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Citation: Gibson, Mel (2023) '...sure to delight every ballet fan.' Consuming ballet culture through girls' periodical Girl, 1952 to 1960. Film, Fashion & Consumption, 12 (1). pp. 11-32. ISSN 2044-2823

Published by: Intellect

URL: https://doi.org/10.1386/ffc_00050_1 <https://doi.org/10.1386/ffc_00050_1>

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Film, Fashion & Consumption
Volume 12 Number 1
© 2023 The Author Published by Intellect Ltd. Article. English language.
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Received 2 November 2022; Accepted 20 March 2023

MEL GIBSON
Northumbria University

'… sure to delight every ballet fan': Consuming ballet culture through girls' periodical *Girl*, 1952–60

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the ways that ballet was presented for girl readers to consume in Girl *(Hulton Press, 1952–64).* Girl *was a weekly publication, part of girls' periodical culture in Britain, which was thriving in the 1950s and 1960s. The ballet content it contained was one aspect of the growing British cultural engagement with ballet in the mid-twentieth century. This broader engagement included watching films and attending performances. In addition, for younger participants, especially girls, this may have been accompanied by participation in ballet classes and reading ballet fiction and non-fiction.* Girl *encompasses all these forms of engagement with ballet through key fictional comic strip 'Belle of the Ballet', photographs of performances, pin-ups featuring dancers and paintings about ballet, articles and non-fiction companion volumes. Arnold Haskell, significant in changing how ballet was understood in Britain, was also involved with content in* Girl. *This connection resulted in readers having the opportunity to compete for an annual ballet scholarship and participate in ballet lessons. In exploring ballet in* Girl, *the article draws together considerations of how ballet practice, costume, other media involving ballet and dancers' street clothes were portrayed and the ways that class, ballet and girls' culture were intertwined.*

KEYWORDS
comics
dance
girlhood
class
readers
consumption
film
costume

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INTRODUCTION

In this article I focus on the ways that ballet was presented for girl readers to consume in the periodical *Girl* (Hulton Press, 1952–64), which formed part of a growing British cultural engagement with ballet in the mid-twentieth century. A key element of this broader engagement came through films featuring ballet, including British productions such as *The Red Shoes* (Pressburger and Powell 1948) and *The Tales of Hoffmann* (Pressburger and Powell 1951), which involved national ballet stars. Slightly earlier, during the Second World War, ballet became seen as a potential morale booster for civilians and performances took place around Britain, effectively popularizing it (Eliot 2016). It additionally appeared as part of a more general promotion of high art by state-sponsored organizations like the Arts Council of Great Britain, which also funded free concerts and recitals. This increasing popularity of ballet with the British public, including Princess Margaret who had a lifelong passion for it, was reflected throughout the media landscape, including comics and other periodicals for girls.

Ballet, then, was consumed by the public through watching films and attending performances; however, for younger participants, especially girls, this may have been accompanied by participation in ballet classes and reading ballet fiction and non-fiction. This also meant that younger people came to know about ballet clothing through their own dance classes and through seeing professional dancers in performance. In addition, publications and films showed ballet professionals in everyday clothing too. Like ballet-specific wear, these clothing choices flag up the relationship between clothing and the body, for, as Joanne Entwistle says, dress 'is one of the means by which bodies are made social and given meaning and identity' (2000: 32). In the case of ballet, this links to notions of appropriate and inappropriate dress in that tightly fitted or revealing costumes and training clothes, particularly for female performers, had historically resulted in ballet being seen by many as an activity that was not considered respectable. The process of repositioning ballet as high art, as discussed later, meant that the ballet dancer became respectable as costumes and training wear came to be considered contextually appropriate, although the idea of mainstream (rather than subcultural) fashion dominated dancers' clothing beyond stage and practice room, ensuring that respectability was maintained whilst publicly presenting the trained body of the dancer as 'a thing of culture' (Entwistle 2000: 36). Ballet's fluctuation between high and low culture served, in effect, to blur boundaries of class and taste.

Turning to *Girl*, this weekly publication was part of girls' periodical culture in Britain, a culture that was thriving in the 1950s and 1960s. *Girl* was printed on high-quality paper and employed four-colour rotogravure. It incorporated non-fiction pieces and illustrated stories alongside comic strips. These high production values and content choices had middle-class connotations and can be seen as a claim by the publisher for it to not be categorized as low culture – to be seen as unlike the periodicals consisting entirely of comic strips that typically made much less use of colour and were printed on poorer-quality paper. As an object (and in terms of content), the periodical was designed to appeal to the intended audience of middle-class girls and their families, or those aspiring to join that social class. Despite costing much more than many other periodicals for girls, which added to the sense of exclusivity, it had a sizable circulation of around 650,000 per week (Gravett 2006: 133). It contained many items that were aspirational in tone, including some of the

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comic strips, which were about careers such as nursing, ballet, working in a television studio or being a flight attendant.

In looking at *Girl*, I explore how ballet was positioned in the periodical as important in girls' lives, as a channel for consumption, pleasure, social activity and as an engagement with the public sphere. I argue that *Girl* offered a unique opportunity to consume ballet through multiple media forms within the publication, including comic strips, photographs of performances, articles about ballet and its interaction with the mediums of film and television, along with portraits of ballerinas. In addition, *Girl* also encouraged awareness of the ballet business (Sayers 1997), ballet history and celebrity culture. In relation to ballet history, Arnold Haskell, who was significant in changing how it was understood in Britain, was also involved with ballet content in *Girl*, as I explore later. Further, the editors' perception of the lived experience of readers meant ballet as both professional and amateur practice were incorporated, so acknowledging and eroding divisions between the private and public spheres. All of this resonates with Cynthia Novack's argument that '[p]eople know and understand ballet because they watch it or study how to do it or perform it' (1992: 34).

I begin by considering how ballet fiction in *Girl*, through the comic strip 'Belle of the Ballet', interacted with ballet as an activity in the real world, touching upon film, the wider profession, the 'ballet body' (Klapper 2019: 413; Davies 2018) and the costuming of the main characters when dancing and off-duty. I then move on to discuss how *Girl* enabled the reader to consume ballet through its factual material, in part through focusing on an article on ballet and film from the fourth *Girl Annual* (1955), on companion publications like *The Girl Book of World Ballet* (Haskell 1958) and on items in the weekly editions such as competitions and pictures. This article is based on a close textual analysis of the ballet content in 50 sample copies of the weekly periodical, five annuals and the companion volume mentioned above.

BALLET FICTION IN *GIRL*

In terms of ballet fiction, 'Belle of the Ballet' is the key narrative in *Girl*. Each week *Girl* contained a single page of the strip, usually ending at a moment of drama, encouraging readers to re-engage with the narrative the next week.[1] Each story arc could last twenty weeks or more, so simply consuming these narratives was a commitment in terms of cost and time. It was a colour comic strip that began in November 1952 and ran for most of the life of the periodical. The overall story follows Belle and her friends' journey through their London-based ballet school under the tutelage and leadership of Madame Arenska, with stories portraying aspects of their training and performances, but also their adventures and social world. The strip presents ballet as offering contradictory possibilities for both male and female dancers, depicting it as a challenge, as hard work, as pleasurable, as spectacle and as empowering. This differentiates it from ballet films where the ballerina tends to be a victim, positioned as passive, or seen as an unachievable (or potential) conquest by a male character who is often a dancer or choreographer themselves.

To set the scene, in the introductory narrative arc, Belle becomes a live-in student at the school and receives free tuition, having proven her talent to Madame Arenska. Her closest friends become Mamie, an American from a wealthy and show business-connected family, Chinese student Hotzi and siblings David and Blossom, whose father is a businessman.[2] This international

1. There is, however, no mention of ballet fiction in *Girl* beyond 'Belle of the Ballet', although it clearly relates to other narratives girls consumed, especially Noel Streatfield's (1936) *Ballet Shoes*, which was considered a 'classic' by the 1950s and described as 'the real initiator of the career novel for British children' (Carpenter and Prichard 1984: 501). Consequently, there is no direct connection with children's literature such as the series novels of Lorna Hill and Mabel Esther Allan (writing as Jean Estoril).
2. David's constant inclusion in the group is partly intended to counter the assumption that ballet is exclusively a female activity.

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and well-off group of young adults take their impoverished peer Belle under their wing. Later in the story it is revealed that she is a runaway and the orphaned daughter of a famous ballerina. Given her orphan status and that her uncle has stolen her inheritance and threatened her, she initially seems to be a tragic heroine, but unlike films like *The Red Shoes* (Pressburger and Powell 1948) and others where the ballerina is often controlled by a man, Belle eventually outwits her uncle, regains her money and makes her own decisions about her profession and life. This suggests that this narrative provides girls with more agency than the films.

'Belle of the Ballet' is like other ballet fictions for girls such as Noel Streatfield's (1936) *Ballet Shoes* in that, as Melissa R. Klapper states, it represents 'the actual labor of ballet, including the physical stress of serious training and the production of a nearly unattainable "ballet body" [… and also …] situates girls as producers of art rather than as mere consumers' (2019: 413). This concept of girls as agentic producers is indicated by 'Belle of the Ballet' narratives where she and her friends are shown creating their own interpretations of roles and designing ballets themselves. Again, this contrasts with films like *The Red Shoes* (Pressburger and Powell 1948) where the central character Vicky has no agency and must choose between love or performing (rather than creating) ballet.

Given *Girl*'s commitment to factual ballet material, usually linked to readers' perceived lived experience of ballet as practice or consumption, even a fictional narrative like 'Belle of the Ballet' reflects aspects of ballet as business and practice, as in the story titled 'Belle of the Ballet in Keeping the School Going' (Beardmore and Houghton 1960). In this narrative, Madame Arenska is on a visit to Russia, and her nephew is to take the classes whilst she is away. However, when he does not arrive, Belle and her friends initiate a search for a substitute teacher. This firstly takes them to a fictional ballet school, described as part of the British dance establishment, which has close similarities to actual institutions. Thus, the action nods towards professional structures, presenting the boundaries that existed between the smaller private schools and major providers like the Royal Academy of Dance, but also suggesting an overall sense of community. When they visit the fictional Royal School of Ballet and Drama, Belle is sure they will help, saying 'they train ballet teachers here. They must have a spare one' (Beardmore and Houghton 1960a: 10). However, after a discussion with the director, Belle reports to her friends that '[a]ll the graduates are either fixed up with jobs, getting married or starting their own schools' (Beardmore and Houghton 1960a: 10). This also serves to amplify the notion that ballet is popular and pervasive. The reasons given for their unavailability present ballet as a career that does not have a single outcome, but instead offers a range of post-training work. In this sense, the narrative is not about readers consuming ballet as spectacle, or ballet as a romanticized occupation where becoming a prima ballerina is key, as is often the case in film, and instead it offers for consumption the practicalities of learning and teaching ballet.

The friends' next idea is to consider whether other ballet schools might help. However, they conclude that they will not, given that private sector schools see each other as rivals. This reflects tensions that did exist within that sector, as echoed in Virginia Christine Taylor's (2003) research, where she says that asking the teaching societies about teachers and syllabi led to her being treated with suspicion. As Taylor notes, '[t]he Societies have good reason

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for defensiveness, since they are belittled by researchers such as myself, by educationalists and the media; and, it has to be said, by each other' (2003: 52). To return to the narrative, back at their own school they look through the old register and pull together a list of potential candidates, which they then follow up by calling or visiting the alumni. This narrative, in not touching on performance but focusing on the business of ballet and the range of post-ballet school career trajectories, indicates an engagement with the text for the reader that is more intimate than that of consuming ballet as spectacle, as the way the narrative is grounded makes it instructional and aspirational. The accuracy of the story suggests the creators and the implied reader have some familiarity with ballet, as the narrative suggests that engaging with ballet involves wider knowledge than that of viewing performances.

The narrative also points to the change in spaces where ballet was consumed and how it was understood. This is shown in a later edition, when, suspecting that potential teacher Pippa's fiancée is simply trying to take control of her coming inheritance, they track him down via unpaid hotel and tailor's bills to Stepney, after which they discover, as Mamie says, 'it looks as though we've got to visit a music-hall!' to which Belle responds, '[t]he things we do to keep our ballet school going!' (Beardmore and Houghton 1960b: 10). The music halls and the later variety theatres had been places where earlier generations had encountered and consumed ballet whether in large-scale music hall ballets or via smaller groups of dancers (Guest 1992; Carter 2005; Pritchard 2007). That they see even visiting such a place as unfamiliar and even surprising flags up that such spaces (and the villainous fiancée who is working there as stage magician Mister Magic) are considered by them to be 'other' in terms of class, emphasizing the connection between ballet as they know it with the opera house, respectability, and middle-class-ness. This relocation of ballet and its consumption was part of what Taylor describes as 'the ideological mission of "British Ballet" [which] was in the business of creating a history, and therefore, rewriting what was there already' (2003: 26). Taylor further argues that 'ballet', then, is not a single text but a history of disputes over claims to define what ballet should be, culturally and aesthetically (2003: 28).

Constructing ballet for the consumption of young readers, in line with the shift initiated in the 1930s towards relabelling ballet as high art, often meant positioning it and its practitioners as middle class in fiction. In this visual medium, this includes the clothing worn by the characters. For example, one story focuses on Belle and her friends enabling access to ballet for a girl marked in both image and text as working class.[3] 'Belle of the Ballet in Little Miss Nobody' is a four-page self-contained short story from the third *Girl Annual* (Beardmore and Worsley 1954: 81–84). In it, Belle, Mamie and David discover that their practice sessions are being watched and copied by a girl who lives in a building overlooking their ballet school.

The only point at which a ballet costume appears is in a vignette alongside the title, where Belle appears in a classical tutu designed to show off point work and multiple turns and is depicted as a 'ballerina icon' (Daly 1987: 58) (see Figure 1).[4]

In contrast to the vignette, however, throughout the narrative, the emphasis is on more casual clothing and on bodies in movement. In the story, the friends are initially dressed for rehearsal (see Figure 1), and whilst Mamie and Belle do wear blocked ballet shoes, this primarily functions as a plot device

3. I have analysed this story through different lenses elsewhere (Gibson 2009, 2015). Further, the altruism and inclusivity of the narrative, whilst intended to offer an example to readers, ignores the history of ballet classes in working-class communities (Taylor 2003).

4. These images by the title varied according to the narrative, though, so 'Keeping the School Going' (Beardmore and Houghton 1960), for instance, shows students getting ready for practice.

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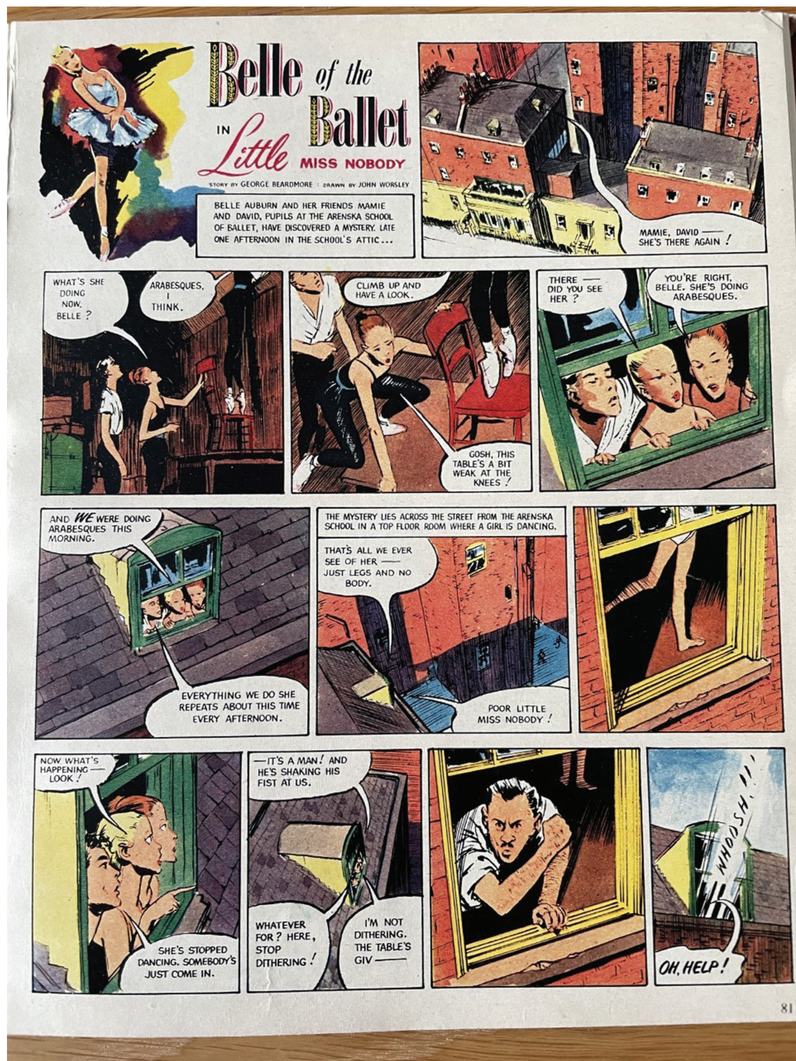

Figure 1: John Worsley, 'Belle of the Ballet in Little Miss Nobody', 1954, in Girl Annual 3, *London: Hulton Press, p. 81. Copyright © Rebellion Publishing IP Ltd, all rights reserved.*

establishing the investigative aspect of the narrative (many stories involve Belle investigating a mystery or solving a problem). To see the girl dance, they climb onto the rickety table in their practice room, but it is not high enough and it is only when 'en pointe' that they can see even part of her body. Unlike them, she dances in everyday clothes (in the panel in Figure 1 possibly in underwear, whilst in Figures 2, 3 and 4, she wears a sweater and a skirt), with her legs and feet bare, suggesting ballet is a 'natural' activity. Suddenly, she is replaced at the window by an angry-looking man, at which point the table they are on collapses. The next panel shows them about to hit the floor, as if in a photograph of that split second (see Figure 2).

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Figure 2: John Worsley, 'Belle of the Ballet in Little Miss Nobody', 1954, in Girl Annual 3*, London: Hulton Press, p. 82. Copyright © Rebellion Publishing IP Ltd, all rights reserved.*

As they fall, not all of their limbs are visible in the image, emphasizing their swift downward movement. This panel is followed by a second where the friends, with Belle sprawled across almost the whole panel, are shown laughing at their situation, again emphasizing their physical ease and strength and the functionality of their clothing.

That evening, Mamie, Belle and David go to the house to find out who the child is, Mamie in a long-length swing coat and Belle in a checked, cinch waist coat, both with tight sweaters and full calf-length skirts underneath, meaning they have defined waists (see Figure 2). Later stories also maintain this kind of dress, sometimes in line with Dior's 'New Look',

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but also sometimes nodding towards the sweater girl look, although their bodies are slender rather than voluptuous. The 'New Look' appears elsewhere in ballet fiction, as in *The Red Shoes* (Pressburger and Powell 1948), where Vicky dresses in full skirts as she visits the Italian mansion to take up the role of the girl in the ballet. Adopting aspects of some of the male styles of the era, David wears a mackintosh over a sport coat, white shirt and slender necktie. The trouser fit is comparatively casual and pleated, with cuffs (see Figures 2–4).

Figure 3: John Worsley, 'Belle of the Ballet in Little Miss Nobody', 1954, in Girl Annual 3*, London: Hulton Press, p. 83. Copyright © Rebellion Publishing IP Ltd, all rights reserved.*

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David's choice of clothing, like Belle and Mamie's, is used later in the narrative to indicate freedom of movement as well as the 'ballet body' (Klapper 2019: 413). It also serves to indicate some respectability in not being attached to any subcultural styles.[5] This choice of dress as depicted by the artist suggests, as Entwistle says, that 'dress is an embodied activity and one that is embedded within social relations' (2000: 34). This casual street wear sends a different message socially to the one that their tight-fitting rehearsal clothing does, as in revealing more of the body it can be read as inappropriate by outsiders. For example, in the panels focusing on them in Figure 1, only their upper bodies are visible, and their clothing means that it is mostly bare neck and shoulders that can be seen. This partly explains why, when they visit Renee, they discover that her father has gone to complain about them to Madame Arenska, saying, 'I will not have my little girl imitate a pack of hooligans!' (Beardmore and Worsley 1954: 84). The idea of ballet as something to protect a child from, as not respectable and dangerous to consume or participate in, partly signified by their visible flesh, refers again to the historical ways in which ballet was constructed, an understanding the story suggests is out-of-date.

This indication of changing understandings of ballet is reinforced by the conclusion of the narrative. Belle and the others respond to the father's hostility by including Renee in a performance they had planned for Madame Arenska's birthday (see Figure 4).

5. The rehearsal clothes, language of ballet, tightly bound groups, costumes and set of key texts are, however, quite suggestive of subcultures. Ballet, as constructed in *Girl*, could perhaps be considered as a high cultural subculture.

Figure 4: John Worsley, 'Belle of the Ballet in Little Miss Nobody', 1954, in Girl Annual 3*, London: Hulton Press, p. 84. Copyright © Rebellion Publishing IP Ltd, all rights reserved.*

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6. This contradicts the ways that ballet was publicized nationally across class in the Second World War.

7. They do not sweat or show other physical signs of exertion, although they do complain of tiredness and are even unwell, something the narratives connect with their extensive training.

They have no chance to change into costumes, which shifts the meaning of their dancing. The dancers are bare-footed, so Renee, although smaller in stature, is immediately aligned with them. In addition, they are not marked as 'other' through formal costumes that would position them as spectacle, or subcultural fashion that could label them as outsiders, and, again, nor is Renee. Here too, their clothes are used to indicate their respectability as well as their dynamism and movement, the latter indicated by the girls' swirling skirts. Their dancing is highlighted by the extensive use of movement lines in the final panels, and yellow lighting bathes all the performers equally on the tiny stage.

Point of view is also used to direct the reader's understanding of ballet as inclusive in the three final panels. Firstly, both dancers and the audience of Renee's father and Madam Arenska are encompassed in a panel where the reader is positioned as an onlooker watching both. The next panel looks from the dancers' point of view outward at the audience. Here the focus is the surprise and increasing pleasure on the father's face juxtaposed with his comments '[b]ut it's fascinating – enchanting! And to think I've stopped my little girl' (Beardmore and Worsley 1954: 84). Finally, in the last panel, the reader's point of view is towards the dancers and especially Renee, as her father – wholly converted (and arguably civilized) by ballet – declares '[s]he must come here for lessons' (Beardmore and Worsley 1954: 84). This narrative locates ballet as something unfamiliar to the working-class parent intent on protecting his child, which is now understood as an important and moving high art form potentially offering social mobility and the opportunity to develop gracefulness.[6] The final panels also point to two forms of consumption, watching ballet performances and taking lessons, both located in a third form of consumption – reading about ballet.

Throughout this and other narratives about Belle and her friends, the clothes they wear offstage serve to emphasize – in line with Pirkko Markula and Marianne Clark's summary of presentations of ballerinas' bodies in children's fiction – that they are 'thin, flexible and technically proficient' (2018: xxiii). Frequently, the reader is offered images of practice and rehearsals in leotard and tights, emphasizing the similarity of the dancers' body shapes. The male dancers are depicted in blousons and tights rather than leotards, but here too the presentation of the body is as Markula and Clark (2018) state. Despite comics consisting of still images, the bodies of the dancers occupy many positions, often in the same panel, and these juxtaposed bodies emphasize work and effort.[7] In one sense, this aligns with the idea of practice leading to perfection and consequently to being beautiful (Davies 2018: 16). The artists emphasize movement in the narratives, and whilst the focus is typically on dance practice, other elements are also shown. In 'Little Miss Nobody', for instance, movement depicted dynamically in the panels shows the characters climbing onto furniture, falling from it, running and moving up and down stairs, emphasized by slightly exaggerated poses, characters filling the panels and several panels where the focus is running feet. This makes the entire strip seem filled with activity (see Figures 1–4).

Despite this, in 'Belle of the Ballet' there are rarely moments where the reader sees a final performance in full costume. Indeed, in my sample reading, I only found three depictions of public performances and two of dress rehearsals, one of which fits the pattern described below, whilst the other depicts a student-created ballet about housework that uses maid and waiter uniforms to keep costs down (Beardmore et al. 1953: 10). In the first, some of Madame Arenska's students have been lured away by a rival

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teacher and company to perform *Swan Lake* (Tchaikovsky 1875–76). Their inexperience combines with nerves when they see Madame and Belle in the audience, and the performance turns into a fiasco. Here the dignity of the skirt-like mid-calf-length romantic tutu showing the dancers' natural silhouettes is undermined to comic effect, with legs drawn at unwieldy angles and tutus tangling together in an inelegant mess (Beardmore and Worsley 1953a: 10).

In the second example of a performance in full costume, the narrative is about a Russian ballerina named Veranova who has decided to retire. Given that she is at the peak of her success, her old teacher Madame Arenska and Belle are puzzled and decide to investigate (see Figure 5).

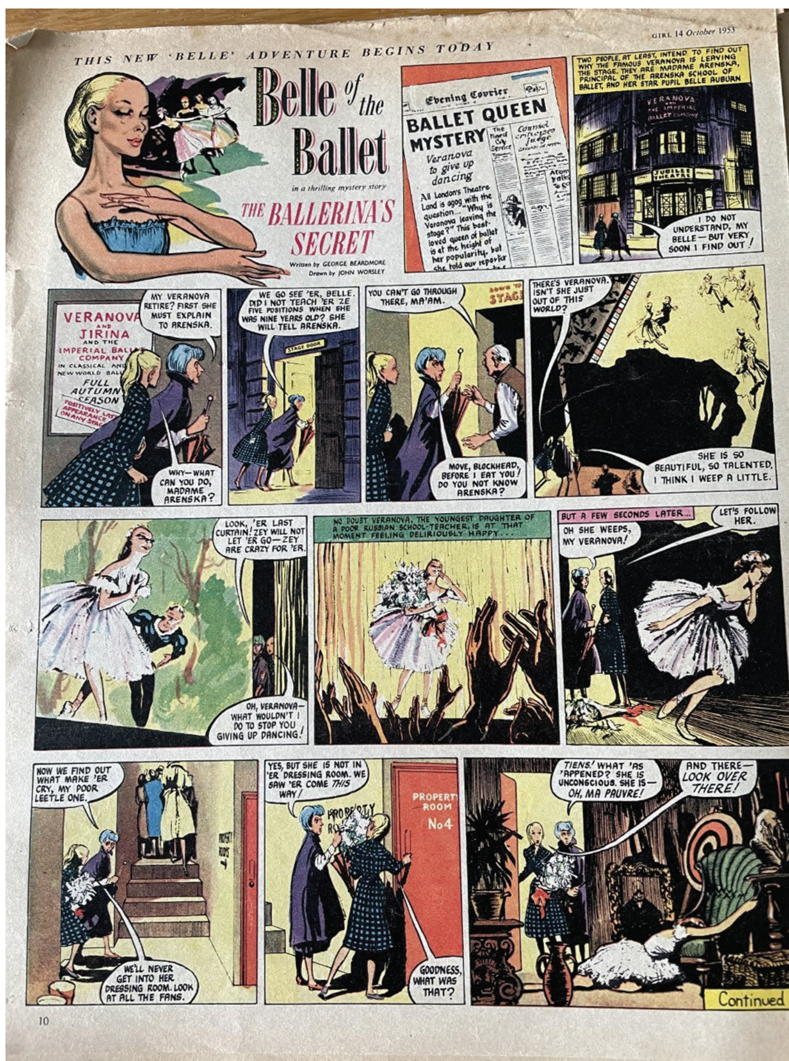

Figure 5: John Worsley, 'Belle of the Ballet in the Ballerina's Secret', 1953c, in Girl*, London: Hulton Press, p. 10. Copyright © Rebellion Publishing IP Ltd, all rights reserved.*

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They watch her performance from the wings, which is incorporated in several of the central panels on this twelve-panel page. After a panel showing Veranova receiving accolades from the audience, she flees, and the panel depicting the climax of that week's strip shows her lying unconscious in the theatre's property room, her white bell tutu juxtaposed with the dark interior (Beardmore and Worsley 1953c: 10). Although the location is incongruous, the way her body is posed is reminiscent of elements of *The Dying Swan* (Fokine 1907), so aligning with the character's role as a tragic heroine, a trope of female disempowerment in ballet and opera that appeared in ballet films. However, in this narrative, Belle and her friends find solutions to Veranova's problems and restore her determination to dance. Again, as noted earlier, in contrast to the films, these comic-strip female characters are agentic, using creativity, skill and hard work to overcome challenges on behalf of others as well as themselves.

The final example, in contrast, shows Belle triumphant, as a narrative about rival companies draws to a close. Here the tutu takes the shorter classical pancake form (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: John Worsley, 'Belle of the Ballet in the Rival Dancers', 1953b, in Girl*, London: Hulton Press, p. 10. Copyright © Rebellion Publishing IP Ltd, all rights reserved.*

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The climactic ballet created by the friends (again showing their agency) takes place in a fun fair, reflecting the seaside town setting for the narrative. The other dancers wear costumes appropriate for the context, including swimsuits, and David wears a striped T-shirt in red and black, along with what looks like jeans. Belle, as the iconic ballerina, appears out of place, but the costume is used to symbolize her skill and centrality rather than a coherent role.

These three performance scenes, then, as Davies says (2018: 12), reflect the cultural understanding that accomplished dancers wear tutus and pointe shoes. Overall, the lack of ballet as spectacle suggests that 'Belle of the Ballet' is about readers consuming ballet as business and as a social activity.

GIRL, BALLET AND FACTUAL ITEMS AND ARTICLES

Consuming ballet in and through *Girl*, as I noted above, was largely via factual items, which took various forms, another way of spotlighting the seriousness and importance of ballet as an art, occupation or life-long interest. They included features in the annuals and companion volumes that referred to other media, especially film and television. In addition, there were opportunities flagged up in *Girl* to participate in classes or compete for ballet scholarships. The breadth of the material creates a sense of ballet as embedded in British culture and is omnipresent. That readers' experiences of ballet are included alongside those of professionals and adult connoisseurs seems to be intended to draw readers into a more intimate understanding of themselves as potential future dancers or consumers of ballet, but also directs their understanding of what ballet is, whose voices are authoritative and how it should be appreciated.

GIRL ANNUALS

In the *Girl Annuals*, the articles are usually biographies of dancers, items on ballet training and accounts of the histories of companies. However, in the fourth *Girl Annual* the focus is on 'Ballet in Films' (1955: 158–60), where author Lisa Gordon Smith states that film 'made ballet more popular than ever' (1955: 160), raised the profile of ballet as high art and prompted girls to join ballet classes, emphasizing how these elements had become intertwined.

Further, it also emphasizes the differences between working in film and ballet through the example of the daily practice classes for *The Red Shoes* (Powell and Pressburger 1948), described as 'the first great, full-scale ballet film' (Gordon Smith 1955: 159). It points out how different film sets are from dance studios, arguing that dancers' familiar equipment, spaces and practice costumes are missing. It also compares scheduling, with film having earlier starts due to wardrobe and makeup, and argues that film is a challenge for all dancers because of many elements, such as being unsure where the audience will be, which camera to work with and facing unfamiliar floor plans, which means 'that her hard-won stage sense counts for nothing and memory alone must serve to get her through her dances' (Gordon Smith 1955: 159). It then exemplifies this by discussing Michel de Lutry's experience of dancing blindfolded on a table covered in eggs for the film *Knights of the Round Table* (Thorpe 1953) and the dancer's shock on seeing the film and realizing how close he came to a dangerous fall.

However, rather than continuing in this vein, the article next talks about the range of ballet films and the reasons for making them. So, for instance,

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8. This was his second collaboration with Hulton. The first was *A Picture History of Ballet* (1954).

the author states that ballet may be filmed to 'make sure that the steps are not forgotten', 'to preserve the interpretations of famous dancers' and to 'show how ballet works' whether through tracing a career or showing 'how a ballet is created' (Gordon Smith 1955: 160). Again, this is about the reader consuming not performance but the ballet business, the behind-the-scenes aspects of dance.

It also talks about film as promoting ballet by 'giving the public an idea of what it should look like' (Gordon Smith 1955: 160) and encouraging engagement with it in theatres. In effect, whilst the films are argued to be works of art themselves, this is seen as secondary to their function as a form of advertising, indicating which modes of consumption readers should see as most important and affirming a hierarchy of the arts. As Gordon Smith states, '[s]o it seems that, as well as giving us some pleasant evenings out, ballet films are quickly resulting in our having bigger and better ballet' (1955: 160).

The article finally turns to the impact on dancing lessons, arguing that the films also serve to promote that form of consumption and engagement. Here the structure of ballet is emphasized by stating that

> only a few of them will become good enough to be professional dancers, and very few indeed will one day be 'stars' […] [but] those who do not succeed will have had a lot of fun trying and a lot of very healthy exercise as well, so they will not have been wasting their time
>
> (Gordon Smith 1955: 160)

Overall, then, rather than considering and analysing the actual films themselves, the article pulls together the different kinds of work that go into them and their function within ballet as a wider concern.

COMPANION VOLUMES

Next, I look at a companion volume *The Girl Book of World Ballet*, edited by Arnold Haskell (1958), before turning to elements within the weekly periodical itself.[8] Generally, the consumption of factual ballet books allowed readers to engage with dance in depth, whether through books of instruction or biographies. As Taylor states, '[m]any books were published […] stressing the importance of technical and historical understanding and giving information about steps, pointe shoes, all the paraphernalia, canonical history, great stars, the "rhetoric of training", and construction of "sign equipment"' (2003: 54). Further, as Angela McRobbie says, her childhood reading of a biography of Anna Pavlova 'introduced me to the idea of work as a commitment, even an obsession, and also as something which could be immensely satisfying and pleasurable' (1984: 134).

The Girl Book of World Ballet (Haskell 1958) contains many of the elements Taylor mentions and heavily direct the readers to consume, value and understand ballet in particular ways. Even the adverts in *Girl* promoting the book direct the reader's understanding in similar ways. For instance, in the 3 October 1959 edition, the text on page 5 encourages readers to '[s]ave up for it, or get your parents to order your copy now', again linking ballet, high cost and quality. It also features a photograph of an unnamed ballet, the lack of information being suggestive of the editor's assumptions about readers' cultural capital. Another, a half-page advert on page 5 of the 23 January 1960 edition for '*Girl* Books for Every Interest', describes it as 'sure to delight every ballet fan'. Whilst

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the use of 'fan' suggests a high level of engagement, the word is not typically used in *Girl* given its overtones of potential frivolousness or over-emotionality, a rejection of this way of framing its consumption. The only other occasion it appeared in my sample reading is in an editor's letter mentioned below, where it is implied that 'fans' are a nuisance. Instead, the term 'ballet lover' is typically used, with its connotations of more mature passions.

Haskell's introduction, titled 'What is ballet?', sets the tone for the volume by presenting his ongoing ideological mission regarding creating a new history of ballet and an accompanying mode of consumption. This is evident in his answer to his own question where he argues that '[b]allet is a very wonderful mixture of a number of arts; dancing, music, drama and poetry and painting' (1958: 5). Haskell was hugely important in the reassessment of ballet as high art in the 1930s and onwards, and he established the idea of the connoisseurship of ballet through publications like *Balletomania: The Story of an Obsession* (1934), although he was probably best known for *Ballet* (1938), which was an introduction to dance appreciation intended to break down British prejudices. This prejudice is indicated by Kathleen Gordon, once director of the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD), who commented that RAD initially called ballet 'Operatic Dancing' to counter negative perceptions, saying, '[i]t is well to remember that the word "Ballet" was very suspect at that time!' (1968: 570). Ballet and those who performed it had been seen as immoral earlier in the century, as noted earlier, in part through costumes being considered revealing. That female dancers had visibly working bodies could be seen as implying sex work as well as dance.

Throughout the volume, the spectacle of ballet, largely absent from 'Belle of the Ballet', is visible in the many black-and-white photographs and prints it contains. They are largely of performances and centre on the 'ballerina icon' (Daly 1987: 58). In addition, three of the articles are photo-essays. One is about 'Dancers in Films' (Haskell 1958: 140–49), another is on 'Ballet on Television' (Haskell 1958: 69–75), and there is also a piece titled 'Dancers at Work and Play' (Haskell 1958: 150–57). 'Dancers in Films' focuses largely on dancers who have become actors, rather than on ballet films. This does reinforce the links between the two arts, through photographs of performances that feature dancers who later became film stars, like Audrey Hepburn, Leslie Caron, Maureen Swanson and Moira Shearer. The few ballet films that feature include *The Red Shoes* (Pressburger and Powell 1948), *The Tales of Hoffman* (Pressburger and Powell 1951) and *An American in Paris* (Minnelli 1951). There is also a still from *On the Town* (Kelly and Donen 1949) featuring Gene Kelly and Vera Ellen, which the article frames by stating that it is based on a ballet.

'Ballet on Television', in contrast, focuses on ten largely informal photographs from the 1930s onwards that allow the reader/viewer behind the scenes, some showing dancers looking at television cameras or being given points on working with them, others where dancers are resting, usually in practice attire or in rehearsal. These reflect the 'Belle of the Ballet' narratives where performance is largely invisible. However, there are also five photographs of performances, all of which are accompanied by captions that pointedly describe how pioneering these ballets and their television adaptations are. All make use of quite stark or abstract sets that focus the viewer on the dancers, including an image from *The Dreamers* by Kenneth MacMillan, where the fact that it was originally 'produced by an experimental group at Sadler's Wells' (Haskell 1958: 74–75) is underscored by the way all the dancers, male

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and female, wear plain black tops and trousers to connote intellectual seriousness. A photograph from an earlier production from 1933 of *Jeux d' Enfants* (Bizet 1871) does focus on a single ballerina, Irina Baranova, 'en pointe', but she wears a full-body leotard covered in lines, which is meant to represent a children's spinning top and is reminiscent of some of Sonia Delaunay's paintings and textiles. The third piece again emphasizes rehearsals and off-duty photographs. All are used to suggest that ballet permeates the other arts and has a rich history of innovation.

These appeared alongside a series of predominantly text-based articles, including 'Can I become a ballet dancer?' (Sparger 1958: 134–35), which is, in effect, a response to frequently asked questions. Written by Celia Sparger, a physiotherapist at the Royal Ballet School, it discusses the 'ballet body', dance as a career and advice on auditions. It flags ballet lessons up as a mode of consumption and as a potential profession and public expression of identity. However, it also offers stern warnings about what shape of body is appropriate, stating '[y]et at auditions we frequently see candidates so completely wrong in shape that sometimes it would be better for them not to learn ballet at all' (Sparger 1958: 135). This offers quite a counterpoint to the encouragement to engage with or consume ballet offered elsewhere, although the images in 'Belle of the Ballet' do embody the ideal and could be considered directive. In addition, James Monahan's 'Your Ballet Bookshelf' (1958: 158–60) is also interesting in that it is suggestive of the wider opportunities to consume ballet. However, whilst I initially assumed that ballet fiction would be the focus, the recommended books turned out to be firmly factual. Most of the recommendations for purchase emphasize connoisseurship as an exclusive form of consumption indicating good taste, and Haskell's books are mentioned alongside autobiographies *Theatre Street* by Tamara Karsavina (1948) and Ninette De Valois's (1957) *Come Dance with Me*, biographies of Marie Taglioni and Nijinsky, and histories of ballet companies. This is a carefully designed bookshelf that positions ballet as serious high art that is worthy of study and specifies how the girl consumer should engage with it.

THE *GIRL* PICTURE GALLERY

Finally, returning to the weekly periodicals, ballet appears in several key forms. The lack of the spectacle of performance or ballet costuming in 'Belle of the Ballet' is partly balanced by the appearance of images of ballerinas in the form of portraits that usually took up a third or more of the central double spread in the periodical. *Girl*'s editors presented these images as part of a diverse series titled the '*Girl* Picture Gallery', giving them more weight and seriousness. In addition, the accompanying text attached to an early image published in the 18 June 1952 edition suggests a formality that goes beyond the poster or pin-up by suggesting that the picture 'will look lovely if you frame it to hang on your wall'.[9] To frame an image suggests importance and permanence, so rather than it being considered an ephemeral consumable, it was, in Michael Thompson's (1979: 273) terms, an object and artwork that was 'durable' rather than 'transient', or 'rubbish'. The high-quality printing means that brushstrokes on the reproductions are visible, emphasizing the notion of the images as art. Each also has a broad white border around it, separating it from other, rather more crowded, elements on the page and they are topped by the title of the item in an ornate italicized font. This use of high-quality reproductions

9. All *Girl* Picture Gallery images were on page 9 of any given edition.

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serves as a claim for the significance of *Girl* too, attempting to rebrand it as art rather than the less respected popular culture format of the comic or children's periodical.

The first relating to ballet (the sixteenth of the series), which featured in the 18 June 1952 edition, is a reproduction of a painting, *The Ballet Shoe*, by Dame Laura Knight (1932), which shows a ballerina in her dressing room preparing to go onstage. She stands at a dressing table holding a ballet shoe in her hand, whilst its partner lies beside her on the floor, which contrasts with the red-brown slippers she is wearing. In line with ballet fiction, the romantic tutu she wears is composed of layers of tulle that match her white shoes. There is a sheen on the material that glows in the light, but the costume is counterbalanced by the intimacy and informality of the painting. The accompanying text gives a biography of the artist, and the editor's letter talks about why the picture was included, combining girls' agency, the editor's responsiveness and consumption. The letter states that '[a] great many *Girl* readers are ballet fans and most of you have written to us at one time or another asking for a ballet painting in our *Girl* Picture Gallery – we hope you will like the one we have chosen for you this week' (Morris 1952: 11). They add on page 9 in the same edition that Knight is 'the most famous living painter of ballet subjects'. The tone, probably unintentionally, makes it sound as if the editor is under siege. Although 'Belle of the Ballet' was not one of the initial stories in *Girl*, it appeared first later that year, which suggests its development might have been linked with the requests to the editor, showing that the readers had some agency regarding content.

Later '*Girl* Picture Gallery' ballerina pictures were more straightforwardly of famous dancers, although they too tended to be reproductions of paintings, again equating consuming ballet with fine art. One appearing in the 5 November 1952 edition is of Margot Fonteyn as painted by Arnold Harris. Here, the costume is a classical bell tutu in a deep pink with gauze sleeves. The bodice and skirt are embroidered with silver motifs. The image captures a sense that Fonteyn is about to move, shifting slightly away from the typical pose of the 'ballerina icon' (Daly 1987: 58). Another example, from the 18 November 1953 edition, shows Eileen Elton painted by Anthony, which also depicts the ballerina in a tutu and blocked ballet shoes (this time a romantic tutu of pale blue tulle). However, it also plays with the iconic image by depicting the ballerina seated in a large picture frame, looking at the viewer and leaning forward with her left foot extending beyond the frame. Whilst this might be read as suggesting that she is 'pretty as a picture', it also breaks the fourth wall and so suggests she is a real, rather than idealized, person. What these images suggest is an understanding of the 'ballerina icon' (Daly 1987: 58), but also attempts to make such images less standardized for young consumers.

CONSUMING COMPETITIONS AND CLASSES, BECOMING THE BALLET BODY IN *GIRL*

There are two kinds of competitions that feature ballet in *Girl*. The first kind are quizzes and crosswords that offer prizes, a staple of *Girl* that helped to create a sense of community. This was partly about their location, as they could be found on the same page as the editor's letter and readers' letters, meaning the whole page was about interactions of various kinds. For example, in the

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10. Tantalizingly, there is no illustration of the dresses.

11. Ballet was not generally more expensive than other activities.

23 January 1960 edition, there is a crossword competition on page 11 based partly on 'Belle of the Ballet', so emphasizing reader knowledge and expertise. The narrative is described as 'one of your favorite stories' (although this may be a marketing tactic), and the main prizes are twelve 'ballet dresses'.[10] The prizes indicate the intersection between the consumption of ballet as fiction and ballet as practice in the periodical.

The second kind of competition links with the notion of ballet as a career, again showing a connection between consumption and participation. The editors initiated a Ballet Scholarship Scheme (a competition for a full-time scholarship) with the Royal Ballet School in 1955, with the aim of supporting talented girls whose families could not afford the expense of the tuition fees. Simultaneously, *Girl* supported classes, spaces in which talent could be discovered as well, being a growing part of the leisure industry, by offering free tuition to members of the 'Girl Adventurers Club'. By 1957 there were 150 *Girl*-supported scholars and two scholarships had been awarded (Morris and Hallwood 1998: 166). So, for example, in the 12 September 1959 edition, the front page flags up that the edition features the year's winner, signifying the competition's importance, as does the fact that it is the focus of the editor's letter on page 11 and an article dedicated to the competition on page 13. The contenders, at this point, were drawn from the first-year *Girl*-supported scholars at what was then called the Royal Academy of Dancing, thus maintaining a hierarchy within ballet between the main institutions and the private schools at the same time as encouraging participation nationally, so 'growing' ballet further as a popular consumer activity. Like the 'Belle' stories, this serves to suggest that there is equality of access in ballet, given the emphasis on the geographical spread (and sometimes assumed class position) of the candidates.

This scheme was personally supported by, amongst others, Haskell, who had been involved in founding Sadler's Wells Ballet School (later the Royal Ballet School). He was its director between 1947 and 1965 (when the *Girl* scholarship was developed) and, from 1956, was a governor of the Royal Ballet. The status of the award is additionally flagged up by the importance of the judges, who include Haskell, Ursula Moreton and Pamela May. The latter was a significant dancer and teacher of classical ballet, who had performed as a principal dancer from 1934 until 1952 with the Royal Ballet. May was also high-profile due to having roles created for her by Ninette de Valois and Frederick Ashton and through her friendship with Margot Fonteyn. There is also a photograph of the candidates with May. Thus, *Girl* engages not only with ballet as business but also with the celebrity culture that had emerged around it.

Finally, the way the scholarship is framed links ballet and high art through the idea of fees at the top-end London schools being beyond most families.[11] High cost, in this context, is again meant to imply quality. Parents' increasing willingness to pay for ballet lessons in the 1950s suggests that it was an activity seen as valuable by adults, in part as a public indicator of a family's middle-class-ness where consumption was an affirmation of class position. Approval of ballet was rooted in perceptions of it as positioned high up in the hierarchy of dance forms, something Haskell and others had worked towards, and in which *Girl*, as I have suggested here, played a part. This shift meant it was understood as superior to tap, ballroom and modern dance and as an activity that produced 'proper' girls (something which implies both class and femininity).

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CONCLUSION

Consuming ballet in *Girl* appears at the intersection of 'doing ballet versus watching ballet' (Wulff 2010: 8). The appearance of readers as dancers in *Girl* offered girl readers other girls as a spectacle for consumption as well as a source of identification. Ballet is depicted as an expression of identity and self-actualization, but also as hard work in both fiction and factual elements, in line with McRobbie's assertion about writing focusing on dance. All the same, these stories and factual narratives offer girls aspirational and agentic models, unlike most ballet films, for, as McRobbie states, 'there are few other places in popular culture where girls will find such active role models and such incentives to achieve' (1991: 217). However, as shown, this is only one aspect of ballet as presented by *Girl.*

The competitions and other interactive opportunities reinforce the idea of ballet as a community, one aligned with that of the *Girl* readers. Yet, some of the items exclude certain physiques, as well as reinforcing a hierarchy with ballet in terms of amateur and professional, private school and major establishment. Nevertheless, the idea of participation, as well as watching performances and other forms of consumption, is foregrounded.

Overall, the periodical acts as a nexus and guide regarding how the reader should think about and engage with the art. It positions the reader as a 'ballet lover', a nascent connoisseur, with all of the connotations around being a consumer of high art that the latter term implies. The periodical also emphasizes the history of British ballet, as recreated in the 1930s and onwards, with Russian ballet being seen as a key inspiration. Indeed, Philip J. S. Richardson in the *Ballet Annual* of 1947 states that British ballet began in 1910 with '[t]he commencement of the "Russian Invasion"' (1947: 115). Whilst this is not true given the earlier history of ballet in music halls and elsewhere, it reflects the ideological choices of a group, including Haskell.

Ballet in *Girl* is, then, full of contradictions, reflecting the world of ballet beyond the periodical. It positions ballet as above popular culture whilst still offering access to it via a medium that was itself generally considered so. It draws on a range of other media, including film and television, to drive home the point that ballet is more important. In part this claim is located in the productions, the costuming and ballet as celebrity culture, and yet, as suggested, much of the material included is about the ballet business and training, not the spectacle of performance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SUGGESTED CITATION

Gibson, Mel (2023), '"… sure to delight every ballet fan": Consuming ballet culture through girls' periodical *Girl*, 1952 to 1960', *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, Special Issue: 'Fashioning Girlhood across the Media in the Mid-Twentieth Century', 12:1, pp. 11–32, https://doi.org/10.1386/ffc_00050_1

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Mel Gibson, associate professor in childhood studies at Northumbria University (UK), has been working with children, young people and comics since the mid-1980s. Her Ph.D. about women readers' memories of comics inspired her 2015 monograph *Remembered Reading: Memory, Comics and Post-war Constructions of British Girlhood*, published by the University of Leuven Press. Her research currently has several strands, firstly the British history of libraries and the comics medium, combining history and policy

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with autoethnography; secondly, gender in relation to both historical and contemporary graphic novels and comics; and, finally, contemporary readers' responses to historical publications.

Contact: Room M003, Manor House, Northumbria University, Coach Lane Campus, Coach Lane, Benton, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE7 7XA, UK.
E-mail: mel.gibson@northumbria.ac.uk

http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8155-3560

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