Journal of Interdisciplinary Feminist Thought

Volume 1
Issue 1 *Women's Work*

Article 7

11-8-2006

# Wendy Buonaventura. Something in the Way She Moves: Dancing Women from Salome to Madonna

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Recommended Citation
Hawkridge, Patricia (2005) "Wendy Buonaventura. Something in the Way She Moves: Dancing Women from Salome to Madonna," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Feminist Thought*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 7.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.salve.edu/jift/vol1/iss1/7

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**Wendy Buonaventura.** ***Something in the Way She Moves: Dancing Women from Salome to Madonna***. Cambridge, Mass: DaCapo Press, 2004. 312 pp. $26 (hardcover), ISBN 0-3068-1348-3

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This provocative and often insightful text takes a serious and quite thorough look at the history of dance from a woman's perspective. Written by British-born Wendy Buonaventura, this volume acknowledges, and somewhat forgives, the widely acclaimed notion that throughout history the female form has been a target of sexual obsession. This forgiveness is possible largely because women are seen as the victors here. They embrace their sexuality, defy social constraints, and find independence through their dancing. Within this writing, Buonaventura passionately argues that "Women have long been assumed to reveal their true nature through their bodies, and aside from giving birth, this is most in evidence when they dance" (9). Buonaventura further claims that men are equally fascinated and fearful of the female sexuality that shines through their dancing and, as a result, throughout history this has led to extreme efforts to control women. According to this author, such efforts include "locking them [women] up in madhouses, confining them in corsets and cumbersome skirts, clitoridectomy, cosmetic surgery," to name a few (13).

How exactly did this obsession with the female body begin? How did we arrive at the perception that women are dangerous creatures? In Chapter One, "And God Created Devil-Woman," Buonaventura cites organized religion as a major culprit. In pre-Christian society the Goddess was present—women were revered, not feared. When the worship of a single male God replaced these goddesses, women no longer held a place in religious ceremonies. From that point on, dance—once considered a sacred ritual—became solely a form of entertainment. As religious consciousness moved in a new direction, woman went from being a goddess to being a temptress. Buonaventura courageously states, "Every major world faith has been, if not in theory, certainly in practice, hostile to women" (23).

She continues to say that government essentially took over where religion left off, banning dance and condemning the professional dancer as the most "dangerous of all women," all because men were seemingly "powerless to resist temptation when it was put on display" (10). This unfounded fear was responsible for keeping women off the stage for centuries. The subsequent chapters are devoted to a meticulously detailed account of dance through the ages. Beginning with Salome and working her way to Madonna, this author examines the power of such exquisite dance forms as Middle Eastern dance; Egyptian dance; Indian, Arab, and Chinese dance; the Spanish saraband; the Hawaiian hula; the waltz; African dance; ballet; commedia dell'arte; the cancan ( the "rudest dance of all time"); modern dance (Isadora Duncan redefined the female image through her dancing and her wild nature), Algerian dance, Flamenco dance, and more. This collection is a sincere celebration of the women who, through

dance, have been brave enough to find independence and defy the rules by proudly "strutting their stuff on stage" (15).

Drawing on her twenty-plus years as a professional dancer and choreographer ("Arabic dance was the door through which I entered the dance world one winter's night back in 1980" (261), Buonaventura weaves personal accounts within her extensive and fascinating research, resulting in an entertaining and enlightening read. Her use of historical anecdotes (her account of Maud Allen's close encounter with a real severed head while dancing the role of Salome is particularly riveting) and occasionally very surprising facts (did you know that the first Geishas were men?) assure the reader that this author has a true love and deep respect for her subject and has done her homework.

*Something in the Way She Moves* should prove to be a welcome addition to any collection on dance history or women's studies. After all, As Bounaventura notes, "For as paganism has never truly been eradicated from Christian culture—neither have people ever really stopped dancing"(285)