Loïe Fuller, Maud Allan, Ida Rubinstein, Ruth St Denis, and many more, revolutionised the ways in which the female body was defined through dance. These women, unpartnered and refusing to realise any choreographic vision other than their own, “detonated the classical stage and its sexual politics” (Leigh Foster 15). Uncorseted and fleshy by comparison to the classical ballerina, these solo dancers danced bare-foot, flat foot, and brought the focus away from the legs

⁴³ One of the general principles of the Code insisted that “No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence, the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrong doing, evil or sin” (<http://www.artsreformation.com/a001/hays-code.html>). For more on the censorship and regulation enforced by the Hays Code see Gregory D. Black (1994).

and onto the mid-section, hips, and upper body. Strongly contrasting with the tenets and principles of the Romantic ballet, these modern dancers negotiated the often-uncertain terrain of the socio-cultural expectations placed on women's bodies at the turn of the century. In doing so, they not only transformed conventional notions of what constituted high art dance, but they also aligned themselves with the gender politics of the 'New Woman'. The dance movements and the often scanty Oriental-esque costumes were designed to produce a display of the body that stressed notions of freedom – both corporeally and socially. In a speech delivered in Berlin, and later published as a pamphlet called "The Dance of the Future" (1903) Isadora Duncan described a mode of dance that is implicitly linked to women's emancipation:

The dancer of the future [...] will dance not in the form of a nymph, nor fairy, nor coquette, but in the form of a woman in her greatest and purest expression [...] From all the parts of her body shall shine radiant intelligence, bringing to the world the message of the thought and aspirations of thousands of women. She shall dance the freedom of women.

(Duncan, "The Dance of the Future" reprinted in Cohen¹²⁹).

Duncan conceived of a dance style that not only physically grounded the dancer, but was an art form that she insisted was explicitly about the dancer's self-expression and identity. Duncan is careful to link women's dance to "intelligence" in order to counter the almost universal linkage of women with body rather than mind. In this way Duncan introduced unprecedented ideas about spiritual, physical, and intellectual freedom into the vocabulary of dance aesthetics.

As I have outlined, the culture of dance in the late nineteenth century was inextricably interwoven with anxieties about atavism, women's sexuality, and concerns with maintaining imperial domination. It was, I argue, the moving female body in dance, gendered notions of Western women's propriety, notions of appropriate public display of the female body, attitudes towards exercise and corseting, combined with Orientalist themes, that became the focus of anxiety surrounding belly dance as the women's movement gained political force in the late nineteenth century.

Oriental Dance and Feminist Dress Reform

Before Middle Eastern dance was seen in the West, audiences were already unaccustomed to, and already intolerant of, the sight of a flexible and unrestrained female torso. Uncorseted, the spectacle of a woman's belly-dancing body posed a threat to the acceptable cultural norms of appropriate femininity. Socially accepted notions of dress for women required that the Western female body was constrained and restricted by girdles, corsets, and long skirts that hid all visible movement of the hips, buttocks and legs.

A number of scholars working on nineteenth-century women's dress such as Valerie Steele (2001), Jill Fields (1999), and David Kunzle (1982) have demonstrated the ways in which corsetry functioned both symbolically and literally to restrict the mobility of women in both the private and public spheres. From the mid-nineteenth century the meaning and acceptability of corset-wearing came into question and was subsequently the subject of heated debate. Fields explains that while some women did abandon corsetry by way of feminist agitation for dress reform, they "remained a daring minority of mostly

young and slim women” (360). Although more flexible and lightweight stretch girdles became available from the turn of the century, the widespread use of rigid corsets continued well into the 1930s. The ongoing use of this article of clothing by women reveals the intensity with which written and unwritten dress codes were enforced, with the corset functioning as a central instrument for the regulation of women’s bodies.

While the issues governing the reasons for corseting in the nineteenth century were predominantly linked to popular notions of femininity and propriety, and to anxieties concerning the female body, the twentieth-century impetus for wearing corsets also became strongly linked with discourses about racial purity. The alarming trend for dancing bare-foot and without corsets, in the fashion of the “Orientals”, was met with firm contempt by social commentators in England and the United States. In his 1921 pro-corset commentary, American-Dutch surgeon Dr. Jan Schoemaker articulated the extent to which racial anxiety was linked with the necessity of the corset:

Firmly muscled women are vital, charming, full of that potential race force which must be coined into American supremacy among men tomorrow. But we are not trying to breed Amazons, nor are we trying to raise a race of Oriental dancers. Your corsetless girl has naturally to fall into one class or the other.

(Schoemaker quoted in Fields 367).

Schoemaker’s equation of corsetlessness with a dangerous transformation into either an ‘Amazon’ or ‘Oriental dancer’ reveals a deep-seated anxiety about the continuance of a strong ‘pure’ race. His comments are a particularly telling expression of not only nineteenth-century cultural fears concerning restraint of

the female midsection, but also the particular threat that was posed by either an athletic or a dancing woman. A woman in public without a corset presented a set of social transgressions: she was physically mobile and healthy, her body was self-supporting, and she established for herself a certain self-sufficiency in her refusal of social pressures to corset her body. A dancing woman, however, particularly one imitating the allegedly wanton Oriental dancer, not only embodied these transgressions but, additionally, also presented the very unstable and threatening element of sexuality communicated in the bodily language of dance movement: a troubling movement, I would argue, that is inextricably bound up in fears of a flexible, unbound waist, as well as women's sexuality and notions of racial impurity.

The modern dancers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries played a major part in contributing to the complex social and political changes which set in motion a redefinition of gender roles and a consolidation of ideas about the public performance of dance by women as a legitimate art form. Despite the modern dancers' frequent compliance with essentialist politics through their emphasis on the "natural" body, the wide dissemination of ideas about women's physical, emotional, and personal freedom through dance movement had important repercussions not only for the first wave feminist movement of the turn of the century but also, I will go on to argue, for the second wave of feminism.

These performers produced themselves as visual spectacles by "acting out" in the words of Mary Russo, the "dilemmas of femininity" (Russo 71). In performing the Orientalised identity of Salome – exotic, independent, aggressive, sexual, and dangerous – the modern dancers 'acted out' an illicit

femininity that conflicted with Victorian conceptions of appropriate womanhood. Although these 'dilemmas', of course, change with the politics and imperatives of feminist discourses, contemporary belly dance continues to engage with the issues and tensions of female spectacle and the representation of cultural difference raised by the modern dancers of the early twentieth century. As we shall see in the following chapter, what had begun in the late nineteenth-century as an important yet problematic alliance between feminism and Orientalism has continued, throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first, to have powerful repercussions for feminist understandings of how discourses of gender, race, and sexuality change over time and are inscribed onto the belly-dancing body.

The Great American Belly Dance: Ecofeminism, Fitness, and the “How-to” Phenomenon

In the decades between 1920 and 1970 representations of belly dance were widely circulated in films produced predominantly in Hollywood and Egypt (Studlar 1997, Stone 1998). The Hollywood film industry in particular capitalised on the erotic Orientalised fantasy that the scantily clad belly dancer provided for the voyeuristic gaze of the West. Films such as *Cleopatra* (1934), *Arabian Nights* (1942), and *Solomon and Sheba* (1959) almost always included representations of belly dance (Shohat & Stam 158). As Stone has argued, the makers of these films frequently approached non-Western dance with indifference to cultural traditions by haphazardly mixing the dance movement vocabularies of different regions (254). Equally as often, the dance numbers were performed by actresses who possessed little or no skill in Middle Eastern dance (Stone 1998: 254)¹.

By the middle of the twentieth century the Hollywood film industry had forged the widely accepted Western view of belly dance as an exotic striptease aimed solely at seducing men. However, despite the fetishistic and demeaning representations of belly dance that were pervasive throughout the first half of the

¹ Many of the films made in Egypt are an exception to this: some of the greatest known film stars of the century were Egyptians who were accomplished dancers. A few examples include Samia Gamal in *Come to Greet Me* (1951) and *Valley of the Kings* (1954); and Tahia Carioca, one of Egypt's best loved performers, made more than 120 films since 1935. For further discussion, see Stone (1998), Zuhur (1998), and Franken (1998).

twentieth century², the 1970s witnessed a massive increase in the popularity of the dance form, particularly in the United States but also in the major cities of Europe and Australia³. Women flocked to take up lessons, and a steady flow of belly dance-related cultural products appeared, such as instructional belly dance manuals, popular fiction in which the dance featured thematically, and television series featuring belly dancers⁴. By 1979 the American Broadcasting Company television news program *20/20* reported that more than one million women in the United States alone were taking belly dancing classes⁵.

The increased social freedoms and mobility of women following World War II, as well as the increasing visibility of belly dancers in restaurants opened by post-war Middle Eastern immigrants in the late 1960s and early 1970s, meant that belly dance was no longer a remote symbol of the distant Orient, but a readily available form of entertainment and an accessible dance practice (Sellers-Young 143).

This chapter isolates the 1970s as a productive and significant period in the development of belly dance in the West. Accordingly, although the influence of the

² For a discussion of stereotypical representations of the Middle East in Hollywood film, including belly dance, see Stone (1998).

³ In the 1970s belly dance also made its entrance into Europe, especially Germany, with prominent dancer Bert Balladine, and in Australia with Rozeta Ahalyea, and later Amara Eid and Terezka; see Despina (2000: 3-9). More recently, belly dance has become popular in Finland: see, for instance, Laukkanen (2003).

⁴ Some examples of television shows that featured belly dancing were *The Bionic Woman* (1978), *Hall of Fame – Gideon* (1971), and *Columbo* (1977), to name a few. Belly dancers also appeared regularly on high profile television shows such as Ed Sullivan, Johnny Carson, and David Frost (see Varga Dinicu, 2001).

⁵ See Sellers-Young (1992: 143).

Hollywood film industry was significant in the cultural history of belly dance in the West – especially given the considerable success with which cinematic representations disseminated ideologically problematic stereotypes – the place of belly dance in film is outside the scope of this thesis for two main reasons. Firstly, the role of Middle Eastern dance in film has been exhaustively discussed by scholars working in film studies⁶. Secondly, and most importantly as outlined in my introduction, this thesis tracks the major feminist treatments of belly dance and contends that following the advancements made by the female modern dancers of the early twentieth century, the second-wave feminism of the 1970s was not only the significant and logical development of the dance's genealogy as a feminist practice, but was also vital to the development of contemporary popular discourse on the dance. The revival of belly dance in the 1970s marked the first time since the modern dancers had pioneered the Orientalist dance movement at the turn of the century that Middle Eastern dance was so intimately connected with women's liberation in the West. As this chapter will show, it was no coincidence that this renewed interest in belly dance converged once more with a major rise in feminist activism.

Belly dance became a highly marketable commodity during the 1970s. Prominent dancers in the United States were prolific producers of popular instructional dance manuals and books that helped both popularise and codify the

⁶ See for example, Shohat & Stam (1994), Studlar (1997), Stone (1991, 1998), and McLean (1997) for discussion and analysis concerning Western depictions of Middle Eastern dance. See Nieuwkerk (1995) and Franken (1998) for discussion on the representation of dance in Egyptian films.

dance form. The key publications of this kind include *The Serena Technique of Belly Dancing: The Fun Way to a Trim Shape* (1972) by Serena and Alan Wilson, *The Compleat Belly Dancer* (1973) by Julie Mishkin and Marta Schill, *The Belly Dancer in You* (1976) by Özel Turkbaz, *The New Art of Belly Dancing* (1974) by Adela Vergara, Roman Balladine, and Sula, and *A Belly Dancer's Slim-Down and Shape-Up Secrets* (1979) by Lebwa⁷. This group of books – which I will collectively call the ‘how-to’ books – was influential in the development of a belly dance subculture in the United States and also throughout Europe, Australasia, South America, and Asia⁸. Also included in my analysis of these texts is an exploration of Daniela Gioseffi's novel *The Great American Belly Dance* (1977). Although Gioseffi's novel is the only work of fiction amongst the books for consideration in this chapter, it is an important text for consideration because it closely reflects the cultural politics of the 1970s belly dance movement.

An analysis of the how-to books together with Gioseffi's novel *The Great American Belly Dance* (hereafter abbreviated as *TGABD*) further develops this thesis's ongoing concern with feminist readings of mainstream representations of belly dance. I argue that these texts reveal an attempt to define the female body in belly dance as something other than a fetishised object, always-already appropriated for male pleasure. However, while this chapter makes explicit the

⁷ Throughout this chapter and elsewhere I refer to several of the authors of the instruction manuals by their first names only (Özel, Lebwa, Serena, and Sula). I do so in accordance with the convention that belly dance performers/authors are frequently identified by a single stage name or by their first name, as well as in keeping with how the author's name appears in the book.

⁸ See Shay and Sellers-Young (2003: 17).

possibilities for resistance in 1970s feminist discourses on belly dance, it also highlights the limitations of these discourses. In *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (1985), Annette Kuhn offers a critical manifesto for feminist scholars to think about gender and representation by arguing that “in order to challenge dominant representations, it is necessary first of all to understand how they work, and thus where to seek points of possible productive transformation” (Kuhn *et al* 10). The irony at work in the representations of belly dance during the 1970s is that while the producers of these texts clearly aimed to generate a construction of belly dance as a subversive practice within the newly mainstream feminist discourses of the period, they also needed to engage with the dominant ideologies of consumer culture. It was essential, in other words, that belly dance be both domesticated and transgressive in order to garner an audience.

The how-to books, aimed at the dance’s new devotees, attempted to challenge the dominant stereotypes about belly dance by reintroducing it as a respectable dance form as well as a healthy and liberating form of exercise that had, it was asserted, long been subject to misinterpretation through ignorance and conservatism. In this way the mass-market belly dance publications of the 1970s had several pedagogical functions: to teach the dance with all its health and fitness benefits, to revise its degraded history, to challenge dominant perceptions and stereotypes about belly dance, and, for the first time, to formulate a popular Western discourse on belly dance that established not only the conventions of the dance as a modern dance form, but also suggested what it might mean for women to be part of a belly dance community. These books were also intimately

connected with two other significant cultural phenomena of the 1970s in the West: the burgeoning fitness industry (as the subtitles of the how-to books suggest), and the emergence of what has come to be known as ‘goddess feminism’ or ‘goddess religion’⁹. These two seemingly unrelated areas of 1970s cultural activity did indeed converge in the textual discourse on belly dance during this period.

The belly dance movement of the 1970s was not without its inconsistencies, contradictions, and ideological complications. The new visibility of belly dance as a seemingly ‘natural’ expression of women’s femininity, and as a popular fitness practice, undoubtedly raised the status of the dance beyond its previous stereotypical representations. Yet attempts by authors to reinvigorate the practice of belly dance through discourses of feminism were not, I argue, always successful. Indeed, the how-to books and *TGABD* often end up reinscribing the very stereotypes they attempt to redress. Furthermore, they also incorporate, and are implicated in, other socio-cultural factors such as the assimilation of women’s bodies into commodity culture, and the construction of discourses of national identity, Orientalism, and ethnocentrism. In arguing this I examine the degree to which these texts achieve their feminist renegotiation of belly dance via an Orientalist discursive strategy. The points of productive transformation are complexly and precariously achieved through the construction of Eastern

⁹ See Merchant (1995). The strain of ecofeminist discourse that focuses on the goddess has been identified under a number of names, including, for example, ‘spiritual ecofeminism’, ‘goddess religion’, ‘goddess spirituality’, ‘Goddess Worship’, the notion of ‘honouring the Great Goddess’, and ‘mother goddess religion’. Also, Gloria Feman Orenstein coined the phrase “feminist-matristic” (1990: ix). See Sturgeon (1997: 36).

otherness as Western feminist liberation. Nevertheless, despite the instabilities, partialities, and contradictions of the 1970s feminist discourse on belly dance, this chapter argues that the significance of belly dance for feminists in the 1970s should not be underestimated or dismissed. Thus, it is my contention that the three broadly connecting cultural interests – feminism, fitness, and notions of the eternal feminine through the image of the goddess – converge, and compete, in the production and consumption of belly dancing products during the 1970s to facilitate a revolutionary, albeit ambiguous and contradictory, feminine empowerment.

Ecofeminism, Goddess Religion, and Daniela Gioseffi's

The Great American Belly Dance

The term “ecofeminism” describes a diverse social movement that emerged in the 1970s and which combined the agenda of the ecology movement (environmentalism) with those of feminism¹⁰. As several critics have pointed out, along with its philosophical and political aspects, ecofeminism contains a strong spiritual dimension often referred to as ‘goddess feminism’. The notion of goddess feminism was an important and integral aspect of ecofeminist thought in the 1970s. As Karen Warren notes, like feminism and ecofeminism generally, “there is no one version of ‘spiritual ecofeminism’” (31). Nevertheless, spiritual ecofeminists such as Starhawk, Charlene Spretnak, Mary Daly, Merlin Stone, and Carol Christ agree that matriarchal symbols and spiritualities, such as those relating to Gaia and

¹⁰ See Sandilands (1999), and Warren (2000).

Goddess, are essential to ecofeminist thought (Warren 31)¹¹. These authors, among others, explore the notion of goddess feminism¹² and the idea that women's oppression came about when modern industrial societies split from ancient matriarchal cultures¹³. The result of this split was understood as a division between "male culture and female nature" (Sandilands 11). Warren has noted that "all ecofeminists agree that there are important connections between the unjustified domination of women and nature" (21). While the woman/nature connection is generally accepted to be fundamental to ecofeminist theory, it is important to keep in mind that, like feminism, there is no one homogeneous or unified concept of ecofeminism. Rather, ecofeminism has multiple goals, contexts, orientations, and is often internally divergent. What they disagree on is "the nature of those [woman/nature] connections" and whether they are "potentially liberating" or constitute "grounds for reinforcing harmful stereotypes about women" (Warren 21).

¹¹ Starhawk (1979) and (1988), Charlene Spretnak (1978), Mary Daly (1973) and (1978), Merlin Stone (1976), and Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ (1979). For further discussion on spiritual ecofeminism see work by Gloria Feman Orenstein (1990).

¹² Melissa Raphael (1996) argues that "Goddess feminism is premised on the necessity of a collective moral confrontation with patriarchy and the planetary injustice and suffering it causes" (199). Central to this discourse is the deification of femaleness through the image of the Goddess: "The Goddess is characterized by her cyclicity and is the source and/or symbol of the sacred power of the cosmic, lunar and seasonal cycles of decay and regeneration characterized as 'female' and of which female reproductivity is a microcosm" (202).

¹³ See for instance Stone (1976) and Marija Gimbutas (1974; reprinted 1982). Orenstein favours the word "matristic" over "matriarchy" (1990: 4).

The basic premise of ecofeminism is that the domination of women and the degradation of nature are intrinsically linked¹⁴. Ecofeminists argue that underlying capitalism is a fundamental disdain for nature and, by extension, for women, due to their link with nature and the cycles of life (Sandilands 11). According to ecofeminists, the fundamental basis of social and environmental crises is the patriarchal rejection of women/nature in favour of material capitalist culture (*ibid* 12). As Rosemary Ruether wrote in her 1975 book, *New Woman/New Earth*:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this society.

(Ruether 204).

Many ecofeminists of the 1970s argued that the notion of “the Goddess” was central to women’s fight against patriarchal domination¹⁵. According to Warren, Goddess feminism or Goddess worship captured, for ecofeminists, the “sacredness of both nonhuman nature and the human body” (33). The discourses surrounding Goddess feminism were, according to Warren, important to ecofeminism because Goddess worship generated “no hierarchy, no centralized institutions, no monumental structures, no liturgy” (33). By contrast, in her book

¹⁴ For a thorough review of ecofeminist thought, see Sandilands (1999).

¹⁵ See, for example, Starhawk (1988), Spretnak (1978), and Christ and Plaskow (1979).

Green Paradise Lost, first published in 1979, ecofeminist theologian Elizabeth Dodson Gray argued that in the biblical accounts of creation is embedded a destructive hierarchy. Examining the roles that religious and sexual imagery play in the patriarchal heritage of the Judeo-Christian and Western intellectual tradition, Gray wrote:

In this biblical view of the nature of things woman comes after and also below man. Woman was created (according to this chronologically earliest account of the creation of the world in Gen. 2) out of man's body [...] Then come children [...] Then come animals [...] Further down are plants [...] Below them is the ground of nature itself – the hills and mountains, streams and valleys – which is the bottom of everything just as the heavens, the moon and the stars are close to God at the top of everything.

(Dodson Gray 3).

Gray argued that this hierarchical tradition encouraged a patriarchal dominance which effectively denigrated the earth as a source of life as well as erasing the feminine symbols of the Goddess and of nature from their original positions of power. Rather than disavowing religion altogether, however, spiritual ecofeminists such as Gray chose to look at religion “from the newly found perspective of a feminist consciousness” (5), and to encourage women to “realize [that the dominant myths of the Judeo-Christian and Western intellectual tradition] are patriarchal – i.e., they rationalize and justify a society that puts men ‘up’ and women ‘down’” (ibid 5). Val Plumwood concisely sums up the ecofeminist rationale: “If we are women, we have as a group an interest in escaping our ancient

domination" (ibid 7). Contrary to patriarchal traditions¹⁶, spiritually-oriented ecofeminists sought to celebrate women's reproductive capabilities and their supposed sacred association with nature as a source of strength, power, and virtue (Plumwood 9)¹⁷. However, as Plumwood writes, "the ecofeminist vision" that appears "so sane and so attractive, seems to raise many problems and questions" (7). One such question that continually arises in relation to this vision, she argues, is whether "ecofeminism [is] inevitably based in gynocentric essentialism?" (8). Elizabeth Grosz elaborates on this notion of "women's essence" which she argues "is assumed to be given and universal and is usually, though not necessarily, identified with women's biology and 'natural' characteristics" (47). While more current feminist work, such as Judith Butler's theories on performative identity in her book *Bodies that Matter* (1993), as well as poststructuralist and postmodern approaches to ideas of difference, have challenged reductivist conceptions of women's identity by claiming that female subjectivity is not only diverse but dependent on innumerable social and cultural factors, the supposition that there is a definable universal woman's essence was taken up vigorously by the belly dance cultures of the 1970s.

¹⁶ The idea of a generalised 'patriarchy' has been criticised as a mark of cultural universalism (Plumwood 11). However, I am using the term here because of the currency of its use in the 1970s, and in the texts I am discussing.

¹⁷ Plumwood argues that Victorian concepts of women's virtue, such as those relating to the 'angel in the house', are amenable to ecofeminism (1993: 9). Although reliant on different but related notions of virtue, the popular ecofeminist version attributes women with characteristics such as "empathy, nurturance, cooperativeness and connectedness to others and to nature" (9).

Many of the texts produced during this time subscribed to the ecofeminist construction of the woman/nature bond and espoused the notion that through belly dance women could ‘unearth’ their essential female nature. Gioseffi’s novel *TGABD*, written in the midst of the ecofeminist movement in 1977, provides an excellent example of the role of discourses of goddess spirituality in relation to representations of belly dance. Gioseffi has said of herself “I am a neo-pagan reviving the shamanist tradition” (*Eggs in the Lake*, 1979), and her novel is the narrative expression of the author’s own theology of goddess spirituality (See Plate 12). The close relationship between the narrative of goddess spirituality and the author’s own viewpoints (and her intention that they be perceived as inextricable) is evinced in the author information that appears on the novel’s inside back cover, and in the inclusion of a poetry section at the end of the novel, where the epigraph to the poetry reads:

Two Psalms by the Author
Who is a True Ritual
Celebrant
of
the Great Goddess Earth:
Read them as you roll your belly.

The inside cover of the book states that Gioseffi is “one of America’s leading belly dancers” and that she has “travelled through the country and in Europe performing her ritual ‘Birth Dance of Earth’”. It is also worthy of note that the two poems by the author, “The Earth is Feminine in Most Languages: A Psalm” and “Belly Dancer”,

were previously published in the prominent feminist publication *Ms. Magazine*¹⁸. *Ms. Magazine*'s strong stance on the 1970s debates about women's rights affiliates Gioseffi with the progressive politics of the second-wave feminist movement.

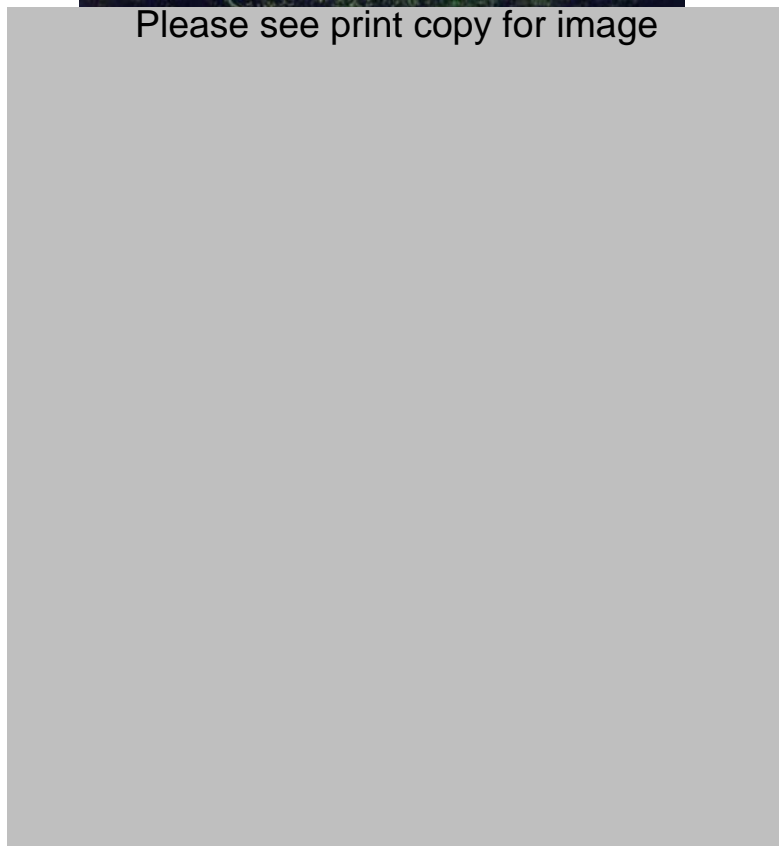


Plate 12 Daniela Gioseffi. *Earth Dancing: Mother Nature's Oldest Rite*. Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1980.

TGABD opens with the novel's thirty-three year old protagonist, Dorissa Femfunelli, contemplating suicide as she reflects on the finalisation of her divorce just hours earlier. Along with the loss of her marriage, Dorissa has lost her sense of fulfilment and self-worth. Her depression is, however, alleviated when she notices an advertisement for belly dancing classes. After taking up the class, Dorissa

¹⁸ "The Earth is Feminine in Most Languages: A Psalm" (*Ms.* July, 1977) and "Belly Dancer" (*Ms.* January 1976).

becomes quickly absorbed in the dance, to the point that she grows completely disconnected from the material and social world around her, and instead begins to experience her own body in a new way. Her self-discovery is figured as a transformation or renewal:

She didn't see anyone [...] she shut out the world like a psychotic and danced until her body was the only reality she knew [...] she didn't even call to say she was quitting her job. She just danced as though dance were a death that would bring her to life again (18).

Although for Dorissa belly dancing starts as a distraction from her divorce, it quickly develops into what the author describes as a crusade for the "Earth Mother" – "belly dancing for the return of Demeter, to balance the masculine urge with the feminine" (129). Dorissa's crusade begins when she causes a media frenzy by dancing daily in New York's Battery Park and is eventually arrested for dancing topless. Encouraged by her transvestite agent, Pat Campley, and her lesbian lover, Delila Dandi, Dorissa continues to belly dance and lecture on the "Birth Dance of Liberation" (176) at numerous feminist gatherings, including a benefit for The Alliance Opposed to Rape (174), Woodstock (151), and at the National Conference of the National Organisation for Women (NOW), which staged a protest against the Miss America Pageant (164).

In Gioseffi's novel the feminist struggle against the patriarchal social order is firmly located in the female body, and, as such, is grounded in the Goddess feminist ideologies of the 1970s ecofeminist movement. "Female strength", says the novel's protagonist, "is in the abdomen, meant for housing and giving birth, not

in the deadly, weapon wielding bicep! If I'm going to get anywhere at all, I'm going to continue to lead with my belly until they understand!" (139). Gioseffi's construction of the female body as the locus of women's "strength" reveals the essentialist discourse that is central to the novel's understanding of feminist empowerment. In particular, it is expressly the notion that women's reproductive capacities (where the female 'belly' is a potent symbol of fertility) sets women apart from (and above) the material and dominating concerns of men. Most importantly, it is belly dance that is naturalised as an articulation of these discursive constructions of women's reproduction, embodiment, and sense of femininity. This relationship between the belly, reproduction, and belly dance is reinforced in the instruction manuals. Serena, in her book *The Serena Technique of Belly Dance*, writes that belly dance "was once performed in pagan fertility rites and was considered useful in preparing for natural childbirth" (23). Likewise, Mishkin and Schill, in their book *The Compleat Belly Dancer*, argue that the "belly is the center of birth and sexual movement" (17). Alluding to 1960s popular media icon Marshall McLuhan, Mishkin and Schill proclaim: "The Belly as Media. The Belly as Message" (17).

This separation between man/culture and woman/nature is grounded in the notion of biological determinism. At the heart of such ideas is the now problematised assumption that discursive categories such as "woman", "man", and "nature" are stable and logical. Sandilands writes, however, that "'women' and 'nature' are social constructs, discursive categories produced in and through social practices in particular contexts, yet their ecofeminist representation as coherent,

stable and inherently meaningful reinforces their definition power” (72). Gioseffi’s novel naturalises belly dance as “a woman’s dance”:

an ancient pagan rite in worship of Earth Herself, the Great Goddess of psychic feeling in the flesh! [...] a magic birth dance of *wicca*! In its devolution to a sexist spectacle in the cafes of modern cities, it represents a cultural parallel for the devolution of the female from free and active, lusty being to sex object! (185).

Elsewhere Gioseffi describes the “The Birth Dance of Earth” where “originally”

the primitive dancer probably entered naked beneath her veil. Then, after removing it and dancing up a frenzy, she went in to the ‘birth mime’ position, kneeling in a backbend and working her stomach in birth contractions, the magic hocus-pocus that caused birth (89-90).

Gioseffi attempts to meld feminist politics with the apparently universal experience of women’s reproductive labour through the metaphor of belly dance as “an ancient pagan rite in worship of Earth Herself” (185) – a strategy which, I argue, is ultimately ineffective. I am not suggesting here that feminist spirituality cannot produce positive and constructive outcomes for both feminism and ecology-based political interventions.¹⁹ Rather, I am questioning whether Gioseffi’s novel operates within such a complex awareness of the possibilities of empowerment through

¹⁹ Ecofeminists Ynestra King (1981) and Chaia Heller (1993), while not themselves adherents to spiritual feminism, have nevertheless accepted the effectiveness of the movement’s philosophies concerning non-violence, especially in relation to spiritual feminism’s ideological coalition with the US antimilitarist movement.

goddess feminism, or whether it constitutes an apolitical mysticism verging on cultural universalism, and a problematic and reductive formulation of essentialist identity politics. Gioseffi's notion of belly dance is based on a biological determinism that assumes that all women have an inbuilt desire to commune with the Earth Mother through primal dance. For example, during Dorissa's speech at NOW's Atlantic City Conference, she calls to her audience to "Dance the trance of the primitive!" whereat all the women unconsciously begin to dance: "Earth Mothers and Daughters Unite!' Began the chant, shouted in unison with hundreds of thrusting hips and rolling bellies" (189). The women in the audience are compelled to perform the movements of belly dance without instruction or training simply because such movement is presupposed to be instinctive.

This charge of essentialism might also be directed at the how-to books in that they express ideas about supposedly feminine modes of thought, feeling, and emotion. The consistent emphasis on the expression of female "sensuality" in all of the how-to books, for instance, is an example of this essentialism. However, one characteristic that sets the how-to books apart from Gioseffi's model of essentialist gender discourse is that they present belly dance less as an *a priori* feminine mode that taps into a sense of universal female identity, and more as an art form that must be learnt, and practised. For example, Serena tells her readers that "it takes time to develop the power, stamina, and skill required to do the steps properly" (40). Likewise, Dahlena and Meilach argue that belly dancing "must be approached in the same way as every other art form [and] can be accomplished on many different levels" (5). Belly dance, they write, "is the result of a discipline that demands a perfect concentration and coordination between mind and body" (5).

While there is no doubt that the authors of the how-to books unanimously invest these books with essentialist constructions of gender, they are nevertheless simultaneously both resistant to, and complicit with, those constructions. On the one hand, the very premise of the instruction manual – to teach – negates the basis of essentialist understandings of the belly dance as a natural, unlearned, and innate feminine dance form. On the other hand, however, there is also the implication that women, under Western capitalism, have become estranged from their femininity, and that belly dance provides the vehicle through which these might be reacquainted with their femininity, bodies, and sexuality. Özel, for example, writes that her readers “can be trained in the ancient Middle Eastern art of belly-dancing and at the same time, get in contact with [their] femininity” (11).

The how-to books and *TGABD* conceptualise belly dance in different but interconnected ways. Though variously enacted, all of the texts have in common an instructional or didactic drive. The how-to books, for example, attempt literally to teach the reader the movement vocabulary of belly dance through posed photographs and step-by-step descriptions of the dance. Apart from the practical instruction of belly dance, they also attempt to educate the reader about the dance by giving historical information and cultural background, and by expounding its specific benefits as a good form of exercise, self-expression, and corporeal liberation. Gioseffi’s novel, while also attempting to be instructive about the very same things, is far less successful at either producing belly dance as a feminist practice, or attempting to restore the dance from the negative connotations it had garnered throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – which, ironically, are two aspects central to the novel’s purpose.

Racial Essentialism and Americanised Orientalism

The principal point at which Gioseffi's novel collapses in its aim to present an empowered representation of belly dance is, as I have discussed, in its unmitigated reliance on essentialist models which conflate woman and nature, and woman and body. Gioseffi's representation of essentialist female identities is, moreover, further complicated by the author's construction of the female belly-dancing body through the dominant modes of Orientalist spectacle. For example, Dorissa meets her lover Delila at a "body-consciousness-expanding workshop" (82) that both women attend. The episode in the novel, in which a group of women engage in communal masturbation, is, on the one hand, akin to soft-porn conventions of the genre of romance novels; on the other, it makes reference to the sexual politics that were part of the second-wave feminist movement in general and to some aspects of goddess spirituality in particular. The two women decide to leave the workshop and instead go to Delila's apartment where Dorissa dances for her:

Delila lay half sprawled, a sultan, upon the pillows of her sofa watching intently as Dorissa, having undressed, floated into the enormous living room, with Delila's veil caressing her torso and arms. She danced toward Delila, peering over the edge of her veil, the firelight behind her silhouetting her body (91).

Gioseffi does not escape either dualistic gender stereotypes of male spectator/female spectacle (Delila as spectator is cast as a man) or oppressive ethnic stereotypes about belly dance (she utilises the Orientalist topos of the harem girl dancing for the sultan as an eroticising strategy). As feminists and literary critics

have argued, the narrative device of simply assigning stereotypically masculine gender characteristics to female characters, such as the role reversal invoked by Gioseffi, is neither a simple process, nor a sufficient means of sabotaging dominant patriarchal gender ideologies²⁰. Gioseffi's characters merely mimic a stereotypical representation of the gendered power dynamics of heterosexual scopophilia. In doing so, Gioseffi simply reinforces a strong demarcation along lines of sexual gendered identity that she is apparently trying to critique. Toward the end of the novel Dorissa becomes

devoid of any obsessive sexual desires [...] she felt she became part of the Great Androgyne, a more omnipotent spirit that could understand more because it was neither of one sexual stereotype nor another (165).

Yet the sentiment here is directly contradicted when Dorissa goes on to delineate those very stereotypes: "she could experience emotion as deep as a woman's birth canal and feel as cocksure as a male" (165). In other words, her attempt to escape these stereotypes merely works to reinforce both.

Aside from the unsettling representations of gender, *TGABD* and the how-to books also problematically deploy racial essentialism and cultural universalism. As Noël Sturgeon and others have argued, there is a set of discourses about racial difference operating within the ecofeminist movement of the late 1970s and 1980s (Sturgeon 113). Sturgeon clarifies the particular appeal that "indigenous cultures" hold for ecofeminists:

²⁰ See for instance Mieke Bal (1985: 83-4) and Anne Cranny-Francis (1992: 143).

The term 'indigenous' signals for many white U.S. ecofeminists the extent that these cultures are nonindustrialized and therefore, from this perspective, more ecological; secondarily, it symbolizes the extent to which these cultures may be more egalitarian in their gender relations (114).

The logic of such assumptions has been criticised by Sturgeon and others²¹. In *TGABD* the desire to reinstate the importance of the devalued feminine principle is seen specifically through the lens of white, middle class, North American culture. In particular, Gioseffi appropriates Native American culture to embody what Sturgeon has termed the seemingly "special relation" (119) between nature and women. As Sturgeon has suggested, Native American culture was an "influential referent for ecofeminism" in late 1970s (119). The ecofeminist idealisation of Native American culture is consistent with a Rousseauian belief in the ideal natures of men and women living in preindustrial societies. Gioseffi's brand of racial essentialism is, however, distinctive in that she also imbricates Orientalist ideologies within her conception of Native American culture. The result of this amalgam between romanticised Native American culture and Orientalism might be thought of as a kind of pan-romantic discourse of Native Americanised Orientalism. As part of Dorissa's crusade to celebrate the Earth Mother through belly dance, for example, she attends the Woodstock Rock festival where she is to belly dance before the crowd wearing only green body paint depicting leaves. At the event a Native American "medicine man" (150) named Bill Schenectady is there to speak about

²¹ See, for example, Huey-li Li (1993).

the degraded state of the Earth and of humanity. Schenectady exclaims “You don’t need an alien guru! We, the Indians, *native* to this land, have the truth of this land, your America! We are the roots here!” (150). He goes on to say “The Earth is wounded [...] go out and do the work of the day, dance a ritual, refresh your prayers to the Earth with every bite of food or thing you do. Just like my people, learn the old ways, again” (151). This kind of deployment of Native American cultures is highly problematic because it sets up a seemingly natural division between “Western” and “indigenous” that assumes an equally fallacious and potentially degrading connection between nature and non-Western people. Sturgeon argues that the appropriation of Native American culture, “their rituals, beliefs, and practices (but not as one would expect, their specific activist struggles), are frequently referenced so that their voices are silenced even while they are idealized” (Sturgeon 118).

In addition to Gioseffi’s complicity with racial essentialism, there is also the extent to which cultural imperialism functions in the construction of belly dance in the novel. Cultural imperialism in *TGABD* is most explicit in Gioseffi’s symbolic colonisation of belly dance. Although Gioseffi mentions that belly dance originated in the dances of the Middle East, the novel concentrates on rewriting the dance’s origins through a manipulation of Western discourses of goddess feminism. This is epitomised when Dorissa is standing in front of the Statue of Liberty and is struck by the notion that she is “The Great Goddess” (76) (See Plate 13). Dorissa imagines the “huge [...] woman putting down her heavy book and torch to lift her skirts and dance. She saw her colossal hips bumping, her breasts shimmying, her

giant belly rolling” (76). In this image the belly dance is not only coded as Western, but as specifically North American.

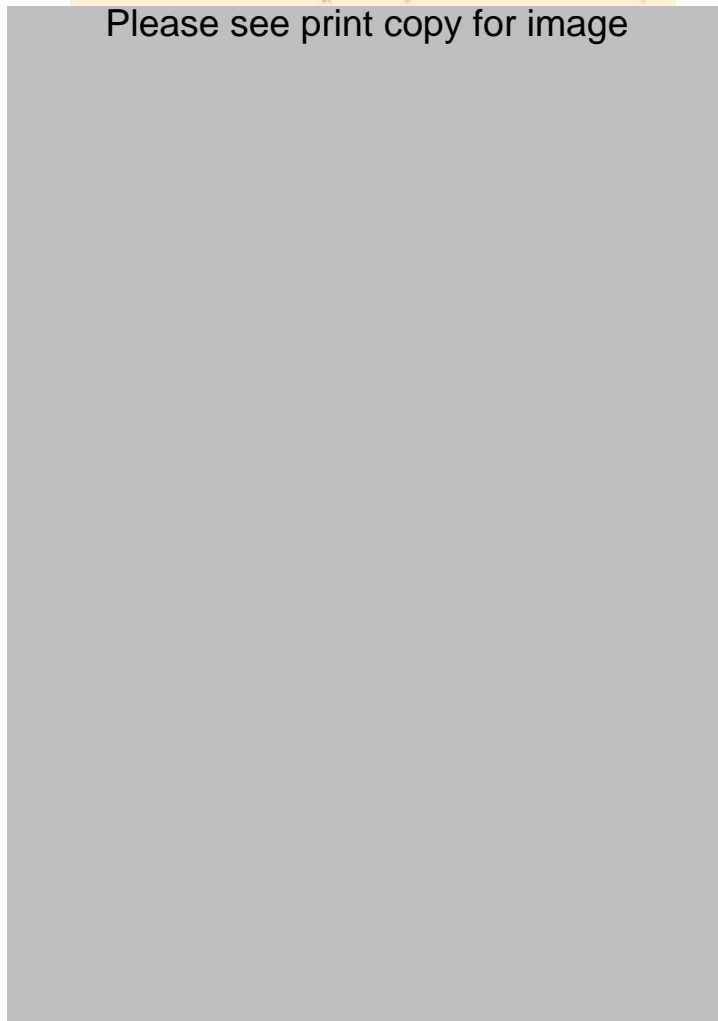


Plate 13 Daniela Gioseffi. *The Great American Belly Dance*. New York: Dell, 1977.

Gioseffi's separation of belly dance from its Middle Eastern cultural heritage and her redesignation of the dance as a Western, specifically American, tradition, are disconcerting. Regardless of the extent of the hybridisation (and Westernisation) of belly dance by the mid-twentieth century, Gioseffi's ultimate severing of the dance from any kind of historical, cultural, and ethnographical source presents the reader with the dominant paradigms of Orientalist discourse.

The problem, I suggest, does not lie with Gioseffi's failure to produce an "authentic" East, which, as Said has argued, is an unattainable exercise: "we need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate" (Said 1978: 71). Rather, the problem lies in the paradox that Gioseffi's supposedly accurate representation of belly dance does not figure the East at all. Gayatri Spivak's (1985) notion of the "epistemic violence" of imperialism might usefully be employed here, wherein *TGABD* enacts not only the severance of belly dance from its cultural heritage, but also the appropriation of the dance as an American tradition.

Gioseffi's blatant Westernisation (or de-Orientalisation) of belly dance in the novel presents a quandary from a critical perspective: is it more culturally insensitive to (mis)represent the East, or not to represent the East? These notions of cultural appropriation and Orientalist misrepresentation in relation to Western feminist practices of belly dance are difficult and complex. While recent works have begun to interrogate these issues²², up until the 1970s there was no critical discourse on the ramifications or meanings of Western women's adoption of Middle Eastern dancing. The publication of the many instructional manuals on belly dance in the 1970s marked the first time that popular texts attempted – however cursorily or inadequately – to raise the issues of appropriation, hybridity, "authenticity", and the politics of cultural ownership. Serena, for example, in *The Serena Technique*, writes that "women danced the belly dance thousands of years before I came

²² See, for example, Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (2003).

along, but what I have done with the steps is *new*" (4). Serena also adamantly criticises "artists [that] simply use the steps without giving credit where it's due" (18). Unlike *TGABD*, all of the authors of the how-to books acknowledge the dance's tradition or derivation, some with greater cultural sensitivity than others. While Mishkin and Schill acknowledge the diversity of the cultural origins of belly dance as it is known in North America, they nevertheless problematically suggest that "when Islam unified the Middle East in the seventh century, the culture became homogenous" (17). By contrast, Lebwa's book *A Belly Dancer's [...] Secrets* not only acknowledges the Middle East as the cultural foundation of belly dance but also dedicates a section on the "Regional Variations" (151). This kind of acknowledgement of the cultural traditions of belly dance, however basic it may be, reveals an awareness of the issues of cultural appropriation that is wholly absent from Gioseffi's novel.

Feminism, Fitness Discourse, and the 1970s 'How-to' Books

The system of 'feminist Orientalist' discourse is at the crux of this thesis's theorisations about the representations of belly dance. Joyce Zonana first used the term in her analysis of *Jane Eyre*, in which she argued that the use of Orientalist imagery by early British feminist writers functioned to displace "patriarchal oppression onto an 'Oriental', 'Mahometan' society" (593). In particular, the institution of the harem and the Islamic veil epitomised the construction of the oppressive and barbaric nature of the East. In chastising the Orient, Zonana argues, the "speaker or writer neutralizes the threat inherent in feminist demands

and makes them palatable to an audience that wishes to affirm its occidental superiority” (594). The implication here, as Charlotte Weber explains, is that “patriarchy was an ‘Eastern’ element to be purged from the West” (125). My reading of Western representations of belly dance presupposes feminism to have a far less antagonistic relationship to the Orient than Zonana’s formulation implies. 1970s liberal feminism was by no means free from ethnocentric assumptions about Western cultural superiority, but neither was it as hostile to the East or Islam as some critics might suppose (Weber 137). As Reina Lewis has suggested in relation to her work on women’s literary and artistic contributions to Orientalism in the late nineteenth century, “there is room within the discourse [of Orientalism] for a feminine, and perhaps less virulently xenophobic, version of Orientalism” (1996: 171). My concern is with how this “feminine” version of Orientalism came to be articulated as a specifically feminist one. I submit that there is a complicated tension between the two constituents of feminism and Orientalism in Western literary representations of belly dance in the 1970s. Specifically, I argue that ecofeminist discourses that link women and nature act as the axis at which Orientalism and feminism are harnessed into a construction of the liberated belly-dancing body. Orientalist discourse is seamlessly woven into the construction and marketing of belly dance as an expression of female power.

Although they appear some fifty years apart, a strong parallel is observable between the feminisms of the early twentieth-century dancers and the belly dance movement of the 1970s: namely, they both utilise, through dance, discourses of Eastern exotic femininity to explore ideas of social and sexual freedom supposedly

denied to Western women. In other words, the authors of the how-to books reinstate the links between Orientalism and discourses of female empowerment which, as I argued in Chapter Two, were initiated by the New Woman dancers at the turn of the century²³. Said has argued that “[t]he Orient was overvalued for its pantheism, its spirituality, its longevity, its primitivity, and so forth” (Said 150). Repeatedly, the how-to books refer to belly dance as “mysterious”, “exotic”, and “enriching”, and in so doing utilise the familiar tropes of romantic Orientalist discourse. The ideological construction of the East as a source of spiritual fulfilment was an integral aspect of the how-to books, and belly dancing functioned as the key way through which women could access such heightened spirituality. In their book *The Art of Belly Dancing*, Dahlena and Meilach write, for instance:

Middle Eastern dance is a marvellous physical and emotional experience. It frees you from your everyday, mundane routine. It may set your mind to dreaming of faraway places, of cultures that have much to offer. It gives you an opportunity to acquaint yourself with your body, to achieve a new sense of freedom (9).

Orientalism, in this sense, becomes a discursive strategy of feminism whereby learning belly dance promises women access to the exoticism and mystery of the East as well as the chance to achieve a sense of embodied liberation.

²³ For discussion of the relationship between Orientalist dance, the New Woman, and feminism, see Chapter Two of this thesis.

As Dahlena and Meilach's statements reveal, despite the possibilities that belly dance presents to second-wave feminism, these books perpetuate prevailing cultural ideologies that equate the East with the exotic, and thus are imbricated within larger patterns of neo-colonialist consumption of 'foreign cultures'. One way in which the consumption of the East is literalised in the how-to books is through the inclusion of recipes for Middle Eastern cuisine. These recipes function in part to authenticate Orientalist representations of cultural otherness. In particular, the consumption of Middle Eastern foods symbolically reinforces the reader/participant's access to the East and renders it a knowable entity. Ghassan Hage has argued that the "multicultural valorisation of ethnic food which stresses its enriching qualities in everyday discourse is often contrasted with the supposed poverty of the Anglo-Celtic culinary tradition" (120). Lebwa's book, for example, suggests that "the Middle Eastern kitchen is full of variety. I can think of at least 50 ways that the Turks cook chopped meat. Compare that with the American one-track mind, wherein chopped meat means 'hamburger'" (100). The construction of food in this way operates through a discourse of what Graham Huggan has called "depoliticised 'ethnic sampling'" (60). It is also relevant to observe that while most of the texts either include recipes, or discuss Middle Eastern foods, they tend to elide eating²⁴. In particular, women's roles in the how-to books are limited to preparing and serving food, as well as dancing, in the case of Özel's book, for "your Sultan" (179). The emphasis on the preparation of food rather than eating it

²⁴ The representation of women's eating practices in relation to popular discourses of belly dance and exercise is significant, and will be taken up more fully in Chapter Four.

acts to both domesticate and exoticise the belly-dancing woman. For example, Mishkin and Schill write:

You've kept your practice sessions all between you and the mirror. Now you want to surprise your man. Serve him an exotic meal: shish kebab, rice pilaf [...] followed by a baklava and Turkish coffee for desert [...] bid your audience of one to make himself comfortable [...] while you change into your costume [...] make your entrance (153).

The food merely adds to the Orientalist atmosphere of the scene and authenticates the harem fantasy of the dancing woman for a masculinist objectifying gaze.

After the long history of the dance's misogynistic denigration, the dancers of the 1970s (following the lead of the modern dancers) were actively reclaiming belly dance as a positive experience for women. Part of this recovery project meant that the spiritual and maternal components of the dance's construction were given emphasis over its nineteenth-century link with sexual display and Orientalist associations with improper bodily movement. In their book *The Compleat Belly Dancer*, Mishkin and Schill attempt to mitigate the sexualised associations of nineteenth-century Orientalist depictions of belly dance: "the movements of the sexual domain – conception and giving birth – were considered natural as any other. Pelvic movement and undulation was not a matter of sensation and pleasure, but of life and unity with nature" (19). They write that "belly dance was performed by helpful village women as another sister was giving birth to a child. The dance served as a rhythmic, soothing reminder to the woman in labor to use her abdominal muscles to aide [*sic*] the birth process" (18).

While none of the 1970s belly dance instructional texts deny the sexuality of the dance, they all prefer to identify “sensuality” as a more suitable description. Dahlena and Meilach pronounce, “Yes, the belly dance, or Middle Eastern or oriental dance – whatever you want to call it – has become virtuous and respectable” (9). Serena argues “the belly dance isn’t sexy – it is *sensual*” (24), and Dahlena and Meilach make the same distinction (despite the subtitle of their book – “The Sexy Exercise”) (5). Vergara firmly warns would-be performers of the dance “no winking ever” (76), a directive also reiterated by Özel (114). By emphasising the spirituality of the dance, the potentially unruly sexuality associated with belly dance could be alleviated. Playing down the sexuality in belly dance, and highlighting instead sensuality and its maternal link, works strategically to domesticate the female body and portray the dance as a legitimate, respectable, and appropriate dance form for women to learn and perform. There is a tension here between attempting to domesticate the body whilst simultaneously attempting to adopt a position of resistance. Recalling and developing earlier discussions on the grotesque body in Chapters One and Two, it is my contention that the apparent domestication of the female belly-dancing body in these texts is continually undermined by their recourse to discourses of the grotesque.

Fitness, the Grotesque, and Belly Dance as Cultural Field

As I discussed in my Introduction, Mary Russo argued that feminism has “stood increasingly for and with the normal” (vii) which has “led to a cultural and political disarticulation of feminism from the strange, the risky, the minoritarian, the

excessive, the outlawed, and the alien” (vii). I propose that the author/performers of the 1970s were indeed attempting to redefine the terms of feminine spectacle, but complexly within the dominant paradigms of what would constitute ‘normal’ female behaviour and movement. While images of the domesticated female body (sensual, nurturing, maternal, provider) are employed in many of the how-to books’ constructions of belly dance, the moving body they describe and advocate is, nevertheless, a body that seems undisciplined and disruptive to normative constructions of femininity. Mishkin and Schill suggest to their readers, for example, that belly dance will “set your body moving in an entirely new way – every part of you will move on its own, rotating or wiggling as though detached from the rest. The hands, legs, breast, and, of course, the belly will say things you never even heard before” (21). Not only does the grotesque belly-dancing body “transgress its own limits” (Bakhtin 320) through its ability to disarticulate, but also, significantly, the body parts will speak. Furthermore, Mishkin and Schill describe the belly dance movement called the “shimmy”, and advise their readers that they need to learn to “let it all hang out and flap around like a bowlful of jelly being gently jiggled” (83). The image of the female body as jelly is simultaneously both grotesque and domestic. Likewise, Özel assures the reader that there is “a belly dancer in you” (10) and that “this is the time to unleash her, to let her strut and wiggle” (10). Iris Marion Young, in her book *Throwing Like a Girl*, argues that women and men use and regard their bodies in space in markedly different ways. Women are inhibited, she argues, from making use of a “body’s spatial and lateral potentialities” (145). Furthermore, she argues, “[t]here is no inherent, mysterious connection between these sorts of typical comportments and being a female

person" (147). Rather, the "timidity, uncertainty, and hesitancy" (146) with which women often approach physical engagements is the direct result of the complex social and cultural forces enacted upon the "lived body" (149). The how-to manuals encourage women to use their bodies in a variety of different ways, extending themselves into the space around them. Moreover, the possibility of a powerfully liberating experience through the grotesque belly-dancing body might add another dimension to Young's thesis, for the belly-dancing manuals not only give women permission and encouragement to move their arms and legs into the space around them, but significantly, encourage them to project their pelvises, breasts, buttocks, and belly into space. The kind of language and descriptions used in the how-to books demonstrate the ways in which images of the transgressive grotesque body permeate the popular discourses on belly dance. Shoulders are "shimmied", hips are "thrust" and "rotated", pelvises are "tilted" and "twisted", and bellies are "rolled", "fluttered", and "popped". Mishkin and Schill write "when it is time to let the belly do her solo, everything else takes a back seat" (90).

The grotesque belly-dancing body presents the possibility for the valorisation and re-connection of feminism with the conception of the body as multiple, protruding, and changing. The grotesque body, according to Bakhtin, has deeply positive dimensions and is a body always in the process of "becoming" (317). The belly dance how-to books promote a grotesque body that is sexual, wiggling, and protuberant.

Paradoxically, however, the how-to books' emphasis on the grotesque body operated within the framework of the 'keep fit' instruction manual which, during the

1970s, conventionally promoted a body that was tight, contained, and firm. Thus, while attempting to present the possibilities of resistance and empowerment through belly dance, they were nevertheless bound up in the complex position of having to adopt the dominant discourses of the domesticated female body through exercise and weight loss. The grotesque ‘natural’ and wobbling body in belly dance presented a patent challenge to the intense disciplining praxis of weight-lifting, fitness, and aerobics which aimed to rid the body of fat that is considered excessive.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the “cultural field” in his book *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), the following section investigates the meanings of belly dance in the how-to books as a highly commercialised feminist practice in the context of the 1970s, and its complex relationship to changing ideas of fitness and female body image. In addition, some observations will be outlined about the changing trends of body image, exercise and fitness, and the role of women in these developments.

Bourdieu’s notion of “cultural fields” describes the complex network of sites, products, practices, producers, and consumers surrounding a designated cultural activity. Belly dance can be seen as one such cultural field. Central to the cultural production of a field is the institutionalisation of certain discourses, resources, bodies of knowledge, as well as hierarchies of authority, and values which function to legitimate the field. As instruments of the field’s capacity to educate consumers, the belly dance how-to books – products of the cultural field of belly dance – functioned to broadcast the field’s practices and values, as well as to present an

exchange of views, and to debate or confirm common assumptions about the field (Ferguson 600). The success with which the field's values and practices are transmitted is evidenced by the continued citation of the how-to books as benchmark texts in the cultural history of belly dance. This success, I would suggest, is in part due to the commodification and marketing of belly dance to a mainstream popular audience. Part of the belly dance field's project was to promote female empowerment via the endorsement of the dance as an alternative to the increasingly rigorous disciplining strictures of the mainstream fitness industry. In order to manufacture such a field for belly dance and simultaneously make it attractive both to mainstream hegemonic discourse and to women attempting to work against the grain of social expectations, the proponents of the field needed to work both inside and outside dominant structures of femininity, feminism, and fitness. In other words, in order to be transgressive they also had to be complicit.

Shifting Cultural Prescriptions of Beauty, Fitness, and Fashion

To contextualise the role of belly dance as a cultural field in the 1970s, it is necessary to outline the key changes in cultural attitudes to conceptions of fitness, beauty, and female embodiment. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Western cultural conceptions of female beauty have undergone a massive transition. As Susan Bordo and others have shown, one of the most pervasive social constructions of ideal beauty for women is centred on ideas of what constitutes appropriate or inappropriate body size and shape. Bordo notes "corpulence went

out of middle-class vogue at the end of the [nineteenth] century” and “excess body weight came to be seen as reflecting moral or personal inadequacy, or lack of will” (192). This was a trend that prevailed throughout the twentieth century. The dominant cultural conception of ideal beauty and femininity in the first decade of the twentieth century was epitomised by the iconic image of the Gibson girl. With her tightly corseted figure and soft mass of hair always arranged high on her head in buoyant curls, the Gibson girl was the symbol of consummate beauty, demonstrating all that was respectable about women of her time (Fangman *et al* 213). The iconic Gibson girl was not only imagined to be beautiful but was, according to Yellis, “maternal and wifely” (44). She was the “embodiment of stability” and the guardian of moral codes (See Plate 14).



Plate 14 The Gibson Girl made famous in a series of drawings by her namesake, Charles Dana Gibson. This image entitled *No time for Politics* (1910)

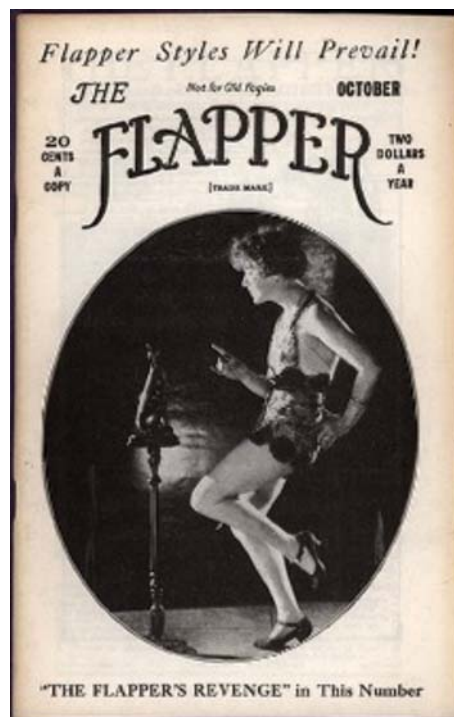


Plate 15 "Flapper styles will prevail" *Flapper magazine: Not for old fogies* October 1922

In stark contrast to the Gibson girl, the 1920s saw another icon of womanhood emerge in the form of the vigorous, youthful, and willowy flapper (See Plate 15). This symbolic image of the modern woman was controversial for her apparently skimpy dress, her "boyish" lean figure, bobbed hair, and hedonistic lifestyle which included drinking, smoking, and dancing (Yellis 44). According to Yellis, the archetypal flapper was the "utter repudiation of the Gibson girl" and the traditional conceptions of "morality and femininity" that she embodied (44).

Although the 1930s saw the abandonment of the androgynous image of the flapper in favour of a softer, fuller bust-line and slender waist, the Great Depression signalled the need for cheaper fabrics and simple, straight skirt that were easy to make at home. The 1940s and 50s saw the return to the diminutive waists and spreading skirts fashionable in mid-nineteenth century dress (Mendes *et al* 79;

128). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was Marilyn Monroe, with her full curves but small waist, who was often described as “femininity incarnate” (Bordo 141). At the same time, however, the iconic sophistication of the slender actress Audrey Hepburn presaged the ultra-slim look to come in the 1960s. The dominance of the hourglass shape made fashionable by Monroe gave way once more in the late 60s to an ultra-slender and androgynous ideal body shape embodied by fashion models such as Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton. With their emerging emphasis on youth culture and bodily self-management through weight-loss and diet, the post-1960s decades saw the ascendancy of the standard of female perfection as a slender, toned, and tightly managed body. During the 1970s this emphasis on diet and weight management was joined by the fitness and exercise movement that had been gaining momentum throughout the decade and that would culminate in the 1980s as a veritable boom in exercise and “physical culture”.

The extent to which women have participated in recreational sports and exercise has varied over time, but it was not until the first half of the nineteenth century that substantial changes in attitudes towards the place of women in society assisted in broadening the scope for women’s involvement in physical cultures (Costa *et al* 1994; Marks 1990). By the late nineteenth century the persistent lobbying by female activists and health reformers had helped set in motion the machinery of social change that would allow women of today to engage more fully in sports, exercise, and fitness practices previously denied them (Vertinsky 63-64). Historically, the exclusion of women from exercise and sporting activities has been profoundly shaped by sexual and gender assumptions that have pronounced women (and women’s bodies) unfit for vigorous physical movement. Indeed, as

Roberta Park has noted, the term “fitness” itself has ideological implications beyond simplistic notions of health or condition of the body, also incorporating, especially since the late nineteenth century, the construction of difference along the lines of gender, mental health, biology, class, and race (62). According to Park “Victorians tended to think of fitness in terms of biological adaptiveness”, and “Athletes”, she writes, “were often depicted as biologically superior males” (62).

In the twentieth century societal attitudes concerning the importance of health and fitness for both women and men changed dramatically. Physical strength, stamina, and muscularity became, as early as the 1920s and especially since the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a sign of empowerment for women (Bordo 1993, Theberge *et al* 1994)²⁵. The rapidly changing social, economic, and political roles of women in the late 1960s, and specifically their large-scale entrance into the labour market, meant that women constituted a new brand of consumers. These changes, along with women’s greater participation in consumer practices, were felt strongly in the fitness industry, especially with the development of aerobics in the late 1960s. Dr. Kenneth Cooper published his highly successful book *Aerobics* (1968), and Jackie Sorenson and Judi Sheppard Missett²⁶, inspired by Cooper’s aerobic system, are each credited with having invented aerobic dance separately around 1970 (Kagan

²⁵ Significant changes in sport and exercise for women were triggered by the legislature of “Title IX” in 1972, as part of the United States Civil Rights laws (Theberge *et al* 369).

²⁶ It is interesting to note that Sheppard Missett co-authored her popular book *Jazzercise* (1978) with Dona Z. Meilach, the co-author of *The Art of Belly Dancing* (1975).

et al 166)²⁷. While aerobics did not take off as a mass movement until the early 1980s, the place of women in the consumer market for fitness products was forged in the early 1970s.

Femininity and Belly Dance: the Artful Exercise

The strong, albeit ambivalent, relationship between exercise cultures and belly dance has been a recurring theme throughout this thesis. In Chapter One, for example, it was the seemingly grotesque display of muscular control and physical stamina by non-Western female dancers that elicited both anxiety and desire from nineteenth-century Western travellers. Chapter Two explored the struggle of turn-of-the-century women against their social and physical disempowerment under Western patriarchal traditions, a struggle which was played out on the theatre stage via the Orientalised dancing body. Here I wish to investigate the development of these cultural interactions between belly dance, exercise, and feminism during the late 1970s when belly dancing developed a contrapuntal relationship to the burgeoning aerobics movement. This correlation between belly dance and aerobics, with their similarly aligned emphases on the physical health benefits of bodily strength and agility on the one hand, and the aesthetic appeal of external appearances and socio-cultural expectations of feminine beauty on the other, highlights the conflicts and struggles at work in discourses of fitness, exercised bodies, and bodily display.

²⁷ Dr. Cooper followed his best seller with a series of successful publications including *The New Aerobics* (1970), *Aerobics for Women* (1972), and *The Aerobics Way* (1977).

One of the contradictions within the second-wave feminist movement was that although the 1970s saw important advances for women in regard to new opportunities for the pursuit of health and exercise, the rapidly increasing emphasis on fitness placed new pressures on women to lose weight and maintain a thin and slender body (Bordo 140). As political debates over women's rights about corporeal empowerment and other biomedical issues intensified, culturally constructed ideas about what constitutes a healthy, empowered, and fit female body became more complex. On the one hand, women's rights to engage in exercise, sports, and fitness became valorised through the rhetoric of choice, in which women enjoyed their newly found freedom to use or transform their own bodies in any way they wished. On the other hand, these ideologies of self-determination helped to naturalise women's complicity with disciplining their bodies in ways that conformed to normalised notions of femininity as thin and toned.

As Bordo, Orbach, and others have argued, it was no coincidence that the heightened interest in bodily transformation also saw instances of anorexia and bulimia begin to escalate dramatically in the 1970s and into the 1980s (Bordo, Orbach 1978, 1986). It was during the 1970s that the previously little-known 'wasting disease', anorexia nervosa, entered into popular medical discourse on the body (Bordo 140). The growing cultural emphasis on idealistic notions of femininity, appearance, and beauty did not go unnoticed by feminists in the 1970s. Some feminists argued that these preoccupations with appearance were at odds with the feminist ideas about women's oppression as objects of male desire. It is my intention here to locate the 1970s belly dance how-to books within this social

climate and to explore how belly dance figured as a feminist practice in the already heated and often-contradictory debates about women and women's bodies.

One of the central paradoxes of 1970s belly dance culture is that while it constructs belly dance as something completely different from other mainstream exercise practices, it nevertheless engages with the dominant discourses of contemporary exercise, fitness, and beauty culture. Many of the how-to books were entirely complicit with reinforcing the cultural values of slenderness. The subtitles of the prominent instructional texts are a telling indication of this complicity. For example, the subtitle of Özel's book *The Belly Dancer in You* claims that belly dancing is: "The joyous way to a youthful figure and a more vibrant personality". Dahlena's and Meilach's *The Art of Belly Dancing* boasts the by-line, "The sexy exercise: Thousands of women have already discovered it. Now an expert demonstrates the sensuous way to a more beautiful you". Similarly, *The Serena Technique of Belly Dancing* proclaims belly dancing "The fun way to a trim shape" (See Plate 16), while Mishkin and Schill's *The Compleat Belly Dancer* is subtitled "For everyone who wants to be healthy and slim and have fun getting there".

These subtitles appeared prominently on the front covers of each book and indicated to consumers that belly dance was a weight-loss activity that was both in collaboration with, yet separate from, the current trends in fitness. Nevertheless, these books also encourage a sense of self-acceptance. Serena's book states that through belly dance the "spirit is enlarged, fears of inadequacy [...] are overcome; inhibitions are dispelled [...] she is desirable not only to men, but to herself" (13). Özel's book claims: "there is a great and permanent need for women to express themselves – as women. Belly dancing is one non-exploitative way to connect with

that need” (15). Although the books encouraged their readers to slim down and keep fit, these texts also worked against ideas of pushing the body to extremes. Serena points out, for example, that many belly dancers are “fat” (27) and warns the reader: “your body type, and the distribution of fat, depend on many factors, not the least of which is heredity. Starvation diets, overwork or excessive exercise [...] in order to produce a dream body that you were never intended to have in the first place can be extremely dangerous” (27). Many of the how-to books discussed here simultaneously advocate the production of slim bodies but with the disclaimer that women’s biology determines the body’s appearance.

Similarly, Gioseffi’s novel *TGABD* also contradictorily endorses the idea of natural female corporeality yet characterises Dorissa’s transformation – “like an ugly duckling, transforming into a swan” (18) – as one dependant on body management. Dorissa’s transformation from a drab, unenlightened, and depressed school teacher into a desirable, inspired, and belly-dancing Priestess-of-the-Earth-Mother is, to a large extent, the result of losing weight. The novel’s discourses surrounding the ongoing theme of weight loss, beginning with Dorissa’s initial harsh self-scrutiny in front of the mirror at Aneera’s belly dance studio (13-14), are inconsistent and contradictory. For example, early in the novel Dorissa takes up the dance with fierce determination: “She coaxed and cajoled her muscles into responding. She went beyond endurance, pushing, stretching, and rolling every pain in her heart out through her sweating pores” (18). Dorissa’s belly dance teacher, Aneera, “feared that [Dorissa] would destroy every muscle in her body by exercising it to death” (15). Later, however, Gioseffi writes:

Dorissa had, more or less, allowed Nature to take Her course. She'd grown several pounds thinner since the day she'd observed herself in the mirror of [Aneera's] Studio [...] but she'd accepted the fact that she would forever be a woman like those found on canvases of Rubens or Titian, not like those found in *Vogue* (181).

Despite the attempt by Gioseffi in *TGABD*, and by the authors of the how-to books, to negotiate the oppositions between approaching the female body as a biological given, and regarding it as a locus of self-determination and choice, slenderness is, nevertheless, constructed as a critical component of women's social and cultural success.

The how-to books of the 1970s were the first of their kind – a genre of books describing the movements of belly dance, and attempting to educate and ameliorate the historically antifeminist constructions of belly dance that had prevailed in the West since the nineteenth century. Because of their multi-faceted objectives, these texts differed from the conventional 'keep fit' genre of exercise manuals that were beginning to appear in the 1970s. The chief difference was that belly dance was set apart from the everyday, the mundane; it was presented as an art form that also happened to be good exercise. All of the instructional belly dance books on the market during the 1970s presented belly dancing as a form of fitness for women that was in direct opposition to other forms of exercise. In particular, many of the books invoked the notion of "fun" in order to contrast belly dance against other forms of exercise that were believed to be monotonous and uninspiring. Dahlena claimed, for example, that her manual could teach the reader the "sexy exercise". She set belly dancing apart from 'calisthenics', a kind of

women's indoor gymnastics activity developed as early as the 1830s (Green 181), stating "the results promise [you're] doing a dance that some consider naughty but nice. What a departure from the counting out of boring calisthenics!" (10). Serena asserts that her book *The Serena Technique of Belly Dance* is not a physical fitness program at all, but that it is about learning "a performing art" (4). She claims that the "benefits are built into the steps themselves; the art came first, and the exercise value follows as part of it" (5). Serena warns the reader that "practice sessions should be *fun*; don't turn them into dull routines of calisthenics [...] It is the monotony of most exercise systems that causes people to abandon them" (22). Belly dance provides a space wherein the ultimate aim of the exercise is kinaesthetic pleasure, to celebrate the movement itself, while the personal fulfilment that the dance brings by altering the shape and size of the body is secondary. Dahlena and Meilach write "let your movements express you and the music – slow and brooding, or fast, happy, and with abandonment. Sway, roll, enjoy" (13). Serena advises "Be a little selfish. As you learn the steps and practice them, spend time getting to know yourself" (24). Integral to these books is an insistence on belly dance as a valuable means of self-expression, kinaesthetic pleasure, and artistic realisation through the accomplishment of the dance skills specific to belly dance.

Returning to Bourdieu's notion of the cultural field, the development of belly dance as a fitness field involved the institutionalisation of specific representational parameters and settings by which consumers could recognise the dance and its meanings. Belly dance was positioned within the Women's Liberation movement by emphasising the dance as both liberating and personally satisfying. In the 1975

book *The Art of Belly Dancing*, Dahlena and Dona Meilach tell their readers that belly dance “gives you an opportunity to acquaint yourself with your body, to achieve a new sense of freedom” (9).

In addition to affirming its respectability, 1970s discourses on health and fitness were utilised to promote belly dance as a healthy activity: “belly dancing, as an ancient art form reborn, has come of age – spinning frenziedly into the limelight as a healthy, exciting body conditioner and a beautiful dance” (Dahlena and Meilach 1). Belly dance was constructed as an appropriate, healthy dance practice.

Changing cultural conceptions about ideal female bodies brought about another important shift occurred beginning in the late 1960s: to be slim and fit was not enough; one had to also be young. This emphasis on youth culture accelerated during the 1970s, so that by the 1980s both medical and popular discourse constructed “mature figures” as symbols of self-indulgence and irresponsibility (Dinnerstein and Weitz 7). The late 1970s’ mass media message promoted a youth culture based on self-mastery, and, ignoring the realities of aging, said that with hard work, diligence, and will power, dominance over the body was possible (Bordo 152, Dinnerstein and Weitz 7). Conversely, the how-to books presented a challenge to mainstream trends in fitness by embracing the realities of aging, and thereby resisting cultural dictates that perceived attractiveness to be the province of young, slim women. One of the key ways in which they navigated a feminist discursive position and achieved this resistance was through the belly dance movement’s firm commitment to inclusiveness.

Belly dance is constructed in the how-to manuals as a form of dance open to women of all ages, backgrounds, body shapes and sizes. Serena claims that her

students range from “7 to 75, and come from every walk of life” (5). Serena states “there is no need to abandon all of the charms and pleasures of childhood because of the number of years you have lived. An active, interested, enthusiastic, flexible woman is *young*” (24). It is noteworthy that Serena evokes childhood rather than young womanhood in a negotiation of youth fetishism. Lebwa writes that belly dance is not a dance just for “young, shapely women” and has “no limits to age or sex” (36). In this sense, belly dance is presented as an alternative to the rigid and often unrealistic ideals exemplified by changing cultural standards and the growing desire for a slender, perhaps prepubescent, ‘hard body’ type. In these texts belly dance is identified as an enjoyable, healthy, and feminine weight-loss activity that recognises the limitations associated with other mainstream exercise trends. The belly dance subculture of the period stressed equally the benefits that belly dance brought to women of physical health, and emotional and mental well-being. The belly dance how-to books (and the increasing community of women who took up the dance) advocated a holistic approach to fitness where the benefits of the belly dance functioned equally to improve not only physical health, but also emotional and mental well-being, and fostered creativity and self-expression. The practice of belly dance ran counter to the popular ethos of what Brabazon has called the “tough fitness” of the seventies with its “no pain no gain” mantra (102).

Pressures on women to be thin are compounded, in part, by the ways in which, as Nicky Diamond explains, ‘fat’ and ‘thin’ are socially constructed as natural opposites (54). Diamond argues that where ‘thin’ is seen as the natural state of the body, ‘fat’ is imagined as “pathological and a problem” (47). She explains that seeing fatness as transgression works to reproduce “those cultural

ideals of femininity which define ‘thin’ as ideal” (47). Moreover, there is a striking contradiction inherent in the process of simultaneously naturalising thinness as ‘normal’, while also suggesting that thinness needs to be achieved through hard work and disciplined body practices. In the 1970s, with the resurgence of interest in belly dance, authors and performers of the dance addressed these issues by challenging the supposed naturalness of this ideology. Paradoxically, however, they did so by exploiting the very same health and fitness consumer market which helped to create these ideologies in the first place – they produced belly dance instructional texts which claimed to help women to keep fit and/or lose weight. Furthermore, rather than exposing the social constructedness of the idea that thin is natural, they somewhat contradictorily attempted instead to rewrite this opposition, such that a soft/fat body is constructed as a natural body. Özel writes for example in the section on movements of the belly: “you’re going to learn some incredible things to do with that stomach of yours. But first, you’ve got to get rid of any shame you feel about yours – it’s an asset, whatever shape it’s in” (101). Mishkin and Schill suggest that when women throw away their “confining elastic girdles” and “replace them with jingly coin belts” their “belly-roll workouts and rib lifts” will give them “a new outlook on the midriff scene” (9). Mishkin and Schill are saying two things here. On the one hand, there is the suggestion that the exercise involved in “belly rolls” and “rib lifts” will mean that women may not need their restrictive girdles. On the other hand, they are promoting a discourse about acceptance and pride in women’s bodies, and especially bellies. This notion of ‘honouring the belly’ as the locus of female reproductive power was a prevalent concept in 1970s goddess feminism; one of Gioseffi’s feminist slogans, for

example, reads “Reclaim our bellies for the Earth!” (189). Moreover, the “jingly coin belt” as a replacement of the elastic girdle (which is meant to hide and suppress the belly), encouraged a sense of self-confidence and self-acceptance. Dahlena and Meilach write “to do the shimmy, first isolate the hip movement as a shake, then make it shorter and faster, and, voilà, you are almost motorized [...] to accentuate the effect of the shimmy [...] don that coin belt and work it into its frantic wiggling and jiggling. The noisier it is, the better you are!” (42).

Belly Dance and the Pleasures of Femininity

The glamorous aesthetic of belly dance during the 1970s openly resisted the ideological push toward androgyny that had emerged as a topic of fierce debate in second-wave feminist discourse. Some feminists of the early seventies argued that by adhering to socially constructed notions of femininity through the routines and practices of beautification (such as wearing makeup, high heels, false eyelashes, bras and so on) women were complicit with the oppressive patriarchal attitudes that positioned women as objects of exploitation. The author-belly dancers of the 1970s were, in a number of ways, working against this rejection by some second-wave feminists of the practices of beauty and femininity and celebrating instead the accoutrements of femininity and the pleasures they produce (See Plate 16). I argue that belly dance, with its flowing skirts, jangling coins, and glamorous makeup, produced a counter-ideology to discourses that espoused the notion that aesthetic artifice and the sexualised display of the body is anti-feminist.

Please see print copy for image



Plate 16 Serena and Alan Wilson. *The Serena Technique of Belly Dancing: The Fun Way to a Trim Shape*. New York: Drake Publishers, 1972.

The issue of beauty practice has been a long-standing debate amongst feminists since the late 1960s (Corrigan *et al* 53). Feminist critics Annette Corrigan and Denise Meredyth explain that “at that time, defying socially prescribed standards of beauty and eschewing the trappings of femininity became an important political statement” (54). Germaine Greer was a leading proponent of these ideas, suggesting that women should accept their ‘natural’ state and resist conforming to an ideal that denied their humanity by emphasising only their external looks and capacity to stimulate desire in men (Greer 1970).

As a development from the feminist writings of Simone de Beauvoir, feminist groups of the 1970s instigated a condemnation of consumer culture and fashion (*The Second Sex*, 1953). As critic Jane Gaines clarifies, there were two recurring

charges against the culture of femininity: first, “fashion is enslavement; women are bound by the drudgery of keeping up their appearance and by the impediments of the styles which prohibit them from acting in the world” (2). Second, fashion may “disguise the body, deform it, or follow its curves; but ultimately puts it on display” (2). While feminist criticism has undoubtedly shown that an emphasis on the practices of feminine beauty can be an oppressive force in women’s lives (Bordo 1993, Sandra Lee Bartky 1990), there is also an argument in which beautification constitutes a feminist practice (Ann J. Cahill 2003). I would suggest that in the how-to books beautification is approached as a pleasurable experiential process, with less emphasis placed on the product as spectacle. Mishkin and Schill in *The Compleat Belly Dancer*, for example, describe not just the kinaesthetic pleasure of the dance but the pleasurable sensation of the dance costume on the body. The belly dancer’s costume can

transform a practice session into the real thing – not only with visual appeal, but also with the intensified feelings you experience inside from the pleasant weight of your costume on your body, the way in which the jingling of coins and baubles inspires you into shimmies, movements, and poses you never dreamed you could attain (137-8).

What they describe here is a body that enjoys not only the costume but the motility that it seems to encourage. Iris Marion Young’s writing concerning women’s experience of their bodies in space is pertinent here: “the modalities of feminine bodily existence have their root in the fact that feminine existence experiences the body as a mere thing – a fragile thing, which must be picked up and coaxed into

movement, a thing that exists as *looked at and acted upon*" (150). The how-to books constitute a celebration of the female body through dance as a site of strength, endurance, creativity, and sensuality; and above all, they promote a sense of feminine power. In her excess of femininity, the belly dancer is potentially subversive. Carol Ascher has asked, "What if self decoration gives women a sense of potency to act in the world?" (quoted in Gaines 6). It is specifically the enactment of a hyper-feminine aesthetic in belly dance, combined with its sensual and complex movements, which can be seen as empowering rather than as a symbol of femininity's acquiescence to patriarchy.

In her book, Serena states that "many women find that most of the common exercises are unattractive and masculine" (22). Serena's comment demonstrates that perhaps, for some women, mainstream exercise trends were deficient in allowing a fully expressed notion of a feminine gendered identity. Belly dance, with its hyper-feminine aesthetic, provides an answer to this deficiency of feminine identification in exercise.

I would argue that belly dance, during the 1970s and 1980s, occupied a subversive yet contradictory place in this debate. Belly dancers of this period celebrated the 'natural' body of women, but with a crucial difference – the natural-body-adorned. Thus, in the feminist logic of Serena and Alan Wilson's book, *The Serena Technique of Belly Dancing*, the authors claim: "the dance also provides us with the kind of make-believe or role playing you enjoy in wearing a new dress or changing your make-up and hair style. It gives you a chance to act out the many facets of your personality" (25).

Many feminist arguments about beauty emphasised social conditioning as the process by which a feminine gender identity is acquired and patriarchal social control is maintained (Corrigan and Meredyth 66). The participation of women in beauty practice was often seen to be either traitorous to the cause of feminism or an effect of coercion. The exponents of belly dancing during the 1970s were not antithetical to the feminist views of the period, but were challenging the feminist renunciation of feminine beauty practices. Belly dancing, which revelled in the presentation of a feminine, glamorous, and sexy appearance, was arguably part of the feminist counterculture of the 1970s which celebrated women's pleasures in the rituals of femininity and beauty. Belly dance practitioners/authors of the how-to books during the 1970s did not consider feminism to be incompatible with each and every traditional designation of the feminine.

The main task of the belly dance how-to book, then, despite its complicity with cultural pressures about women's vigilance in monitoring the body's contours or appearance, was to explore the pleasures of the body in motion, as well as self-expression through movement and costume. Gioseffi's novel, by contrast, advocated an essentialist view of all women as linked to an eternal feminine in the form of goddess spirituality. The how-to books' construction of belly dance as an inclusive and open-ended practice meant that more nuanced notions of the multiplicity of sexuality, sensuality, femininity, and body politics could be developed. They not only demonstrated the ways in which belly dance provided a vehicle through which women actively challenged prescriptive ideologies surrounding their bodies, especially in relation to the fitness industry, but also encouraged a sense of personhood, where sensuality, femininity, and sexuality

were also sites of self-empowerment. The redefinitions of femininity being mobilised in this context established a new vision of belly dance outside of its previous connotations of erotic display, and instead constituted a response to the changing desires of women for a practice that encapsulated exercise, the pleasures of femininity, and empowerment through the acceptance of corporeality. Taken together as integral components of the cultural field of belly dance, the how-to books are united in their attempts to establish oppositional discourses through belly dance, delineate the difficulties of resistance, and underscore the struggle to negotiate competing social practices and ideologies. Nevertheless, belly dance is the site of a negotiated self, both implicated in and complicit with hegemonic constructions of femininity, Orientalism, and ethnocentrism.

Controlling the Unruly (Soft) Body: The Grotesque and the Politics of Appearance in Young Adult Literature

Following the major renaissance of belly dance during the 1970s, the 1980s saw a slight decline of the dance in favour of the escalating trend for aerobics exercise (Sellers-Young 144). Despite this decline, belly dance did not disappear but developed an increasingly complex relationship to feminism, to the cultural field of fitness, and to Western capitalist consumer culture throughout the 1980s and into the twenty-first century. One of the significant ways in which these relationships and intersecting discourses are articulated from the 1980s onwards is through literary discourse. As a development of the themes and issues discussed in Chapter Three, and in recalling discussions of the grotesque in Chapters One and Two, this chapter examines the ways in which imagery of the belly-dancing body has been transmitted to the genre of Young Adult fiction¹. The discursive fields of literary and cultural studies have created a receptive critical environment for children's and Young Adult literatures. However, the omission of study on the meanings and significance of dancing bodies in these critical fields suggests that despite the increasing importance of "the body"² in social and cultural research,

¹ Michael Cart has pointed to the ambiguity of the category of "Young Adult" fiction by questioning whether the phrase refers to "Adolescents? Teenagers? Adults in training wheels?" (4). However, despite the criticism of the term it has been helpfully defined by Hunt as "the literary novel with an adolescent hero or heroine seen coming to terms with the world and self" (Hunt 147).

² See, for example, Helen Thomas and Jamilah Ahmed's edited collection *Cultural Bodies: Ethnography and Theory* (2004).

dance, and especially belly dance, is yet to make inroads into the fields of Young Adult literature. Consequently, this Chapter's examination of three previously unanalysed Young Adult titles constitutes the first study into how the imagery of the belly-dancing body has functioned to articulate Western cultural anxieties surrounding girls' corporeality, appearance, and femininity.

The three books for examination feature their adolescent female protagonists as belly dancers. These are Merrill Gerber's *Also Known as Sadzia! The Belly Dancer!* (1987), Karen Mueller Coombs's *Samantha Gill, Belly Dancer* (1989), and Karen McCombie's *Boys, Brothers and Jelly-Belly Dancing* (2002)³. As with the how-to books discussed in Chapter Three, this chapter argues that the group of Young Adult books are largely didactic. However, while the 1970s instructional manuals attempted to educate adult readers about the value of belly dance as a means of bodily liberation and self expression, the Young Adult books discussed here use belly dance as a tool to explore and teach adolescent girls acceptable socio-cultural ideas about sexuality, body image, and personal relationships⁴. In particular, *Samantha Gill* and *Jelly-Belly* teach girls to be body- and weight-conscious while they normalise the Western cultural equation of thinness with social success, control, and beauty. Embedded in all three books is the underlying theme of female obsession with weight and body image. However, as this Chapter will argue, while *Sadzia!* works towards dispelling culturally-constructed ideas that for girls thinness equals normality and success, *Samantha*

³ Hereafter, I shall refer to these titles as *Sadzia!*, *Samantha Gill*, and *Jelly-Belly* respectively.

⁴ The books for analysis are aimed at readers between 10 and 16 years of age.

Gill and *Jelly-Belly* serve to reinforce this construction by equating thinness with confidence, sexual attractiveness, and an easy assimilation into the social structures of the girls' peers.

Both *Samantha Gill* and *Jelly-Belly* construct thinness as an important component of the social and sexual identity of their respective protagonists, Samantha and Ally. All three books dramatise the learning of belly dance in order to either naturalise the culturally imposed processes of appropriate female sexuality, embodiment, and desire, or refute them. While in all three books sexuality and concerns with weight are intimately linked, there are two conflicting ways in which the belly-dancing body is used to perform the politics of adolescent female sexuality and body image. Gerber, in her book *Sadzia!* attempts to write against the uncompromising bodily disciplining practices of the eighties aerobics fad by presenting belly dance as its sensually liberating opposite. In this way she negotiates a feminist subject position for the figure of the belly dancer in her novel. The authors of the other two books, *Samantha Gill* and *Jelly-Belly*, however, use belly dance symbolically to explore ideas of unstable or inappropriate female sexual identity as well as to promote and valorise an ultra-thin standard of beauty. While this chapter focuses predominantly on the ways in which belly dance functions as a discursive vehicle through which to explore notions of female adolescence, embodiment, weight, and sexuality, there are also some key moments in which Orientalist assumptions about Eastern exotic otherness surface in these novels. The Orientalism in these books will be dealt within the broader focus of this chapter.

I draw on some recent research surrounding the genre of Young Adult fiction to examine the ideological constructions of body image and sexuality in literature designed specifically for adolescent girls. Significantly, as Beth Younger has pointed out, while critics of Young Adult fiction routinely address the representation of important issues such as “sex, abortion, sexual orientation, and violence”, issues of “body image in Young Adult fiction have received almost no critical attention” (55). Younger elaborates, “there is no book-length critical text that specifically focuses on body image in the Young Adult genre and very few articles address the issue more than cursorily” (55). Accordingly, in this chapter I attempt to redress this gap.

In extending the discussion of the grotesque belly-dancing body in my previous Chapters⁵, I contend that from the 1980s onwards a new binary of corporeality begins to emerge in relation to the cultural constructions of belly dance and fitness culture. That is, the apparently ‘hard’ body of the 1980s exercise culture is juxtaposed against the supposedly ‘soft’ body of the belly dancer⁶. My reading of these binary categories of corporeality in relation to ideas of embodied femininity in belly dance aims to provide highly suggestive categories for rethinking notions of the classical/grotesque body distinction generally, and to provide an understanding

⁵ See Chapter One for an examination of the representation of belly dancing in colonialist travel literature from the perspective of the ‘Oriental grotesque’. See Chapter Two for a discussion of the moving body as the locus of the grotesque in accounts of twentieth Century female ‘Oriental’ dancers.

⁶ This is not to suggest by any means that a belly-dancing body is an unfit body. Rather, in the texts under discussion, the belly dancer’s ability, fitness level, and attractiveness are not deemed dependent on the appearance of an outwardly sculpted or muscular body.

of how these meanings come to bear on the broader issues of the female grotesque specifically. Some significant questions arise in relation to this task. What, for example, does it mean that belly dancing has been inculcated into debates surrounding the social and discursive politics of female bodies? What is the significance of the distinction between 'hard' bodies and 'soft' bodies, especially when they correspond respectively with gym culture and belly dance? Lastly, what does it mean that belly dance has been co-opted into the genre of Young Adult fiction?

In attempting to answer these questions it is essential to contextualise the Young Adult fictions for analysis within the cultural arena of the 1980s. Specifically, some important changes were occurring in relation to trends in the fitness field, as well as changes in the attitudes of fitness consumers, and to broader cultural discourses surrounding notions of women's ideal appearances. While much of my discussion focuses on the 1980s, McCombie's *Jelly-Belly*, which was not written until 2002, provides an excellent example of how the cultural project of body and weight management in the 1980s has been accelerated and assimilated into the twenty-first century, and specifically, how belly dance continues to be implicated in this project.

Hard Bodies/ Soft Bodies

From the 1980s, social and economic success has become increasingly dependent on the presentation of a self that is conspicuously fit and active, not just thin (and preferably tanned), but also possessing muscle definition (Rader 262). As

discussed in Chapter Three, the fitness movement had been gaining momentum throughout the late 1970s. It was not, however, until the early 1980s that consumers became profoundly preoccupied not only with slenderness, but with the muscular body. Sharlene Hesse-Biber suggests that during this time “the subcutaneous fat layer, which gives softness to the female physique, disappeared in favour of large, hard muscles” (45). This new perspective on the perfect body was increasingly idealised as a “hard body”. As Cheryl Cole and Amy Hribar have argued, the 1980s saw the “hard body” develop into a manifestation of consumer identity: “images disseminated by promotional culture routinely and repetitiously solicit the hard body, the deep self, and free will” (347). These images, they argue, “aroused the desire to do work on the body and consume commodities in order to maintain the body and stabilize [...] identity” (347). Fatness in the 1980s came to represent failure: that is, an inability to adequately manage the appropriate (read feminine) boundaries of the body. While heaviness may often attract a level of social hostility regardless of a person’s gender, it is well recognised that it is women who have especially endured the impact of what Kim Chernin has called the “tyranny of slenderness” (*The Obsession* 1981, *Womansize* 1983).

There have been periods in cultural history, even in the mid-twentieth century, where rounded and fleshy female bodies have carried positive implications. However, several critics, including Benjamin Rader and Susan Bordo, note that by the 1970s many believed that 1950s screen icon Marilyn Monroe had been overweight (Rader 263, Bordo 141). The recent statement made by actress/model Elizabeth Hurley about Monroe in *Allure Magazine*, “I’d kill myself if I was that fat” encapsulates this cultural shift in notions about female body ideals

(Banvard 2). Feminist writers have shown that in the West, since the late twentieth century, fatness has increasingly signified a “disturbing unresponsiveness to social control” (Kathleen Rowe 61). Bordo suggests that muscles, as opposed to fleshiness, “express sexuality, but controlled, managed sexuality that is not about to erupt in unwanted and embarrassing display” (195). A woman with a heavy body is often understood to be in breach of feminine standards of beauty and decorum. Thus, fatness in women is understood as an indication of self-indulgence, poor impulse control, and as will be discussed later, an overactive sexual appetite.

By the early 1980s, the entrance of women *en masse* into the traditionally male preserve of the gym was both a point of contention for male users, and a site of resistance for women (Brabazon 98)⁷. The influence of dance on aerobics had a significant and lasting effect on socio-cultural assumptions about exercise and gender, and especially on transforming institutionalised notions about ‘the gym’ being an exclusively male domain. David Rowe has argued,

There is a powerfully resilient association between sport and masculinity that obstructs equality of access, participation and reward for women. Sport has been one of the major means by which masculinity is constructed against femininity in a manner that presents a clear hierarchy of cultural power⁸.

(Rowe 133).

⁷ For further discussion on the gender politics of the gymnasium see Eskes *et al* (1998).

⁸ Tara Brabazon (2000) criticises and problematises the tendency of cultures to set up a binary opposition between “elite/sport and mass participation/fitness” (98). In criticising this opposition she argues that the “presentation of aerobics as both exercise and sport [...] performs the shift from trivial to serious, and feminine to masculine spheres” (98).

When Kenneth Cooper coined the term 'aerobics' he did not specify whether this exercise format was intended for men or women (*Aerobics* 1968). However, as a result of its fusion with dance, along with the newly geared marketing of aerobics to women, the majority of aerobics participants by the late 1970s were female (Brabazon 99; Kagan & Morse 164). The presence of aerobics, with its high-powered motivational disco music that accompanied the highly choreographed dance-exercise movements, made a significant impact on the 'boys club' image previously attached to gyms. As Tara Brabazon has argued, this particular moment in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when dance became intrinsically coupled with aerobics, has been consistently attacked by male gym users (99). Brabazon, for example, quotes Dennis Hemphill who felt strongly that "aerobics [had been] 'colonised' by the dancers" (99). This apparent feminisation of the gym as a result of the intrusion of female dancing bodies suggests that the 1980s saw dance-exercise engender new economies of representation and power.

Major changes were occurring in gyms not only ideologically but also structurally. Many gyms began to include, for the first time, separate women's changing facilities and amenities. Moreover, the gymnasium as a space predominantly occupied by men was fractured by the presence of women not only in the actual space of the club, but also in the types of activities women were taking up. During the 1980s and 1990s, for example, there was a major increase in women taking up weight-lifting and bodybuilding (Heywood 9, 61). Since the 1980s a substantial body of critical discourse surrounding weight-lifting and bodybuilding for women has explored a wide range of views on the topic. While some have

argued that women's bodybuilding objectifies and exploits the female body (Ian 2001: 70-71, Balsamo 49), others have argued that "the female bodybuilder threatens not only current socially constructed definitions of femininity and masculinity, but also the system of sexual difference itself" (Schulze 9). Principally, it is the female bodybuilder's production and development of conspicuous strength and muscularity – conventionally associated with masculinity – that has engendered such heated debates surrounding women's bodybuilding. In this way, women's activities in the gym pushed at the boundaries of what was understood to be appropriate feminine behaviour and fitness activities.

The most highly contested issue in relation to female weight-lifters is the question of how the production of muscle mass plays a role in defining sex, gender, identity and, especially, empowerment (Ian 1991: 7). Yet, at the same time, striving for the attainment of a hard and muscled body involves a paradox for women: as Bordo has argued, the tightly managed female body, whether demonstrated through a sleek, toned physique or through strongly developed muscles, has now become "overdetermined as a contemporary ideal of specifically female attractiveness" (211) and thus inseparable from the demands of contemporary ideologies of femininity.

The contestatory gender performance produced through the spectacle of the 'built' and 'hard' female body is pertinent to this chapter's discussion of female embodiment because it is frequently constructed as the quintessential opposite of the 'soft' belly-dancing body. The three time Pulitzer-prizing winning political cartoonist Jeff MacNelly satirised this distinction in a cartoon he drew for the

Chicago Tribune⁹ (See Plate 17). In this cartoon, which was published in the mid-1990s, MacNelly juxtaposes the image of a thin, but muscular, woman wearing gym exercise gear and holding hand weights against the figure of a belly dancer whose body is less static, softer and rounder. The cartoon's heading reads, "In The Something Has Gone Terribly Wrong Department:" Coupled with this heading and the captions (which indicate that the woman with the weights has "fabulous abs" while the belly dancer has "flabby abs"), this image implies that cultural concepts of female beauty are the wrong way around.

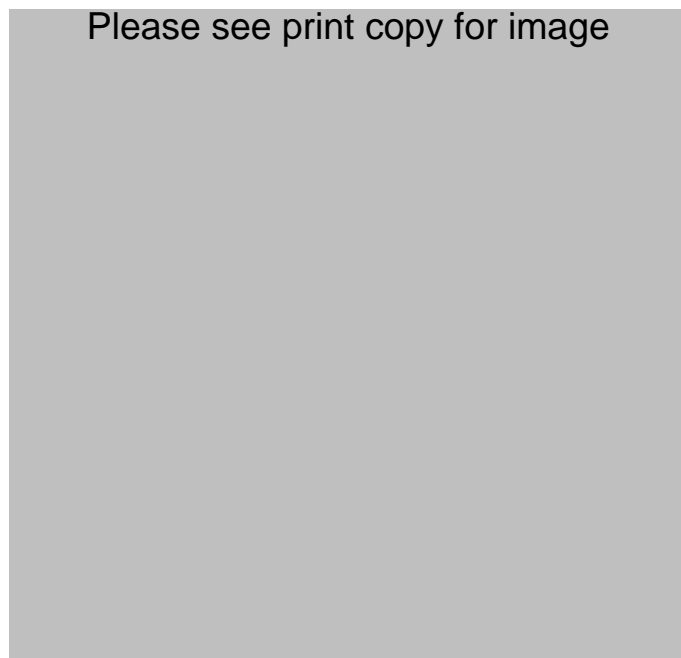


Plate 17 Jeff MacNelly "In the Something Has Gone Terribly Wrong Department". c1995.
Cartoon published in *Chicago Tribune*, Chicago.

In the 1980s and 1990s a woman's hard, muscled body seemingly pushed to excess the conventionally feminine norm of the 'soft' body which had dominated

⁹ Davies, Mathew. Personal Communication (20th April, 2005).


the previous decades¹⁰. For some, on the other hand, the figure of the belly dancer – which in MacNelly’s drawing is neither fat nor muscular – was often defined in the 1980s and 1990s as a more desirable feminine form. From this perspective, though, belly dance becomes caught in a contradictory binary opposition with the notion of the exercised hard body, where belly dance is perceived as simultaneously soft and muscular, thin but curvy. For example, a recent article in *TIME* reported,

[Belly dance] is one of the few dance or exercise disciplines in which a few extra pounds around the middle aren’t a problem. The traditional belly dancer has ample hips and a voluptuous shape, and many students like the fact that the teachers, while fit, look more womanly than the typical hard-body fitness instructor.

(Carr 2).

Although Carr reiterates the widespread idea that belly dance is tolerant of a “few extra pounds” and “ample hips” on women, the author also stresses the importance of belly dance as a fitness activity that can tone, strengthen, increase flexibility, and help women lose weight. There is a paradox at work here: on the one hand, belly dance continues to be perceived (and constructed) as an especially inclusive form of dance-exercise suitable to women of all ages, fitness levels, and body shapes (part of the legacy of the 1970s how-to books), and on the other hand, belly dance is also implicated in the hegemonic body practices of exercise culture and is contradictorily caught up in the politics of the hard/soft body binary (See Plate 18).

¹⁰ See for example Heywood (1998) and Haber (1996).



Please see print copy for
image

Plate 18 *Terminator II: Judgment Day*. Dir. by James Cameron. Perf. Linda Hamilton; Arnold Schwarzenegger. Universal Studios. 1991

“Let’s Get Physical”: Consumer Culture and Fitness

Physical activity during the 1980s was seen not only to improve health and longevity, but was also inextricably linked to a new social and cultural urgency to test one’s endurance and strength. Moreover, one’s commitment and ability to “pare, prune, tighten and master the body” operated, as Bordo has argued, “as a clear symbol of successful upward aspiration” (195). In the context of the growing fitness movement of the 1980s, the relationship between the body and self-identity was tightening (Shilling 7). In 1983 Zygmunt Bauman noted that within the liberal political economies of fitness “the body is charged with the responsibility for success and failure in earthly endeavours, and the urge ‘to do something about my life’ is most eagerly translated into a precept ‘to do something about my body’” (41). Body sculpting and diet, fitness and fashion, were fundamentally tied up with ideas about individual success, personal choice, power, and ultimately a “sense of

self-mastery” over one’s body (Bordo 152). Coupled with the establishment of the New Right with its ‘free to choose’ radical liberal ideology, and the postmodernist collapse of the binaries between high art and popular culture, the 1980s became a period of heightened interest in consumer culture, bodily appearance, and technologies of self-preservation (Thomas 2004: 51). This relationship between consumer culture, identity, and the discourses of high fashion, pop culture, and physical fitness in America in the 1980s was satirised by Bret Easton Ellis in his 1991 novel *American Psycho*. In Ellis’s book a superabundance of hard-bodies, sex, violence, and commodities converge to produce a culture where, according to David W. Price, “everything is an object – our bodies, our possessions, our sex partners, even ourselves” (329).

The fitness boom of the 1980s was inextricable from the changes that were occurring on the new consumer market. Benjamin Rader notes that the “pressures of consumption frequently extended into the fitness arena; one had to exhibit the most fashionable exercise clothing and belong to the appropriate clubs” (262). Accompanying these changes, with the regular attendance of women to gyms, there was a newly (hetero)sexualised atmosphere in gyms making them popular social spots for singles (262). Rader explains that along with the facilities for fitness, the clubs frequently provided “restaurants, bars, lounges and a social calendar of dances, ski trips and other events” (262). As a result of this developing social culture there was a massive expansion of the health and fitness industry into all areas of the consumer market: from trendy workout clothing and specialised shoe manufacturing by retail giants Nike and Reebok to the hundreds of ‘keep-fit’ manuals, diet plans, and exercise videos on the market.

While aerobic workouts had appeared in instructional books since the late 1970s, it was the introduction of videotaped aerobic sessions in the early 1980s that brought the fitness craze to a broader market. Actress Jane Fonda pioneered the fitness video market with the release of her first exercise video in 1982, which appeared closely after her best-selling *Jane Fonda's Workout Book* (1981) (See Plate 19). Fonda's video, which dominated the best selling lists until the mid-1980s, had sold four million copies in the US by 1986. Fitness instructors and celebrities would follow Fonda's lead into tape sales, which continued to be a strong component of the escalating fitness market in the 1990s. Around the same time belly dance instructional videos were also in high demand, with a number of successful tapes such as Alicia Dhanifu's *Belly Dancing for Fitness and Fun! The Original Aerobics* (1984), Atea's *Bellydance! Magical Motion* (1985), and Delilah's series of tapes *Belly Dance Workshop I, II, and III* (1987-1989). The market for belly dance fitness tapes and DVDs has skyrocketed in the last decade with a multitude of products available¹¹.

When the aerobics boom reached its zenith in the 1980s, with its obsessive fascination with the external presentation of a slender yet muscled body, belly dance afforded many women an alternative to the rigid and often unrealistic demands of the growing mainstream exercise culture. The Young Adult novel *Sadzia!* directly engages with the socio-cultural discourses surrounding the politics

¹¹ See, for example, www.amazon.com. A search on Amazon using terms such as "belly dance" and "bellydancing" in the DVD and VHS categories revealed upward of 116 belly dance instructional products (accessed 24th October, 2005). A search on www.yahoo.com using the terms "belly dance" and "DVD" produced 485,000 web page results.

of the female body that were specific to the 1980s. The book clearly references the 1980s fashion for aerobics when it juxtaposes aerobics with belly dance: the heroine Sandy's best friend Pam is described as a "fanatic" (11), obsessively "working-out" with Jane Fonda and Raquel Welch exercise videos (12).

Please see print copy for
image

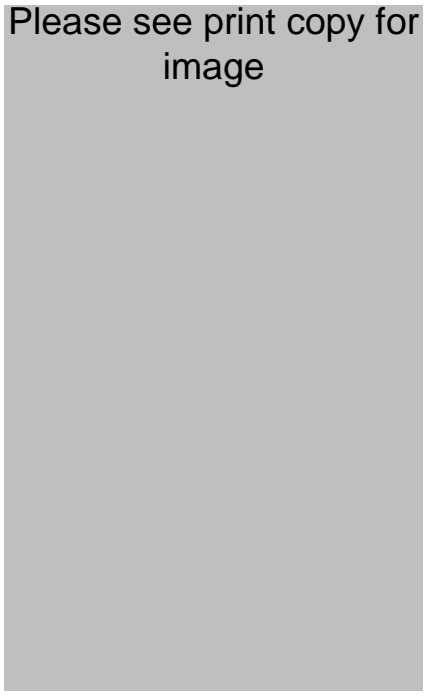


Plate 19 Jane Fonda. *Jane Fonda's Workout*. VHS. Karl Video, 1982.

Please see print copy for image

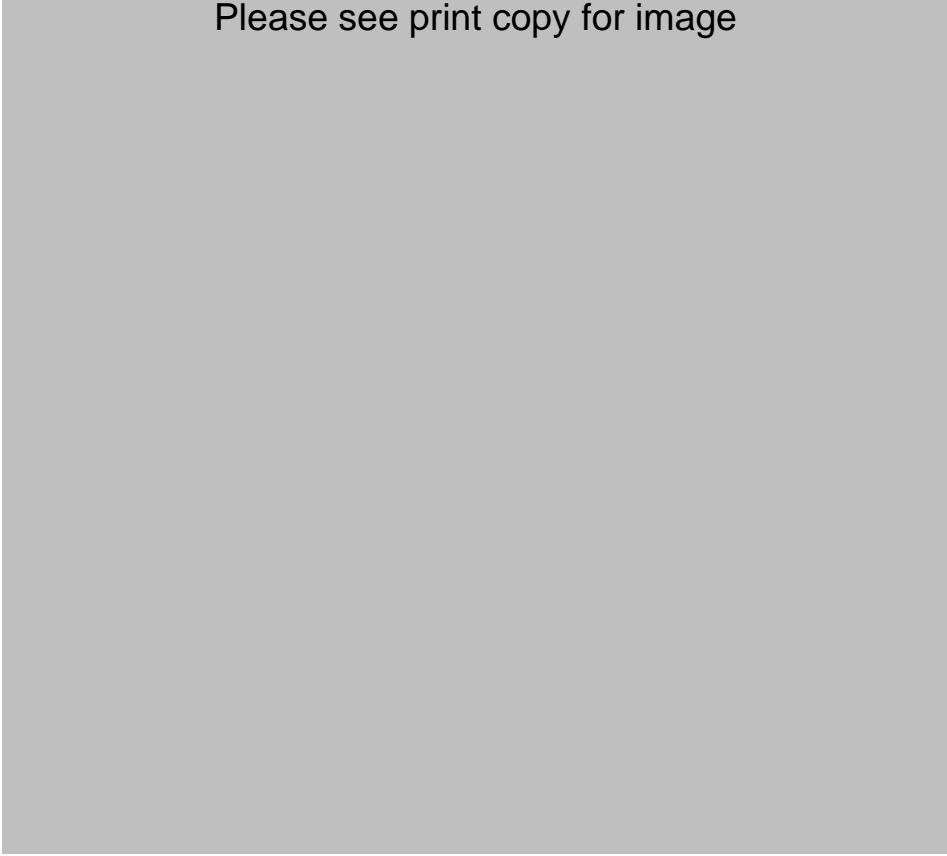


Plate 20 Olivia Newton-John. *Physical*. VHS. MCA Home Video, 1981.

From the popularity of aerobics grew a dance-exercise style that began to permeate the dance scene of the 1980s. The early 1980s saw the mass popularity of a dance-exercise style that grew out of the disco culture of the late 1970s and was being influenced by the recent aerobics trend. The new kind of popular music based on the exercise trend is reflected in songs such as Olivia Newton John's chart-topping international success "Let's Get Physical" in 1981 (See Plate 20). The song was accompanied by a video clip which showed a taut and suitably attired Newton John pressuring overweight men to "Get Physical". By the end of the clip the men were transformed into firmly muscled men, posing before mirrors. While the clip refers to the "gym culture" of the 1980s, the obvious homoerotic

overtones also parody the narcissism of gym culture at the same time – at the end of the song, the men ignore Newton John and pair up with each other before leaving. The TV series *Fame* (1980) and the film *Flashdance* (1983) which featured the aerobics/jazz style dance, helped initiate a fashion craze of ‘workout’ style clothing such as leggings, sweatbands, and leotards (McRobbie 218, 224).

The impact of the representation and commodification of aerobics and fitness culture was not just profound in popular culture marketed at adults, but was also a clearly visible influence in youth cultures. A telling sign of the impact of physical fitness on girls’ popular culture is indicated by Mattel’s release of “Workout Barbie” complete with her own workout accoutrements such as a training bench, hand weights, and towel (Rader 256). Already the epitome of the ‘hard body’ type, Barbie was the perfect agent for the transmission to girls of values associated with the slender, disciplined body. The consumer could also buy Barbie her own full range of fashionable work-out wear – tights, leotard, running shoes, sweatbands and, of course, that quintessential eighties fashion item, leg warmers. Disney also produced a regular children’s segment called “Mousercise”, first released in 1982, where the theme song encouraged kids:

1, 2, 3, 4 [...] now c’mon do just one more - push ups, pull ups, lets get down and do some sit-ups too, just like Mickey. Mousercise! Mousercise! Lets get started gals and guys, we do it everyday – everybody workout

Mickey's way. Mousercise! Mousercise! "Soon you won't believe your eyes", says Mickey, "when you run!" c'mon everybody, Mousercise!¹²

Disney's Mousercise song was accompanied by a fifteen minute exercise routine led by aerobics instructor Kellyn Plasschaert on the Disney Channel's Home Video collection¹³. The lyrics of the song describe the kind of regimented sequence of exercises familiar to the world of exercise aerobics classes (See Plate 21). The language used to describe the exercises such as "push ups", "pull ups", "sit-ups", and "workout" introduces children to the kind of cataloguing of exercises in fitness discourse of the 1980s. The disturbing element of Disney's message, however, is the way in which it promotes the idea of exercise as a vehicle through which control and ultimate triumph over the body is possible. The children, for example, are encouraged to "do just one more", making apparent the mantra of "no pain, no gain". Gerber's novel *Sadzia!* makes explicit the prevalence of this uniquely 1980s ideology when "Auntie Fan", the tyrannical aerobics instructor in the novel, admonishes her aerobicisers: "If it doesn't ache, it's fake. If it doesn't burn, there's no earn. A little pain, a lot of gain" (24). While Gerber's novel is a critique of this kind of hardline approach to exercise, Disney naturalises it as an everyday childhood preoccupation. Even more alarming is Disney's suggestion that through

¹² <http://disney.go.com/disneyrecords/Song-Albums/mousercise/> The mousercise video and accompanying CD has been recently re-released by Disney in May 2005. See also, Philip C. Kolin (1985), who has noted that the 1980s saw a number of root words conjoined with the suffix "ercise" in order to connote "healthy, vigorous activity" (91). Kolin identifies "mousercise" as one such coinage, along with examples such as "dancercise" and "jazzercise" (91).

¹³ (Vol. 9 Burbank, Calif 1982)

persistence and determination with these exercises the body will transform – “soon you won’t believe your eyes”. This emphasis on the visual monitoring of the body clearly implies that there is a different body before and after exercise and that children need to be looking for changes in the body brought about by exercise. The Mousercise program establishes for children an ideology about constant dissatisfaction with the body and indoctrinates the idea that this kind of exercise is a group project in which their peers exhibit the same level of (acceptable) concern with body image.

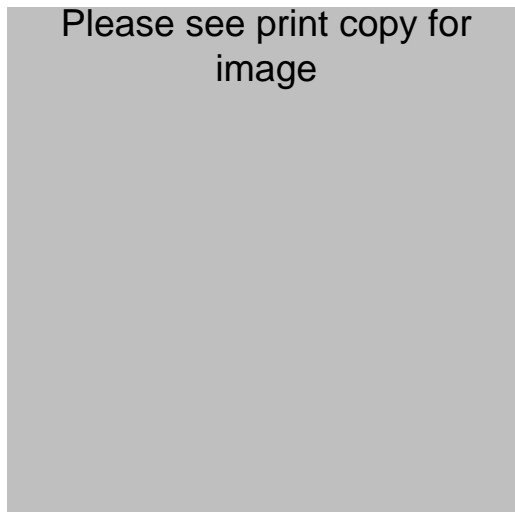


Plate 21 Walt Disney. Minnie-Mouse. Cartoon. Walt Disney. Available: <http://disney.go.com/disneyrecords/Song-Albums/mousercise/>. 25 November 2005.

To suggest that the commodification of exercise and fitness through children’s products is problematic is not, however, to call into question the importance of physical fitness, since increasing levels of inactivity amongst children (as well as adults) has led to rising incidence of obesity in many Western countries (Dietz & Gortmaker 337). At the same time as levels of obesity rise, however, there is also an increased incidence of anorexia and bulimia. The late 1970s and early

1980s reflected a sharp increase in instances of these eating disorders¹⁴. In the aftermath of the 1980s fitness craze, an American study in 1993 estimated the combined prevalence of anorexia and bulimia to be as high as 20% for school age children in the U.S. (Phelps & Wilczenski, 1993)¹⁵. In Australia in 1994 the prevalence of eating disorders was, comparatively with the U.S., estimated to be as high as 1 in 5 in the student population¹⁶. The obvious health benefits of good nutrition and regular exercise are not under debate here. Rather, the point at issue is that the message being sent to young people about the physical development of their bodies is one of distrust and fear; that bodies must be monitored and controlled. The following section of this chapter explores Gerber's Young Adult novel *Sadzia!* as an example of a text which resists the inflexible conventions of the exercise culture of the 1980s and presents belly dance as an empowering alternative that also engenders confidence, a positive body image, and a sense of sexual self-awareness and personal growth through movement.

¹⁴ See Susie Orbach (1978, 1986), Chernin (1981, 1986) and Éva Székely (1988).

¹⁵ In a recent study, Katarzyna Bisaga (et al, 2005), wrote that "despite claims that in the United States, ED [Eating Disorders] affect mostly non-Hispanic white females of middle class background, [...] the balance of evidence suggests that no ethnic group is immune to eating problems, although rates vary across groups" (257).

¹⁶ Statistics from Sydney Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Eating Disorder Clinic cited on the Eating Disorders Foundation of Victoria www.eatingdisorders.org.au (Accessed 22nd September 2005).

Merrill Joan Gerber's *Also Known as Sadzia! The Belly Dancer!* Discourses of Empowerment and Identity

Gerber's 1987 novel *Sadzia!* can be read as a feminist narrative where belly dance provides the impetus for sixteen-year-old Sandy Fishman to achieve personal growth and independence. Gerber constructs for her young adult readers a feminist narrative where Sandy is transformed from an insecure girl who was constantly made to feel "fat and guilty" (3) by her mother into "Sadzia [the belly dancer] graceful, passionate, confident" (162). This chapter will show that unlike the protagonists in McCombie's *Jelly-Belly* and Coombs's *Samantha Gill, Belly Dancer*, Sandy is not compelled to withdraw from the transgressive behaviour embedded in cultural discourses surrounding belly dance, but rather is empowered by her persistence in learning the dance. In this book belly dance is constructed as a liberating practice that is integral to Sandy's sense of well-being, her acceptance of her body, and her eventual autonomy from her domineering mother.

Gerber's book deals with these issues through the exploration of the complex mother-daughter relationship that is characteristic of Young Adult fiction. With her tyrannical criticisms of her daughter's appearance, Sandy's mother, Mrs. Fishman, emerges in the novel as a destructive force to Sandy's self-esteem. Mrs. Fishman, whose motto is "you can't be too rich or too thin" (23), constantly harasses Sandy about losing weight and is completely consumed with controlling and shaping her daughter's appearance. She criticises Sandy for the foods she eats and regularly calls her daughter names such as "blubber thighs" (4). The only redeeming feature Mrs. Fishman finds in her daughter's appearance is Sandy's

lips: "Thank God you have sexy lips at least" (7). Sandy's response to Mrs. Fishman indicates the feminist standpoint crucial to the story, and foreshadows Sandy's emancipation from her mother's old-fashioned and anti-feminist ideas:

Sexy lips! Where was her mother coming from? Hadn't she ever heard of women's lib? Didn't she know that sexy lips were *not* supposed to be a women's goal in life? Sometimes Sandy thought her mother had gotten caught in the cogs of a time machine (7).

An underlying issue in the novel is Sandy's Jewish identity. The inside jacket of the book states "Sandy Fishman is blessed with naturally curly hair, fat thighs, and a very Jewish mother who wants her to get thin and get married". While Mrs Fishman is obsessed with changing her own physical (Jewish) appearance as well as her daughter's, Sandy is content with her body. In part, Sandy's journey of self-discovery and independence is not only about rebelling against her mother's expectations, but also about rejecting the social expectations to conform to an Anglo-Saxon physical appearance.

One significant way in which Sandy's mother badgers her daughter about her weight is by insisting that the garter Mrs. Fishman wore on her wedding day be hung on her daughter's bedpost. The garter serves as a premature reminder to sixteen-year-old Sandy that she needs to lose weight in order to find a husband: "trust me sweetheart, no one will want to marry you if you have blubber thighs" (4). Mrs. Fishman's more immediate motive for coercing Sandy into losing weight is to ensure that she has a date for the high school prom: "you can't miss your prom.

And if you start working on yourself now, and spend the entire summer getting thin and sexy, I can guarantee you'll have a date" (19).

Throughout the novel there is an emphasis on rites of passages such as the high school prom and graduation, as well as the elements of the conventional romance plot with Sandy's first kiss and first boyfriend. Even though Mrs. Fishman attempts to control the direction of Sandy's path to maturity, Sandy rebels against her mother's obsessions and her criticisms. Toward the end of the novel two critical moments signal Sandy's autonomy from her mother: first, Sandy replaces the wedding garter on the bedpost with her belly dancing finger cymbals (zills): "a new flag to mark the new country she would live in from now on" (152). Second, Sandy decides not to go to the prom as a student but attends instead, with Sumir, the boy who drums for the belly dancing class, as the belly dancer hired to perform as the prom's headline entertainment. Sandy's decision not to attend the prom as a student is a significant one¹⁷. With Sandy's refusal to conform to the institution of the prom – a social occasion which is afforded iconic status in American society – the terms are rearranged: Sandy is no longer a spectator but is the spectacle. As Rowe has argued, "in acts of spectatorial unruliness [...] we might examine models of *returning* the gaze, exposing and making a spectacle of the gazer, claiming the pleasure and power of making spectacles of ourselves, and beginning to negate our own invisibility in the public space" (12). Sandy's act of unruliness presents one such possibility for empowerment. It is significant to note that all three protagonists in the books under analysis stage a public performance of belly dance. Sandy,

¹⁷ For further discussion on the meaning and significance of the prom in American culture see Amy L. Best (2000).

however, is the only one who continues to belly dance despite the negative criticism she receives from her mother, and is empowered by her decisions.

Sandy's rejection of the prom, an event that was especially important to Mrs Fishman, indicates that she has gained power over her relationship with her mother. At this moment Sandy also achieves financial independence:

"Tell me something," Sandy's mother said. "You get paid for this?"

"You bet," Sandy said. "It's not six figures, but it's good money" (181).

Sandy and Sumir inform the Fishmans that they are saving their earnings to travel together. Importantly, this moment also reinforces the earlier suggestion in the story that Sandy's relationship with Sumir has developed beyond her newly found sexual awareness (the book implies Sandy loses her virginity to Sumir) and toward a sense of mutual respect and equality. There is an interracial subtext in the novel which suggests that Sandy's independence from her conservative Jewish mother is also about her bi-cultural identity. The Jewish-American heroine embraces her Jewish heritage by learning Yiddish from her elderly Jewish neighbour Mrs. Roshkov (53). She also reveals her rejection of the anti-Arab sentiments of her parents – Sandy's father, the reader is told, is "rabid on the subject of the Arabs" (92) – by taking up an Arab dance form, and not the Israeli folk dancing that her mother practices. The implication, furthermore, is that Sumir is Arab: he majors in Middle Eastern Studies at UCLA and plays the drum for the belly dance class. However, it is revealed toward the middle of the novel that Sumir's real name is Sam Klofman – he is also Jewish, a discovery which highlights that like Sandy,

Sumir has also enacted a significant anti-ethnocentric self-transformation. In this characterisation, Sandy and Sumir effectively exploit the indeterminacy of their Semitic appearances to successfully 'pass' for Arab. Gerber's construction of racial passing offers a neat inversion of Grant Allen's 'passing' heroine Elma: rather than the 'Oriental' passing for English, here is the opposite with American-Jews passing for Arab¹⁸.

Early in the novel it becomes clear that Mrs. Fishman has nothing in common with her daughter. Mrs. Fishman does, however, share interests with Pam, Sandy's best friend, who is as obsessive about weight and physical appearances as herself. Likewise, Pam's mother Melody, who was a "flower-child in the sixties" (12), shares Sandy's ideas about there being more to beauty than being thin. The two teenage girls become allied with each others' mothers. This alliance is crystallised when Mrs. Fishman and the exercise-obsessed Pam conspire to force Sandy and Melody to attend a "Thinnercize" class at the local recreation centre. At the exercise class, both Sandy and Melody are appalled by the military-like exercises taught by a strict "Amazonian" woman they are expected to call "Auntie Fan" (26):

"And a one... and a two... and a reach and a stretch! And a three... and a four... and a reach and a bounce!" [...] Sandy shuddered into motion. She bent. She stretched. She had to give it a fair chance. [...] Sandy checked herself in the mirror. She looked like a pudgy gray ball in her loose sweatshirt and sweatpants (24-25).

¹⁸ For discussion of Grant Allen's novel *What's Bred in the Bone* (1891), see Chapter One.

Sandy and Melody abandon the Thinnercize class and the “Valkyrie” (26) teaching it, and attend instead a belly dancing class they find underway in the next room. Gerber’s description of Aunty Fan as a Valkyrie – in Norse mythology the maidens of Odin who chose heroes to be slain in battle – is significant in raising issues of race. The reference to Germanic mythology clearly aligns the aerobics instructor with a fascist ideal of female physical strength and dominance as opposed to Sandy’s own Sephardic appearance. Gerber’s book clearly juxtaposes the awkward and undignified experience of the aerobics class with the gracefulness, fun, and sensuality experienced by the women in the belly-dancing class:

A circle of women, wrapped in billowy lengths of chiffon, turned and swirled on the carpeted floor of the big room. Gold coins clicked and danced on their bare bellies and on their foreheads. [...] When the music slowed, their exposed bellies quivered and breathed like living souls. The women swayed. They undulated (28).

Belly dancing in Gerber’s descriptions is clearly a source of power for the women dancing.

Gerber’s book *Sadzia!* implicates the belly-dancing body in the politics of the 1980s exercise culture as the quintessentially non-aerobicised body, which significantly, is also not necessarily a young body:

Melody was dancing with enthusiasm next to the grandmotherly woman, who didn’t seem old at all and didn’t look foolish in the least. She seemed sensual and dignified, both at the same time. Most of the women in the class were in their twenties and thirties, but none of them, not *one* of them,

was thin. They all had ample breasts and round, shimmery bellies. When they shimmied, they had something to shake! It was wonderful – to be in the room next to the Thinnercize class and feel blessed *not to be thin!* (38).

Sadzia! works to acknowledge issues of body image and exposes the damaging effects of enduring notions of female beauty as ideally thin, young, and firm. Gerber attempts to place belly dancing outside the practices of aerobics which she constructs as intimately tied up in the workings of Anglo-American patriarchal power.

Gerber's book teaches its young adult readers that women should not mindlessly conform to socially prescribed ideas of how women should look. Instead it suggests that there should be pleasure in the processes of embodied experience. This didactic aspect of the Gerber's message of empowerment is forged through Sandy's newly found sensual bodily awareness and her sense of independence. Gerber makes her didactic intent clear when she writes that Sandy had not "considered that there had to be a *receiver* of her dance; she hadn't even given a thought to dancing for a man. [...] If she learned to dance, she was going to do it for her own satisfaction and pleasure" (61). Sandy's enjoyment of the dance is not reliant on whether she satisfactorily performs male desire but whether she satisfies her own. By contrast, Mrs. Fishman's and Pam's slavish endorsement of rigorous beauty and exercise practices in order to satisfy dominant patriarchal conventions of the feminine body are represented in the book as flawed and anti-feminist. Sandy, on the other hand, uses belly dancing not to lose weight but to explore the idea of inner beauty that is ultimately translated into a positive sense of herself as

beautiful: “Her costume dazzled her eyes. Overnight, it seemed to her, she had become transformed from Miss Blubber Thighs to Miss Arabian Nights” (76). Gerber’s last reference to Sandy’s transformation into “Miss Arabian Nights”, highlights, as I have established throughout this thesis, one of the central conventions of feminist belly dance narratives: the affiliation of belly dance – an always already unrestrained, sexualised, and potentially dangerous body – with the feminist notion of bodily emancipation from repressive social and cultural structures. Gerber’s linkage of the belly dance performance with the moment of Sandy’s independence is, however, informed by a discourse of racialism. Even though Gerber’s novel is an empowering novel in so many ways, it nevertheless falls back on reactionary neo-Orientalist discourses. Gerber, however, is careful to ensure that Sandy’s belly-dancing body is not read as too dangerous: Sandy’s first public, paid performance is at a home for the elderly. In this way, Sandy can experience the transgressive sexuality implied through the belly dance but in a safe, socially protected space.

In order to fully appreciate the significance of belly dance as a mode of female empowerment in Gerber’s novel, it is essential to explore the potential of belly dance’s mobility as a cultural sign. As I have argued throughout this thesis, belly dance, and the proliferation of images surrounding the dance form, represent a complex site of cultural anxiety about women’s corporeality and sexuality. The belly dancer as an icon of sexualised femininity has been, and continues to be, subject to change and renewal, always being coded and recoded according to socio-cultural relations and mores. Each time the figure of the belly dancer is employed, a tension is enacted between this potential for renewal and the heavily

determined nature of the belly dancer's function as a symbol of sexual excess. In other words, the link between belly dance and excessive female sexuality was so strongly forged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that when belly dance is translocated through time to different historical contexts and to different geographical places, it maintains the traces of its previous meanings. Indeed, the power of belly dance as a cultural image lies in its ability to evoke a female sexuality that induces ambivalence. This ambivalence might be explained through the topos of the "unruly woman", a figure, according to Rowe, "of female outrageousness and transgression which often evokes [...] ambivalence – on the one hand, delight; on the other, unease, derision, or fear" (30). Gerber's construction of belly dance acknowledges this ambivalence implied in the movement of belly dance and does not shy away from it: "Flushing with heat, Sandy felt too embarrassed to practice the movement. The obvious thrusting out of her breasts, then her buttocks, seemed too brazen. Suddenly she felt shy [...] for an instant she wanted to flee back to Thinnercize class, to the innocent, mechanical jumping jacks of Auntie Fan" (80). *Sadzia!* deconstructs not only the discourses that have seen belly dance represented as a demeaning or inappropriate sexual display, but also intervenes in dominant assumptions that it is only thin, firm, and non-wobbling female bodies that express successful femininity. Crucially, the most positive aspect of Gerber's narrative is that unlike the protagonists of McCombie's and Coombs's books, Sandy is not punished for her indulgence in the transgressive behaviour of belly dancing in public, nor is she punished for fulfilling her sexual desires for Sumir.

The authors of Young Adult fictions demonstrate the inescapability of the cultural trace of sexual excess attached to the concept of belly dance by utilising the belly dancer as a “stock rhetorical theme” (Rowe 30) of female unruliness. Derrida’s concept of “hauntology” or the “trace” might be usefully applied here (*The Specters of Marx* 10). Derrida describes the ways in which history leaves traces of a past which is, and yet is not, there in the present. In other words, the ghostly traces of the belly dancer as a vaguely threatening force may be recoded or reframed but ultimately retains the ghosts of its past. This is most apparent when Mrs. Fishman finally discovers that Sandy has been taking belly dancing, and not “Bellycize” as Sandy has told her – an exercise class where “You work on your belly” (40). Mrs. Fishman, furious with her daughter, assumes the activity to be “striptease” (83) and tells her daughter “I want you out of it. It’s not respectable!” (85). As I have shown in earlier Chapters, the notion of belly dance as an unrespectable striptease is an integral component of the enduring stereotypes attached to the dance form. Gerber works not only to revise these stereotypes but also to invest belly dancing with the power to resist the social conventions which would attempt to curtail the “unruly woman”. Gerber’s reiteration of the historical connotations of belly dance as degraded and unladylike serve to throw into relief the subsequent oppositional stance taken by Sandy: “[she] walked out of the room. She didn’t look back. She entered her classroom [...] Sandy took her place and began to move in a manner her mother would have considered far too sexy” (87). Sandy’s new-found confidence to stand up to her mother is inextricably caught up in her desire to defy socio-cultural conventions that insist she move her body differently. The unruly woman, according to Rowe, “represents a special kind of

excess [...] her sexuality is neither evil and uncontrollable like that of the femme fatale, nor sanctified and denied like that of the virgin/Madonna" (10-11). Toward the end of the novel Sandy's empowerment through belly dance is crystallised when she belly dances at the old-age home: "She danced as she had never danced before. She used her body as if it were an instrument extracting from it tones of emotion, depth of feeling she had never given voice to in the past" (162). "Ultimately", argues Rowe, "the unruly woman [...] is transgressive above all when she lays claim to her own desire" (31).

Karen Mueller Coombs's *Samantha Gill, Belly Dancer*: Representing Incestuous Desire and the Belly-Dancing Body

If Gerber utilised the ghostly traces of female unruliness in *Sadzia!* to challenge the negative associations of belly dance with inappropriate female sexuality, Karen Mueller Coombs, in *Samantha Gill, Belly Dancer*, uses these traces to reinforce these very associations. Coombs won first place in the 1986 Utah Arts Council Creative Writing Contest for her book *Samantha Gill*. The novel, created for nine-to twelve-year-old readers, was later published in 1989. *Samantha Gill* tells the story of ten-year-old Samantha who, with the help of her best friend Abby, decides to learn belly dancing as a hobby over the summer holidays. While on the surface this book may appear to be an innocuous tale about a girl's exploration of an unusual summer hobby, the story is actually a thinly veiled representation of incestuous desire of a father for his pre-pubescent daughter and her duty to simultaneously court his desire and ward it off. I argue that the central emblems used to represent

this desire are, first of all, the image of the snake, which symbolises, at one level, a patriarchal social economy, but ultimately functions at a much baser level as the father's penis; and secondly, belly dance, which acts as the medium through which the daughter's body is read as sexually available/enticing.

While my reading of *Sadzia!* assumes Gerber's narrative to be self-consciously resistant, Coombs's novel by contrast is far more ambiguous. On the one hand, the meanings which emerge in the novel appear to operate on a deeply unconscious level¹⁹. On the other hand, the novel's often-blatant sexual symbolism, as well as the ideologically problematic construction of the father/daughter relationship, offers a compelling case for reading the text as far more deliberate than it first appears. My reading of *Samantha Gill* reveals the ways in which belly dance has been inculcated (unconsciously or not) into a didactic tale of girlhood socialisation, in what amounts to an extremely unsettling text which warns girls about the potential danger of their bodies and sexuality.

Like the instructional books of the 1970s that were examined in Chapter Three, all three Young Adult books analysed in this Chapter define belly dance as a kind of alternative to other types of popular exercise. Each of the female protagonists cites clumsiness, ineptitude at sport, or being overweight as the main reasons for taking up belly dance. Samantha, who we are told is "more awkward

¹⁹ This book was published in Utah, an area of the United States known for its majority population of Mormons. While I do not wish to infer the author's religious affiliation from this fact, it is intriguing to speculate as to whether she was influenced by the socio-cultural climate in which she lived, with its famous legalisation of polygamy, and whether this might have resulted in this cautionary tale about the sexual dynamics of family units.

than a lot of girls her age" (8), decides to teach herself to belly dance using Özel's 1976 how-to book *The Belly Dancer in You* (15)²⁰. Samantha is eager to learn the dance when her friend Abby recounts this anecdote about a belly dancer she once saw in a restaurant:

My mother knew the dancer. She said she'd taken a racquetball class with her and that she had been really fat and – get this – she was so clumsy she practically tripped over her own toenails. But you'd never have guessed it to watch her dance. She was real skinny and she didn't trip once (10-11).

Here, Coombs establishes two significant and recurring ideas about belly dance in the novel: belly dance is an alternative to other forms of exercise and is an effective mode for weight loss. More importantly, however, in this novel there is an underlying ambiguous subtext which suggests that belly dance is not just a hobby or form of exercise, but is also a symbolic catalyst for Samantha's reluctant sexual awakening. Unlike Gerber's novel *Sadzia!* though, where belly dance is the vehicle through which Sandy achieves bodily freedom and selfhood, in *Samantha Gill* belly dance is the allegorical scapegoat through which female sexuality and the female body are denigrated.

The recurring idea in the book of overcoming girlish "clumsiness" (4, 8), "klutziness" (10), and a lack of "gracefulness" (115) stands in for a kind of transition from childhood to pubescence, or even sexual readiness. This transition in

²⁰ See Chapter Three for discussion of the belly dance instructional manuals of the 1970s.

Samantha Gill is especially unsettling because it is, in particular, Samantha's father who takes what is arguably too active a role in his daughter's integration into a heterosexual social economy. At the end of the novel Samantha has learned her lesson about the sexualised messages her body might convey through the movement of belly dance, and completely withdraws from the activity. One moment in the novel that reveals the ambiguity of belly dance as both an innocent pastime and a symbol of inappropriate sexual maturity occurs when Samantha announces to her family that she does not want to continue belly dancing. Mr. Gill responds with disappointment:

"I'm sorry you want to quit. I hoped it would make a good hobby for you. At the very least I thought it might make you more..." Mr. Gill hesitated.

"More graceful," finished Samantha (115).

Derrida has speculated in his work on the significance of the ellipsis in what he has called "an *elliptical* essence" (296), where the "three dots" signify the logic of the supplement. He questions whether the word or words "left out" are the same as what is "merely implied"? (296). The unfinished sentence of Mr. Gill implies that his answer contains a less than innocent expectation; Samantha heads off the potential for Mr. Gill's inappropriate expectations by providing an innocent alternative. In light of the construction of belly dance throughout the novel Samantha's assessment of what her father had hoped she would become seems, paradoxically, *faux-naïf*.

A long-standing family custom means that Samantha cannot begin her new hobby until her father has heard her argue her case for why she should be allowed to belly dance. She must earn ten points for her argument in order to gain her father's permission. After Samantha secures her ten points Mr. Gill is enthusiastic about his daughter's new interest and surprises Samantha with tickets to "Kismet", a local belly dancing event for the whole family (57). However, after seeing the belly dancing for the first time Samantha begins to get a "creepy feeling" (71) and decides "for some reason it was the way the woman moved that bothered her" (72). It is especially Mr. Gill's reaction to the belly dancing at this event that foreshadows the inappropriate fixation he exhibits with Samantha's hobby: "She wondered what her father was thinking. He just sat there chewing on his mustache with a strange look in his eye" (70). The image of Mr. Gill's moustache recurs throughout the book. In these images, which possess a strong auto-erotic tone, Mr. Gill variously "chews" (70, 79), "tugs" (44), "strokes" (93), and "pulls" (113) his moustache often while he is looking at Samantha. For example, after her single belly dancing performance Mr. Gill "tugged at his mustache and grinned at Samantha" (110).

Samantha becomes especially agitated by the belly dance performance when she watches a dancer who seemed to have "no bones" (69). Samantha determines that her uneasiness with belly dancing is caused by the "sinuous and curvy" (72), snake-like movements the dancer makes during the dance:

Now she realized why she kept getting that creepy feeling when the no-

bones woman danced. All her movements were sinuous and curvy. They were *snakey*! All along the woman had been reminding Samantha of a snake! (72).

When the dancer on the stage takes a large snake out of a basket and dances with it, the performance becomes highly eroticised:

Samantha could see the dancer on stage put the snake around her neck. Then she held the snake over her head in the air, stared into its slitty eyes, brought it back down and let it slither over her chest. All the time the woman kept doing hip shimmies and thrusts as though she were alone on the stage, not dancing with a bulgy five-foot-long reptile (72)²¹.

Repulsed by the spectacle of the snake dance and the identification of belly dance with snakes and serpentine movements, Samantha immediately changes her mind about wanting to learn the dance: “I absolutely, positively do not want a hobby that involves snakes, I absolutely, positively do not want to be a belly dancer” (73). Afraid of disappointing her father – “my dad will call me a quitter” (74) – she decides to learn the dance only long enough to be able to perform once. She does not, however, inform her parents of her decision until her performance at the end of the novel. Struggling to come to terms with the reasons for her sudden revulsion for belly dancing, Samantha’s secret becomes a source of trauma and shame.

²¹ It is worth mentioning here that Coombs’s description of the snake dance is, to a degree, similar to Flaubert’s representation of Salamambo’s dance with a snake. The similarity of the representations of serpents and serpent dancing demonstrates the pervasive way in which stock stereotypes have become embedded in cultural narratives about Eastern dance. See for example, Flaubert’s passage quoted in Chapter One, p37.

The issues surrounding Samantha's anxiety and hatred of snakes and serpentine movement dominates the remainder of the story. However, Samantha's fear of disappointing her father, who continuously tells his daughter "I'm glad you're not a quitter" (76), is overturned when he betrays her trust by buying his daughter a gift certificate for a snake. This is a crucial moment in the book. While on the surface, the snake is intended for Samantha to use in her belly dance performances²², the image of the snake is actually a flimsily disguised priapic symbol: "She pushed herself away from her father [...] she wanted to say that there was no way [...] she would ever [have] the slightest connection with certain long, slimy creatures" (86). Samantha's reaction, as well as the unmentionability of the snake, and Mr. Gill's final comments, leaves the disturbing sexual innuendo of the scene undeniable:

She was about to shout "I hate snakes and you know it!" when her father interrupted. "The ice cream! I left it in the car." He turned and dashed out of Samantha's room. "I'll let you tell your mother," he called over his shoulder [...] Be sure and tell her boas are gentle – not like pythons." His chuckle hung in the air behind him (87).

Coombs's use of the word "chuckle" has a vaguely sinister tone, especially when coupled with Mr. Gill's cowardice at not wanting to tell his wife about the snake, and, most disturbingly, the suggestion that "boas are gentle – not like pythons". In

²² While not a traditional part of Middle Eastern or belly dancing, some performers do include live snakes in their performances. For more information see *The Middle Eastern Dance Resource Guide* <http://www.bdancer.com/med-guide/culture/snake.html>

Deborah Cameron's 1992 study, which explored the meanings and significance of American College students' nomenclature for the penis, she found that snake metaphors such as "python", "cobra", and "anaconda" were common (371). Coombs's distinction between boas and pythons serves to construct the father's penis (presumably the boa) as harmless as well as to conceal the more insidious implication of the father's incestuous desire. Samantha is upset that her father knows how she feels about snakes. Immediately after this incident she retreats to her childhood tree-house and hopes that "this is all a monstrous mistake" (87). The episode is described as a traumatic moment for Samantha, who feels as though she might "throw up" (87):

she could hear the blood rushing through her brain. [...]The floor seemed to get very far away. [...] she wished she could drop dead that instant (86).

Only moments before this incident Samantha had been comfortable with Mr. Gill's fatherly affection, when he had come up to her room to give her the gift certificate for the snake:

"Samantha!" he called, [...] "Shimmy over here and give your father a hug." Samantha was glad to oblige. There was nothing she liked better than a good hug. It made her feel tingly right down to her toenails (85).

At the point when Mr. Gill offers Samantha the snake/priapus she suffers a kind of anxiety attack during which she is unable to breathe or speak (86). When

Samantha regains her composure, she rejects his physical contact and literally pushes herself away from her father (86).

Temptresses and Snakes

The symbol of the snake has an extensive and intricate literary history of being used to explore themes of sexuality and temptation. While the snake is unmistakably representative of the father's penis in *Samantha Gill*, it also functions as a feminine symbol of temptation. The link between the snake and biblical notions of evil and temptation are made apparent when Samantha says: "If there was anything evil about belly dancing it was the snake part of it" (82). Bram Dijkstra stressed that the link between women and snakes was especially pronounced in the nineteenth-century imagination: "in the evil, bestial implication of her beauty, woman was not only tempted by the snake but was the snake herself" (305). Samantha functions in this narrative as a composite temptress figure – she is representative of both Eve and the snake. Furthermore, Dijkstra suggests that among the terms to describe a woman's appearance none were more overused during the late nineteenth century than "serpentine", "sinuous", and "snake-like" (305). Recall, for instance, the discussion of Grant Allen's *What's Bred in the Bone* and Elma's "Eastern snake dance" with the feather boa. While the ten-year-old Samantha works hard to negate the identification between herself, the snake, and the sexuality represented by the belly dance, the father's desire in the book is treated as both innocent and natural. It is Samantha who expresses repulsion at the thought of the snake.

Samantha very clearly distinguishes between fear and hatred of snakes. On several occasions she adamantly asserts “I am not *afraid* of snakes. I *hate* snakes” (90). Yet when Samantha tells both her parents that she hates snakes, her father explains that he has researched phobias and believes that what she needs is “desensitization”: which he explains “means gradual, gentle, repeated exposure to something you’re afraid of” (92). Samantha’s entry into an appropriate category of femaleness is determined simultaneously by her necessary acceptance of the snake/penis, but also her rejection of it.

Belly dance works as a metaphor for female sexuality on display. When Samantha identifies the symbolic relationship between the belly dance and her own inevitable sexual development, she rejects belly dancing. In rejecting the belly dance, she is also rejecting her father’s interests in her emerging sexual identity. Where belly dancing symbolises sexuality, the rejection of belly dancing shows that Samantha has learned to make the correct choice (according to a dominant patriarchal social system) about what is an appropriate socio-sexual development for a young girl.

Samantha Gill contains specific training in gender, and in this way the book functions in a similar way to a fairy tale. Critic Anne Cranny-Francis explains that the instructive feature of fairy tales works by “introducing girls to a number of feminine characters, defining their specific characteristics and then evaluating those characteristics by reference to what subsequently happens to these characters in their narratives” (120). Part of this didactic process is achieved by showing what sort of behaviour is rewarded, as well as illustrating how punishment for inappropriate behaviour is inevitable (120). In this way girls learn to take up the

discursive practices of what it is to be female in this society. These practices, furthermore, are constructed in such a way that they seem to be natural components of the subject's personal and social identity.

The principal lesson that *Samantha Gill* teaches its readers is that girls need to exercise sexual modesty not just around men in general, but also to monitor their sexuality carefully around their fathers. If this book is to be read as a moralistic tale, Samantha's punishment for her inappropriate experimentation with belly dance is the unwanted sexual attention of her father. Samantha becomes aware that her sexuality should be concealed, and that the impending punishment for inadequate control of that sexuality is the threat of her father as a potential predator. Coombs's gender construction in this book is ideologically problematic, as it can be seen to encourage a sense of shame and self-loathing in young female readers. Above all, and indeed the most unsettling aspect of this book, is the implication that it is the girl, not the adult, who is responsible for the sexual messages that are read onto her body. Samantha's fear of appearing snake-like through the belly dance is the fear of being the temptress. Samantha says "I must have been blind not to notice how snakey belly-dancing is [...] but now she saw it – and felt disgusted" (82). This idea that women/girls are continually manipulating men to arousal is, according to Bordo, so powerful a construction that "rapists and child abusers have been believed when they have claimed that five-year-old female children 'led them on'" (6).

When Samantha tells her mother that the father had offered her a snake, Mrs. Gill is initially alarmed:

“A snake?” Her voice went up into a squeak.

“A snake.”

Suddenly Mrs. Gill stopped her beating [the casserole] and got an understanding look on her face. “I get it. It’s so you’ll have a snake for your belly dancing, isn’t it?” (90).

Mrs. Gill’s initial reaction reveals a moment of recognition of the symbolic implication of her husband offering a snake to his daughter. Her reaction seems to be directly related to the story’s subtext of incest and not to the choice of the unusual pet. Yet Mrs. Gill chooses to ignore the sexual implication and respond to Samantha that the gift is simply thoughtfulness. Both the sexual innuendo signified by the snake and Mrs. Gill’s complicity becomes conspicuous when she tells her daughter: “You know, when I was your age, I was afraid of – hated – snakes too,” (91). The mother attempts to induct her daughter into heterosexuality, and in the book this correlates with the acceptance of the father.

There is a paradox at work in this book. On the one hand it presents an attempt to prepare the daughter for entrance into (hetero)sexual maturity through the incestuous desire of the father, but on the other hand it seems to suggest that girls should not ‘stray from the path’. Either way, a patriarchal discourse motivates this narrative. The mother can be read as a patriarchal feminine woman: she counsels her daughter to accept her patriarchal positioning but at the same time the narrative shows Samantha rejecting the snake and the sexuality of the dance. The critical moment in the story, when Samantha finally rejects the belly dancing, is the moment when her father oversteps the boundary by suggesting that they belly dance together. This moment is also informed by ethnocentric assumptions about

the Orientalised body as an available body. Samantha's engagement in the practice of belly dance seems to give the father license to treat Samantha as an unruly body. In other words, the belly-dancing body connotes a permissive sexual body. At the end of the book, Samantha ensures her own safety by choosing to take cooking classes instead of belly dancing classes. Samantha's decision to take cooking classes allows her to avoid the sexual inappropriateness of belly dancing with her father. Her resolution reinstates the status quo and confirms her acceptance and entry (like her mother) into the private and domestic space of the home.

Along with repressing her sexuality, the child in the book also learns about suppressing that other supposedly dangerous female desire: her appetite. Bordo suggests that women's appetites have been culturally coded (and gendered) as a specifically indulgent female desire (14); a desire that Samantha, like her mother, must learn to curb. Throughout the book there is a focus on weight, eating, and abstinence from eating. For example, Samantha's mother, who writes verses for greeting cards, is working on a series of cards that congratulate people on losing weight. One of the verses reads:

When the other little piggy went to market, the first little piggy stayed home.
When the other little piggies had roast beef, the first little piggy had none.

When the other little piggies got fatter, the first little piggie got ...WEE WEE WEE! Congratulations, first little piggy! (49)²³.

Samantha learns to control her food intake as the result of the ways in which her parents approach concepts of food, femininity and self-control. Controlling food also, however, functions to suspend (or perhaps refuse) the onset of sexual maturity, and in this way promotes a pathological femininity: one that is gendered feminine but without sexual identity. Bordo notes that the “so-called flight from sexuality” is common amongst many sufferers of anorexia as well as bulimia, and has often been informed by early experiences of sexual abuse (46). In *Samantha Gill, Belly Dancer* the issues of weight control signals such a connection between sexual abuse and a fear of sexuality. Bordo suggests that the syndrome of anorexia emerges:

not as a conscious decision to get as thin as possible, but as the result of her having begun a diet fairly casually, often at the suggestion of a parent, having succeeded splendidly in taking off five or ten pounds, and then having gotten hooked on the intoxicating feeling of accomplishment and control (149).

In the book Samantha’s father often chastises her for eating ice cream:

²³ Coombs’s use of the image of the pig as moralising tool for weight loss evokes well-established traditions of associating women with pigs; what Patricia Parker has called the “sisterhood of swine” (39). For an interesting re-reading of the derogatory application of the theme of woman-as-pig, Rowe in her book *The Unruly Woman* (1995) discusses the feminist potential of the image of Jim Henson’s Muppet character Miss Piggy.

“If you’re serious about learning to belly dance you have to begin watching your belly. Too many sundaes and it will be your belly that comes jiggling into the room first.” He laughed. “A dancer with Dunlop’s disease would look pretty ridiculous, wouldn’t she?” (65).

Yet the reader is told at the beginning of the book that Samantha “looks like a twig” (4) – she is a skinny ten-year-old girl. Still the admonition is not taken lightly by Samantha: “Now that I think of it, thought Samantha, letting a spoonful of sundae slide down her throat, none of the dancers in my books or on the record covers has Dunlop’s disease. [...] I never thought of having to stay in shape when I took up belly dancing” (66). Underlying all of the references to weight in the book is a generalised condemnation of female appetite that is intimately linked to female sexuality. It is, conversely, perfectly alright for Mr. Gill to eat as much ice cream as he wants (65).

Coombs’s use of belly dancing shows the power of belly dance as a cultural image to convey ideas about female sexuality. Women who belly dance, even when they are silent, are seen to be ‘speaking’ through their bodies a language of sexual provocation. In this book there is a discourse about dangerous female sexuality that constantly threatens to surface – it suggests that women’s sexuality must be repressed for their own good. The female belly-dancing body signifies, in this book, an immoral sexual seduction.

The Grotesque Ear

The book culminates with Samantha's one and only belly dance performance for her family and their friends, after which she announces that she will not continue belly dancing. Samantha's recognition of the sexualised movement in the belly dance performance is also the recognition of her own seemingly dangerous impending pubescence. The pivotal moment in the book where the issues surrounding the onset of Samantha's puberty and the belly-dancing body converge is an event involving Samantha's newly pierced ears. Earlier in the novel, before the emergence of Samantha's repressed anxiety surrounding the snake, and before the serpentine movement of the belly dancer's body surfaces as a point of anxiety, Samantha decides to pierce her ears for her belly dancing debut. However, it is not the experience of the piercing itself that constitutes this critical moment – according to Samantha there was “Nothing to it” (31). Rather, I argue, the bloody hole and infection that develops from the piercing, as well as the painful insertion of “dangly” earrings for her performance (101), constitutes a hybrid image of grotesque metonymic menstruation and depucelation (or loss of virginity):

she opened the dangly earring and aimed the earwire toward the hole in her earlobe. [...] the first part went in okay [...] But then the wire came to a dead end inside her earlobe. It felt as though the wire was poking around inside with no place to go. “YOW!” yelled Samantha [...] She gritted her teeth and made another jab with the earwire. This time, though it made her want to cry and her tummy want to curl up in a corner somewhere inside her, the wire went through (101).

Coombs's graphic and lengthy description of the insertion of the earring seems a clear enactment of virginal penetration. In current criticism, the grotesque is referred to almost exclusively in connection with the lower bodily stratum. As I have argued throughout this thesis, it is indeed the lower bodily stratum which consistently emerges in the representation of belly dance as a productive site of the grotesque body. However, my reading of the image of the ear as a displaced site of the grotesque creates a confluence between the upper and lower bodily strata. Bakhtin argues in "all languages there is a great number of expressions related to the genital organs, the anus and buttocks, the belly, the mouth and nose. But there are few expressions for the other parts of the body: arms, legs, face, and eyes" (319). Bakhtin overlooks two important grotesque body parts, the ears and the navel. I will return to the navel shortly, but wish, at this point, to consider the discursive construction of the grotesque ear.

Bakhtin's neglect of the grotesque ear is somewhat surprising since in *Rabelais and His World* he notes the "unexpected and completely carnivalesque birth of Gargantua through his mother's ear" (226). This Rabelaisan episode where Gargemelle, after eating too much tripe, is forced to give birth to her giant baby through her ear, suggests a parody of the Virgin Mary's conception of Jesus through hearing the word of the Holy Spirit. The metonymic conflation of the ear and the vagina in relation to Mary's conception of Jesus is well documented. According to Leo Steinberg, the Latin Church evolved an "acoustical metaphor" (26) which "taught that the Virgin conceived through [...] the right ear". Steinberg explains that this "fantasy" was to "haunt the popular and poetic imagination in

Western Catholicism right down to W. B. Yeats" (26)²⁴. In Coombs's book Samantha's right ear functions not so much as a site of impregnation, but rather more manifestly as a symbolic hymen. There is also a close connection between hearing and the polarity of Eve and Mary where, according to Steinberg, "both lent their ears to persuasion – the one in credulity to the fiend [the serpent], the other to the angel of God" (27). The act of re-piercing the already pierced ear with the dangly earring suggests the moment of Samantha's disobedience, since at the beginning of the novel she is warned by her mother, "absolutely no dangly earrings" (24). The reader is told earlier in the story that Samantha's mother was eighteen when she got her ears pierced, "And it was a real mess. My right ear got infected" (23). Coombs's description of ear-piercing again invokes the metaphoric loss of virginity.

The symbolic importance of the infection which ensues from the piercing is worth noting. In particular, as I discussed in Chapters One and Two, the cultural narrative of belly dance has often incorporated the notion of the dance as infection²⁵. Samantha does not heed her mother's warning, nor does she take into account her intuition about the serpentine movement of the belly dance, but against her better judgement, puts in the earring: "Her ear didn't look fine. The hole didn't look anything like she thought it should. It looked really long and skinny. [...]"

²⁴ According to Steinberg Yeats's poem "The Mother of God" (1931) gives "voice to Mary's subjective experience" (26):

The threefold terror of love; a fallen flare
Through the hollow of an ear...

²⁵ See, for example, the discussion in Chapter Two of the epidemic of "Salomania" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (17-19).

every swing of the earring felt like someone was poking a hot needle around in her earlobe" (102). It is significant that Samantha only inserts one earring into her right ear (the same ear that became infected on her mother); she is half-way between childhood and pubescence. Samantha's preparation for the dance incorporates dressing in her costume which consists of a swimming top "– her bra, as she preferred to think of it" (99), a decorative fishnet, and applying makeup. Looking in the mirror she spins around: "How exotic, she thought. [...] In fact, she looked so exotic, Samantha was almost beginning to feel sorry it was also going to be her *last performance*" (100). Given that female sexuality in this book is regarded with such ambivalence, the construction of Samantha's preparation and adornment for the performance suggests that she has not only failed to adequately monitor her newly sexualised body, but has wilfully been seduced by the pleasures of vanity. Pamela Norris, in her discussion of early Christian hostility to women's cosmetics and clothes, has argued:

female adornment is a metaphor for (wicked) female desire: women are categorized according to how they dress, and an alluring presentation is read as an invitation to sexual dalliance that will rob the male of his self-control and leave him powerless to resist (75).

This notion of female vanity, when combined with the Orientalist stereotypes of belly dance as a metaphor for unruly and dangerous sexuality, cements the novel's implication that women (and girls) are responsible for the reactions and actions of men.

Samantha's symbolic depucelation is complete when she performs her belly dance for her parents. Also in attendance is Grandma Gill, as well as James, one of her father's work colleagues, and his girlfriend, Ms. Strong. It is notable that Samantha introduces herself to her audience as an "Exotic Dancer" (104) and not as a "belly dancer". There is an implied transition of the dance from belly dance when Samantha practices privately to an exotic dance or striptease when it is performed more publicly. James's comment makes this transition clear: "You're the most exotic dancer I've ever seen. And I've seen a lot of exotic dancers in my time, let me tell you" (109). Like Mr. Gill, James is disconcertingly absorbed in Samantha in a sexually predatory way. While she's dancing Samantha "saw her friend James sitting on the sofa with a huge grin on his face that reminded Samantha of the Cheshire cat in *Alice and Wonderland*, a book she hated" (105)²⁶. The performance itself, according to Samantha, is a "disaster" (109). Toward the end of her dance the pain in her ear, as well as the execution of a "stomach flutter" which requires "short, panting breaths" (108), triggers Samantha to faint. The moment is described thus:

She must have panted too quickly, or else she was more excited and nervous than she realized, because the room suddenly got smaller and smaller and darker and darker. When the room got big and light again, Samantha found herself sitting on the floor. The first thing she noticed was the pain she had in her right ear. The next thing she noticed was the pain

²⁶ Given the subtext of paedophilic incest in this novel it is possible that in referencing *Alice in Wonderland*, Coombs is also alluding to the Lewis Carroll's well-documented penchant for female children. For further information see Hunt (2001).

she had in her behind from sitting on one of the seashells in the fishnet skirt (108).

The description of Samantha's excitement and subsequent fainting, coupled with the pain she feels, first at the site of the ear-piercing and second in her "behind", connotes a metaphoric loss of innocence.

The grotesque ear in this moment is figuratively linked to the grotesque lower bodily stratum. Moreover, the implication of the relationship between the ear and the seashell Samantha finds she is painfully sitting on should not be ignored. As Michael Sims has pointed out, like the image of birth from the ear, in ancient mythology "birth from a seashell was also a common theme" (88). Sims elaborates, "Spiralling, folded inward, both ear and shell seemed visually reminiscent of the vulva – and therefore symbolic of both sexual intercourse and birth" (88). The reading of this moment as a symbolic loss of innocence is further strengthened by Coombs's construction of Mr. Gill's reaction: "Whew!" Said her father. "For a second there we thought you had shimmied yourself into Never-Never Land" (108). In the context of the overall characterisation of Mr. Gill, and his somewhat unwholesome interest in his daughter's impending pubescence, the reference to "Never-Never Land" – a place where children never grow up – is especially pointed.

At the end of the novel, however, despite the fairly graphic imagery of the grotesque pierced ear as symbolic loss of virginity, Samantha's sexual immaturity is reinforced. The realisation of Samantha's pre-pubescence, or more accurately, her sexual unreadiness, is further crystallised by Coombs's treatment of

Samantha's navel. Throughout the novel Coombs suggests a number of reasons why belly dancing is unsuitable for the sexually underdeveloped Samantha. Firstly, Samantha decides her feet are too large and that the belly dancers at the Kismet performance all had small feet. Secondly, the serpentine movement of belly dancing generates a "creepy" (71) feeling in Samantha, and finally, at the end of the novel she announces that she "has a handicap so serious it ruins [her] for belly dancing" (112): Samantha's belly button is an "outsy" rather than an "insy" (113).

As I outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the female navel has proven to be a powerful site of anxiety and is a compellingly complex grotesque body part. While Bakhtin describes the belly as an important site of the grotesque he fails to note the grotesque nature of the navel. For example he explains that the lower bodily stratum is concerned with the "life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth" (21). The navel, however, complicates and to some extent confounds Bakhtin's paradigm of the grotesque lower body and the classical upper body, because it exists in the kind of liminal space which, while neither of the upper or lower stratum, is nevertheless the visual focus of the belly.

Elisabeth Bronfen has argued that the navel is quite literally a "no thing"; "[of] no anatomical value, the navel is at once a worthless body part and a cipher for obscene fantasies of erotic or horrific nature involving penetration into the body interior or extracting something from this intimate, unknown site" (7). If, as Bakhtin claims "the artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, [...] impenetrable surface of the body" then why has the navel been subjected to such close and vigilant governance, as though it were, in fact, an orifice? In the

grotesque imagery of the belly dancer, the navel has repeatedly functioned as a site of horror in its symbolic displacement of the vagina. The implication that Samantha's "outsy" (a belly button which protrudes, rather than indents as an "insy" does) impairs her ability to belly dance suggests that her body bears the proof of her sexual immaturity. By contrast to this representation, Gerber's heroine Sandy "noticed, with a thrilling little shock, that her navel was quite deeply indented. Was it destined, someday, to display a gem?" (33). The incident when Samantha informs her audience of her handicap is worth recounting here:

[James] stared at Samantha's belly button. So did everyone else. Samantha had a strong urge to plaster her hands over her navel to hide it from all the looks it was getting, but she resisted it (113).

Samantha withstands the gaze of her audience in order to prove her unreadiness. The sexual intimation is further strengthened when Mr Gill looks at Samantha's navel and "stroked his mustache" while telling her that her "belly button isn't much of an outsy" (113). When he tells Samantha that it should not stop her from being a belly dancer she protests,

"But it would," she said. "Where would I stick my sapphire?"

She heard James chuckle and saw Gramma Gill give him an elbow jab (113).

This moment in the book, as well as James's interjections, are provocative because they mark a rupture between the façade of the story, in which a young girl

explores but ultimately rejects a hobby, and the (barely) veiled sexual symbolisms of the novel's subtext, in which belly dance functions as an allegory for exploring both taboo sexual relations and the socialisation of female children into patriarchal society.

**Karen McCombie's *Boys, Brothers and Jelly-Belly Dancing*:
Body Image, Appetite, and the Grotesque**

Boys, Brothers and Jelly-Belly Dancing, written in 2002, is the fifth book in Karen McCombie's *Ally's World* series. This series of children's books follows the intricacies of the adolescence of Ally Love, the books' thirteen-year-old female protagonist. The primary concern of this book is with Ally's intense dissatisfaction with her body, as well as her changing relationship with boys, and her anxiety related to having an absent mother. The issues surrounding poor body image are crucial to the development of Ally as a character as well as being important to the advancement of the narrative. In this book belly dancing functions as the central tool for encouraging young women's self-surveillance of their bodies according to socio-cultural norms. Like the other books discussed in this Chapter, McCombie's novel presents belly dancing as an alternative to mainstream sports and exercise. Unlike *Samantha Gill*, where Coombs never makes an attempt to construct belly dancing as a healthy and empowering practice for girls or women, McCombie's book appears to suggest that belly dancing might encourage Ally to reflect in a positive way on her developing sexuality and gain a constructive awareness of her body image. However, the book ultimately withdraws from this potential for empowerment through self-acceptance, and instead suggests that empowerment

comes through self-control and self-surveillance. Ultimately, *Jelly-Belly* reinforces social anxieties about young female bodies. Unlike *Sadzia!* which took a liberating approach to the intersections between body image and sexuality, *Samantha Gill* and McCombie's *Jelly-Belly* are reactionary. These Young Adult books and their thematic concerns with exercise and weight loss naturalise the girls' attempts to be thin as being a part of normal socialisation and growth toward maturity, as well as encouraging the idea that girls should be slim and toned to be acceptable.

As the title of the book suggests, Ally's primary discontent with her body is specifically with her belly, which she perceives as unacceptably soft and "wobbling" (80). The book opens with Ally in the bath. While contemplating what she calls her "pathetic excuse for boobs" (5), she notices that she has a "jelly belly":

I gasped at the big, blobby thing that had just risen out of the foamy bubbles: was it an over-inflated pink balloon? Was it a basking whale? Gingerly, I lifted my dripping hand out of the bathwater and tentatively gave The Thing a prod with my finger. It wobbled. It wobbled like a jelly. Omigod. I, Ally Love, had – eek! – a jelly belly (6).

In this passage, Ally's abdomen is reduced to "The Thing", akin to a monster; her belly is an unidentifiable wobbling entity rising out of the water. There is a sense of alienation from her body; the belly itself is singled out, disconnected from the whole body as an object of revulsion. Ally's self-fragmenting self-scrutiny in the passage above reveals what can be considered a powerful enactment of Laura Mulvey's famous notion of the "male gaze" (1975). Not only does Ally internalise the objectifying male gaze when she looks at her belly, but she also approaches her

body with caution: from the outset this book teaches that female bodies should be treated with fear and suspicion. Some titles of fitness 'how-to' books contemporary to the novel's publication, and which would have been part of the social context of a girl Ally's age, demonstrate the extent to which the (female) body is seen as the enemy: Brad Schoenfeld and Carole Semple-Marzetta's *Look Great Naked: Slim Down, Shape up & Tone Your Trouble Zones in Just 15 Minutes a Day* (2001), Michele Stanten's *Banish Your Belly, Butt & Thighs Forever!: The Real Woman's Guide to Body Shaping & Weight Loss* (2000), and Denise Austin's *Shrink Your Female Fat Zones: Lose Pounds & Inches – Fast! – from Your Belly, Hips, Thighs, & More* (2003).

Bordo argues that a sense of alienation from the body, which usually develops at the onset of puberty, is characteristic of eating-disordered persons (156). Furthermore, the self-criticisms of the anorectic, as we see characterised in McCombie's book, are "usually focused on the particular soft, protuberant areas of the body (most often the stomach) rather than the body as a whole" (188). While McCombie never identifies anorexia as the motivation behind Ally's obsession with her belly, the author's representation of Ally's weight-related anxiety is certainly symptomatic of the syndrome. Bordo states,

Adolescent anorectics express a characteristic fear of growing up to be mature, sexually developed, and potentially reproductive women. "I have a deep fear," says one, "of having a womanly body, round and fully developed. I want to be tight and muscular and thin" (155).

Ally's anxiety concerning the changes occurring in her body is revealed when she is pleased with the way her breasts appear flat in the bath: "I was transfixed, marveling at how my pretty-much-flat chest looked flatter than ever when I was lying back. From this angle, I looked like a cross between an ironing board and a boy" (3). Bordo also notes that many young anorectics frequently fantasise about growing up to be boys (155). At the end of the book when Ally decides not to continue with belly dancing classes, she claims that "all the glitter and tinkly stuff" was too "girlie" for her (199).

The way in which the author treats Ally's corporeal experience of herself is characteristic of Bakhtin's notion of the body as grotesque. Ally's unfamiliar, seemingly excessive, wobbling belly is given shape in the discursive language of the grotesque. The grotesque body is a body always in the process of "becoming" (317). As I have outlined elsewhere in this thesis, Bakhtin sees the body divided between the upper body and the lower body. He claims the "upper part is the face or the head and the lower part is the genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks" (21). In Bakhtin's model of the grotesque, the upper body emphasises the classical, contained, and spiritual, while the lower body stresses the protruding body, fertile, material, and growing (19). Ally's concern with her body is located in the lower bodily stratum. Her belly is grotesque because in the grotesque tradition it "outgrows" the rest of the body. The belly, unpredictable and animated, transgresses its own limits; according to the Bakhtinian grotesque, it "lead[s] an independent life" and in this sense hides the rest of the body "as something secondary" (Bakhtin 317).

Bakhtin identifies 'degradation' as a typical and important feature of the grotesque: "[degradation] means coming down to earth, the contact with the earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time" (21). In this way, degradation is an intensely ambivalent act since it often entails new birth implicit in death. As well as working on what Bakhtin calls the "cosmic" level, degradation is also encountered at the level of the body:

To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth (24).

Bakhtin's model of the grotesque seems to be stated in distinctly gendered terms: earth and the unfinished reproductive body are associated with the feminine, while heaven and the rational, complete body are male (Vice 156). Classical aesthetics are, according to Bakhtin, associated with the "ready-made [...] the finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development" (25). However, despite the apparent gendering of this divide, Bakhtin insists that his conceptions of the grotesque and the classical are opposites without the complication of gender.

It could be argued, though, that it is possible to add another dimension to the Bakhtinian binary of the grotesque and the classical by not ignoring the problematics of gender. If, as I showed earlier, socio-cultural notions of what constitutes an ideal female body have, since the 1970s, come to value a leaner body, with tight, firm muscles, this body can be seen to resemble the classical

body: finished, smooth, its “apertures closed” (29). The binary opposite of this classical tight body, then, is the wobbling, loose and protruding body, that is, a body “hideous from the point of view of ‘classic’ aesthetics” (Bakhtin 25). From this point of view, *Samantha Gill* and *Jelly-Belly* present, through their protagonists Samantha and Ally, an internal battle between the classical and the grotesque body.

The central way in which this battle between the grotesque and the classical is played out is through the practice of belly dancing. Samantha and Ally both reject the grotesquerie of belly dance’s confronting and excessive bodily gestures. The belly dance poses a threat to the idea of the classical body because it implies a body that is excessive – a body that does not conform to the private space of the controlled and proper body. This non-conforming grotesque body is emphasised by the repetition of certain words and actions to suggest the grotesque. In *Samantha Gill*, there is an accumulation of words used that evokes the grotesque; Samantha says, for example, “Today wasn’t the day she could wriggle out of her belly-dancing hobby. *Wriggle!* How could she have used that word? It reminded her of snakes.” (83). Later she recoils at the word “squirm” (84). In *Jelly-Belly*, Ally’s reaction to the different belly dance movements reveals her withdrawal from the emphasis the dance places on the grotesque lower bodily stratum. Describing the “hip circle”, for example, Ally says, “I didn’t feel too gorgeous, standing there sticking first my bum and then my jelly belly out into this big arc” (86). When the girls perform their belly dances in public, the grotesque erupting body in the process of change is on display. As I mentioned earlier, in the grotesque, the body is continually built. A new body is born from the death of the old one – the belly

dancer in costume, along with the movements of the dance where the body seems to escape its own confines, enacts this grotesque transformation. In *Jelly-Belly*, Ally's previous self is completely co-opted by this ambivalent grotesque transformation: "I only recognised myself by my boring, style-free brown hair and the little jelly belly on show above the waistband of my skirt. (Yuck.)" (183). This is dramatically different from the moment when Sandy in *Sadzia!* looks at her self in the mirror: "she looked in the mirror and saw a girl wearing a bathing suit top and a half-slip; the half-slip was pulled low over her hips. Her belly looked smooth and round. Not bad." (Gerber 69)

Both Samantha and Ally attempt to deny the positive elements of the grotesque and instead strive for the impossible ideal of the classical body. They are horrified by the grotesque body in belly dance, a wobbling and unruly body. They struggle to embody the classical aesthetic, closed, complete, and non-regenerative. However, this concept of the classical body (devoid of orifices, protuberances and convexities) is unattainable. While this elimination of the grotesque body is ultimately unattainable, the internal (fictional) logic of both books assumes that it is possible. The grotesque body is successfully repressed, not eliminated. *Samantha Gill* and *Jelly-Belly* explore the ambivalence and degradation implicit in the grotesque body through the belly dance and then work towards ridding the body of its grotesque materiality.

Both *Samantha Gill* and *Jelly-Belly* teach young girls to be critical and distrustful of the development of a fleshy female body. In *Jelly-Belly*, for example, there is no real sense that Ally's lack of self-confidence and efforts to lose weight are related to her actually being overweight, but are specifically related to fears and

anxieties about the normal development of womanish flesh and fat. When Ally talks to her older sister Rowan about her belly, Rowan says, “everyone gets a bit wobbly sometimes!” she persisted. “All you do is cut out chocolate and stuff and it’ll go away!” (36). Again, as in *Samantha Gill, Belly Dancer*, the author here constructs the appropriate response to poor body image as controlling food intake. The conversations about eating, not eating, and exercising, revolve around Ally’s end goal to eliminate her belly.

These discussions persistently naturalise and valorise Ally’s anxiety about her weight not only as *normal*, but moreover, as an *appropriate* adolescent concern. Kimberley Reynolds has argued that

while writers do not set out to harm their young readers, it is worth considering whether cumulatively, the literature produced for adolescent readers may encourage them to capitulate to corporate culture, to retreat into privatized and narcissistic preoccupations, and to think of adolescence as a time when it is ‘normal’ to self-harm (141).

Furthermore, the light-hearted tone with which the author approaches the subject of Ally’s obsession with her weight conceals the seriousness of this kind of representation of low self-esteem. For example, each time Ally is anxious or depressed, she eats. After the first belly dance class she attends with Rowan and her friend Von, Ally feels dejected by not having been invited to accompany the two older girls for a coffee at Von’s house, so she uses food for comfort and companionship: “Anyway, I wouldn’t be on my own. Just down the road from the church there was a late-night grocer’s, and I could hear a family-size bag of sour

cream and chive kettle crisps calling my name from here ..." (89). Again, in a chapter entitled "The Healing Power of Biscuits", food takes on therapeutic potential: "I needed something to cheer me up, and I had a feeling that something might be hiding in the biscuit tin" (150). Later Ally uses "Ginger Nut" to "keep the sick feeling at bay" (166) and calls a Jaffa Cake "medicinal" (167). Ally's over-eating is presented in the book not as the result of her low self-esteem, but is redirected as a consequence of her lack of self-control. Ironically though, while the book presents Ally's food consumption as overindulgence, it simultaneously reinforces and validates the connection between eating and depression. Even while it repudiates Ally for her uncontrollable cravings, it encourages them through the naturalisation of craving and the lack of self-control as two sides of the one coin. In other words it disapproves of comfort eating even as it legitimates it. McCombie's book continually evokes yet obscures the more serious implications and realities of women's eating disorders. Bordo argues "The talk of "obsession" and "innermost cravings", the furtiveness, the secrecy, the use of food to satisfy emotional needs, all suggest central elements of binge behaviour" (126). The issue of self-control as a source of anxiety is made clear when she is offered food by her father: "I stared at the hot buttery hunks of toast and felt my resolve wobble as much as my squashy tum. [...] Without my brain even agreeing to it, my hand shot out and grabbed a great big slice" (66). Embedded in the suggestion that Ally is governed by bodily hungers – a mindless consumption of food that threatens to overtake her – is also a gendered implication that her hunger is specifically female.

The depiction of hunger also intersects with issues of sexuality. Throughout the book Ally struggles with the nature of her relationship with her best friend Billy.

Unsure if she is sexually attracted to her friend, Ally oscillates between feelings of sexual attraction for Billy and being disturbed by the idea of kissing him. Ally attempts to repress her sexual desire at the same time that she attempts to suppress her appetite. Toward the end of the book, when she learns to moderate her eating, she also gains a new sense of confidence and control over her relationship with Billy.

When Ally attends the belly dancing classes with her sister it seems as though the book will eventually present a positive stance in relation to weight issues and eating. For example, when Ally goes to the belly dance class she notices “there wasn’t a textbook slim-line body in the room. In fact there were loads of different shapes, sizes and squashy bits in here” (88). Ally begins to reflect on the other bodies around her: “Maybe there was a point to coming back next week, after all. Next to some of the jelly bellies on show here, mine was a mere blip. A *junior* jelly belly” (89). The potential for Ally’s positive self-realisation is undermined here by her need for reassurance through the competitive evaluation of other women’s bodies. Several key points are put forward by the author to suggest that belly dance has the potential to improve Ally’s poor self-esteem. Firstly, belly dance is constructed as a suitable activity for a girl of her age (it is not overtly sexual); secondly, the book affirms that belly dance is an inclusive dance form open to women of all sizes and ages; thirdly, the spectators at Ally’s first performance were not disapproving as she expected; and, lastly, Ally’s best friend Billy thought she looked “brilliant” (199). Despite this accrual of positives, the book ultimately beats a hasty retreat from its suggestion that the dance is not that bad after all. At the end

of the book, despite her relatively positive experience of the dance, she decides not to go back to the belly dancing class.

The decision not to attend any more classes suggests that Ally has chosen to exercise not her body but her self-control by curbing her appetite. At the end of McCombie's book, Ally is confident now that she has the ability to control herself; that is, she feels powerful now that she can manage her appetite. In a letter Ally writes, she says:

It's my turn to have a Girls' Video Night, and I've got to sort out the nibbly bits before Sandie and Chloe and everyone arrive. Yes, there'll be nachos, and yes, I'll be eating some – only I'll try not to eat my whole body weight in them, just so the jelly belly doesn't get any bigger (199).

This passage reveals what Ally has learnt: in order to maintain her social status, sexual identity, and an appropriate standard of beauty, she must exercise not her body but dietary self-control. Ally's new relationship to food and her body is represented as a positive achievement – that she has found an optimistic middle-ground; she is not starving herself, but neither is she binge eating her “whole body weight” in food. Embedded in *Jelly-Belly* are some deeply problematic assumptions about pubescent female bodies as sites of fear, repulsion, and about sexuality as a taboo drive that must be regulated.

Coombs's character Samantha, on the other hand, metaphorically eliminates the consumption of food altogether when she chooses to cook food for others instead of eating food herself. In this way, the grotesque cycle of eating and excreting, or what Bakhtin calls the “inner processes of absorbing and ejecting”

(29) that are hidden in the classical body, are suppressed by Samantha and Ally. By the end of both novels, each character gives the impression of having succeeded at repressing the dangerous grotesque body.

Ally's struggle with her relationships with boys and peers is constructed as being directly influenced by her body image. Her acceptance of her own body is intimately tied up with validation from her family, boys, and her peers. Ally tells the reader at the end of the book that she has come to terms with her "jelly-belly" just as long as "the jelly belly doesn't get any bigger" (199). By the time the book concedes that "it's kind of *normal*" for girls to have a "jelly belly" (199), it has already established the notion that to have a thin, firm, non-flabby belly is better. Although Ally accepts that her friend Billy admires her, she does not fully accept herself. *Jelly-Belly* instructs the reader that girls need to be ever-vigilant in controlling their eating habits in order to be responsible and successful.

Belly Dance has provided authors with a multiplicity of narrative possibilities. In the language of these narratives, belly dance exists as representative of a range of issues seen as specific to women. As a metaphor, belly dance is assigned the demanding task of signifying an array of issues. It is manipulated to represent an array of feminine bodies: sexual, unruly, inappropriate, grotesque, and subversive. Often the historical and accumulated cultural meanings associated with belly dance are paramount to the narrative, and the dance itself is inconsequential. In this way belly dance, in all three books, frequently functions as a tool whereby the reader can draw on all the associations connected with the dance and its history.

Some of these texts attempt to rewrite the dance's cultural coding as temptation to male heterosexual desire and reclaim it as a feminist practice, while

others merely use belly dance to reaffirm cultural mythologies about woman as sexual temptress. The two books *Samantha Gill* and *Jelly-Belly* must be considered as servicing certain patriarchal gender ideologies. These books use the metaphorical universe of belly dance and the female-oriented culture of belly dance to warn girls of the dangers and temptations of food, sexuality, and desire, and to educate them as to the importance of exercising self-control in relation to both their sexuality and their weight. Gerber's novel *Sadzia!* on the other hand, reveals an attempt by the author to celebrate a positive version of unruly femininity through the belly-dancing body.

Beheading the Belly Dancer: (Dis)articulating the Female Body, Consumption, and the 'Postcolonial Exotic'.

Underlying the key conceptual themes of this thesis is the notion that belly dance has been subject to an ongoing process of commodification whereby it has been marketed and domesticated for Western consumption. It is this marketing of the concept of the 'belly dance' in the West in the period of mass consumer culture that is the central focus of this chapter. In particular, I undertake a close analysis of the meanings and significance of the visual codes and conventions of texts about belly dance or featuring belly dance. One of the most striking of these visual conventions is the remarkable regularity with which the image of a headless female torso is depicted on the front cover of belly dance texts. These images, I argue, have been crucial to the widespread commodification of belly dance. These include, for example, headless torsos on the covers of vinyl LPs and compact discs, the covers of instructional belly dance manuals, as well as fictional and non-fictional books, adult magazines, and in advertising campaigns. Key to my examination of this image is the exploration of the ways in which the commodification of racial difference and the female exotic are imbricated with the larger cultural field of postcolonial studies.

This chapter extends and develops my analysis of Western representations of belly dance in literature by raising some questions about the nature of the visual traces of the belly-dancing body and its circulation as a reified object in late-capitalist culture. My concentration on the visual does not, however, suggest that I dispense with the literary construction of the dance. Rather, I propose a contrapuntal dialogue between the two modes of

representation and will show that this dialogue is played out in the tensions which emerge between the text and what Wendy Waring has called the “paratextual” apparatus surrounding the text (1995: 455). Waring argues that the “paratextual traces” of a text “render the process of cultural production visible” (455). These traces include, for example, the marketing of books, such as the cover design and the front- and back-cover blurbs, as well as media promotion surrounding a text or artist, along with editorials, reviews, and interviews with an author or creator of a text. These paratextual traces are an important yet often ignored aspect in the critique of cultural artefacts¹. While these traces are peripheral to the internal narrative of a particular text, they are, nevertheless, integral to the construction of the meanings embedded in it. To illustrate this dialogue between the text and its paratextual apparatus, I will examine Australian-Lebanese author Loubna Haikal’s recent novel *Seducing Mr Maclean* (2002). In particular, Haikal’s novel will be examined in relation to the analytical category that Graham Huggan has called the “postcolonial exotic” (2001: vi) – that is, the process by which postcolonial texts may function as cultural commodities that both serve and resist the growing “alterity industry” (vi). However, I wish to make an important distinction here: while Huggan’s analysis centres on the processes of value attributed to postcolonial works, I am using postcolonial theory to read a number of texts that, while including

¹ Graham Huggan writes that, “to date, the only essay that I have come across that deals in any detail with the ideological effects of the paratextual is Wendy Waring’s (1995)” (Huggan 272n21). He goes on to assert that “a more detailed treatment is urgently needed of the ideological function of the paratextual” (272n21). My work here on the ideological functions of the paratextual traces regarding the belly-dancing body attempts, in part, to redress this absence.

postcolonial elements, are not solely defined by them. For instance, while Haikal's novel is not a postcolonialist text per se, it is nonetheless open to postcolonial critique, rather than being analysed exclusively from the perspective of multicultural fiction. This is chiefly, as I will demonstrate, because of its often uncritical deployment of Orientalist tropes and assumptions to service its 'multicultural' representation of Lebanese Australians. I wish to briefly draw out these terms, and their relationship to the broader terms of my thesis, before moving on to this chapter's examination of images of headless belly-dancing torsos.

One of the ongoing issues in this thesis, explored especially in Chapters Three and Four, is the extent to which feminism has been used to strategically mitigate the Orientalist discourses implicit in Western women's appropriations of belly dance. In this way, feminist discourse, or what I have called 'feminist Orientalism' in previous chapters², functions as a progressive discourse that nevertheless shares a complex and ambivalent alliance with Orientalism. This Chapter proposes a similar kind of alliance; however, I argue here that it is postcolonialism rather than feminism that functions to conceal, or even capitalise on, rather than to refute or challenge, the racist politics of Orientalism that permeate the commodification of belly dance. Drawing on Huggan's concept of the postcolonial exotic, I argue that Haikal's book marks an intersection between two contending regimes of representation: one that is related to the largely oppositional practices of postcolonialism – practices which implicitly attempt to dismantle the discursive structures of imperialism – and

² See, for example, Chapter Two.

another which is more closely related to the “global market” and the widespread circulation of commodified notions of cultural otherness (Huggan 28). In other words, the social and cultural ideologies embedded in the various strategies to market belly dance, although intimately bound up in the sexual and racial politics of Orientalism, also, at times, rely on the symbolic currency attached to liberatory discourses such as feminism, postcolonialism, and multiculturalism.

The role of paratextual material in (pre)determining a text's meaning is, according to Waring, of vital importance. Huggan, drawing on the work of Waring and Amanda Nettlebeck (1997), discusses the role of paratextual material to provide “reading cues” in a postcolonial context. Huggan argues that one of the “most important of these cues is the cover design” which sets up “an initial horizon of readerly expectations that is subsequently confirmed or, more likely, modified in the narrative that follows” (168). These paratextual traces “indicate a tension between what the text says and what its various promoters [...] would have it do” (168). Haikal's novel, which features the image of a headless belly dancer on its cover, provides an excellent example of this tension between the internal narrative of the novel and its paratexts. The cover of Haikal's novel not only sets up, as Huggan suggests, “readerly expectations” (168) but, I argue, also encourages a readerly oscillation between the cover and the narrative, or more specifically, between the paratext, text, and subtext.

The subtitle of Haikal's novel claims that the book is a “richly comic novel of baclawa, belly dancing and Lebanese love”, while the back cover declares that it is written with an “authentic” voice “in the great tradition of migrant

Australian satires”³. When these paratextual claims are compared to the text’s content, we find that not only does Haikal’s novel feature very little belly dancing, as I will go on to discuss later, but by the end of the novel neo-imperial notions of Western superiority are left unchallenged and Orientalist constructions of the exotic East are reinforced.

Reading the Headless Belly Dancer

The depiction of the headless belly dancer, I argue, is a dense and evocative reflection of the sexual, racial, and gender politics that, as I have shown throughout this thesis, surround the representation of the belly-dancing body in the West. Indeed, so frequently has this image been used to represent belly dance that perhaps no other dance form has been plagued by such a limited set of visual signs. These images, which are extraordinarily similar from one to the next, have become a familiar, if not staple, visual emblem of popular notions of

³ Contrary this claim to ‘authenticity’, many migrant Australian satires are best known for their inauthentic voices. See, for example, Maggie Nolan’s and Carrie Dawson’s edited collection: *Who’s Who: Hoaxes, imposture, and Identity Crises in Australian Literature* (2004).

belly dance⁴. Yet despite the density of meaning implied in this image, it has not been the subject of any in-depth critical writing. While several scholars have indicated the phenomenon of the headless belly dancer⁵, most treat this extraordinarily complex image with little more than a footnote or passing comment⁶. In a footnote in her article on the myth of Salome in literary discourse, Megan Becker-Leckrone writes “all of these lopped heads seem quite ripe for analysis, especially in conjunction with rhetorical and narrative dis- and re-memberment” (257). Becker-Leckrone does not, however, elaborate further on the subject.

In this chapter I will individually address a selection of headless belly dancer images throughout this chapter, and have included these *passim* within my discussion. However, in order to illustrate the widespread and prolific nature of this image, I have also chosen to include an appendix of visual images of headless belly dancers across a range of different types of texts. While this is by no means an exhaustive collection of these types of images, the sheer

⁴ There are a range of visual conventions surrounding the marketing of belly dance products aside from the convention of the headless belly dancer. For example, many album covers draw on Orientalist harem fantasies popularised in the nineteenth century. These images often feature a male “sultan” surrounded by scantily clad women lounging and dancing, seen through a ubiquitous ‘key hole’ shaped border that evokes not only a distinctive Islamic architectural motif but also the voyeuristic pleasures to be had inside the Islamic harem. Some albums incorporating these conventions include: *East of Suez: 101 Strings*. Somerset Records, P-11200, c.1970s, and Mohammed El-Bakkar & His Oriental Ensemble. *The Sultan of Baghdad: Music of the Middle East Vol. 2*. AudioFidelity Stereodisc, AFSD-5834, 1957.

⁵ Andrea Deagon for instance, comments on the undercurrent of the decapitated-Salome theme in *fin de siècle* discourse (2005: 265).

⁶ See, for example, Karayanni (2005: 216n2), and Shira’s web site “The Art of Middle Eastern Dance” <http://shira.net/videoreviews/bulimia.htm>.

saturation of the headless torso image in popular representations of belly dance attests to its importance as a powerful symbol in the cultural exchange of the exotic in the West. While the phenomenon of the headless belly dancer began to emerge during the early 1960s (See Appendix), the photographic images of belly dancing torsos – especially on the covers of albums, but also on other types of texts – came into prominence in the West in the 1970s and have remained a strong signifier of the dance ever since. Some pressing questions surround this cultural development: how did this image come about, and what does it signify? Do these images continue to circulate as commodities merely because they are caught in a self-perpetuating cycle, or are they significant and meaningful to consumers in some other way? The image of the female torso – headless, faceless, and eroticised without identity – seems a dehumanised and passive object. Yet if this image dehumanises women, why has it been so thoroughly embedded in the visual conventions of texts aimed primarily at those it may offend? I am referring principally to the how-to belly dance instructional manuals, both from the 1970s⁷ and in recent how-to publications (See Plate 22). What role does this image play in the construction of the exotic, and more specifically, what do these constructions mean when they are (re)produced and (re)presented in a postcolonial or feminist context? I will now respond to these questions by analysing some of the visual conventions of photographic images of the headless belly dancer.

⁷ See Chapter Three.

Please see print copy for
image




Plate 22. Julie Russo Mishkin and Marta Schill. *The Compleat Belly Dancer*.
New York: Doubleday, 1973.

The marked similarity between the photographic images of the torsos belies their complexity at an individual level. This complexity is realised at the different points of production of the photograph such as choices to do with framing, layout, lighting and technical treatment, as well as any literary text that may or may not appear in the photograph. Roland Barthes, in his influential discussion of the semiotics of photographs, distinguishes between the image's "denoted message" (that is, the reality of the scene, object, landscape) and its "connoted message" (the art, meanings, and arbitrary messages attached to the image by individuals or society) (19)⁸. Barthes calls this "co-existence" of the two messages the "photographic paradox" (19). He argues that "every sign supposes a code, it is this code (of connotation) that one should try to establish" (19). Thus, in my reading, the denoted message – the semi-nude female torso – may be translated through a variety of recognisable visual conventions and

⁸ This chapter refers to the 1982 Flamingo edition of *Image, Music, Text* which was originally published in French in 1961 (trans, Great Britain: Fontana, 1977).

“photographic connotations” (20) to designate belly dancer: exotic, sexually charged, a dancing female body object⁹. This is not to suggest, however, that these connotations are natural or given, or, indeed, that the image of a woman’s body constitutes a clear message of sexuality and otherness. Rather, these images have come to enact a range of meanings through the reiteration of discourses about exotic female embodiment, and in this way appear at once natural and stable.

The figure in these photographs is recognisable as a belly dancer by the (re)presentation of the stock stereotypes that have come to be associated with the dance and the belly dancer: the bare midsection, the heavily decorated yet scanty costume, the suggestion of sinuous movement in the photograph, and the possibility of the sexually available Oriental woman. Despite the ubiquity of these stereotypes, as Andrea Deagon and others have argued, they rarely correspond with the actual experiences of women regarding the practice of belly dance¹⁰. Deagon writes “belly dancers are often portrayed as being exhibitionistic or sexually immoral”; yet, she argues, “most dancers feel that they are dancing for themselves and for a wide audience, rather than to please

⁹ While Barthes work on the photographic image is valuable in thinking about the visual codes of belly dance texts, I also acknowledge that his theories rely on the notion that the meanings of images are always related to and, in a sense, reliant on linguistic messages in the image to make meaning – as in, for example, a cartoon with speech bubbles (Barthes 39-40). This dependency of the visual image on linguistic messages has since been critiqued. Following Kress and van Leeuwen’s reassessment of Barthes, I view the ubiquitous image of the headless belly dancer as independently readable as a cultural sign and not dependent on its “anchorage” to linguistic messages (1995: 17).

¹⁰ For a discussion on these issues see, for example, Deagon (1999), Sellers-Young (1992), Osweila (1999 and 2001), and Pettigrew and Wort (2003).

or seduce men" (1999)¹¹. Nevertheless, these stereotypes are both powerful and resilient. Furthermore, the relations between print representations and lived experience are not the focus of this thesis. What is of particular importance to this thesis is the ways in which images and representations of the belly-dancing body define, or confine, women. As the object of the scopophilic gaze, these images of the headless belly dancer incorporate stereotyped attitudes about the seductive East; attitudes which not only explicitly feminise the Orient but also Orientalise the feminine.

Figura Serpentinata

One of the significant ways in which the connotations of the images of the headless belly dancer emerge is through the pose of the female models and the photographic frame of the torso. According to Barthes, "the pose of the subject" is crucial to the analysis of photographic texts because it incorporates an "'historical grammar' of iconographic connotation" (22). In looking at the connotations of the pose, I wish to draw some connections between my discussion in Chapter One of the grotesque moving body in nineteenth-century travel accounts, and the visual representations of the belly dancers analysed here.

As I argued in Chapter One, nineteenth-century travel writers focussed on the Middle Eastern dancer's seemingly out-of-control abdomen, hips and pelvis in order to articulate broader cultural anxieties about racial otherness; an otherness which suggested the threat of female sexuality generally, and a

¹¹ See Deagon at <http://people.uncw.edu/deagona/raqs/feminism.htm>.

sexualised 'primitive' body specifically. Furthermore, and most importantly, the literary evocations of Eastern dancing bodies were articulated through the language of the grotesque. These seemingly uncontained grotesque bodies variously twisted, undulated, writhed, and vibrated in the accounts of colonial travellers. The written records of these female dancing bodies seemed to exemplify both the anxieties and the desires of the colonial travelling subject. In drawing a connection between these representations and the still images of the headless belly dancer, I argue that the evocation of the grotesque Eastern dancing body is translocated from the literary to the visual in the serpentine form of the dancer's torso, captured in the photographic text. In the same way that certain descriptions of grotesque female dancing bodies by colonial travellers became commodifiable stock associations of the Eastern dancer, the photographs of belly dancing torsos with their distinctly asymmetrical jutting hips have become a standard visual emblem of the belly dancer in contemporary consumer culture (See, for example, Plates 23, 24, and 25). I wish to concentrate here on the recurring emphasis on the projection of the dancer's hip in these photographs – or what Leo Steinberg might call the "elastic anatomy" of the "*figura serpentinata*" (Steinberg 1972: 183). In his discussion of Picasso's 1954 painting "Women of Algiers", Steinberg notes the artistic technique of the *figura serpentinata* whereby the artist simultaneously displays the "front and the back [of the female nude] without recourse to repetition, external propos [*sic*] or the aid of witnesses" (183). Steinberg locates the *figura serpentinata* in the art of the pinup:

Pin-up models posing for calendar art [...] tend to work up a *figura serpentinata*, and their photographer, if he has a sense of craft, knows just how much expository rotation is wanted to meet the terms of an 'eyeful'.

(Steinberg 1972: 186).

While Steinberg's model relies especially on the rotation of the whole body, the *figura serpentinata* that is "worked up" in the still photographs of the headless dancers relies on the horizontal misalignment of the torso and not on its rotation. The distinctive curve of the hip in the photographs suggestively focuses the scopophilic gaze on the flexible female torso where the *figura serpentinata* and the fetishised erotic display of the headless female torso converge. The disjunctive body signified in the poses of these dancers seems to remind the viewer of the familiar language of the grotesque dancing body. Furthermore, some of these images capture the impression of moving dancing bodies. This movement is suggested by photographic techniques which involve blurring the edges of the female torso in the photograph (See Plates 25, 26, and 27). Barthes, following Edgar Morin, has called such "embellishment" of the image "photogenia" (23). Not only does this blurring of the image deliver Steinberg's notion of the "eyeful" but it also suggests the rapid movement of the unruly grotesque and Orientalised female body.

Please see print copy for image



Plate 23. Gus Vali *Belly Dance Navel Academy Vol. 2*. Peters International, PLD-2003, 1977.

Please see print copy for image



Plate 24. Pina Coluccia, Anette Paffrath, and Jean Putz *Belly Dancing: The Sensual Art of Energy and Spirit*. Rochester, Vermont U.S: Park Street Press, 2005.

Please see print copy for image

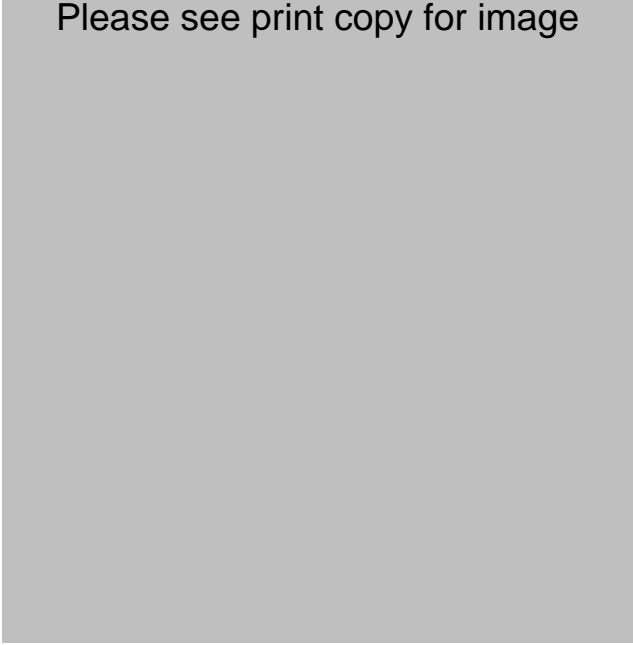


Plate 25. Tamalyn Dallal. *Belly Dancing for Fitness: The Ultimate Dance Workout That Unleashes Your Creative Spirit*, Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 2004

Please see print copy for image



Plate 26. Eddie Mekjian & Ensemble. *Belly Dance Music from the Middle East Vol. 2*, Fiesta Records, FLPS-1742, Date Unknown.

Please see print copy for image



Plate 27 Bel-Sha-Zaar with Tomee & the Grecian Knights.
The Art of Belly Dancing, Gateway Records GSLP-3527, Date Unknown.

In these images the female torsos become objects of a gaze that is identified with the West. They are explicitly coded as Oriental, despite the fact that they are headless, and therefore without facial features that might allow racial characteristics to be discerned. They are coded as such partly through their inability to return the gaze (the Orient is understood in Western imperialist discourse as the object of study and spectacle), but also through other dominant modes of Orientalist spectacle. The belly dance costumes in these images play a decisive role in the signification of Orientalness. As I have argued in Chapter One, the spectacle of Middle Eastern and North African dancers' seemingly excessive ornamentation and dress in nineteenth-century travel accounts served as a conspicuous marker of racial difference. Likewise, the

presence of the bejewelled brassiere and belt has become typically associated with belly dancing and functions as a marker of the dance's otherness¹².

The relationship between costuming and racial politics is made explicit on some album covers that depict the dancer as topless or only wearing pasties (or nipple covers)¹³ (See Plate 28)¹⁴. For instance, while Nejla Atesh, the dancer on the cover of Mohamed El-Bakkar's album "Port Said", is wearing pasties, the unnamed dancer on the cover of "Music of the African Arab", also by El-Bakkar, is shown not wearing any pasties (See Plate 29). There are clear racist overtones here where the nipples of the "African Arab" woman are not subject to the same codes of feminine modesty that the lighter skinned dancer's are held to. In this way, the dancer's breasts become conspicuous markers of cultural difference. The cover of El-Bakkar's "Music of the African Arab" is, furthermore, steeped in ethnocentric colonialist stereotype in its suggestion of a salacious Arab slave trader auctioning an apparently willing female African slave. It is also significant to mention that despite the particularly racist

¹² This is, of course, despite the common misconception that the two-piece 'brassiere and belt', or 'cabaret costume', is based on traditional dance attire of Middle Eastern and North African women. The two-piece costume is actually the result of Western influences on the aesthetics of the dance costume (AlZayer 72).

¹³ Carolina Varga Dinicu stresses the point that although the use of pasties in Oriental dance was popularised in New York clubs in the 1950s, they were in no way linked to traditional costuming practices; for more information see Varga Dinicu *The Ethics of Ethnic* (2003). For photographic documentation of belly dance from the 1950s onward, including some examples of the use of pasties in belly dance costuming, see Ozdemir (2002).

¹⁴ A number of well-known dancers, including Atesh, appeared – with their heads – on album covers during the late 1950s through to the 1970s. Arguably, the celebrity status of these dancers required their faces to be included. Moreover, the recognisability of some dancers would have presented a major marketing tool for producers.

iconography in this album cover, it was recently re-released by Hollywood Music in Compact Disc format with the exact same image as featured on the 1958 album cover¹⁵.

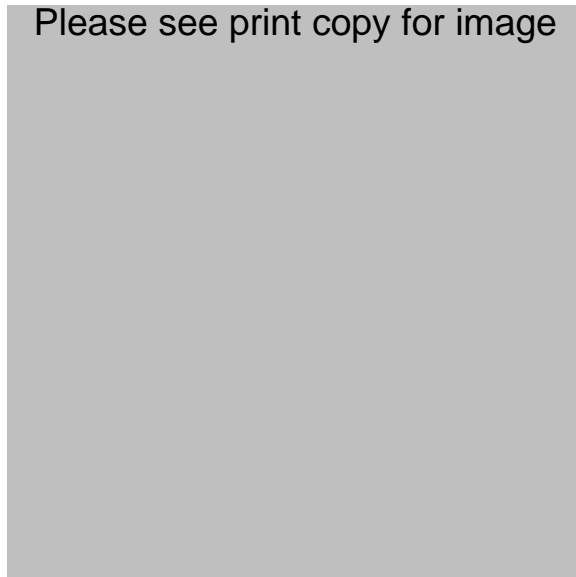


Plate 28. Mohammed El-Bakkar & His Oriental Ensemble.
Port Said: Music of the Middle East Vol. 1 AudioFidelity Stereodisc AFSD-5833, 1958.



Plate 29 Mohammed El-Bakkar & His Oriental Ensemble. *Music of the African Arab: Music of the Middle East Vol. 3*, AudioFidelity Stereodisc AFSD-5858, 1958.

¹⁵ Hollywood Music, HMC-1289, 2004.

However, the most conspicuous marker in the construction of the Orientalised female belly dancing body is the female torso, or more specifically, the female belly. The image of the headless torso exemplifies the grotesque lower bodily stratum laid bare – devoid of the head, the classical body is completely effaced. In the images of the headless belly dancer, the belly functions synecdochically – as a part that stands in for the whole – where the belly stands in for the Orientalist construction of exotic cultural otherness of the belly dance. As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, the belly “and the life of the belly and the reproductive organs” (21) feature strongly in Bakhtin’s model of the grotesque. The connection between eating and the belly-dancing body has been established in earlier Chapters as an important site of the grotesque (see, especially, Chapters Two and Three). The emphasis on the belly in the images of the headless torsos demonstrates a further link between the notion of the grotesque consuming belly and the material processes of consumer culture of which these images are part. A recent advertising campaign for Colorado clothing and shoes demonstrates this link (See Plate 30). The advertisement features a belly dancer who has, unusually, retained her head, but whose identity is obscured by her hair. The caption of this advertisement is of particular interest: “loosen the button; indulgent new looks for men and women”. The use of the words “loosen” and “indulgent” in this advertisement point to long held constructions of the Oriental female body as both an unruly body and an over-indulgent or excessive body. Moreover, the use of the word “button”, while indicating the colloquial term for the navel, also implies the need to release the belly from restrictive clothes after excessive eating: “loosen the button”. While the implications of indulgence as over-eating are made clear in this image (the

audience in the background appear to be in a restaurant), the wording is especially pointed toward the assumed sexual excessiveness of the Oriental feminine. Kathleen Rowe suggests, "For *women*, body size and bearing are governed by especially far-reaching standards of normalization and aestheticization, which forbid both looseness and fatness" (62). Rowe points out that a woman of "ill repute", regardless of her size, is described as "loose" (62). The bodies of "loose" women, especially their sexuality, are seen as out of control (62). The connections between "looseness", sexuality and voracious femininity are complexly interrelated.

Please see print copy for image



Plate 30. Colorado. "Loosen the Button: Indulgent New Looks for Men and Women." Advertisement, 2004.

Beheading the Belly dancer

While some of the images represent the female figure from the neck down to the top of the thigh (See Appendix), the majority frame the female body from the lower part of the breasts down to, and including, the pelvis. With only a few exceptions, most of these images do not include the dancer's arms. In all of the images analysed in this chapter, the belly or abdomen of the dancer dominates the frame. One way in which to read the image of the headless belly dancer is to understand the torso not in relation to its lack of a head, but rather in its capacity to displace the face. Annette Kuhn has argued that in the portrait genre,

attention is directed at the subject's face. The face stands in for the person's whole being: the subject's essential humanity is seen as inhabiting his or her face [...] Within this perspective, an abstracted bodily part other than the face may be regarded as an expropriation of the subject's individuality (37).

The lack of identifying facial features in these images conveys an anti-feminist message about women's identity as wholly constituted in their corporeality. They depict, in other words, women's mindless physicality.

René Magritte's 1947 Surrealist painting *Le Viol* (The Rape) provides a point of entry into this reading (See Plate 31). In Magritte's painting, a woman's torso replaces her facial features – breasts replace the eyes, the navel replaces nose, and the genitals replace the mouth. Magritte's female torso embodies a highly eroticised "face-body" (Greeley 50) as fetish object. The images of the headless belly dancers, I argue, bear an uncanny affinity to Magritte's painting.

Using the conventions of the portrait, Magritte exchanges the woman's face (that part of the body most often associated with identity) with her torso suggesting that she is her body, and nothing more. Likewise, the headless belly dancers, figured time and again on the covers of novels, books, albums etcetera, are a portrait of the belly dancer: she is reduced to breasts, belly, and pelvis – nothing more. Susan Gubar argues Magritte's portrait "shockingly fragments the female by turning her into a sexual body" (717). Gubar draws a comparison between Magritte's painting and the sentiment expressed by one of William Faulkner's fictional characters, a man who imagines the ideal woman as a desubjectified trunk, "a virgin with no legs to leave me, no arms to hold me, no head to talk to me" (Faulkner quoted in Gubar 722)¹⁶. Gubar's parallel between these misogynistic conceptions of women seems disturbingly apt in relation to the plethora of legless, armless, and headless female belly-dancing torsos on display in popular culture.

Please see print copy for
image

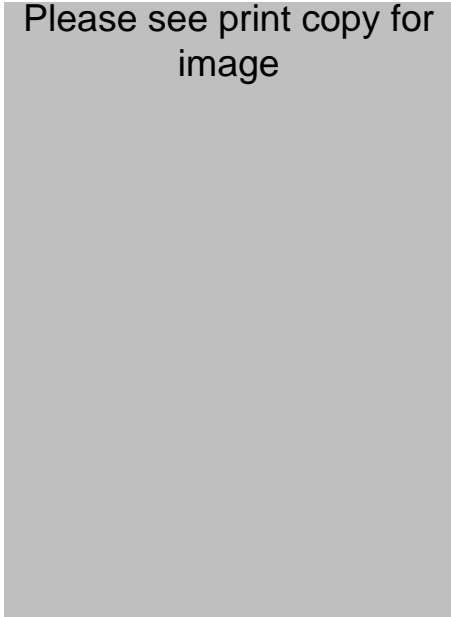


Plate 31 René Magritte. *Le Viol* [the Rape]. 1934. Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels-Paris, Belgium.

¹⁶ Gubar quotes William Faulkner's *Mosquitoes* (New York, 1927: 26).

Gubar suggests, furthermore, that Magritte's image is disturbing in its depiction of woman's identity as female torso because "the articulation of the woman as genital organ [in *Le Viol*] makes her inarticulate" (722). However, Robin Adele Greeley, in countering Gubar's condemnation of Magritte's painting as inherently misogynistic, argues that Magritte's "female face-body, [...] although forced into speechlessness, seems far from being powerless; rather, she threatens Medusa-like to break those enforced bonds at any moment and unleash the full power of her sexuality" (50)¹⁷. Greeley's feminist rereading of Magritte's painting also takes into account the relationship between the image, its title ("The Rape"), and the processes of cultural production surrounding the image – what I have called, in this chapter, the paratextual apparatuses of the text. In particular, the title of the painting seems, for Gubar, to be a direct indictment of Magritte's attitude to women. However, as Greeley suggests, there is an essential discursive interaction between the image and its original relationship to André Breton's lecture *Qu'est-ce que le Surrealisme?* [What is Surrealism?]. Specifically, when Breton presented his lecture at a public meeting of Belgian Surrealists in Brussels in 1934, a pamphlet was issued immediately afterwards with Magritte's drawing on the cover. In other words, *Le Viol*, placed directly under the title of Breton's speech was, according to Greeley, "meant as an immediate and provocative answer to the question *Qu'est-ce que le Surrealisme?*" (50). With its intensely anti-rationalist agenda,

¹⁷ The larger terms of the debate over surrealist images of women such as Magritte's *Le Viol* are outside the scope of the chapter. For more on this topic see, Gubar (1987), Greeley (1992), and Mary Ann Caws (1986).

Surrealism itself, it seems, was characterised by Magritte as a violation – it raped reality. Another way in which to approach Magritte's painting is to read the image as not as either Gubar or Greeley has, but to see the face-body as a literal representation of the effects of rape: a desubjectified woman. Some of the same complexities surrounding *Le Viol* haunt the images of the headless belly dancer, thus highlighting the importance of the partatexts in both framing the text and encoding multiple meanings.

Focusing on the Navel

Where Magritte's painting is explicit in its metaphoric displacement of the mouth by the female genitals, the headless belly dancers incorporate a slightly different and more unsettling displacement. That is, the genitals are displaced symbolically upward to the navel. As I have discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the navel has resonated throughout the historical and cultural representations of the belly-dancing body as a highly erotic, often illicit, and ambiguous expression of the grotesque body.

It has been my contention in previous chapters that many literary texts dealing with belly dance as their subject matter routinely treat the navel as a complex site of sexual difference. Despite the anatomical fact that both men and women have navels, the navel on the female body has been culturally constructed as a site connoting the erotic. The following section explores some of the strategic marketing manoeuvres which work to fetishise the navel as a repository of psychic anxiety and desire in the image of the headless belly dancer.

In her discussion of the meanings embedded in pornographic images of the female body, Kuhn argues:

photographs are often composed in such a way that a particular bodily part is greatly emphasised. While the whole belly dominates the frame of many of the images, it is the navel that conspicuously forms the focal point. Or it may even fill the whole of the picture, in which case the body is fragmented, cut up, by the frame (36).

She writes furthermore, that pornography's fragmentation of body parts is "never random" but is "preoccupied with what it regards as the signifiers of sexual difference and sexuality: genitals, breasts, buttocks" (37)¹⁸. In the case of the texts featuring headless female torsos on the covers, the belly and the navel becomes such a signifier of sexual difference. Kuhn writes that in hardcore pornography it is the vagina alone which is the focal point of the image, the "vagina in the picture stands in for the enigma of the feminine" (39). In the images of belly dance it is the navel that operates simultaneously (and, as we have seen, inaccurately) as the marker of female difference and as the symbolic "enigma of the feminine", the metonymic vagina (39). The belly is the prime object of the viewers' scrutiny and as Kuhn suggests in relation to pornography, "nothing outside the frame is of any significance" (40).

¹⁸ While I am not suggesting here that these images of the belly dancing body are pornographic, they do, nonetheless, partake of the visual idiom of pornography. While Kuhn's analysis concentrates primarily on hard-core pornographic images, her analysis is useful in examining the sexualisation and fragmentation of the female body in photographic images of belly dance.

In a number of significant ways – whether through camera angle, lighting, pose of the model, photographic manipulations, or text – these images draw the viewer’s attention toward the navel. For example the cover of Ketī Sharif’s book *Bellydance* (2004) shows a female torso decorated with intricate henna designs around the navel which serves to accentuate the indentation. From a design point of view, furthermore, a number of technical interventions focus the eye on the navel. The text, for example, is positioned so that the word “belly” appears on one side of the navel and “dance” on the other, drawing attention to the indent in the middle of the two words (See Plate 32):

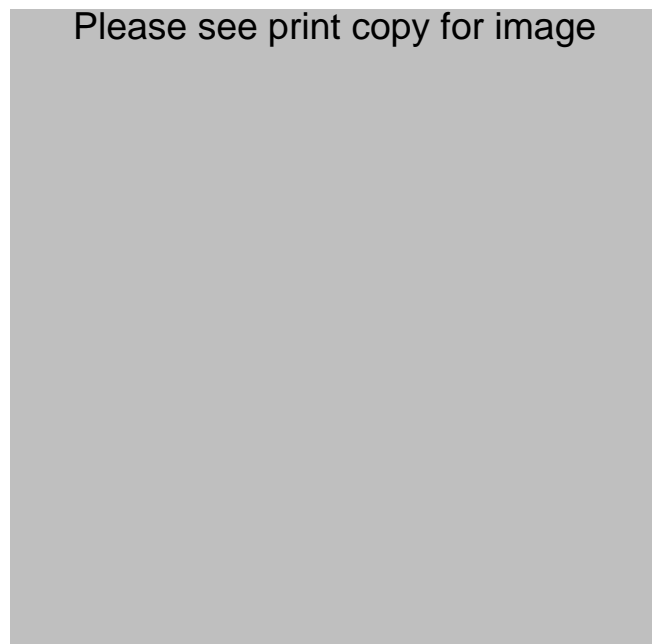


Plate 32 Ketī Sharif. *Bellydance*. St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2004.

Please see print copy for image



Plate 33 Dolphina. *Bellydance: Get Fit and Feel Fabulous with This Unique Workout for the Mind and Body*, New York: DK Publishing, 2005.

Similarly, Dolphina's book, also called *Bellydance*, positions the letter "y" in "belly" so that the tail of the letter strategically points to the navel (See Plate 33). Moreover, the photograph on the cover of Dolphina's book has been manipulated, to produce what Barthes would call a "trick effect" (21). The image has been treated with a slightly blurred swirl-like visual effect around the belly with the navel at the vortex in sharp focus. Other texts paradoxically highlight the navel by obscuring it, such as on the album cover of Udi Joseph Kouyoumjian's *Beautiful Belly* (1975) (See Plate 34). The image is manipulated so a flash of light simultaneously obscures the navel and draws attention to it, thereby eroticising what cannot be clearly viewed.

Please see print copy for image



Plate 34 Udi Joseph Kouyoumjian & Orchestra. *Beautiful Belly: Music for Listening and Dancing*, Federated Records, FD-1000, 1975.

Others point to the navel overtly in the text, such as the albums *Belly Dance Navel Academy Vol. 2* (Gus Vali, 1977) (See Plate 23) and *Belly Dance to Great Navel Music* (The Sultan's Caravan, 1976). Indeed, the latter record cover, like the cover of *Beautiful Belly*, also obscures the navel in order to accentuate and eroticise it by placing a jewel where it indents. However, this image is somewhat unique in that it dismembers the belly dancer's head and then overlays the beheaded torso with the full figure of the belly dancer. In a bizarre doubling, she appears both enlarged and dismembered, and remembered but in miniature, her jewelled navel strangely highlighted as she dances on her own abdomen (See Plate 35):

Please see print copy for image



Plate 35 Gus Vali & The Sultan's Caravan. *Belly Dance to Great Navel Music*. RCA Records. APL1-1820, 1976.

The image of the jewel in the navel seems to point to a potential point of penetration. Along these lines, it is perhaps significant to note that all of the images show models with indenting navels (what Samantha in Coombs's novel called an "insy"¹⁹) as opposed to ones that protrude. The fascination with a navel that indents is a recurring idea in the texts analysed throughout this thesis, and it is arguable that this persistent fascination with the navel may also be traced in the visual images of female torsos. In 2002, Charles L. Puckett published an article in *Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery* following research he conducted to "ascertain the characteristics of an aesthetically pleasing umbilicus" (389). In order to reach his findings Puckett photographed 147 (female) participants between the ages of 18 and 62 years, and then had the photographs reviewed by a panel and given a score between 1 and 10 to rate

¹⁹ Coombs (1989: 113). See Chapter Four.

attractiveness. The results showed that “the T- or vertically shaped umbilicus with superior hooding consistently scored the highest in aesthetic appeal, whereas the presence of any degree of protrusion and a horizontal orientation or distorted shape detracted from the score” (389).

As I have suggested elsewhere in this thesis, the representation of the jewel in the navel is a complex recurring image in relation to belly dancing. I would like to dwell on this association by suggesting that there is a tripartite symbolic relationship between jewels, genitals, and navels. While the historical connection between placing a jewel in the navel and belly dancing has been most popularly linked with the Hays Code (which prohibited motion pictures from showing women's navels)²⁰, there is also evidence to suggest that this connection is much older. The metaphorical connection between jewels and genitals is not a new conceptual association²¹. Denis Diderot's Orientalist libertine novel *Les Bijoux Indiscrets* (*The Indiscreet Jewels*, 1748), for example, describes a sultan who possesses a magic ring that can make women's “jewels” (genitals) speak. One of the most explicit linkages between the navel, jewel, vagina and the Eastern dancer may be found in Joris Karl Huysmans's novel *À Rebours* (*Against Nature*, 1884). In Huysmans's novel the main character, des

²⁰ See the Introduction of this thesis.

²¹ The extensive history of the symbolic connection between “jewels” and female genitals goes back to medieval literature, but is outside the scope of this study. For a discussion of a pre-modern example, see Friedman, Albert B., and Richard H. Osberg. “Gawain's Girdle as Traditional Symbol.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 90.357 (1977): 301-15. An early twentieth century connection between jewels and genitals appeared in Freud's famous case study of Dora in *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (S.E., 1905: 7-122). In this case study Freud draws a connection between the presence of a “jewel-case” in the dreams of Dora and female genitals (1905: 69).

Esseintes, stands before Moreau's painting of Salome (*The Apparition*, 1875) and describes the dancer in vivid detail:

a wondrous jewel sparkles and flashes in the cleft between her breasts; lower down, a girdle encircles her hips, hiding the upper part of her thigh, against which dangles a gigantic pendant glistening with rubies and emeralds; finally, where the body shows bare between gorgerin and girdle, the belly bulges out, dimpled by a navel which resembles a graven seal of onyx with its milky hues and its rosy finger-nail tints.

(Huysmans 67-68).

In Huysmans's description he moves vertically down the body of the dancer. However, from the breasts he skips the abdomen and moves "lower down" to the hips. It is significant that he leaves the description of the belly and the navel till last. Where the pelvis might have been described, that is, last in the vertical hierarchy of top to bottom, he dwells instead on the navel with "its milky hues and its rosy finger-nail tints" (67-68). In his disordering of the description of the body, the symbolic displacement of the female genitals to the navel is made apparent. Furthermore, the proximity of the jewelled pendant to the genitals, which hangs directly from the dancer's girdle, also suggests a metaphorical conflation of jewels and female genitals. It is also significant that nowhere in Huysmans's description of Salome does he describe her head or face. Huysmans's "portrait" effectively decapitates Salome.

The image of the headless belly dancer evokes the spectre of the fragmented female body. Despite the complex Orientalist and gender concerns embedded in this image, there is also the pressing question of how it came

about in the first place. There is certainly a degree to which the headless belly dancer has become (predicably) emblematic of the genre of belly dance, and thus, the viability of the headless torso as a commercial motif is strong. There is also, however, evidence to suggest that the image is symbolically grounded in the development of the nineteenth-century artistic and literary obsession with the Biblical figure of Salome.

Although the Biblical narratives of Mark (6: 14-29) and Mathew (14: 6-8) tell of the beheading of John the Baptist, there is also a little-known reference in the writings of the fourteenth-century historian Nicephorus to Salome, in which she is beheaded. The modern currency of this image is arguably a result of the influence of Oscar Wilde who, as Richard Ellmann has noted, was aware of Nicephorus's account, and considered calling his important play *The Decapitation of Salome* (344). In Nicephorus's account Salome died when she walked over a frozen lake and the ice broke beneath her. She fell through the ice up to her neck. The icy water is said to have "made her dance and wriggle about with all the lower parts of her body" (Hospodar quoted in Deagon 265) until eventually Salome's head was parted from her body by the sharp ice fragments. This, it seems, was Salome's last dance and a reminder of that other dance that resulted in the Baptist's beheading. The fact that Salome, like the Baptist, meets her death with decapitation suggests that her deed did not go unpunished. The parallel between these two beheadings raises the implication that Salome was subjected to the retributory logic of the *lex talionis*, an 'eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. The images of the headless torsos on contemporary commercial texts about belly dance seem, due to the diffuse but indisputable influence of Wilde, to bear the trace of Salome's comeuppance.

Counter Readings of the Headless Torso

I have argued that the images of the headless belly dancer are, in many ways, detrimental to women in that they foreground a sexualised and fragmented – or, what Kuhn has called, a “bits and pieces” (35) – approach, to the female body. It is true that as Linda Nochlin has argued “woman [...] cannot be seen as a fixed, pre-existing entity or ‘image,’ [...] but as a complex, mercurial and problematic signifier, mixed in its messages, resisting fixed interpretation despite the numerous attempts made in visual representation literally to put ‘woman’ in her place” (35). These images, however, challenge the feminist-sympathetic reader to question the viability of a headless female torso as an empowering image for women. A number of recent how-to books have been published using the convention of the headless belly dancer to market their texts. Ketī Sharif, Dolphina, Tamalyn Dallal, and Pina Coluccia *et al* have each produced books about belly dancing with female torsos on their covers, yet all of these authors praise the importance of belly dance for women as a source of empowerment (See Plates 24, 25, 32, and 33). Coluccia *et al* claim, for example, that “[b]elly dancing, for many women, offers a way of speaking back to a culture that demands that a female body be thin and that women remain small and quiet at the edges of culture” (9). Likewise Dolphina writes “[y]ou’ll find that performing these intensely feminine movements helps you leave behind the stresses and strains of modern life and reawaken the woman within” (10). Despite the essentialist discourses at work in these texts, it is clear that they are intended to be empowering to women. There is a clear disjunction here between the text and its paratexts: while the central premise of these books is

that through belly dance a woman may “proclaim her wholeness” (Coluccia *et al* 2), they nevertheless feature partial female bodies on their covers.

There is, however, another way of looking at this apparent paradox. It is important to keep in mind that many of the texts featuring female headless torsos, are, in fact, aimed at women. It would be erroneous to suppose that such a pervasive image is mindlessly consumed by female readers without recourse to the meanings embedded in the image. The marketing of these texts must bear some relationship to the largely feminist agendas of their narratives. Laura Mulvey’s argument in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), hinges on the idea that women are positioned as objects of a male gaze which renders them passive objects of male desire. In countering Mulvey’s argument however, Mary Ann Doane argues “even if it is admitted that the woman is frequently the object of the voyeuristic or fetishistic gaze [...], what is there to prevent her from reversing the relation and appropriating the gaze for her own pleasure?” (1997: 180). Taking up Doane’s argument, the representation of the female torsos on texts aimed at women reflects not male desire for the image of the disarticulated, desubjectified woman, but female desire for the spectacle of the unruly woman. The “figure of the unruly woman”, Kathleen Rowe argues, “contains much potential for feminist appropriation, for rethinking how women are constructed as gendered subjects in the language of spectacle and the visual” (11). Focussing on the female abdomen is an invitation to the female viewer/reader to identify with a gaze that privileges the energy and vitality that has been attached to the grotesque body. Lisa Sarasohn points to the cultural anxiety surrounding the female abdomen when she writes that “in many ways our culture ‘can’t stomach’ woman’s belly” (38). In foregrounding the belly, then,

the texts by Sharif, Dolphina, Dallal, and Coluccia may be seen to reclaim the image of the headless torso, to destabilise dominant frameworks and create new ones.

Yet, there are limitations to this strategic re-reading of the image of the headless female torso. For example, when Dolphina's book is observed alongside the 1971 issue of *Playboy Men's Magazine* the images are strikingly similar: the stance of the female models is similar, the pelvis is juted forward in both images, the hands frame the pelvis in each, and both fragment the female body by reducing it to a headless torso (Plates 33 and 36)²². These two images are analogous, yet one is deemed objectifying to women and the other not. Despite the similarity of the visual conventions of these two texts, the intentions and purposes of their internal narratives are very dissimilar. *Playboy* positions the female torso as the object of a male gaze, whereas Dolphina's book, as well as the other abovementioned how-to books, presents the female torso as the object of a female gaze. This comparison of Dolphina's book with the *Playboy* cover demonstrates that the meanings attached to the image of the headless torso are also strongly dependent on the context in which the text is produced and disseminated.

²² The particular issues regarding debates on pornography in relation to feminism are both complex and diverse and are outside the parameters of this project. My discussion relates specifically to the extent to which the image of the headless belly dancer has been used in a wide and varying range of cultural artefacts, including men's magazines.

Please see print copy for image




Plate 36. *Playboy Magazine*. New York: Playboy Press, February, 1971.

I wish to develop further issues raised earlier in this chapter regarding the tensions that are played out between the internal text of a book and its external paratexts. To illustrate this tension I will briefly discuss Stavros Stavrou Karayanni's recent non-fiction study *Dancing Fear and Desire: Race, Sexuality, and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance* (2005). The main focus of this discussion, however, will be on Lebanese-Australian Loubna Haikal's novel *Seducing Mr Maclean* (2002). Both books feature on their covers the headless belly-dancing torso. In my reading of Haikal's book, I will concentrate on the ways in which the ideological construction of cultural difference emerges as a result of the tensions between the text and its paratexts. These tensions, I argue, centre on the construction of 'cultural authenticity' as part of the strategic marketing tools of postcolonial and multicultural literature.

Karayanni's *Dancing Fear and Desire* is a critical text that explores how Middle Eastern dance engages with race, sex, and national identity. In a

discussion on the Orientalist dynamics of power in the production of Compact Discs for Middle Eastern dance, Karayanni is critical of the “offensiveness that has sadly become a common trademark of such productions” (163). He footnotes this statement with the following comment:

I am thinking specifically of disconcerting but very popular representations: headless torsos on album covers (an eerie evocation of the decapitation of Salome) (216n2).

Despite the tantalising nature of this comment, particularly its Salome reference, Karayanni does not mention the theme of headlessness anywhere else in the book. Within this context, however, Karayanni’s charge of “offensiveness” (163) concerning the production of headless belly dancers on popular texts is ironic, since *Dancing Fear and Desire* reproduces such an image on its cover (See Plate 37). It is true that authors are frequently denied artistic control over the cover design of their books (Genette 16). However, the blatant contradiction between the paratext (the headless belly dancer on the cover) and the text (Karayanni’s criticism of such an image) perfectly illustrates the “tension”, described earlier “between what the text says and what its various promoters, its ‘legitimizing agents’ (Bourdieu 1993) would have it do” (Huggan 164).

Please see print copy for image



Plate 37. Stavros Stavrou Karayanni. *Dancing Fear and Desire: Race, Sexuality, and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance*. Ontario, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2005.

Yet on closer analysis, we see that the cover of *Dancing Fear and Desire* subverts both the expectation of the viewer and the convention of the headless belly dancer by presenting not a female torso as belly dancer but a male belly-dancing body²³. The pose of the body, the juted *figura serpentinata* of the hip, the tantalising glimpse of the elaborately decorated and sequined costume, are all reproduced in the conventions of the headless belly dancer, but supplemented by something else: a distinctly masculine abdomen covered with fine dark hair. In the case of the cover of *Dancing Fear and Desire*, the viewer is

²³ Karayanni thanks the artist and belly dancer Cihangir Gümüstürkmen for his photograph on the cover of the book (ix).

faced not with the phantasm of the beheaded Salome but the spectacle of transvestism. In the postcolonial context of Karayanni's book, the exoticism of the image is effectively repoliticised, redeployed both to unsettle the expectations of viewer and to produce a counter image: the male transvestite belly-dancing body.

All the markers of the Eastern exotic body as a quintessentially feminine body are, in this image, subversively disrupted. The navel on this body eschews the reading of the grotesque metonymic vagina; instead it provokes the viewer to confront that other taboo grotesque opening, the anus. This image is subversive because it draws on the generic conventions of marketing belly dance texts with headless female bodies but unhinges that convention from the construction of a feminine Orientalised body subservient to the Orientalist heterosexual gaze of the West. Furthermore, the image functions to effectively 'queer' Orientalism while still constructing 'the Orient' as a sign of difference and transgression.

It is clear, then, that belly dance circulates in contemporary commodity culture as a powerful token of both cultural 'otherness' and exotic corporeality. The construction of the female headless belly dancer in the many consumer products surrounding the belly-dancing body can be seen to be participating in a fantasy of the fragmented female body – a fragmentation that simultaneously conjures up both misogynistic notions of woman-as-body and feminist unruly or grotesque bodies. The representation of female corporeality in these images is, nevertheless, intimately bound up in the complex power dynamics of Western discourses of Orientalism, and made all the more complex by its continued commodification under such liberatory discourses as feminism, postcolonialism,

and multiculturalism. The repetition of this image of the fragmented female body gives the impression that one Oriental-belly-dancing-body is equivalent to the next. This universalising process belies the heterogeneity of both the broad variations of the dance genre known as belly dance, and the meanings attached to it by women in its various forms.

Loubna Haikal's *Seducing Mr Maclean*: The Fetishisation of Cultural Authenticity

Certain questions have become fundamental to the debates concerning the meaning of the term 'postcolonial'. For example, how should 'postcoloniality' be differentiated from 'postcolonialism' and why? What might constitute a postcolonial 'condition', and is, in fact, such a condition achievable? And to what extent are so-called postcolonial writings bound up in ideologies operating under the very discourses of colonial oppression these writings purport to undermine? It is with particular attention to this last question that this section of the chapter investigates the social meanings of representations of cultural difference in Loubna Haikal's novel *Seducing Mr Maclean*. Haikal's book can be seen to embody what many critics have identified as a constitutive divide within postcolonial and multicultural studies and writing²⁴. On the one hand, the

²⁴ For example, Ghassan Hage, in his book *White Nation* undertakes a systematic critique of multiculturalism in Australia. Hage argues that the governmental institutionalisation of concepts such as "tolerance is structured around racist ideas "emanating from a position of power" (1998; 2000: 88). See also Sara Suleri (1992) for a discussion of work conducted around the theoretical intersections of feminism and postcolonialism.

postcolonial has been understood as an index of empowerment and resistance where literatures may question, subvert, and re-write the dominant narratives of colonial projects (Huggan ix). On the other hand, however, certain postcolonial and multicultural texts have been criticised for their complicity in the commodification of ostensibly marginalised literatures and cultures²⁵. This commodification of marginality has led some critics to believe that these purportedly 'resistant' literatures frequently fail to produce a critique of differential power relations and instead ironically become purveyors of neo-imperialist ideology.

On a number of levels, *Seducing Mr Maclean* is indicative of this paradoxical condition, presenting the rhetoric of exotic otherness whilst simultaneously encoding the oppositional discourses attributed to postcolonial and multicultural literatures. As I have already briefly suggested, this paradox is played out most fully in the disparity between the paratextual apparatuses of the book and its highly problematic representation of Lebanese identity in the novel. In addition to examining the material paratexts of the book – the title, cover, blurbs, and so on – I will also consider Haikal's interviews, and published press releases, as well as Picador Australia's online "Notes for Reading Groups" as paratextually integral to the implications and meanings invested in Haikal's text.

In several interviews Haikal openly asserts her concerns about the importance of fiction by migrants, like herself, to challenge damaging cultural stereotypes. When asked what prompted the writing of *Seducing Mr Maclean* in an interview with Magdalena Ball for *The Compulsive Reader*, Haikal said that

²⁵ See, for example, Hage (1998; 2000), Suleri (1992), and Aijaz Ahmed (1995).

she wanted to write about “the migrant experience, exploring themes such as loss, survival, morality, power, seduction, compromise and identity” (2002c). Furthermore, “literature”, according to Haikal, is an “important way of transmitting many aspects of one's culture and subverting and challenging media constructed stereotypes”. In the book, however, the presentation of cultural stereotypes is at best problematic and at worst blatantly racist. This line of investigation is intended to interrogate a quandary that seems to be central to postcolonial discourse itself: how might one construct, and account for, cultural difference – in opposition to colonial representations – without reproducing the exoticist discourses of imperialist politics²⁶. Haikal's novel raises some key questions about the notion of ‘cultural authenticity’ and whether it is possible to claim authenticity without reverting to essentialist stereotype.

In the interview with Ball, Haikal states that of particular importance in her novel is the extent to which the “vulnerability of migrants, their need to survive, to succeed, to be accepted, to be seen as successful” leaves them susceptible to “exploitation by the world of corruption” (2002c). Furthermore, Haikal claims that she wanted to explore “misconceptions and prejudices towards one another, and as importantly, the commodification of migrants” (2). It is her last statement concerning the “commodification of migrants” that seems most jarring in light of both the kind of media marketing of her book, and the ideological position taken in the text, which I will go on to discuss. A key strategy in marketing *Seducing Mr Maclean* is the construction of it as ‘authentic’; its authenticity lies in its author's ethnicity, gender and migrant

²⁶ For further discussion on the politics of representation through the theoretical framework of “hybridity”, see R. Radhakrishnan (2000).

experience. Implicit in this is the assumption that the ‘marginal’ voice of Loubna Haikal as ‘migrant woman’ provides direct access to the life-experience of the ‘other’. The back cover reads, for example: “In the great tradition of migrant Australian satires, Loubna Haikal writes with a voice that is at once authentic, sharp-eyed and very, very funny”. This strategy, however, proves on closer scrutiny to be troubling to Haikal’s project: her avowed task of deconstructing homogenising stereotypes – the ‘authentic ethnic’ being one such stereotype – is brought to a halt precisely because the novel encodes essentialist identity politics by its very claim to being authentic. Its legitimacy is thus compromised at the very moment it is asserted.

In Huggan’s examination of the processes by which commodity value is attributed to postcolonial works he identifies certain “value-coding systems” (7) within the field of postcolonial writing and thinking. According to Huggan, terms such as “‘marginality’, ‘resistance’, [and] ‘the postcolonial’ itself” (7) take on significant worth in the global market for “culturally othered goods” (6). Haikal capitalises on the exotic appeal attributed to postcolonial and multicultural literatures and cultures. The title and cover of the book themselves are testimony to the degree to which Haikal and her publishers satisfy the consumer market with the construction of exotic otherness (See Plate 38). The cover features the by now familiar headless belly dancer’s torso with the addition of a stethoscope around her neck. As with the other images of headless belly dancers, Haikal’s dancer functions as a marker of ‘otherness’ and draws on the viewer’s knowledge of stereotypical notions of the sexualised Eastern belly-dancing woman – that is, a body for Western consumption. In his essay “The Photographic Message”, Barthes states, “[t]he photograph clearly only signifies

because of the existence of a store of stereotyped attitudes which form ready-made elements of signification” (22). The photograph on Haikal’s book draws on the viewer’s knowledge of these stereotypes of the sexualised Eastern belly-dancing woman, a body to be gazed at. However, a number of other visual indicators as well paratextual apparatuses surrounding the text intervene in the meaning of the image. The representation of the stethoscope is one, and the interviews the author is another.

In an interview with prominent Australian belly dancer Amara Eid, Haikal is asked why there is a belly dancer on the cover when there is virtually no belly dancing featured in the book. Haikal’s response was “I wanted to put a bellydancer on the cover, because as a Lebanese I was expected to be a bellydancer” (12). Haikal’s statement suggests that the cover was intended to be an ironic gesture, especially when coupled with the inclusion of the stethoscope around the dancer’s neck, which suggests not only that she is a belly dancer but also that she is a doctor. The idea of a belly-dancing-doctor is designed to be incongruous and disruptive to two main stereotypes: the assumption that a migrant woman cannot hold a professional position, and the stock association of Lebanese women with belly dancing. However, the ultimate success of the irony of the image, in relation to the paratextual apparatuses of the novel, is questionable. Firstly, in order to read the cover as ironic, a potential reader or viewer of the book would need to be aware of Haikal’s insistence on the intentional meaning of the image – information which is only available in the paratextual apparatuses of interviews, and so forth, and not in the book itself. Without these statements of intention, the image merely trades in the dominant stereotypes about all Lebanese women being belly dancers and ultimately

provides the Orientalist fantasy of the exotic. Secondly, Haikal, although frustrated by popular notions and expectations of cultural difference, does not ultimately disrupt them in the internal narrative of the novel. Indeed, instead of critiquing the idea that all Lebanese women are belly dancers “born with the ruby in the belly button” (12), the book cover, along with the narrative, feeds the fantasy and reinforces the stereotype.

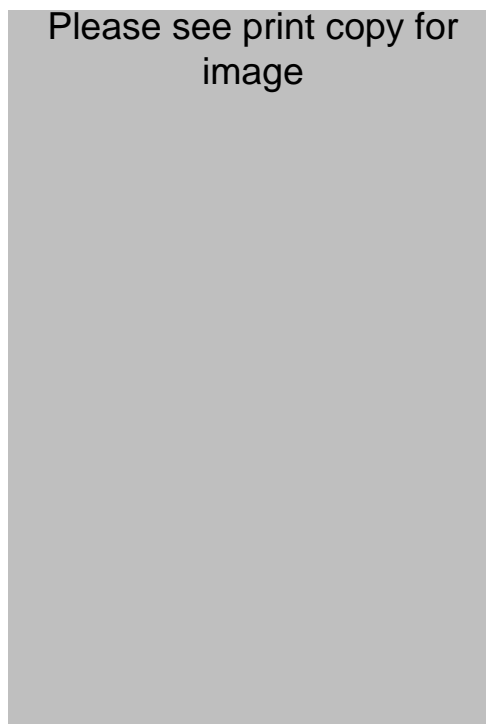


Plate 38 Loubna Haikal, *Seducing Mr Maclean*, Australia: Macmillan, 2002.

Belly dance on the novel's cover functions successfully as a marker of otherness, with little attempt by the author to challenge this in the book's narrative. In a similar way to which the protagonist in Haikal's book is nameless, the dancer on the cover is faceless. Haikal says in her interview with Eid "If I couldn't belly dance then I wasn't a genuine Lebanese item. So I wanted to put a bellydancer without a face – a faceless torso can belong to anyone I wanted

to emphasise the loss of individuality or identity by removing the face” (12). I would argue that despite Haikal’s intentions, the facelessness of the belly dancer does not rewrite the dominant ideologies concerning woman-as-body, nor does it subvert the stereotype of Lebanese woman as the quintessential belly dancer. Furthermore, the headless belly dancer cannot return the gaze of the viewer as she is only a body, a torso in fact; she is reduced to breasts, belly and hips, nothing more. Moreover, in light of Haikal’s statements about loss of identity, it is ironic that while she names the owner of the belly dance costume pictured on the cover in her “acknowledgements”, she does not identify or give thanks to the woman whose body is in it.

The disjunction between text and paratext intensifies when we encounter the novel’s narrative content. The narrative of *Seducing Mr Maclean* traces approximately four years in the life of a young Lebanese woman who has migrated with her family from war-torn Beirut to Melbourne, Australia. Haikal’s unnamed female protagonist negotiates the difficulties of studying medicine in an Australian university amidst the complexities of cultural difference and the barriers of language. The construction of multicultural identity is a fundamental issue in this novel, and one that has particular resonance in contemporary postcolonial literatures featuring culturally hybrid characters²⁷. However, I wish to argue that Haikal flirts with but ultimately precludes the possibility of multiple or hybrid cultural identities due to her reliance on cultural stereotypes and Orientalist discourse. In addition, I wish to raise some questions about the

²⁷ See, for example, Ashcroft *et al* (1989), Ghassan Hage (2000), and Greg Noble and Paul Tabar (2002).

convergence of gender issues, knowledge, and corruption through Haikal's use of the university as the epitome of Western power and knowledge.

Haikal describes a large Lebanese family which, apart from the unnamed narrator, consists of her adulterous father Naiim, the superstitious and overbearing mother Hayat, their bevy of "dark and hairy" (13) daughters, and their twin sons who share between them an Anglo-Australian girlfriend, Sharon. Drawing on a whole host of 'ethnic' clichés and stereotypes, Haikal reproduces the familiar markers of Orientalist discourse. In particular, the Lebanese characters are constructed as highly emotional and loud, prone to criminal behaviour, and childishly naïve. The Australian characters, by contrast, yet equally stereotypically, are racist, restrained, self-serving, and superior.

The lives of the protagonist's family are chaotic and eccentric; the twin sons abandon their university degrees to join Mr Shareef's drug-ring, Samia the eldest daughter has scandalised the family with her out-of-wedlock pregnancy to a Turkish Muslim, dad has sexual relations with Elham, the falafel maker at the family restaurant, and mum is pregnant with their ninth child – a pregnancy which was supposed to force Naiim to end his adultery. All the while, the narrator is herself negotiating her involvement in a complicated sexual relationship with the University's medical Professor, Prof Maclean²⁸. Amidst this turmoil, the family places pressure on the narrator both to become a doctor and to marry one. Throughout the book Haikal evokes stereotypical notions about the migrant obsession with professional and financial status. Their daughter's

²⁸ Although the novel's title designates Maclean as "Mr", the novel also calls him "Prof Maclean", as well as naming him without either designation. For ease of discussion I will use these designations interchangeably.

graduation is perceived as an event that will not only elevate the social status of the family, but will improve the lives of all Lebanese people in Australia. The novel explores the protagonist's migrant experience in Australia through a series of events that highlight the character's sense of cultural division. Most strongly, this separation is characterised on the one side by the cultural demands made by her family, as well as her own difficulties with Australian customs, and on the other side by the expectations and tensions posed by the University and Prof Maclean.

Classified somewhat nebulously as 'youth-fiction', and with its light-hearted tone, *Seducing Mr Maclean* appears to be a relatively uncomplicated story about the angst of early adulthood in general, and the cultural disorientation of a young migrant woman in particular. Marketed as "comic" and "satirical", Haikal takes a jocular approach to the more serious underlying issues of national identity and the fetishisation of cultural difference. However, while Haikal claims that her book is an attempt to "expose the reader to the pernicious nature of stereotyping" (Haikal interview with Ball 2) the narrative, like the cover, actually does the opposite, ultimately sliding into essentialist categories of racial stereotype.

Orientalism, National Identity, and Knowledge

Haikal establishes the staples of orientalist discourse early in the book by positing East and West as polar opposites. In the book the figure of Prof Maclean can be seen as a metaphorical representation of the 'West' and the narrator as the symbolic 'East'. In an interview with Ball, Haikal is clear about this opposition: "I introduced the character of Mr Maclean as a metaphor for the

'West', the West that the narrator is trying to seduce in order to fit in" (2002c). In keeping with Orientalist and colonialist discourse, Maclean as 'West' is male, intellectual, and in a position of authority – "the Prof was Establishment" (29) – while the narrator as 'East' is constructed in opposite terms: that is, female, and linked with the body, emotions and superstition rather than the mind (39, 41). As an Anglo-Saxon male in a position of power it is not difficult to see the analogy Haikal is drawing in terms of unequal power structures.

Haikal explores the idea of uneven power structures in particular through the sexual exploitation of the protagonist by Prof Maclean. Maclean begins his sexually inappropriate behaviour toward the narrator at their very first meeting, and continues his behaviour throughout the book. His desire is explicitly formed through colonial discourses of exotic 'otherness'. Maclean constantly describes the narrator as "exotic" (45), "different" (44), and frequently asks her to belly dance for him (47). For Maclean, she is nothing more than an exotic fantasy; he has no interest in her beyond his desire for her culturally othered body. Feeling flattered by this attention, the narrator not only welcomes his obvious cultural misconceptions about her, but actively performs the role of Eastern seductress. For example, at one point in the novel she envisions herself walking toward Prof Maclean

as if I was doing some traditional Lebanese folk dance with a clay jar on my shoulder, a seductive dance by a maiden, a Lebanese maiden, and there was this English gentleman eyeing me, a beautiful native (271).

In the narrator's fantasy, colonial and patriarchal discourses are clearly interwoven. The narrator celebrates herself as primitive, seductive, and subordinate: she is the object of the Western gaze.

As its title suggests, the notion of seduction is a recurrent and major theme in the novel, one that is always problematised by the construction of the uneven power relations between the narrator and Prof Maclean. Desperate to impress Maclean, the narrator "was contemplating how an Arabian princess should behave" (273). She decides "I could not disappoint him [...] I had to invent a persona" (272). The persona she develops has to be constructed "*authentically*, like an authentic virgin, a shy one, or maybe like a Lebanese goddess" (272). Here Haikal evokes the gendered tropes of colonial discourse, projecting the fantasy of the virgin coyly awaiting the coloniser²⁹. Haikal's book reproduces for the reader a seemingly endless train of Orientalist stereotypes. The book enters here what Huggan argues is the "constitutive dilemma of the exotic – the impossibility of achieving reinvigoration through the medium of cliché" (192). At the end of the novel, imperialist notions of Western dominance are left unchallenged and Orientalist constructions of Eastern 'otherness' are reinforced.

At the end of the narrative, which is really the start of the book, the protagonist still measures her success by her ability to seduce. Nothing has changed:

²⁹ For a discussion of gendered tropes in colonialist discourse in the context of film, see Ella Shohat (1997).

I wore a black dress that highlighted my skinny waist and moulded my breasts and bottom. My two assets. I had let my long black hair down and brought it forward to rest in two bunches on my breasts. It was part modesty and part seduction (8).

Despite the fact that she is a trained medical professional, the narrator's identity and sense of achievement is ultimately bound up in the strong sense of her own exotic sexual appeal. The notion of seduction, and its importance to the narrative, is established from the outset via cover of the book, where the novel's title is featured in bold black print directly across the belly of dancer.

The concept of 'seduction' in the novel is also posited as a tool through which the narrator deals with her marginality. The back cover blurb of the novel, for example, states the narrator is "finding the new landscape of suburban Melbourne even more perilous to negotiate than a Lebanese cease-fire. Seduction beckons as her only weapon, and so a new belly dance begins...". Since nowhere in the novel does the narrator actually belly dance, the dance is invoked here as a trope of cross-cultural seduction. Seduction is further characterised, no less, as her "weapon". Moreover, the terms of this construction imply the seduction of the West/Prof Maclean by the East/narrator (Haikal invites these dichotomies) as the narrator's only available mode of cross-cultural communication. In a press release by Picador Australia, Haikal writes "*Seducing Mr Maclean* is my attempt to add to the tradition of Australian migrant stories, to help others realise they are not alone and hopefully to bridge the gap of understanding between cultures" (Haikal 2002b). And yet the narrator's self-perception as a Lebanese-Australian woman is, even at the novel's end, compliant with hegemonic perceptions, only existing in relation to

the way in which the West sees her: "I had become a chameleon that best enjoyed lying on fair skin" (146).

Haikal's self-conscious delivery of an inventory of Orientalist clichés does not achieve the satirical effect she claims to aspire to, but instead appears self-defeating and cynical. The narrator goes on to recount the effect of her sexuality on the male guests, Mr Shareef, Prof Maclean and Mr Whiteside:

As I breathed in and out, my chest moved up and down [...] and I knew the effect that had on some of the guests [...] their eyes shone with delight and, if I may say, even desire as they looked at me and talked about my achievements. That gave me confidence and made me breathe deeper (8).

The narrator's sense of self-confidence is not a reflection of her achievements but a reflection of the desiring male gaze upon her body. Her desire is however, revealed throughout the book to be intensely ambivalent. She constantly oscillates between feeling a certain compulsion to seduce Maclean at one moment, and then outright repugnance for him the next. When Maclean leans in to kiss her on the forehead she says:

Prof Maclean could have made any wish and I would have succumbed and said the final words, Yes I do, were it not for the feeling of his lips on my skin, moist – too moist, to my disappointment, and I subtly wiped my forehead (270).

In another moment she says, "His breath was very close to my face and, even though it had the smell of a pub, I didn't object, for beneath it I knew there was

knowledge" (44). Here again, despite Prof Maclean's repellent physicality, the narrator is willing to tolerate him because he is the epitome of authority – he has knowledge. This knowledge is constructed as a source of power and is presented as the privilege of the West. Yet the narrator's desire for knowledge is complicated by her dependency on Prof Maclean. In order to gain knowledge, the narrator continually performs the role of seductress in relation to the West. For the narrator her medical degree is her first ticket to Western power, and marriage is the second.

Prof Maclean tells the narrator on their first meeting "Medicine would be too hard for you" (18), but after some flirtation she is permitted entry. In order to pass the exams she is 'coached' by the Professor with private lessons while he physically molests her. For example, in one incident in the book the professor gives the narrator a seemingly unprofessional amount of assistance in preparing for her exams, "highlight[ing] the important areas of study for the exams" and giving her "sample questions" (34). While he prepares her for the tests, Prof Maclean has the narrator sit on his lap. He touches her and says:

"Dissociate and concentrate," he said. "Two very important words if you want to get anywhere in this country. They are the key to progress. That's why you people are still behind. That's why you people keep on fighting each other, you can't do either." (35).

Haikal presents the protagonist as willing to endure the sexual interference and, indeed, to court it, in order to pass her exams. The protagonist plays on her otherness; whether she plays the seductress to please Maclean or for some personal gain, this does not essentially alter the uneven power structure. It is

significant that throughout the novel Haikal presents these incidents in a double-handed way. The glib assertion that Maclean “highlighted the important areas of study for the exams” by giving her “sample questions” (34), after which she passed with “flying colours” because the “exam questions were predictable”, carries a clear implication that the narrator passed her exams only because she was coached³⁰. This serves to highlight and reinforce the complicity of the narrator (and the author) with discourses of Orientalism, to the extent that what emerges is not a critique of Western abuses of migrant women, but something much more like its opposite, the endorsement of cultural patronage. The narrator’s faux naïveté is further revealed when, in Maclean’s office for the first time, as he touches her shoulder and she flirts back: “I was trying to sound even more French, concentrating on the accent as if nothing unusual was happening between us” (21). She indicates that she knows the behaviour to be inappropriate. The idea that the narrator is able to disrupt Western prejudices by overplaying her exoticism instead of demystifying it relies on false logic. While she does show up this exoticism to be a construction, she also occupies a degraded position in relation to Maclean. Although, as the reader realises, the protagonist understands Maclean’s behaviour to be inappropriate, she pretends to Maclean that she is merely naïve. The end result is that the protagonist’s

³⁰ A number of the paratextual apparatuses surrounding the publication of the book invite the reader to view *Seducing Mr Maclean* as loosely autobiographical. Although Haikal denies the similarities between herself and the narrator, they are nonetheless noteworthy. In particular, Haikal received her degree but does not practice medicine; indeed, one interviewer states that Haikal “does not like to talk about her life in medicine” (Griffin 2002: 10). Furthermore, Haikal is married to a cardiologist, Peter Macdonald.

sexuality becomes currency, and her availability is exchanged for success in her exams.

The Bakhtinian Carnavalesque and Cultural Hierarchy

In Haikal's novel a carnivalesque inversion of hierarchies occurs when to the narrator Prof Maclean becomes increasingly diminished. For example, later into the story the narrator recounts her thoughts while watching Maclean eat at the family's restaurant:

He dipped the falafel in the taratour, and the taratour dribbled out of his mouth thick and creamy like colostrum and he ended up with a tahini ring around his lips and I couldn't help thinking of him as a baby (287).

Haikal's transformation of the once domineering and sexually predacious Maclean into a baby is loaded with subversive potential. It seems that in characterising Maclean as an infant Haikal might begin to invert the uneven power structure between Maclean and the narrator. However, this potential for inversion is thoroughly ruptured when at the end of the book Prof Maclean discovers that his birth mother was Lebanese. Rather than being diminished on the basis, say, of his Anglo-Australian ignorance of Lebanese culture, or his fascinated Anglo 'ethnic sampling' of Eastern cuisine, Maclean's final diminished status has an overtly racial, and indeed anti-Lebanese, aspect to it, since his enfeeblement is in direct relationship to his newly discovered cultural 'otherness'.

Leading up to his discovery, Haikal foreshadows his grotesque transformation with several depictions of his behaviour that become increasingly

more stereotypically Lebanese and less stereotypically Anglo. For example his transformation is prefigured by his uncanny passion for Lebanese food. The narrator describes:

It became second nature, maybe first nature, the way he came every day as if he was addicted to it all: the music, the food, and especially in that very peculiar way the tahini. [...] He even started dipping his finger into the plate and licking it, childlike, unselfconscious, almost primitive, though I do apologise for using that word (287).

This is perhaps the most ideologically problematic moment in the book: the author/narrator apologises for using the word ‘primitive’, because she is aware of the implication that Prof Maclean’s behaviour, which involves an atavistic reappearance of his Lebanese heritage and proclaims a cultural regression from his ‘passing’ Anglo status.

Bakhtin’s concept of carnival provides a useful vehicle in which to further explore Haikal’s construction of racial difference. In particular, Haikal’s depiction of Maclean’s reduced position toward the end of the book can be seen as a carnivalesque ‘decrowning’. Bakhtin insists that within the writing of Rabelais there exists evidence of the history of folk humour and the historic practices of carnival in the Middle Ages and Renaissance³¹. Bakhtin gives an account of the rituals of carnival, which he argues, was characterised by utopian inversions of

³¹ Bakhtin’s writing on the history and significance of carnival is both extensive and complex, and can only be briefly rehearsed here. For more on the carnivalesque, see Bakhtin (1968; reprinted 1984), Vice (1997), Dentith (1995), and Danow (1995).

everyday life (166)³². For Bakhtin, carnival was a temporary period of anti-authoritarian forces organised against the official structures of Church and State. Authority figures were mocked, the routines of everyday life were dispensed with, and the grotesque lower bodily stratum – normally censured through social taboos – was celebrated. An integral component of carnival was the “mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king” which he argues is a “primary carnivalistic act” (*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 252). Bakhtin further explains that “he who is crowned is the antipode of a real king” (ibid 124). In other words, he is “a slave or a jester; this act as it were, opens and sanctifies the inside-out world of carnival” (ibid 124).

While the symbolic reversion of Prof Maclean to an infant is certainly a carnivalesque gesture, it is crucially, the discovery of his Lebanese heritage that signals his true “decrowning”. Specifically, in the carnivalesque tradition the mock crowning of the carnival fool was always temporary in that he would return to his ‘low’ status following the period of carnival. Prof Maclean can accordingly be seen as a ‘mock king’: his Anglo status, and the authority that attended it, was essentially impermanent and false, and he is now reinstated as infantilised Lebanese fool. This decrowning crystallises the highly problematic ideological constructions of race in Haikal’s novel, as it not only suggests a racial hierarchy between West and East, but also implies that Maclean’s ‘dethroning’ results from his atavistic return to his ‘low’ Lebanese heritage.

The moment of Maclean’s symbolical decrowning is registered not only when he discovers his Lebanese heritage, but, even more pointedly, when the

³² Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Bakhtin refer to *Rabelais and His World* (Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984).

narrator becomes aware of it and subsequently rejects his advances for the first time in the novel. For example, immediately prior to the revelation of Maclean's Lebanese ancestry, the narrator had fantasised about a marriage proposal from him: "The ideal would be for Prof Maclean to propose after the graduation, if not during, with a diamond ring to make the night complete and the memory of it perfect" (282). Yet at the end of the novel she no longer wants to marry him: "I took his hand and put it back on his knee" (318). Rather than resolve the tensions about the narrator's abject marginality in relation to Prof Maclean, the author merely confiscates symbolically that which positioned him as superior: his Anglo cultural background. Furthermore, the fact that Haikal constructs Prof Maclean's regression as inevitable, that is, overpowering the privileges of his Western upbringing and his subsequent medical Professorship, implies in no uncertain terms that race is biologically determined and not socially constructed. Moreover, one of the central (though less critically analysed) premises of carnival is that following the carnivalesque period of chaos and inversions, the status quo is reinstated. Haikal's final gesture of returning Maclean to his true status of Lebanese merely reinstates the dominant position of the West in relation to the East. Maclean's ethnic fall from grace, furthermore, raises questions for the reader about whether Maclean's lechery toward the narrator is ultimately meant to be retrospectively read as the atavistic return of a Lebanese trait rather than, as has been implied earlier in the novel, reflective of his Anglo-male sexual Orientalism. Haikal's strategy, although an attempt to satirise the West/East relationship, is ultimately flawed.

As I mentioned earlier, Haikal's book is marketed by the publisher Picador Australia as a satire that aims to explore and then subvert some of the

deep inequalities engrained in Australian multicultural society. Haikal attempts to satirise the dominant ethnic stereotypes, as well as cultural misunderstandings, through an extravagant display of stereotypical representations of Lebanese and Anglo-Australian people³³. However, I argue that Haikal's novel ultimately fails to produce the necessary irony needed in satire to establish her critique of Anglocentric discourse. The central problem in Haikal's novel is that while she mimics Anglo-Australian colonialist definitions of Lebanese culture, she does not ultimately unsettle them. Rather, in a postcolonial context the Orientalist discourses surrounding Lebanese cultural difference are effectively redeployed to satisfy the Western multicultural consumer market for cultural otherness.

While Haikal claimed that her novel *Seducing Mr Maclean* is a satirical commentary on the complex cross-cultural issues of Lebanese migrants in Australia, it ends up presenting a highly clichéd representation of Lebanese ethnicity. Indeed, the excessive stereotyping in the book fails to provide any kind of positive construction of cultural difference. *Seducing Mr Maclean* reproduces discourses of exotic otherness whilst wearing the tag of resistance literature. As a consequence, the Orientalism in *Seducing Mr Maclean* is to some extent diluted under the sign of the postcolonial. There seems to be a facile assumption on Haikal's part that postcolonial and/or migrant literatures

³³ This strategy of excessive stereotype, particularly through the comedy genres that attempt to diffuse the hostility often implied in ethnic stereotyping, has been used, with similarly limited effect, in live theatre and television shows such as *Wogs Out of Work* and *The Comedy Company*. Tony Mitchell has argued that while this stereotyping is "not always negative", with its "affectionate caricaturing of ethnic minorities", it does, nevertheless, "confirm [...] Anglo-Australian negative stereotypes" (1).

are automatically invested with discourses of resistance to Anglo/Western hegemony. Nevertheless, this novel demonstrates that the seeming efficacy of postcolonial fictions as ostensibly anti-colonial should not be left unquestioned. The novel effectively (and mistakenly) invites the reader to construe it as an unproblematic dismantling of the very discourses it continues to reproduce. Ultimately, while Haikal's novel does highlight the continuing market for Orientalist stereotypes, which as I have shown from the beginning of this thesis draw heavily on those associated with belly dancing, her book is very much a contribution to that market. And while the author may very well have intended the book's stereotypical construction of cultural difference to underscore the existence of those stereotypes, they are scarcely distinguishable from the long-standing exoticist modes of representation she purports to destabilise.

Conclusions

This thesis has shown that the culturally constructed image of belly dance is a symbolically fertile site for ideological constructions of femininity, as well as identity and cultural difference. These representations, it has been shown, are both polysemic and contradictory. On the one hand there has been, and still is, a tendency by artists and writers to automatically invest images of belly dancing with an aura of sexual salaciousness. On the other hand, women have manipulated the figure of the belly dancer as a subversive icon of female empowerment. As a result of white liberal feminism's co-optation of the dance, an Eastern performance art that the West had long associated with sex and Orientalist concepts of racial excess, has become, throughout the twentieth century and beyond, inextricably linked with notions of feminist emancipation.

From its entry to the West via the Chicago World's Fair in the nineteenth-century to the subsequent adoption of the dance by the modern dancers at the turn of the century and later by the second wave feminists of the 1970s, belly dance has been a valuable commodity and a complex symbol for articulating Western anxieties and desires. What had begun in the late nineteenth century as an important yet problematic alliance between feminism and belly dance continues into the twenty-first century as a still-pertinent issue. As a means of protesting against hegemonic prescriptions of female embodiment and behaviour, the representation of belly dance negotiates a complex and often contradictory

discursive terrain. These contradictions are embodied in the representation of the dance's movements, its costuming, and the construction of femininity, and bodily display.

While the movements and aesthetic of belly dance have afforded women since the turn of the twentieth century a certain degree of agency and self-empowerment, this empowerment has been achieved through the inscription of the markers of Eastern exotic 'other'. Belly dance has also functioned as an index for a range of complex socio-sexual discourses and imperialist desires of the nineteenth century, encapsulating both a white expansionist appropriation of foreign culture and a dangerous 'invasion' / 'infection' by it. The contemporary belly dancer in the West produces a constant and complex slippage between the practice of belly dancing as a symbol of female empowerment on the one hand, and Orientalist figurations of 'Eastern otherness' linked to colonialist discourse on the other. This thesis has argued that under specific socio-cultural conditions, belly dance has been an important international site of empowerment despite its ambiguous and problematic location at the intersection of Orientalism and feminism.

The tension between belly dance, the representation of cultural difference, and feminism, has to some degree maintained its currency with the ideological concerns of contemporary belly dance practice. Today, the debate remains relevant with an ever-increasing number of women taking up the dance, with its specific pelvic-orientated mode of movement as an instrument of female empowerment. Indeed, as I have shown throughout this thesis, the articulated torso and pelvic movements of the belly dance has consistently emerged in Western representations of dance as a powerful expression of the grotesque body.

The image of the grotesque belly-dancing body dances across the ideological cultural terrains of imperialism, feminism, and societal norms, both contained within them and exceeding them to evoke the contradictory elements of anxiety, desire, and transgression.

The issues raised here provide a point of entry into thinking further on the theoretical and political issues involved in the cultural analysis of the representation of the female body in belly dance. New scholarship on belly dance will broaden the scope of feminist concerns of women's performance as well as raise new questions regarding the ways in which the body of the belly dancer is inscribed with, and transformed by, social and cultural meanings. The internet, for instance, has become a globalised space for feminist political demands by women who have created coalitions surrounding belly dance, its practices, and its philosophies. The internet seems to offer both a new space in which women might negotiate the politics of feminism and embodiment in belly dance, as well as present a productive site of potential scholarship in the field.

The tension between belly dancing and feminism opens up rather than closes down the possibilities for further research not only for feminism, but also other areas such as postcolonialism, dance studies, and cultural difference. A celebratory notion of the female body as enacted through the art of belly dance may have the welcome effect of generating positive images for women, in rebellion against dominant constructions of gender and femininity. At the same time, there are risks involved with adopting this kind of celebratory politics: these images may be re-appropriated by the dominant culture such as occurs in a number of the novels analysed in this study. The practice of belly dance operates simultaneously

within and outside of dominant conceptions of race, identity, and gender, and thus, its ability to straddle both the dominant culture and embody the unruly liminal spaces of the grotesque body functions to highlight the amenability of belly dance to emancipation and yet also commodification. Indeed, this study can be seen as a timely contribution to contemporary discussions of Western representations of the East, that is, on a much broader scale, regarding the current political unrest between the two, and of the West's current anxieties about the East and its apparent 'threats'.

Bibliography

Abdelmohsien, Iman. "An Arab Woman's Exploration of an Ancient/Modern Dance Form." MA thesis. San Jose University, California, 2000.

Adra, Najwa. "Belly Dance: An Urban Folk Genre." In *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy*. Eds. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young. Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, Inc, 2005. 28-50.

Ahmed, Aijaz. "Postcolonialism: What's in a Name?" In *Late Imperial Culture*. Eds. Román de la Campa, E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker. New York: Verso, 1995. 11-32.

Allan, Maud. *My Life and Dancing*. London: Everett & Co., 1908.

Allen, Grant. "Aesthetic Evolution in Man." *Mind* 5.October (1880): 430-64.

-----". "The New Hedonism." *Fortnightly Review* 55 (1894): 377-392

-----". *What's Bred in the Bone*. London: Tit-Bits Offices, 1891. *The Project Gutenberg ebook*. Released July 2004. [Accessed 20 December 2004] Available from <<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/6010>>.

Allen, Virginia M. *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon*. New York: Whitston Publishing, 1983.

Alloula, Malek. *The Colonial Harem*. Trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Al-Rawi, Rosina-Fawzia. *Grandmother's Secrets: The Ancient Rituals and Healing Power of Belly Dancing*. 1996 [German]. Trans. Monique Arav. Massachusetts: Interlink Books, 1999.

-----". *Belly Dancing: Unlock the Secret Power of an Ancient Dance*. London: Constable & Robinson, 2001.

Alves-Masters, Judy. "Changing Self-Esteem of Women through Middle Eastern Dance." Doctoral Thesis, University of Georgia, Georgia, US 1979.

AlZayer, Penni. *Middle Eastern Dance*. World of Dance. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004.

Apter, Emily. "Sexological Decadence: The Gynophobic Visions of Octave Mirbeau." In *The Decadent Reader: Fiction, Fantasy, and Perversion from Fin De Siecle France*. Ed. Asti Hustvedt. New York: Zone Books, 1998. 961-1006.

----- . *Continental Drift: From National Characters to Virtual Subjects*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back : Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London & New York: Routledge, 1989.

Atea. *Bellydance! Magical Motion*. VHS. Goldhil Home Media, 1985.

Austin, Denise. *Shrink Your Female Fat Zones: Lose Pounds & Inches--Fast!--from Your Belly, Hips, Thighs, & More*. Emmaus, Pa: Rodale Books, 2003.

Bade, Patrick. *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women*. London: Ash & Grant, 1979.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. 1929. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Theory and History of Literature; V. 8. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

----- . *Rabelais and His World*. 1968. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Trans. Christine van Boheemem. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.

Balsamo, Anne. *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1996.

Banvard, Kris. "Meee-Ow!" *The Columbus Dispatch*, 3 January (2000): 2.

Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text: Essays Selected and Translated*. 1977. Trans. Stephen Heath. London: Flamingo, 1982.

Bartky, Sandra Lee. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Bauman, Zygmunt. "Industrialism, Consumerism and Power." *Theory, Culture and Society* 1.3 (1983): 32-43.

Becker-Leckrone, Megan. "Salome: The Fetishization of a Textual Corpus." *New Literary History* 26.2 (1995): 239-60.

Benjamin, Roger, ed. *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*. Sydney: The Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997.

Bentley, Toni. *Sisters of Salome*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002.

Berger, Morroe. "The Arab Danse Du Ventre." *Dance Perspectives* 10 (1961): 4-41.

----- . "The Belly Dance." *Horizon* 8.2 (1966): 42-49.

Bernard-Donals, Michael. "Knowing the Subaltern: Bakhtin, Carnival, and the Other Voice of the Human Sciences." In *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences*. Eds. Michael Mayerfeld Bell and Michael Gardiner. London: Sage Publications, 1998. 125.

Bernstein, Mathew, and Gaylyn Studlar, eds. *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Best, Amy L. *Prom Night: Youth, Schools and Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London; New York: Routledge, 1994.

----- . "The Other Question." *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. London & New York: Arnold; St Martin's Press, 1986. 37-54.

----- . "The Other Question: Homi K Bhabha Reconsiders the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse." *Screen* 24.6 (1983): 18-36.

Bisaga, Katarzyna, Agnes Whitaker, Mark Davies, Shirley Chuang, Judith B Feldman, and Timothy Walsh. "Eating Disorder and Depressive Symptoms in Urban High School Girls from Different Ethnic Backgrounds." *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* 26.4 (2005): 257-67.

Bizot, Richard. "The Turn-of-the-Century Salome Era: High- and Pop-Culture Variations of the Dance of the Seven Veils." *Choreography and Dance* 2.3 (1992): 71-87.

Black, Gregory D. *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Blade Runner. Dir. Ridley Scott. Perf. Harrison Ford, Rutger Hauer and Sean Young. Warner Home Video, 1982.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1993.

Brabazon, Tara. "Time for a Change or More of the Same? Les Mills and the Masculinisation of Aerobics." *Sporting Traditions* 17.1 (2000): 97-112.

Bronfen, Elisabeth. *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and Its Discontents*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Buel, J. W., ed. *The Magic City: Original Photographic Views of the Great World's Fair*. St Louis, Philadelphia: Historical Publishing Co., 1894.

Buonaventura, Wendy. *Serpent of the Nile: Women and Dance in the Arab World*. 1989. London: Saqi Books, 1998.

Burbank Ayer, Emma. *A Motor Flight through Algeria and Tunisia*. Ed. Elle Winchell. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1911.

Burnaby, Frederick Gustavus. *On Horseback through Asia Minor*. Vol. 1. London: S, Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1877.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York & London: Routledge, 1993.

Byrde, Penelope. *Nineteenth Century Fashion*. London: B. T. Batsford Limited, 1992.

Cahill, Ann J. "Feminist Pleasure and Feminine Beautification." *Hypatia* 18.4 (2003): 42-64.

Caine, Barbara. *English Feminism: 1780-1980*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Callaway, Helen. *Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987.

Cameron, Deborah. "Naming of Parts: Gender, Culture, and Terms for the Penis among American College Students." *American Speech* 67.4 (1992): 367-82.

Carlton, Donna. *Looking for Little Egypt*. Bloomington, Indiana: IDD Books, 1994.

Carr, Coeli. "Belly-Dance Boom." *TIME* 165.14 (2005) [Accessed 28 April 2005]. Available from
<<http://www.time.com/time/connections/article/0,9171,1042444,00.html>>.

Cart, Michael. *From Romance to Realism: 50 Years of Growth and Change in Young Adult Literature*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.

Cassuto, Leonard. *The Inhuman Race: The Racial Grotesque in American Literature and Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

-----, "'What an Object He Would Have Made of Me!': Tattooing and the Racial Freak in Melville's 'Typee'." In *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. Ed. Rosemarie Garland Thompson. New York & London: New York University Press, 1996. 235-36.

Caws, Mary Ann. "Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art." In *The Female Body in Western Culture*. Ed. Susan Suleiman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986. 268-88.

Çelik, Zeynep, and Leila Kinney. "Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Expositions Universelles." *Assemblage* 13 (1990): 35-59.

Çelik, Zeynep. *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World Fairs*. Berkeley, Los Angeles & Oxford: University of California Press, 1992.

Cherniavsky, Felix. "Maud Allan, Part II: First Steps to a Dancing Career, 1904-1907." *Dance Chronicle* 6.3 (1983): 139.

Chernin, Kim. *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.

-----, *Womansize: The Tyranny of Slenderness*. London: The Woman's Press, 1983.

Chilvers, Ian, Harold Osborne, and Dennis Farr, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Cohen, Selma Jeanne, and Katy Matheson, eds. *Dance as a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance History from 1581 to the Present*. Second ed. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Book Company, 1992.

Cohen-Stratynner, Barbara Naomi. "Gertrude Hoffman: Salome Treads the Boards." *CORD: Dance Research Annual* 9 (1978): 23-32.

Cole, Cheryl L., and Amy Hribar. "Celebrity Feminism: Nike Style, Post-Fordism, Transcendence, and Consumer Power." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 12 (1995): 347-06.

Coluccia, Pina, Anette Paffrath, and Jean Putz. *Belly Dancing: The Sensual Art of Energy and Spirit*. Rochester, Vermont U.S.: Park Street Press, 2005.

Comstock, Anthony. "Its Got to Stop." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 6 August 1893: 18.

Conboy, Katie, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, eds. *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Connelly, Frances S. "Introduction." In *Modern Art and the Grotesque*. Ed. Frances S. Connelly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 1-19.

Coombs, Karen Mueller. *Samantha Gill, Belly Dancer*. New York: Avon Camelot, 1989.

Cooper Albright, Ann. "Auto-Body Stories: Blondell Cummings and Autobiography in Dance." *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*. Ed. Jane C. Desmond. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999. 179-206

Cooper, Kenneth Dr. *Aerobics*. New York: Bantam, 1968.

----- . *New Aerobics*. London: Bantam, 1970.

Cooper, Kenneth Dr., and Mildred Cooper. *Aerobics for Women*. New York: M. Evans & Co., 1972.

Cooper, Kenneth Dr. *The Aerobics Way: New Data on the World's Most Popular Exercise Program*. New York: M. Evans & Co., 1977.

Corrigan, Annette, and Denise Meredyth. "The Body Politic." *Contemporary Australian Feminism*. Ed. Kate Pritchard Hughes. Melbourne: Longman, 1998. 53-75.

Costa, D. Margaret, and Sharon Ruth Guthrie. *Women and Sport: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1994.

Cranny-Francis, Anne. *Engendered Fiction: Analysing Gender in the Production and Reception of Texts*. Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1992.

Curtis, G. W. *Nile Notes of a Howadji*. London: Vizetelly, 1852.

Dahlana, and Dona Z. Meilach. *The Art of Belly Dancing*. New York & Toronto: Bantam Books, 1975.

Dallal, Tamalyn. *Belly Dancing for Fitness: The Ultimate Dance Workout That Unleashes Your Creative Spirit*. Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 2004.

Daly, Mary. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

Daly, Ann. "The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers." *Drama Review* 31.1 (1987): 8-22.

----- . *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.

"Dancing Masters Enter a Protest." *Chicago Tribune* 23 July 1893: 10.

Danow, David K. *The Spirit of Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque*. Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 1995.

D'Arc, Jean. "Mlle Polaire Aux Ambassadeurs." *Le Courrier Français* 22 April 1894: 9.

Deagon, Andrea. *Innana's Descent: An Archetype of Feminine Self-Discovery and Transformation* Originally published in *Habibi* 14.3 Summer 1995, [Accessed 28 August 2002]. Available from <<http://people.uncw.edu/deagona/raqs/inanna'sdescent.htm>>.

----- . *Dancing the Eternal Image: Visual and Narrative Archetypes* Originally published in *Habibi* 14.1 Winter 1996, [Accessed 28 August 2002]. Available from <<http://people.uncw.edu/deagona/raqs/eternalimage.htm>>.

----- . *Mythology and Symbolism in Middle Eastern Dance* Originally published in *Habibi* 16.3 Fall 1997 [Accessed 28 August 2002]. Available from <<http://people.uncw.edu/deagona/raqs/keynote.htm>>.

----- . *In Search of the Origins of Dance: Real History or Fragments of Ourselves* Originally published in *Habibi* 17.1 Spring 1998, [Accessed 28 August 2002]. Available from <<http://people.uncw.edu/deagona/raqs/origins.htm>>.

----- . *Feminism and Belly Dance* Originally published in *Habibi* 17.4 Winter 1999, [Accessed 28 August 2002]. Available from <<http://people.uncw.edu/deagona/raqs/feminism.htm>>.

----- . "Dance of the Seven Veils: The Revision of Revelation in the Oriental Dance Community." In *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy*. Eds. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young. Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers Inc, 2005. 244-266.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans & ed. H. M. Parshley. London: Cape, 1953.

de Goncourt, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt. *Journal: Memoires De La Vie Litteraire* (1887-96). Vol. 3. 3 vols. Aylesbury, Great Britain: Editions Robert Laffont, 1889.

de Leeuw, Hendrik. *Crossroads of the Mediterranean*. New York: Hanover House, 1954.

De Leon, Edwin. *Askaros Kassis, the Copt*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1870. *Wright American Fiction Project*. Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), The Trustees of Indiana University. [Accessed 23rd June 2004]. Available from <<http://www.lettrs.indiana.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=wright2;idno=wright2-0715#resultstoc>>.

Delilah. *Delilah's Belly Dance Workshop Vol 1*. VHS. Visionary Dance Productions, Seattle, WA, 1987.

----- . *Delilah's Belly Dance Workshop Vol 2*. VHS. Visionary Dance Productions, Seattle, WA, 1988.

----- . *Delilah's Belly Dance Workshop Vol 3*. VHS. Visionary Dance Productions, Seattle, WA, 1989.

Dempster, Elizabeth. "Women Writing the Body: Let's Watch a Little How She Dances." In *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*. Eds. Ellen W. Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995. 24-38.

de Rooy, Piet. "Of Monkeys, Blacks, and Proles: Ernst Haeckel's Theory of Recapitulation." In *Imperial Monkey Business*. Ed. Jan Breman. Casa Monographs. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1990. 7-34.

Denon, Vivant. *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt: In Company with Several Divisions of the French Army, During the Campaigns of General Bonaparte in That Country*. London: Longman and Rees, 1802. Trans. Arthur Aikan. Vol. 1. New York: Arno Press, 1973.

Dentith, Simon. *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*. London; New York: Routledge, 1995.

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Desmond, Jane C. "Dancing out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis's "Radha" of 1906." *Signs* 17.1 (1991): 28-49.

----- . ed. *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

Dhanifu, Alicia. *Belly Dancing for Fitness and Fun! The Original Aerobics*. VHS & BETA. A Dhanifu Audio-Visual Distributors, Pasadena, CA, 1984.

Diamond, Nicky. "Thin Is the Feminist Issue." *Feminist Review* 19 (1985): 46-64.

Diderot, Denis. *The Indiscreet Jewels*. Les Bijoux indiscrets (1748). Trans. Sophie Hawkes. New York: Marsilio, 1993.

Didier, Charles. *Nuits De Caire*. Trans. Bernice Terluin. Paris: Hachette, 1860.

Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003.

Dietz, William H., and Steven L. Gortmaker. "Preventing Obesity in Children and Adolescents." *Annual Review of Public Health* 22.1 (2001): 337-53.

Dijkstra, Bram. *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-De-Siecle Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Dinnerstein, Myra, and Rose Weitz. "Jane Fonda, Barbara Bush and Other Aging Bodies: Femininity and the Limits of Resistance." *Feminist Issues* 14.2 (1994): 3-24.

Doane, Mary Ann. "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator." *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. Eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. 176-194.

Dodson Gray, Elizabeth. *Green Paradise Lost*. Wellesley, Mass: Roundtable P, 1981.

Dolphina. *Bellydance*. New York: DK Publishing, 2005.

Dowling, Linda. "The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 33 (1979): 434-53.

Dox, DonnaLee. "Thinking through Veils: Questions of Culture, Criticism and the Body." *Theatre Research Journal* 22.2 (1997): 150-162.

-----, "Spirit from the Body: Belly Dance as a Spiritual Practice." In *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy*. Eds. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young. Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, Inc, 2005. 304-341.

Duncan, James, and Derek Gregory, eds. *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*. London & New York: Routledge, 1999.

Duncan, Isadora. *The Art of the Dance*. 1928. Ed. Sheldon Cheney. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1977. 123-129.

-----, "The Dance of the Future (1903)." In *What Is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*. Eds. Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. 262-264.

-----, *My Life*. 1927. New York & London: Liveright, 1995.

Eid, Amera. "Book Review: *Seducing Mr Maclean*." *The Palace Magazine* October (2002): 12-14.

Eisele, John C. "The Wild East: Deconstructing the Language of Genre in the Hollywood Eastern." *Cinema Journal* 41.4 (2002): 68-94.

Ellis, Bret Easton. *American Psycho*. New York: Vintage, 1991.

Ellis, Havelock. *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Secondary Sexual Characteristics*. London: Walter Scott, 1904.

Ellis, Sylvia C. *The Plays of W. B. Yeats: Yeats and the Dancer*. London: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988.

El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Press, 1980.

Eskes, Tina B., Margaret Carlisle Duncan, and Eleanor M. Miller. "The Discourse of Empowerment: Foucault, Marcuse, and Women's Fitness Texts." *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 22.3 (1998): 317-44.

Fame. Dir. Alan Parker: MGM, 1980.

Fangman, Tamara D., Jennifer Paff Ogle, Marianne C. Bickle, and Donna Rouner. "Promoting Female Weight Management in 1920s Print Media: An Analysis of *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Vogue* Magazines." *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 32.3 (2004): 213-53.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1967. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991.

Farrah, Ibrahim. "Statement of Purpose." *Arabesque* 1.1 (1975): 3.

-----, "Editorial." *Arabesque* 3.5 (1978): 3.

Fields, Jill. "'Fighting the Corsetless Evil': Shaping Corsets and Culture, 1900-1930." *Journal of Social History* 33.2 (1999): 355-84.

Finney, Gail. "The (Wo)Man in the Moon: Wilde's *Salome*." In *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theater at the Turn of the Century*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1989. 55-78.

Fiske, John. *Television Culture*. London & New York: Methuen, 1987.

-----, *Introduction to Communication Studies*. London & New York: Routledge, 1990.

Flaubert, Gustave. "Herodias." In *Three Tales*. Trans. Robert Baldick Middlesex; Victoria: Penguin, 1978.

-----, *Salamambo*. 1977. Trans. A. J. Krailsheimer. London: Penguin Books, 1978.

Flashdance. Dir. Adrian Lyne: MGM, 1983.

Fonda, Jane. *Jane Fonda's Workout Book*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981.

-----, *Jane Fonda's Workout Video*. VHS. Karl Video, 1982.

Forner, Michelle. "The Transmission of Oriental Dance in the United States: From Raqs Sharki to Belly Dance." MA Thesis. University of California, Los Angeles, 1993.

Foster, Susan Leigh. *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986.

-----, ed. *Choreographing History*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995.

-----, ed. *Corporealities: Dancing, Knowledge, Culture, and Power*. London & New York: Routledge, 1996.

-----, "Pygmalion's No-Body and the Body of Dance." In *Performance and Cultural Politics*. Ed. Elin Diamond. London & New York: Routledge, 1996. 131-54.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. Trans. Robert Hurley Vol. 1. London: Penguin, 1990.

-----, "Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977 Reprinted as "Genealogy and Social Criticism"." In *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory*. Brighton: Harvester / New York: Pantheon Books 1980. Ed. S Seidman. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 39-45.

Franken, Marjorie. "Farida Fahmy and the Dancer's Image in Egyptian Film." In *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East*. Ed. Sherifa Zuhur. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998. 265-282.

Fraser, Kathleen Wittick. "The Aesthetics of Belly Dance: Egyptian-Canadians Discuss the Baladi." MA of Fine Arts, York University, North York, Ontario, 1991.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. and Ed. James Strachey. Ed. James Strachey. 24 vols. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1966-1974.

Friedman, Albert B., and Richard H. Osberg. "Gawain's Girdle as Traditional Symbol." *The Journal of American Folklore* 90.357 (1977): 301-15.

Ferguson, Priscilla P. "A Cultural Field in the Making: Gastronomy in 19th-Century France." *American Journal of Sociology* 104 (1998): 597-641.

Gaines, Jane, and Charlotte Herzog, eds. *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*. New York & London: Routledge, 1990.

Garelick, Rhonda K. *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin De Siècle*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Garland Thompson, Rosemarie. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Gautier, Theophile. *Voyage Pittoresque En Algerie*. 1845. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1973.

Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Literature, Culture, Theory 20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Gerber, Merrill Joan. *Also Known as Sadzia! The Belly Dancer!* New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987.

Gilbert, Elliot L. "'Tumult of Images': Wilde, Beardsley, and Salome." *Victorian Studies* 26.2 (1983): 133-59.

Gimbutas, Marija Alseikait e. *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 Bc: Myths and Cult Images*. 1974. New and updated ed. London: Thames and Hudson, 1982.

Gioseffi, Daniela. *The Great American Belly Dance*. New York: Dell, 1977.

----- . *Eggs in the Lake*. Brockport, New York: Bookslinger, 1979.

----- . *Earth Dancing: Mother Nature's Oldest Rite*. Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1980.

Gissing, George. *The Whirlpool*. Bell's Indian and Colonial Library. London: Bell, 1897.

Goellner, Ellen W., and Jacqueline Shea Murphy. *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995.

Gossett, F. Thomas. *Race: The History of an Idea in America (New Edition)*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Grace, Daphne. *The Woman in the Muslin Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature*. London: Pluto Press, 2004.

Greeley, Robin Adele. "Image, Text and the Female Body: René Magritte and the Surrealist Publications." *Oxford Art Journal* 15.2 (1992): 48-57.

Green, Harvey. *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport and American Society*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.

Greenslade, William. *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel: 1880-1940*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Greer, Germaine. *The Female Eunuch*. 1970. London: Harper Collins, 1993.

Griffen, Michelle. "A Serve of Lebanese." *The Age*, 6 October 2002: 10.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1989.

Gubar, Susan. "Representing Pornography." In *For Adult Use Only: The Dilemmas of Violent Pornography*. Eds. Susan Gubar and Joan Huff. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989. 47-67.

Gunew, Sneja. *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms*. Transformations: Thinking through Feminism. London: Routledge, 2004.

Haber, Honi Fern. "Foucault Pumped: Body Politics and the Muscled Woman." In *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*. Ed. Susan J. Hekman. Harrisburg: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996. 137-158.

Hage, Ghassan. *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. Sydney: Pluto Press, 1998. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Haikal, Loubna. *Seducing Mr Maclean*. Australia: Macmillan, 2002.

----- . *Loubna Haikal Talks About Seducing Mr Maclean* [Press Release]. Picador, Australia, 2002 [Accessed 3rd October 2002]. Available from <<http://www.panmacmillan.com.au/resources/pr-loubnahaikal.pdf>>.

-----, "Interview with Loubna Haikal, Author of *Seducing Mr Maclean*" [Interview by Magdalena Ball]. 5 June 2002 [Accessed 5 October 2002]. Available from <<http://www.compulsivereader.com>>.

Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

Heilmann, Ann. *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Heller, Chaia. "For the Lover of Nature: Ecology and the Culture of the Romantic." In *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*. Ed. Greta Gaard. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993. 219-42.

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene. *Am I Thin Enough Yet? The Cult of Thinness and the Commercialization of Identity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Hester, Al. "Mati Hari: Dancer of Illusion." *Arabesque* 8.1 (1982): 12-13.

Heywood, Leslie. *Bodymakers: A Cultural Anatomy of Women's Body Building*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998.

Hoare, Philip. *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1997.

Hobin, Tina. *Belly Dance: The Dance of Mother Earth*. London & New York: Marion Boyars, 2003.

Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. London & New York: Routledge, 2001.

Hunt, Peter. *Children's Literature*. Blackwell Guides to Literature. Oxford, UK & Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.

Huysmans, J. K. *Against Nature: A New Translation of À Rebours*. 1884. Trans. Robert Baldick: Penguin, 1959.

Ian, Marcia. "From Abject to Object: Women's Bodybuilding." *Postmodern Culture* 1.3 (1991): 7.

-----, "The Primitive Subject of Female Bodybuilding: Transgression and Other Postmodern Myths." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 12.3 (2001): 69-100.

International Encyclopedia of Dance. Founding Editor Selma Jeanne Cohen. 6 Vols, *A Project of Dance Perspectives Foundation, Inc.*, 1998.

Jameson, Frederic. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Joffe, George. *Boundaries and State Territory in the Middle East and North Africa*. MENAS Press, 1987 [Accessed 1 November 2005]. Available from
<http://arabworld.nitle.org/texts.php?module_id=4&reading_id=119&sequence=3>.

Jowitt, Deborah. *Time and the Dancing Image*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989.

Jullian, Philippe. *Dreamers of Decadence: Symbolist Painters of the 1890s*. New York: Praeger, 1971.

Kabbani, Rana. *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient*. 1986. London: HarperCollins, 1994.

Kagan, Elizabeth, and Margaret Morse. "The Body Electronic: Aerobic Exercise on Video: Women's Search for Empowerment and Self-Transformation." *TDR* 32.4 (1998): 164-80.

Karayanni, Stavros Stavrou. *Dancing Fear and Desire: Race, Sexuality, and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance*. Ontario, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2005.

Kayser, Wolfgang. *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*. Trans. Ulrich Wisstein. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963.

Keft-Kennedy, Virginia. "'How Does She Do That?' Belly Dancing and the Horror of a Flexible Woman." *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 34.3-4 (2005): 279-300.

Kendall, Elizabeth. *Where She Danced: The Birth of American Art-Dance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.

King, Ynestra. "Feminism and the Revolt of Nature." *Heresies* 13 Fall (1981): 12-15.

Klunzinger, Carl B. *Upper Egypt: Its People and Its Products*. London: M.D. Blackie & Son, 1878.

Knapp, Bettina L. "Herodias/Salome: Mother/Daughter Identification." *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 25.1-2 (1996-1997): 179-202.

Kolin, Philip C. "The Pseudo Suffix- (Er)Cise." *American Speech* 60.1 (1985): 91-93.

Koritz, Amy. "Moving Violations: Dance in the London Music Hall, 1890-1910." *Theatre Journal* 42.4 (1990): 419-31.

-----, "Dancing the Orient for England: Maud Allan's 'The Vision of Salome'." *Theatre Journal* 46.1 (1993): 63-78.

-----, *Gendering Bodies / Performing Art: Dance and Literature in Early Twentieth Century British Culture*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Krafft-Ebing, Richard. *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to Antipathic Sexualinstinct: A Medico-Forensic Study*. Trans. Charles Chaddock. Philadelphia: F. A. Davis & Co., 1893.

Kress, Gunther, and Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Signs*. London & New York: Routledge, 1995.

Krieg, Joann P. "Walt Whitman and the Prostitutes." *literature & Medicine* 14.1 (1995): 36-52.

Kuhn, Annette. *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality*. London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.

Kuhn, Annette, Frances Borzello, Jill Pack, and Cassandra Wedd. "Living Dolls and 'Real Women'." In Annette Kuhn. *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality*. London, Boston, Melbourne & Henley: Routledge & Paul Kegan, 1985. 9-18.

Kunzle, David. *Fashion and Fetishism: A Social History of the Corset, Tight-Lacing and Other Forms of Body Sculpture in the West*. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1982.

Kuryluk, Ewa. *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex: The Grotesque: Origins, Iconography, Techniques*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1987.

La Meri [Russell Meriwether Hughes]. "Learning the Danse Du Ventre: In Berger, Morroe. *Curious and Wonderful Gymnastic*." *Dance Perspectives* 10 (1961): 42-49.

Lane, Edward William. *The Manners & Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. 1832. Reprinted London: Everyman, 1966.

Laukkanen, Anu. "Stranger Fetishism and Cultural Responsibility in Transnational Dance Forms: Case: Oriental Dance in Finland." *Gender and Power in the New Europe: 5th European Feminist Research Conference*. Lund University, Sweden, 2003.

Lebwa. *A Belly Dancer's Slim-Down and Shape-up Secrets*. West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1979.

Ledger, Sally. "The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism." In *Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siècle*. Eds. Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 22-44.

Lee, Carol. *Ballet in Western Culture: A History of Its Origins and Evolution*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Leland, Charles G. *The Egyptian Sketchbook*. London: Strahan & Trubner, 1873.

Lewis, Reina. *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation*. Gender, Racism, Ethnicity Series. London & New York: Routledge, 1996.

-----, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem*. London & New York: I. B. Taurus, 2004.

Li, Huey-li. "A Cross-Cultural Critique of Ecofeminism." In *Ecofeminism, Animals, Nature*. Ed. Greta Gaard. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993. 272-94.

Lorius, Cassandra. "Desire and the Gaze: Spectacular Bodies in Cairene Elite Bodies." *Women's Studies International Forum* 19.5 (1996): 513-23.

Lowe, Lisa. *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*. Ithica & London: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Lowe, Maria R. *Women of Steel: Female Body Builders and the Struggle for Self-Definition*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Liotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition*. 1979. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

Mabro, Judy. *Veiled Half-Truths: Western Travellers' Perceptions of Middle Eastern Women*. London & New York: IB Taurus Publishers, 1996.

MacKenzie, John M. *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1995.

Malchow, Howard L. *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Manning, Susan. "The Female Dancer and the Male Gaze: Feminist Critiques of Early Modern Dance." In *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*. Ed. Jane C. Desmond. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1997. 153-165.

Marks, Patricia. *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*. Kentucky: University of Kentucky, 1990.

Martin, Carol. "High Critics/Low Arts." In *Moving Words: Re-Writing Dance*. Ed. Gay Morris. London & New York: Routledge, 1996. 320-33.

Martin, Randy. "Dance Ethnography and the Limits of Representation." In *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*. Ed. Jane C. Desmond. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999. 321-343.

McCombie, Karen. *Boys, Brothers and Jelly-Belly Dancing*. Ally's World; 5. London: Scholastic Children's Books, 2002.

McDonald, Peter D. *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice: 1880-1914*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

McElroy, Bernard. *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989.

McLean, Adrienne L. "A Thousand Ways There Are to Move: Camp and Oriental Dance in Hollywood Musicals of Jack Cole." In *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*. Eds. Mathew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997. 130-157.

McRobbie, Angela. "Dance Narratives and Fantasies of Achievement." In *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*. Ed. Jane C. Desmond. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999. 207-231.

Melman, Billie. *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918 Sexuality, Religion and Work*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992.

Meltzer, Francoise. *Salome and the Dance of Writing: Portraits of Mimesis in Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Mendes, Valerie, and Amy De La Haye. *20th Century Fashion*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999.

Menefee, David W. *The First Female Stars: Women of the Silent Era*. Westport, Connecticut & London: Praeger, 2004.

Merchant, Carolyn. *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Metropolis. 1927. Dir. Fritz Lang. Perf. Gustav Fröhlich, Brigitte Helm and Alfred Abel. Reconstructed and adapted videocassette release; music by Giorgio Moroder. dist. Vestron Video, 1985.

Mishkin, Julie Russo, and Marta Schill. *The Compleat Belly Dancer*. New York: Doubleday, 1973.

Mitchell, Tony. "Wogs Still out of Work: Australian Television Comedy as Colonial Discourse." *Australasian Drama Studies*, 20 (1992): 119-33.

Morton, Peter. *Busiest Man in England: Grant Allen and the Writing Trade, 1875-1900*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Morton, Peter. *Grant Allen: An Annotated Bibliography of His Non-Fiction* 24 June 2004 [Accessed 25 Oct 2004]. Available from
<<http://ehlt.flinders.edu.au/english/GA/NFBibliography.htm>>.

The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (Hays Code) Reformation of the Arts and Music, 1 February 2000 [Accessed 14 March 2005]. Available from
<<http://www.artsreformation.com/a001/hays-code.html>>.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18.

Nederveen Pieterse, Jan. *Black on White: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992.

Nettlebeck, A. "Presenting Aboriginal Women's Life Narratives." *New Literatures Review* 34 (1997): 43-56.

Nieuwkerk, Karin van. *'A Trade Like Any Other': Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.

Noble, Greg, and Paul Tabar. "On Being Lebanese-Australian: Hybridity, Essentialism and Strategy among Arabic-Speaking Youth." In *Arab-Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging*. Ed. Ghassan Hage. Victoria, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 2002. 128-44.

Nochlin, Linda. *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1994.

Nolan, Maggie, and Carrie Dawson, eds. *Who's Who: Hoaxes, Imposture, and Identity Crises in Australian Literature*. Special Issue of *Australian Literary Studies*, 21.4 St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2004.

Norris, Pamela. *The Story of Eve*. London: Papermac, 1998.

Odom, Maggie. "Mary Wigman: The Early Years 1913-1925." *TDR* 24.4 (1980): 81-92.

Oram, Alison. "Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Inter-War Feminist Discourses." *Women's History Review* 1.3 (1992): 413-34.

Orbach, Susie. *Fat Is a Feminist Issue*. London: Arrow Books, 1978.

-----, *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor of Our Age*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1986.

Orenstein, Gloria Feman. *The Reflowering of the Goddess*. Athene Series. 1st ed. New York: Pergamon Press, 1990.

Osweila, Laura. "Contemporary Images of the Middle Eastern Dancer in the United States." *University of California Cultural Dance Studies Conference*. Los Angeles, 1999. 1-9.

-----, "Two Representations of American Middle Eastern Dance." *Second International Conference on Middle Eastern Dance, Dancing on Common Ground: Tradition and Innovation*. Costa Mesa, California, 2001.

Ozdemir, Kemal. *Oriental Belly Dance*. Istanbul: Donence, 2002.

Park, Roberta J. "A Decade of the Body: Researching and Writing About the History of Health, Fitness, Exercise and Sport, 1983-1993." *Journal of Sport History* 21.1 (1994): 59-82.

Parker, Patricia. *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property*. New York: Methuen, 1987.

Penfield, Frederick Courtland. *Present-Day Egypt*. 1889. New York: The Century Co., 1907.

Pettigrew, Simone, and Fiona Wort. "Consuming the Belly Dance." Paper presented at the *All Changed, Changed Utterly?* Conference for the Association for Consumer Research, Dublin 2003.

Phelps, L, and F Wilczenski. "Eating Disorder Inventory-2: Cognitive-Behavioral Dimensions with Nonclinical Adolescents." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 49.4 (1993): 508-14.

Pitts, Victoria. "'Reclaiming' the Female Body: Embodied Identity Work, Resistance and the Grotesque." *Body and Society* 4.3 (1998): 67-84.

Plaskow, Judith, and Carol P. Christ. *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. Harper Forum Books. 1st ed. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.

Playboy Magazine. New York: Playboy Press, February, 1971.

Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London & New York: Routledge, 1993.

Porter, Roy, and David Wright, eds. *The Confinement of the Insane: International Perspectives, 1800-1965*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London & New York: Routledge, 1992.

Praz, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*. 1933. Trans. Angus Davidson. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Price, David W. "Bakhtinian Prosaics, Grotesque Realism and the Question of the Carnavalesque in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*." *Southern Humanities Review* 32.4 (1998): 321-46.

Prime, William Cowper. *Boat Life in Egypt and Nubia*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1857.

Puckett, Charles L., Craig S.B., and Faller M.S. "In Search of the Ideal Female Umbilicus." *Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery* 105.1 (2000): 389-92.

Pykett, Lyn. *The "Improper" Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*. London & New York: Routledge, 1992.

Rader, Benjamin G. "The Quest for Self-Sufficiency and the New Strenuousness: Reflections of the Strenuous Life of the 1970s and the 1980s." *Journal of Sport History* 18.2 (1991): 255-66.

Radhakrishnan, R. "Adjudicating Hybridity, Co-Ordinating Betweenness." *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 5.1 (2000). [Accessed 20 October 2005] Available from <<http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v5i1/con51.htm>>.

Raphael, Melissa. "Truth in Flux: Goddess Feminism as a Late Modern Religion." *Religion* 26 (1996): 199-213.

Reynolds, Kimberley. "Alchemy and Alco Pops: Breaking the Ideology Trap." In *Studies in Children's Literature, 1500-2000*. Eds. Celia Keenan and Mary Shine Thompson. Cornwall, Great Britain: Four Courts Press, 2004. 138-147.

Rowe, David. *Popular Cultures: Rock Music, Sport and the Politics of Pleasure*. London: Sage Publications, 1995.

Rowe, Kathleen. *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1975.

Ruskin, John. *The Stones of Venice*. 4th ed. Orpington, Kent: George Allen, 1886.

Russo, Mary. *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Ruyter, Nancy Lee. "La Meri and Middle Eastern Dance." In *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy*. Eds. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young. Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers Inc, 2005. 207-20.

Sachs, Curt. *World History of the Dance*. Trans. Bessie Schönberg. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1937.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. 1978. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

----- . *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1993.

Saleh, Magda. "A Documentation of the Ethnic Dance Traditions of the Arab Republic of Egypt." Doctoral Thesis, New York University, 1979.

Sandilands, Catriona. *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Sarasohn, Lisa. *The Woman's Belly Book: Finding Your Treasure Within*. Asheville, NC: Self-Health Education Inc., 2003.

Sarde, Michèle. *Colette: Free and Fettered*. Trans. Richard Miller. London: Michael Joseph, 1978.

Schick, Irvin C. *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alterist Discourse*. London & New York: Verso, 1999.

Schiebinger, Londa, ed. *Feminism and the Body*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Schoenfeld, Brad, and Carole Semple-Marzetta. *Look Great Naked: Slim Down, Shape up & Tone Your Trouble Zones in Just 15 Minutes a Day*. New York: Prentice Hall Press, 2001.

Schulze, Laurie. "On the Muscle." In *Building Bodies*. Ed. Pamela L. Moore. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995. 9-30.

Sellers-Young, Barbara. "Raks El Sharki: Transculturation of a Folk Form." *Journal of Popular Culture* 26.2 (1992): 141-52.

Sharif, Ketii. *Bellydance*. St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2004.

Shay, Anthony. "The Male Dancer in the Middle East and Central Asia." In *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy*. Eds. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young. Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers Inc, 2005. 51-84.

Shay, Anthony, and Barbara Sellers-Young. "Belly Dance: Orientalism--Exoticism--Self-Exoticism." *Dance Research Journal* 35.1 (2003): 13-37.

----- eds. *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy*. Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2005.

Sheppard Missett, Judi, and Dona Z. Meilach. *Jazzercise*. Toronto & New York: Bantam Books, 1978.

Shilling, Chris. *The Body and Social Theory*. Theory, Culture & Society. London: Sage Publications, 1993.

Shira. *The Art of Middle Eastern Dance* 1 November 2005 [Accessed 21 November 2005]. Available from <<http://www.shira.net/sevenveils.htm>>.

Shohat, Ella, and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentricism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London & New York: Routledge, 1994.

Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980*. London: Virago, 1987.

Siegal, Barbara. "Belly Dance: The Enduring Embarrassment." *Arabesque* 21.4 (1995): 11-13.

Sims, Michael. *Adam's Navel*. London: Penguin, 2003.

Sladen, Douglas. *Carthage and Tunis: The Old and the New Gates of the Orient*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1906.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry* 12 Autumn (1985): 243-61.

Spretnak, Charlene. *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: A Collection of Pre-Hellenic Myths*. New ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.

Stafford, Barbara Maria. "Conceiving." In *Modern Art and the Grotesque*. Ed. Frances S. Connelly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Stanten, Michele, ed. *Banish Your Belly, Butt & Thighs Forever!: The Real Woman's Guide to Body Shaping & Weight Loss*. Emmaus, Pa: Rodale Books, 2000.

Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1979.

------. *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex & Politics*. 1982. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.

St. Denis, Ruth. *An Unfinished Life*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939.

Steele, Valerie. *The Corset: A Cultural History*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2001.

Steinberg, Leo. "'How Shall This Be?'" Reflections on Filippo Lippi's "Annunciation" in London, Part 1." *Artibus et Historiae* 8.16 (1987): 25-44.

------. *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Stewart, Iris J. *Sacred Woman, Sacred Dance*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2000.

Stone, Merlin. *When God Was a Woman*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976.

Stone, Rebecca. "Salome, Scheherazade, and Hollywood: the Oriental Dance in American Feature Film." MA thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1991.

------. "Reverse Imagery: Middle Eastern Themes in Hollywood." In *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East*. Ed. Sherifa Zuhur. Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press, 1998. 247-263.

Stott, M. D. *The Real Algeria*. London: Hurst & Blackett Ltd., 1914.

Studlar, Gaylyn. "'out-Salomeing Salome': Dance, the New Woman, and Fan Magazine Orientalism." In *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*. Eds. Mathew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997. 99-130.

Sturgeon, Noël. *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action*. New York & London: Routledge, 1997.

Suleri, Sara. "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition." *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1992): 756-69.

Székely, Éva. *Never Too Thin*. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1988.

Taylor, Bayard. *Journey to Central Africa; Life and Landscapes from Egypt to the Negro Kingdoms of the White Nile*. New York: G. P. Putnam & Co., 1854.

Theberge, Nancy, and Susan Birrell. "Structural Constraints Facing Women in Sport." In *Women and Sport: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Eds. D. Margaret Costa and Sharon R. Guthrie. Long Beach: California State University, 1994. 331-340.

The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde. Ed. J.B. Foreman. Great Britain: HarperCollins, 2001.

"The Drama: The New Dancer." *Times Literary Supplement* 26 March 1908: 102.

The Dream City: A Portfolio of Photographic Views of the World's Columbian Exposition. [With an Introduction by Prof. Halsey C. Ives,] St. Louis, Philadelphia: N.D. Thompson Publishing Co., 1893.

Thomas, Helen. *The Body, Dance, and Cultural Theory*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Thomas, Helen, and Jamilah Ahmed. *Cultural Bodies: Ethnography and Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004.

Thomson, Philip. *The Grotesque*. London: Methuen, 1972.

Trodd, Colin, Paul Barlow, and David Amigoni, eds. *Victorian Culture and the Idea of the Grotesque*. Aldershot & Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 1999.

Turkbaz, Özel. *The Belly Dancer in You*. New York: Fireside, 1976.

Uhlig, Robert. "Britannica Spears at No 1 as Internet Encyclopaedia Goes for Pop." *Telegraph*, 15 February 2001. [Accessed 20 October 2005] Available from <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>>.

Vanska, Annamari. "A Heroic Male and a Beautiful Woman: Teemu Maki, Orlan and the Ambivalence of the Grotesque Body." *Nordic Journal of Women's Studies* 10.3 (2002): 154-67.

Varga Dinicu, Carolina. *Serendipity & Enjoying the Proceeds from the Reality Check: A Retrospective on My Career*. Conference Paper presented at the "2nd International Conference on Middle Eastern Dance". 2001 [Accessed 24 May 2005]. Available from <http://www.discoverbellydance.com/morocco_conferencespeech.html>.

----- . *The Ethics of Ethnic* 2003 [Accessed 8th November 2005]. Available from <http://www.casbahdance.org/ethics_ethnic.html>.

Vergara, Adela, Roman Balladine, and Sula. *The New Art of Belly Dancing*. 1972. Millbrae, California: Celestial Arts, 1974.

Vertinsky, Patricia. "Women, Sport, and Exercise in the 19th Century." *Women and Sport: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Eds. D. Margaret Costa and Sharon R. Guthrie. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1994. 63-82.

Vice, Sue. *Introducing Bakhtin*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1997.

Walkowitz, Judith R. "The 'Vision of Salome': Cosmopolitanism and Erotic Dancing in Central London, 1908-1918." *American Historical Review* 108.2 (2003): 337-76.

Waring, Wendy. "'Is This Your Book?' Wrapping Postcolonial Fiction for the Global Market." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 22.3-4 (1995): 455-65.

Warner, Charles Dudley. *My Winter on the Nile: Among the Mummies and Moslems*. Hartford, Conn: American Publishing Company, 1881.

Warren, Karen. *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Weber, Charlotte. "Unveiling Scheherazade: Feminist Orientalism in the International Alliance of Women, 1911-1950." *Feminist Studies* 27.1 (2001): 125.

Wilde, Oscar. "Salome." *Oscar Wilde: The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*. London: Penguin Books, 2000.

Wilson, Serena, and Alan Wilson. *The Serena Technique of Belly Dancing: The Fun Way to a Trim Shape*. New York: Drake Publishers, 1972.

Wolff, Janet. "Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics." In *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*. Ed. Jane C. Desmond. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999. 81-99.

Wollen, Peter. "Fashion/Orientalism/the Body." *New Formations* 1 Spring (1987): 5-33.

Wood, Leona. "Danse Du Ventre: A Fresh Appraisal (Part 1)." *Arabesque* 5.6 (1980): 10-21.

Yates, Wilson. "An Introduction to the Grotesque: Theoretical and Theological Considerations." In *The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections*. Eds. James Luther Adams and Wilson Yates. Michigan & Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997. 1-68.

Yeazell, Ruth Bernard. *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000.

Yellis, Kenneth A. "Prosperity's Child: Some Thoughts on the Flapper." *American Quarterly* 21.1 (1969): 44-64.

Young, Iris Marion. *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Younger, Beth. "Pleasure, Pain, and the Power of Being Thin: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature." *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 15.2 (2003): 45-56.

Zagona, Helen Grace. *The Legend of Salome and the Principle of Art for Art's Sake*. Geneva: Droz, 1960.

Zola, Emile. *Nana*. 1880. Trans. George Holden. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1972.

Zonana, Joyce. "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of 'Jane Eyre'." *Signs* 18.3 (1993): 592-617.

Zuhur, Sherifa, ed. *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998.

Appendix

Please see print copy for image



Plate 39

Please see print copy for image



Plate 40

Please see print copy for image



Plate 41

Please see print copy for image



Plate 42

Plate 39 Gizira Band. *Modern Belly Dance from Egypt*. HMC-1241.

Plate 40 Mrad, Said. *Remixes - One Thousand and One Nightsone*. ACSM-Ark 21, 2003.

Plate 41 *Bellylicious*. Virgin Records, ACC-BEL, 2003.

Plate 42 Oojami. *Bellydancing Breakbeats*. Mondo Music & Ark21, MM-502, 2002.

Please see print copy for image

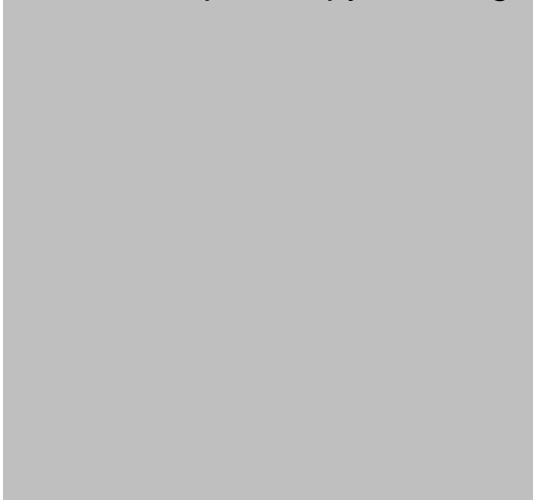


Plate 43

Please see print copy for image

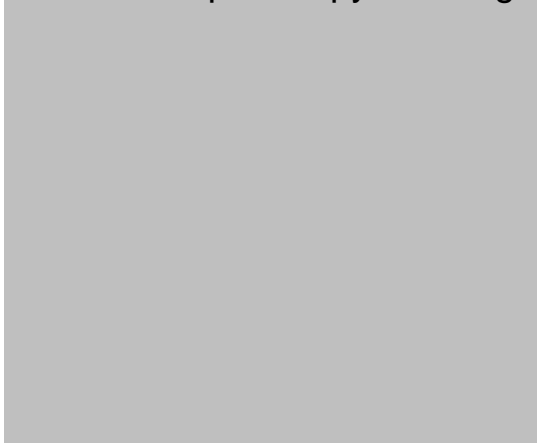


Plate 44

Please see print copy for image

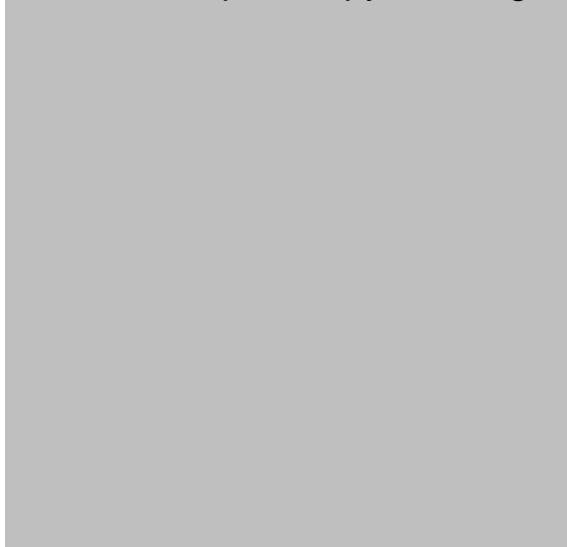


Plate 45

Please see print copy for image

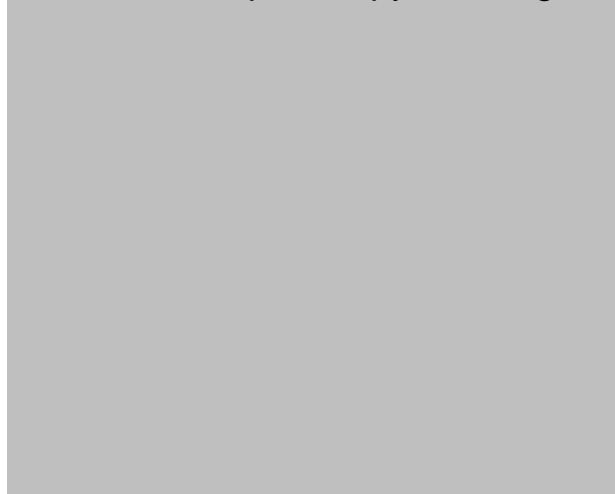


Plate 46

Plate 43 *Belly Dance: Le Meilleur De La Danse Du Ventre*. Atoll, 747752, 1999.

Plate 44 Galactic Caravan. *Intergalactic Bellydance*. Mondo Melodia, MM-832, 2004.

Plate 45 Schill, Marta. *Belly Dance: Fine Art of the East*. VHS. Rosemead, CA: U.S. Rubayat, 1983.

Plate 46 Sami Nossair Orchestra. *Cairo Classics*. Hollywood Music, HMC-1297, Date unknown.

Please see print copy for image

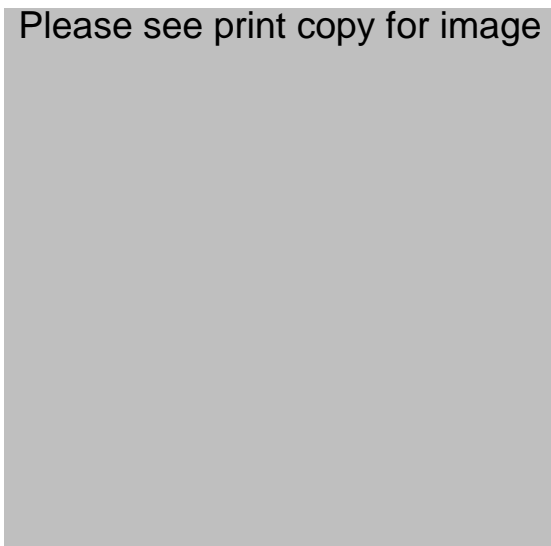


Plate 47

Please see print copy for image



Plate 48

Please see print copy for image

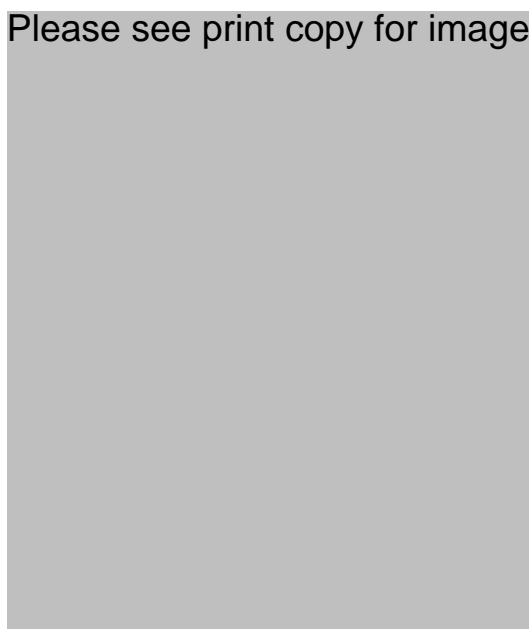


Plate 49

Please see print copy for image



Plate 50

Plate 47 Sami Nossair Orchestra. *Beyond the Desert*. Hollywood Music, HMC-1215, 2002.

Plate 48 Kassab, Youssef with Hamouda Ali. *Belly Dance: A Gift from Cairo!* Peters International, PLD-2061, 1980.

Plate 49 Hobin, Tina. *Belly Dancing: For Health and Relaxation*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1998.

Plate 50 Young, Louisa. *Baby Love*. Hammersmith London: Flamingo, 1998.

Please see print copy for image



Plate 51

Please see print copy for image



Plate 52

Please see print copy for image



Plate 53

Please see print copy for image




Plate 54

Plate 51 Agby, Naif & his Orchestra. *El Debke: Music of the Middle East*. AudioFidelity Stereodisc, AFSD-5980, 1962.

Plate 52 Agby, Naif & the Lebanese Radio Orchestra. *An Evening with Uncle Tanous*. AudioFidelity, AFSD-6268, 1974.


Plate 53 Vali, Gus & Caravan. *Let's Belly Dance*. P.I. Records, PI-LPS-93, 1973.

Plate 54 El-Bakkar, Mohammed & His Oriental Ensemble. *Exotic Music of the Belly Dancer: Music of the Middle East Vol. 6*. AudioFidelity Stereodisc, AFSD-6154, 1966.



Please see print copy for
image

Plate 55



Please see print copy for
image

Plate 56



Please see print copy for image

Plate 57

Plate 55 El-Bakkar, Mohammed & His Oriental Ensemble. *Navel Maneuvers*. AudioFidelity AF-2415, 2 record set. c.1970.

Plate 56 Soffee, Anne Thomas. *Snake Hips: Belly Dancing and How I Found True Love*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2002.

Plate 57 Amari, Raja. *Satin Rouge*. Advertisement Poster. Zeitgeist Video, 2002.