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Bennahum, Ninotchka Devorah. *Carmen: A Gypsy Geography*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013. Pp. 270. ISBN: 978-0-8195-7353-7

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Tackling a new reading of the legendary nineteenth-century *femme fatale*, Carmen, can be a daunting endeavor. Nonetheless, Ninotchka Devorah Bennahum succeeds in delivering a fresh and dynamic angle in her new book, *Carmen: A Gypsy Geography*, by examining intersections of dance, architecture and space, mythology, modernism, and surrealism. As a dance historian with a background in Spanish dance, Bennahum integrates dance historiography throughout her analysis of Carmen, focusing especially on the rhythmic footwork and percussive castanets defining the joyful and bucolic *seguidilla*, which transformed into *siguiriyas*, then the traditional *cante jondo* and of course, flamenco. In addition to masterfully deconstructing the moving parts that contribute to Carmen's evolution, Bennahum sprinkles each chapter with rare photographs of Gypsies—the accepted English term for the Roma or Travelers during the nineteenth century—and *Carmen* performances discovered in the Roger-Viollet archives in Paris, providing a pictorial narrative that parallels her fluid literary analysis.

In a brief introduction, Bennahum presents the methodology behind her mapping of Carmen the dancer's body as the essential pursuit of freedom, inherently characteristic of her Gypsy heritage: "to be free, to live free, to die free" (4). She frames her study of Carmen's movement through time and space with the theories of French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941). Following a Proustian ideal of uncovering the past-present geography and genealogy of Carmen, Bennahum launches her analysis from specific moments in performance to explore deeper meanings in historical memory as "sudden ecstatic recollection" (6). Finally, Bennahum applies French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's notion of the "place on immanence" as infinite smooth space to her evaluation of Carmen as nomadic historian, writing history through movement and space.

Bennahum devotes the first two chapters to Mérimée's original 1845 novella and the genesis of George Bizet's 1875 opera. She pays homage to Mérimée and Bizet while orienting the reader through a close reading of the novella and then a synopsis of the opera to provide a basic understanding of the literary Carmen. From here, she pursues cultural and historical implications, digging deeper into the meaning and significance behind both Mérimée's and Bizet's original works and the implications that the mythology engenders in social constructs of exoticism, dance and the feminine other.

Carmen: A Gypsy Geography, while mapping Carmen to a corporeal body of Gypsy influence, also maps Carmen to Spain and the Islamic influence therein. Carmen's journey through Bennahum's eyes extends not only to geographical origins, but also spans across temporal boundaries, posing questions of women's roles in ancient historical and religious contexts. For example, chapter three, entitled "Mythic Space and Ancient Carmen," explores the worship of the female principle and the transference of "mythological and societal power from the mother goddess to the male warrior gods in the ancient Middle East and throughout the emerging city states of Asia Minor and Europe" (69). Bennahum sews together the origins of the tensions surrounding Carmen's illustrious yet dangerous persona through an exploration of land ownership as a shift in social hierarchy: "With agriculture and land

ownership women were subordinated and veiled, the male principle dominating the female. It is precisely against this ancient repression that Carmen and all landless Gypsies rebel” (81).

Bennahum continues her analysis with a well-researched and concise history of marginalized nomadic Gypsy culture in chapter four, followed by a historiography of the dance cafés of the Islamic Mediterranean through the lens of Edward Saïd’s *Orientalism*. Her fifth chapter is devoted to Pablo Picasso’s images of *la corrida* as a model for passion, life and death. Bennahum’s inclusion of Picasso’s work in her reading of *Carmen* exemplifies her interest in performing research that crosses media, gender and temporal boundaries.

Bennahum’s penultimate chapter, entitled “Space and Place in Islamic Spain,” uses flamenco dancing as “the archival dance of survival” to trace the historical influence of Persian poetic and musical culture on an emerging Andalusian culture (185). The cross-cultural influence of *Carmen* exemplified in this analysis sets the stage for chapter eight, in which Bennahum concludes her study by analyzing a selection of *Carmen* adaptations, putting into practice the performance theory that has served as a backdrop to her mapping of Carmen through mythology, feminism, and social history. The selected performances range from Joseph Gai Ramaka’s bisexual Senegalese *Karmen Gei*, to Alberto Alonso’s Cuban perspective of *Carmen Suite* Ballet, to Soledad Barrio’s contemporary, feminist interpretation of the *femme fatale par excellence*.

Paralleling the countless adaptations and interpretations of *Carmen*, Bennahum proves that there are still new perspectives to explore surrounding the mythology of the Gypsy dancer and her relevance in social history. *Carmen: A Gypsy Geography* delivers as promised, providing a fresh critical perspective of Gypsy culture through *Carmen* with a solid foundation and evaluation of previous research on the subject in conjunction with new dynamic angles. Bennahum maintains, “*Carmen* has no walls, no borders, no boundaries, no ‘correct’ manner of staging and production. It is a story that lends itself to any culture” (195). The structure and themes of Bennahum’s book exemplify this adaptability and universality—Carmen is indeed a slippery character, speaking multiple languages and adapting to various cultures in order to manipulate others and cross cultural borders. *A Gypsy Geography* embodies the malleability and flexibility of Carmen’s character through its own interdisciplinarity. This elegantly written and meticulously researched book will prove a valuable resource for scholars of dance history, anthropology, feminism, musicology, literature and aesthetics.