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In the 1906 programme for the Opéra-Comique's production of *Aphrodite* (Camille Erlanger's opera based on Pierre Louÿs' exotic novel of the same name), images from antique vases mingle with photographs of Mary Garden (1874–1967) dressed as the courtesan Chrysis.

The juxtaposition of Mary Garden's thoroughly modern gown and the antique motifs borrowed from vases and bas-reliefs illustrates the opposing and conjoining forces involved in the production and reception of operas and ballets invoking the imagery of ancient Greece in *fin-de-siècle* Paris: images both modern and antique, yet indisputably fashionable. In a review of this performance in *Le Théâtre*, the dancer Régina Badet (1876–1949) is shown wearing a costume that closely adheres to the traditional images from antiquity. Badet is in heavy drapery, which cascades loosely over her frame and her head is bound with fabric and veils wrapped across her forehead and under her chin to represent a paradigmatic 'oriental' costume worn by 'exotic' dancers like Ida Rubinstein (1885–1960). The dresses for this production, designed by Marcel Multzzer (1866–1937), combine elements of the past with the present – the oriental and the occidental – in an erotic fantasy of an imagined antiquity for a fashionably modern audience.

Exoticism exists in many forms throughout the printed ephemera which promoted, reviewed and documented early twentieth-century Parisian opera and dance. Of all these images, I shall focus in this essay on

1 All translations from French, unless otherwise attributed, are by Samuel N. Dorf and Naomi Segal.
those that simultaneously exoticize and eroticize the world of the ancient Greeks. Regardless of how the creators envisioned their operas, the visual components of these performances helped to reinforce certain constructions of the past. In particular, ‘antique’ performances for the Opéra-Comique choreographed by Madame Mariquita (1830–1922), including the opera *Aphrodite* (1906) by Camille Erlanger (1861–1919) and the revivals of C. W. Gluck’s ‘Greek’ operas in the 1890s, engaged in a multifaceted system of commodification of ancient Greece for mass distribution in the popular fashion and music presses.

Contributing to popular magazines like *Musica, Comedia Illustré* and *Le Théâtre*, dancers, choreographers and musicians helped sell fantasies of the ancient world to a predominantly female readership. These artists capitalized on the magazines’ format as they wrote articles and posed for photographs that highlighted the fashionably exotic nature of the dances they created.

Selling antiquity to the masses through the stage spectacles of the past fuelled an interest in performing the past not just on stage but also at home. This essay explores the diffusion of the discourse of antiquity in the popular music and theatre press, as well as in the private salons of the patrons who funded the public performances of ancient Greece in Paris. The complex relationships between these patrons and the habitues of their salons demonstrate that the competing discourses of antiquity presented on the operatic stage (the popular, the exotic, the erotic and the scholarly) could come together.

The effects of the eroticization and exoticization of ‘Greek’ opera are rarely found in the musical scores themselves; instead, one must look at the ephemera surrounding these works – programmes, reviews, magazines, photographs, advertisements. Musical exoticism rarely distinguishes between nations, the soundscapes of musical ‘others’ blend together in a sea of augmented seconds, chromaticism, vamps, ostinati, lowered sevenths and colourful orchestration; other media can illustrate better how audiences, singers and dancers embodied and performed these operas. Moreover, a medium like fashion reminds us of the limitations of disciplinary boundaries. Fashion travels everywhere – from the opera to the beach, from the pages of cheap magazines to the most elite *soirées*. Tracing the path of trends in decor and costume from the stage to the pages of music and theatre magazines opens up new avenues of enquiry. Complicating matters, the serials entangle images from stage productions with articles, reviews, interviews and advertisements, drawing upon multiple media – a microcosm of Paris itself.

Paris’s music, theatre and dance journalism catered to a specific clientele consisting of socialites, artists and writers, as well as the typical readers of fashion magazines and the outlets in which it appeared were printed in a colourful glossy format that included photographs, illustrations, articles on popular entertainments, alongside reviews and human-interest stories. As Mary Davis writes: ‘[these magazines] linked the imaginary sphere of the stage with the (more or less) realistic world of the paying clientele.’ In doing so, they extend the fantasies of the stage to the home and the boutique.

With the reader in mind, one can view the magazines not merely as chroniclers of theatrical life, but also as ‘guides for the aspiring theatregoer’ and advertisements for those who wished to stay informed on the fashionable spectacles and costumes of the day. In many cases, the reviews themselves serve multiple purposes for a reader who is better acquainted with popular culture than with the history of opera. The text provides a synopsis as well as short reviews of the performers and often includes a brief history of the work, supplying cocktail-party knowledge of the often exotic and tantalizingly erotic spectacles the readers may not have seen.

The complex relationship of Paris fantasies of ancient Greece can be observed in the opening scene from the 1906 production of *Aphrodite*,

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3 Lucia Ruprecht writes how in this period audiences of dance expanded and diversified: ‘They extended to those who did not have to be present at a performance at all, to the “lisœuses de feuilleton” and to those who enjoyed being able to observe the dancers through the eyes of a critic who might even allow glimpses into the secret spaces behind the stage, the green rooms of Europe’s theatres to which only the lucky few were admitted’. Lucia Ruprecht, ‘The Romantic Ballet and its Critics: Dance Goes Public’, in Mario Kant, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 175.
which surely would have interested the readers of the popular press. Set in Greek Alexandria in 57 BCE, the opera tells the tale of Chrysis, a lesbian courtesan who, while attending orgies, induces a sculptor to steal and murder for her. At the end of the opera he rejects her and she is crucified for her crimes. The novel’s eroticism and references to lesbianism were not subtle and adapting Chrysis’s raw sexuality for the opera stage required some delicacy. Despite such difficulties, these topics proved particularly appealing to fin-de-siècle Paris audiences. Emily Apter describes how such Parisian fantasies of ancient Greece often leaned toward the exotic and oriental, noting that ‘[t]his conflation of Greece and the orient was of course particularly common in turn-of-the-century art, literature, opera, dance and theatre; syncretistic otherness was the fashion, spawning a wild hybridity of styles – Egypto-Greek, Greco-Asian, Biblical-Moorish.’

Similarly, according to Apter, the ‘orientalist stereotypes’ were used as a vehicle to express ‘saphic love’ (p. 19), most notably for Colette and Ida Rubenstein, but this could apply to the dancers Régina Badet, Liane de Pougy and Cléophane Mérodé as well. She also points out that the unique and interesting aspect of Colette and Ida Rubenstein’s forays into orientalism is the use of orientalism as an erotic cipher, a genre of theatricality in which acting “oriental” becomes a form of outing (p. 20). Rubenstein and Colette were not alone in their use of antiquity as a cipher for queer eroticism; Aphrodite represents a much more explicit statement of the collision of these worlds.

4 See Julie McQuinn, ‘Unofficial Discourses of Gender and Sexuality at the Opéra-Comique during the Belle Epoque’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Northwestern University, 2003).

7 The opera opened with Chrysis’s two very young lesbian handmaidens Myrto and Rhodos playing flutes and singing an erotic song about Pan, Syrinx and Eros. As Théano dances, the girls sing a simple, hum-able, seductive song over an ostinato figure in the bass. A hidden women’s choir echoes them as the young voices weave their melody chromatically over a vamp that is reminiscent of the ‘Arabian Dance’ from Tchaikovsky’s ballet, The Nutcracker. The music contains most of the signifiers for musical orientalism. These signifiers were quite common; moreover, the dance music from the ‘Egypto-Greek’ dance music in Erlanger’s Aphrodite, Louis Ganne’s Phryné (1897) and even Richard Strauss’s Salome (1905) are all very similar. Setting scenes depicting female dancers and women playing flutes, each opera features music with sinuous, chromatic flute melodies evoking Eastern modes with flattened leading tones and lowered seconds; moreover, all are in triple time, feature similar orchestrations (flutes, oboes, and English horns, playing the melodic line over pizzicato strings and/or harps as well as a colourful addition of Eastern percussion often including tambourine, triangle and antique cymbals), and are diegetic dances of women performing to a predominantly male audience.

While they perform their ‘orientalist’ music, Théano, Rhodos’s sister, performed poses and steps designed by Mme Marquita. Although it was the famed English soprano Mary Garden who created the role of Chrysis for Aphrodite, the real draw of Erlanger’s opera was apparently Régina Badet, the dancer who originated the role of Théano. In numerous reviews, Badet received more press than Mary Garden herself. The performance made

8 These are not ‘authentic’ Eastern melodies and it was not the composers’ aim to make them so; they are part of a long-standing tradition of ‘orientalist’ chromaticism. See Timothy Taylor, Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 89–93; Derek B. Scott, ‘Orientalism and Musical Style’, Critical Musicology Journal (1997) <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/music/Info/critmus/articles/1997/02/01.html> accessed 13 May 2014.
9 Julie McQuinn summarizes some of the reviews as follows: ‘Mlle Régina Badet flies into a passion and writhes, whirls and dances with an extreme frenzy’; ‘even more
Badet a star and she went on to appear in numerous other exoticized Greek performances. 10 Aphrodite took on a life of its own, finding its way onto numerous other stages. Sappho, a 1912 operetta starring Badet, parodied Aphrodite and lampooned a multitude of ancient Greek-themed productions. 11 1914 saw a spoken-theatre version of Aphrodite brought to the stage once again due to the popularity of the opera, which had a very successful revival in 1910 with Régina Badet reprising her role as the dancing handmaiden once again to the choreography of Mme Mariquita.

Each of these productions received extensive coverage in the magazines, which reproduced an oriental antiquity in polychrome vibrancy. The reviewers rarely focused on the music; the visual spectacle of the opera productions proved more important. The design of the articles and photos themselves render them theatrical and fashionable. The review in Comédia Illustrée for the 1914 version of Aphrodite provides sumptuous pull-outs in a colourful layout. 12 The brilliance of the two-page image of the Bacchanalian orgy in the middle of the article is made only more vivid by the way in which pages 622 and 627 fold over the gilded image, shrouding the orgy in a dark curtain with stark Greek letters spelling out 'Aphrodite' as though it were the mourning curtains of Chrysis (see Figure 1).

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10 Étienne Roubier, 'Aux Capucines, Sappho, Opérette en deux actes, de MM. André Barde et Michel Carré, Musique de M. Charles Cuvillier', Le Théâtre no. 319 (April 1912), 122–4.


12 A 'grand spectacle in verse' with music by Henri Février; see Claude Roger-Marx, 'Aphrodite', Comédia Illustrée 6:13 (5 April 1914), 620–8.

first public performance of the ballet: 'the whole of Paris now dresses in “oriental” clothes.' The arrival of the Ballets Russes and Poiret’s harem-chic line of trousers and turbans evoked the pan-orientalism of the fin-de-siècle—Egypto-Greek, Greco-Slavic, Slavo-Moorish, etc. In this case, orientalism was entangled in a distinctly cosmopolitan, twentieth-century conglomeration of publications and venues. The appeal of operatic productions was not limited to music alone, nor to dance.

Whereas the images of the magazines elided the boundary of theatre and daily life, the writings that surrounded these production photographs often employed a more reserved language when written by the operatic singers or dancers themselves. Concerning the prospect of creating new divertissements for C. W. Gluck’s Orphée et Eurydice for Badet to dance, Mme Mariquita, formerly of the Folies-Bergère, at the time the maîtresse de ballet at the Opéra-Comique and a renowned expert in exotic dance, noted in an interview in 1908:

Je n’écris rien ... je pense, je réfléchis, je règle dans mon esprit, mais ce travail mental n’est qu’une préparation ... Je ne règle rien, définitivement, avant d’être dans la salle de danse, avec mes danseuses. Je sais alors le poème ... Je l’ai longuement médité. [...] Je me suis aussitôt empressée de visiter des musées, j’ai regardé des vases anciens, des fresques, des statues ... et dans des documents longuement examinés, étudiés avec soin, j’ai trouvé des poses, des attitudes, des gestes, sur quoi reposerait tout mon divertissement ... Que voulez-vous, je ne suis qu’une interprète ! ... Je n’ai ni inventé, ni créé l’art grec.


20 Georges Talmont [and Mme Mariquita], ‘Comment Madame Mariquita monte un ballet’, *Comédie Illustrée* 11 (15 December 1908), 23.
authenticity of reconstructing ancient Greek dances either. She playfully recreates a scene for *Musica* between the maître de ballet and the less studious members of the corps de ballet. After the teacher announces the new ‘Greek’ dance:

[O]n s’enfonce dans les textes ardus, on « potasse » les gravures qui les commentent; on « pioche » la mythologie. On questionne les amis bacheliers: [...] 

Et la bâcheuse reprend le tête-à-tête avec l’archéologie. De temps en temps, séduite par une attitude, elle court devant la glace, essaye une pose. Arrive une amie, ou le coiffeur, ou la modiste, ou le vieux savant. Elle interroge:

— N’est-ce pas que c’est grec ?
— L’amie s’étriasse. Le coiffeur répond: « Ça, c’est du grand art; ça nécessite une coiffure... que je vois ! » La modiste: « Cette pose vous va!... Tenez, comme ce petit toquet, que j’apporte, vous l’aurez ! ».

Le lendemain, à la répétition, la piocheuse stupéfie ses camarades par la profondeur de son érudition. Le maître est un peu vexé. D’autant que l’élève a tôt fait de découvrir qu’il ne règle que des danses choisies dans leur pureté.

En quoi elle n’a pas tort: car le maître se laisse aller à son inspiration propre. Il ne fait pas seulement de la reconstitution; il fait plus; il fait de la « résurrection ».

Ce principe permet d’aller loin. N’empêche que, le soir de la générale, la salle ravie

— Bravo ! Bravo ! Comme c’est ça ! Comme c’est cher !
— Et tout le monde est enchanté. Et tout le monde a raison de l’être. 23

[The girls bury themselves in difficult texts, ‘bone up on’ the engravings that explain them, ‘eram’ mythology. They pester their student friends with questions. [...] 

And the class swot resumes her tête-à-tête with archaeology. From time to time, thrilled by a pose, she rushes to the mirror to try it out. In comes her best friend, or the hairdresser, or the milliner, or the elderly scholar. She asks: ‘Does this look Greek to you?’ The friend goes into raptures. The hairdresser replies: ‘You know what that is? It’s great art; all it needs is the right hairstyle ... I can just see it now!’

The milliner says: ‘How that pose suits you! ... Wait a moment, see this little cap I’ve brought, it’ll be perfect on you!’

The next day, at rehearsal, the crammer amazes her classmates with the depth of her erudition. The master is a bit put out – all the more as his pupil had quickly discovered that he had not choreographed the selected dances in their original form.

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22 For her dances created for the Opéra-Comique, Mariquita used Régina Badet as well as the great contralto Alice Raveau (1884–1951). Another reviewer in the same issue of *Musica* praised Mariquita’s choice in choreography; see G. P., ‘La Reprise d’Orphée à l’Opéra-Comique’, *Musica* 8.77 (February 1909), 31.
Erótizing Antiquity

voir – tableau bien parisien – telle jolie silhouette de petite femme passer, pressée, sur le
boulevard, en tenant précieusement M. Salomon Reinach – imprévu bien entendu. 24

[One day the teacher announces in a serious tone: ‘Listen, young ladies. The next
piece by M. Beaubémol includes dances. The action takes place in Mytilene. I’ve
decided to rework Callichorée and Kométiké.’

At this, everyone shares a moment of silent admiration, including the ballet
master. Then whispers begin:

‘Did you get that?’ says a dancer to her neighbour.

‘Oh yeah: Chicory and Cosmetics.’

The younger pupils find it very funny; other dancers, on the contrary, and especially
the principals, despise the jokes of these children; they gather round the teacher, eager
to ‘get researching’; they seize on the titles of books and other important information.

‘Yes,’ he says, ‘I have been to the Louvre to study the paintings on the Greek vases,
I’ve looked through the catalogues of the museum of antiquities in every country;
I’ve consulted volumes of archaeology.’

And, once the first rehearsal is over, while the dancer who laughed at it from the
beginning exclaims: ‘How do you say “what a drag” in Greek?,’ the conscientious,
ambitious dancer who did not make fun of it keeps buying informative books. Thus
we see a very Parisian scene: the pretty silhouette of a small woman hurrying past on
the boulevard, clenching tightly to M. Salomon Reinach – the printed version, that is.]

Even scholars of antiquity were attracted to the exotic world of the dancers
and courtesans who ‘performed antiquity’ on the stages of Paris. Salomon
Reinach (1858–1932), the man whose books these dancers clung to, was
one of three brothers who were all distinguished in the fields of archaeology,
history and classics. 25 Salomon studied archaeology, but his academic
interests in the ancient world also focused on Greek art and philology.
Aside from his academic credentials, lists of publications and awards and
honours, he took a keen interest in the private salon of Natalie Barney and
the Belle Époque courtesans who passed through her garden.

25 Joseph Reinach was a lawyer, historian, politician and an ardent supporter of Alfred
Dreyfus. Théodore Reinach studied archaeology and musicology and became an
important scholar of ancient Greek and Jewish coins as well as ancient Greek music,
publishing numerous books on both subjects.
In 1929, Barney drew up a ‘map’ of the leading figures behind her salon, in which Salomon’s name appears among those closest to the temple, alongside such notables as Renée Vivien, Proust, Isadora Duncan and Pierre Louÿs. When describing the ‘map’, the dancer Eva Palmer, Barney’s one-time friend and lover, also mentioned the Reinach brothers in her list of Barney’s circle, noting: ‘Some of these [people] were already her friends in Neuilly, enough of them to show the trend and to make my mother’s fear for my future isolation appear in an unexpected light.’

This shows that associating with Barney was not an asset for an American woman trying to develop a ‘respectable’ career as a dancer in fin-de-siècle Paris.

Salomon’s prominent positioning on the map did not seem to trouble the respected scholar and museum director. When not in the museum or in the field, Salomon spent much of his free time corresponding and socializing with the courtesans and sapphic lovers of Barney’s salon. He took a particular interest in Liane de Pougy (1869–1930), the celebrated dancer, courtesan and lover of Barney around 1900, whose notoriety is illustrated by a confession she made to a priest: ‘Father, I have lived very freely. Except for murder and robbery I’ve done everything.’

Barney hosted a salon at her home celebrating Sappho that included plays, dance and music. While these sapphic productions were limited to her garden, Barney and her friends took their Greek fashions to the photography studio as well. A set of private photos of Barney, Liane de Pougy and Colette survive among Barney’s papers at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington. These images were taken at one sitting and feature the three women in languid poses wearing various ‘Greek’ costumes. Seven photos exist from this shoot taken at Cautin & Berger in Paris; they feature Pougy, Colette and Barney dressed as familiar characters from ancient Greek-themed operas and ballets: Greek women, nymphs and fauns.

Operetta singers, dancers, actresses and fashionable courtesans were often employed to promote the fashions they wore on the stage. In addition, they embraced these fashions in their daily lives. When describing her career at the Folies-Bergère in the 1890s, Pougy remarks: ‘Posture by Mariquita, hair by Marcel, dresses by Callot, hats by Lewis, it really was quite a show!’ (p. 59). Pougy’s multiple roles as dancer, courtesan and fashion icon were not unique to her. While not a courtesan herself, Badet rose through the ranks of the corps de ballet with many others such as Pougy and Cléo de Mérode (1875–1966). Actresses, dancers and singers routinely lent their images to advertising in journals, souvenir programmes and other print sources associated with their productions. They would often appear in the costumes from their most popular roles and, based on their regular appearance in these publications, it can be deduced that dressing celebrities up in ancient costume became a popular and effective method for selling clothing and perfume to both real and aspiring theatre-goers.

Advertisements from a 1912 Ballets Russes programme, features Cléo de Mérode pouring an ancient analgesic liquid on her delicate hands, whereas an ad for Rigaud perfume boutique showcases Mary Garden dressed in an exotic costume starring in ‘Mary Garden the Perfume’. Palm trees decorate the side of the insert and a caption quotes an endorsement from the famed actress: ‘a fluid of odour exquisite [sic] and I will be charmed to have it called by my name. Very Sincerely, Mary Garden’. Garden even wears a costume closely resembling the one she wore in Aphrodite.

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27 He was keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities at Saint-Germain-en-Laye.
29 Salomon Reinach helped convince Pougy to keep her ‘blue notebooks’ – a diary of her former life as a courtesan, which she began in the summer of 1919, years after she married a client and shed her former career for the respectability of nobility as the Princess Anne-Marie Ghika. Reinach’s primary interest was not in her transformation from courtesan and dancer to a pious, Catholic Romanian princess, but her former life as a courtesan and lover of Natalie Barney.
Other ads were built around the fashion of costumes from antiquity even without a famous star promoting their product. In a season that featured the revival of *Aphrodite* (see Figure 2) appeared in a 1910 programme for the Opéra-Comique for two different perfumes — both evoking classical antiquity in their design and their names. The Rigaud advertisement conveniently sits opposite an image of Mary Garden as Salome in a gown strikingly similar to the popular advertisement. One of these ads highlights a pair of oriental earrings from a production of Gluck’s *Armide* (also choreographed by Mariquita) that have been co-opted for the advertisement for a particularly potent cordial. Significantly, in the same 1912 issue of

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30 For more on *Sapphô* see Dorf, ‘Seeing Sappho in Paris.’
31 Nancy Troy argues that commercial ‘tie-ins’ and ‘product placements’ already existed in fin-de-siècle Parisian theatre, decades before they were cemented into 1930s Hollywood tradition: ‘The familiar commodity tie-ins that in the 1930s enlisted Hollywood movie stars in the promotion of consumer products to female audiences of films were already operational, although in somewhat less sophisticated form, in the early twentieth-century French theatre of fashion [...]’, Troy, ‘The Theatre of Fashion,’ 1.
32 The 1920 Ballets Russes season did not include *Faune* or any of the other ‘Greek Ballets’ (*Daphnis or Narcisse*), but consisted of mainstays of the company such as the Polovtsian Dances and Scheherazade, a new production of *Le Sacre du Printemps [The Rite of Spring]* and the premieres of *Le Chant du Rossignol [The Nightingale’s Song]*, Pulcinella and the opera *L’astuce féminine [A Woman’s Trick]*.
This was not a closed system; celebration of the erotic aspects of antiquity took place off-stage as well. Concerning plainly fantasies of the monstrous woman of the late half of the nineteenth century, Bram Dijkstra writes:

aside from having been draped with some usually rather skimpy 'classical' garb, [the women] tended, given their usually very stylish hairdos and facial features, to look just like contemporary women of marriageable age. Classical mythology, then, became once again a useful source for appropriate narrative pegs upon which to hang suggestive contemporary images.  

The orientalizing influence of antiquity and the simultaneous modern emphasis on erotic images of antiquity blended together in fin-de-siècle visual culture, which reconfigured the past and the East for a public eager to own their own little bit of this fantasy. The Persian flavour of orientalism, as evidenced in the fin-de-siècle, laid the groundwork for the early twentieth-century fashions of Greek antiquity which freely borrowed from the sensualist, decadent and oriental fantasies of the Greek past. The magazines displayed the contradictions of exoticized eroticism on the ballet and opera stage. Where the visual spreads of sumptuous sets and costumes lay bare the decadent imagery of the productions, the creators’ words (reproduced very often alongside the images) downplay the eroticism, or at least attempt to guard against accusations of impropriety with the validation of scholarship. 

Magazines like Musica, Comedia Illustré and Le Théâtre – designed for a predominantly fashion-conscious segment of the world’s female population – titillated the theatre-going crowd (as well as those unable to attend) with the decadent sensualist excess and polychrome exoticism of an imagined past rendered in a new light, with new colours, shorter hemlines and no corsets, all accompanied by musical eroticism. Approaching opera from this perspective allows us to see how operatic orientalism and eroticism migrated to other media in ways that musical analysis would be ill-equipped to illustrate. The dancers themselves sold this commodified view of antiquity because they realized, like Badet, that such displays were successful and that the real thing (whatever that may be) was either unattainable or just plain boring for audiences seeking spectacle in the elaborate stagings of the past. Nonetheless, while for the most part they eschewed the sensuality of the images accompanying the articles, Mariquita, Badet and the magazine editors opted for a respectability that would simultaneously protect their endeavours and attract the type of reader and consumer they hoped to lure into the theatres and the pages of their publications. They provided just enough to titillate but not enough to offend. Including these publications in the discourse on fin-de-siècle French opera and ballet provides a tantalizing look into how exotic Greek opera functioned within a multimedia society coming to terms with a rapidly advancing media frontier where magazines can indeed become theatre.

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Loïe Fuller and Salome: The Unveiling of a Myth

Loïe Fuller was born Mary-Louise Fuller in Illinois in 1862 and from the tenderest age she began performing on stage, in genres ranging from temperance recitations to popular theatre. At the age of sixteen, she changed her name, moved to New York with her mother and brother Burt and began in earnest a career in vaudeville and burlesque. She got all sorts of jobs, including a touring production with Buffalo Bill’s The Wild West Show. From the mid-1880s she started experimenting with veil- and skirt-dances accompanied by ingenious lighting effects. In her autobiography, however, she chooses to recount the artistic epiphany that turned her into ‘the’ artiste of the Parisian fin-de-siècle: in 1891 she played a young widow hypnotized by a doctor in a play called Quack, M. D. Dressed in a voluminous costume of her own making, Fuller danced an interpretation of the unconscious state provoked by suggestion. Thus the ‘serpentine dance’ was born. After successes in New York, she decided to take her new act to Paris, and was immediately engaged by the Folies-Bergère, where she made her debut in October 1892. By this time, she had refined her costumes, which now included curved bamboo or aluminium wands that enabled her to shape the fabric into gigantic swirling sculptures. At the same time, coloured spotlights were projected onto the fabric, dying the silken shapes a variety of vivid colours. The audience saw not a woman but a giant violet, a butterfly, a slithering snake, a flame or an ocean wave.

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1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this essay are by Clair Rowden and Naomi Segal.
2 Loïe Fuller, Quinze ans de ma vie (Paris: F. Juven, 1908), collected with other writings by Fuller in Giovanni Lista, ed., Ma Vie et le danse (Paris: Editions CÉil d’Or, 2002), 22-32.