



# Stripping Gypsy: The Life of Gypsy Rose Lee

*Noralee Frankel*

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Whenever stripper Gypsy Rose Lee encountered public criticism, she spoke frankly in her own defense. "Thousands have seen me at my--ah--best; and thousands have made no objections."

Noralee Frankel's lively biography, *Stripping Gypsy*, the first ever published about the highly mythologized Gypsy, examines the struggles Lee faced in making a lucrative and unconventional career for herself while maintaining a sense of dignity and social value. Frankel shows that the famous Miss Lee was an enigma, clearly struggling with her choices and her desire to be respected and legitimized. Those who know Gypsy Rose Lee only from the musical and film based on her rise to stardom will be surprised by what they uncover in *Stripping Gypsy*. In all ways, Lee trafficked in the incongruous: she was at once sex object, intellectual, and activist. In addition to her highly successful strip-tease act and film career, she published two mystery novels and a memoir, wrote two plays, and showed her original artwork in famed Modern Art-impresario Peggy Guggenheim's gallery. Lee also gained notoriety for her participation in liberal politics. As photographer Arnold Newman said, "She was a lady, a brilliant, bright woman who was the friend of many writers and intellectuals." Though she wasn't above using her femininity to full advantage, Lee aspired to much more than admiration for her physical beauty.

Frankel places Lee's life in social and political context while detailing a fascinating entertainment career, in which Lee created and recreated her own identity to fit changing times. Frankel's biography transcends the sensationalism of stripping and asks the public to see the woman beneath the costume, a woman who always kept a little of herself shrouded in mystery.

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