



# Failed Impressions: Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in America, 1916

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In 1916 the Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev (1872–1929) took the Ballets Russes out of war-torn Europe for a tour across the North American continent.<sup>1</sup> The tour was scheduled to run from January to April 1916, with short seasons in New York at the beginning and the end. As it turned out, the company returned for a second tour that ran from late September to January 1917, during which time, however, Diaghilev's former lover and principal star dancer, Vaslav Nijinsky (1889–1950), replaced him as director.

In this article I discuss the cultural differences at the heart of the Ballets Russes' failure to conquer America in 1916–1917, and why that failure had to be edited out of history.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, I look at three aspects of the publicity and critical reception: elitism, patriotism, and modernism. The publicists of the company both misunderstood and underestimated their audience, but in dance research, their prejudices have been taken for granted. The “eye-witness accounts” of Diaghilev's employees and the histories of the company written in the first half of the twentieth century have largely gone unquestioned since, but contemporary primary sources of the North American tours tell a different story. By contrasting the first tour with the second, which received less publicity and better reviews, I emphasize the practical experience of touring in the New World and how differently American critics evaluated the achievements of the two Russian directors of the company—Diaghilev (for the first tour) and Nijinsky (for the second).

The reviews of 1916–1917 offer surprisingly acute insights into the fortunes of a dance company ravaged by the effects of the war if not by the war itself: after nearly a year's interval in performances, the Ballets Russes was not up to its prewar standard, and the company lacked many of the star performers audiences expected to see. More importantly, reviews reveal how, in the American context, the Ballets Russes did not appear as vanguard as it did in Europe. As a conclusion, I ask what were the repercussions of the American fortunes of the Ballets Russes to the history of dance, the consequences of *what* we remember for *how* we remember.

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To do this, I make a distinction between hegemonic and canonical dance history. The term “hegemonic” derives from Michel Foucault’s view that historiography is use of power over how we collectively remember the past. Hegemonic dance history is the dominant form of narrating the past that actively suppresses or silences alternative forms of the discourse. “Canonical,” by contrast, refers to the process of constant re-evaluation and reinterpretation of certain individuals and works of art as particularly relevant to today’s aesthetic preferences.

The influence of the hegemonic interpretation of the 1916 tours has had substantial effect on the canonical history taught to dance students and dance aficionados, which, in turn, is repeated in program leaflets and CD covers as well as academic research. Rather than correct factual mistakes in the hegemonic account or attempt a canonization of works dismissed as being of little importance in the canonical account, I argue we should move toward a genealogy of dance, a metahistorical approach that forces us to be aware and take responsibility of the narratives about the past that we repeat and reproduce in our own work.

### Coming to America

In the annals of ballet, the American fortunes of the Ballets Russes have been subject to some controversy. In terms of repertoires of dance companies, the narrative spectacles of the Ballets Russes are not often performed—yet many of them are canonized as crucial masterpieces and the company presented as a major turning point for the art form in histories of dance. Over the past century, which works have been given importance and on what grounds has changed to emphasize abstract compositional qualities of the works and the role of the choreographer. In contemporary records these are rarely in focus—rather, critics discuss (star) dancers, visual and auditory qualities of the performances, and the social importance of “being there.” With current interest in corporeality gaining ground, dance history would need to move away from the choreography-centered canon and toward a narrative about the past that also takes into account the dancers’ everyday interests.

Moreover, hegemonic accounts of the 1916 tours have assumed that American audiences did not really understand ballet and that Diaghilev lacked the sponsorship of high society that had guaranteed the European success of the company (Kirstein, qtd. in Amberg 1949, 21; Macdonald 1975, 137; Buckle 1993, 301). Particularly the second tour, directed by Nijinsky, has been stamped as the folly of the Metropolitan’s managers, who should have known better than to place the soon-to-be-institutionalized dancer in Diaghilev’s shoes. In other words, whereas the failure of the first tour has been attributed to American audiences, the second has been read as a symptom of Nijinsky’s insanity, evidenced by his irrational behavior and religious conversion, as his wife later claimed (Nijinsky 1980, 338–67), and/or by the dismal failure of what was to be his last choreography for the company, *Till Eulenspiegel* (as claimed by some of Diaghilev’s closer collaborators, such as Grigoriev [1953]). Of course, the myth of the madness of true genius has also played its part in this desire to interpret Nijinsky as insane by 1916 (Järvinen 2003).

Diaghilev helped to concoct these myths because they downplayed his shortcomings as an impresario and flattered his European postwar audiences as the true connoisseurs of the art of ballet. The dismissal of Nijinsky in 1913 had not solved the aesthetic and financial crises caused by his choreographic work in 1912–1913, which sharply divided audience opinion: although the scandals of *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, *Jeux*, and *Le Sacre du Printemps* sold out performances and provoked unprecedented discussion in the press, they alienated important financiers of the organization and made the impresario doubt their worth. Yet, with Nijinsky gone, the reviews of the 1914 season were somewhat tepid, and the defenders of the new style were outright hostile toward Diaghilev (for example, Rivière in *La Nouvelle revue française*, June 1914; the *English Review*, July 1914.) The company dispersed when the First World War hindered its touring opportunities in Europe, and Diaghilev faced the worst financial crisis of his career. The politically neutral United States, a mythical “land of milk and honey” for European immigrants at the time, must have seemed an ideal refuge, its *nouveau riche* millionaires an untested and less discerning audience than that of Europe.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, such stereotypes rarely correspond to reality: shortly after his arrival, Diaghilev had to reconsider his views on America and Americans.

By 1916 the Ballets Russes was the most famous private dance company in the Western world. When it finally did land in New York in January 1916, it had to live up to pre-existing notions about itself. Beginning from its inception in the visits to Paris of the Ballet of the Imperial Theatres of St. Petersburg and Moscow in 1909 and 1910, rich Americans had formed an important part of the audience of this company. This importance shows in how a season at the Metropolitan Opera had been amongst the first that Diaghilev negotiated prior to founding the Ballets Russes as a private dance company late in 1910. Assured that a contract would materialize, the Metropolitan made these negotiations public knowledge in the American press.<sup>4</sup> American audiences anticipated seeing the Ballets Russes for six years prior to their actual arrival, with the Metropolitan officials complaining of Diaghilev's unreasonable demands, which postponed the promised visit. Meanwhile, the cream of American society that regularly traveled to Paris imported Parisian fashions, including the Orientalist decorative influences credited to Ballets Russes designer Léon Bakst (pseudonym of Lev Rozenberg, 1866–1924). Over the years, reports of the most scandalous works performed by the Russians in Europe quickly crossed the Atlantic, increasing local demand.<sup>5</sup>

With constant delays and cancellations, other more-or-less Russian companies toured America. Perhaps the most important of these precedents was the “Russian Ballet” company that had appeared in 1911 at the Winter Garden in New York. Starring the American Gertrude Hoffman, the company was directed by Morris Gest, but its roster included dancers who had appeared with Diaghilev in Europe, most notably Theodore Kosloff (Fyodor Kozlov), Lydia Lopokova (Lidiya Lopukhova), and Alexander Volinine (Aleksandr Volinin). The repertory consisted of (unauthorized) versions of the Orientalist *pièces de résistance* that had created the “decadent” fame of the Ballets Russes, including *Cléopâtre* and *Schéhérazade*.<sup>6</sup>

But not all points of comparison were from years back and not all of them copies

in any sense of the word. Anna Pavlova, who had performed with the Ballets Russes in 1909, also called her troupe “The Russian Ballet,” and when the Ballets Russes arrived to perform at the Century Theater, she had just finished a successful season at another New York venue, the Hippodrome. Pavlova could thrill her audience just by taking her bows, and her partner Mikhail Mordkin was an extremely virile dancer, more of a star and a virtuoso than either Kozlov or Volinin.<sup>7</sup> Like Hoffman’s troupe, Pavlova and Mordkin were willing to work in a tight schedule, which remedied some of the prejudices against ballet in America.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, as stars of the Russian Imperial Theatres, Pavlova and Mordkin provided a standard against which to measure the technical quality of the dancers of Diaghilev’s company claiming the same provenance.

At the same time, the various “Russian ballets” also spread the reputation of Russian ballet, from which “The One and Only Serge de Diaghileff’s Ballet Russe” (*New York Times*, September 26, 1915) then benefited. The stress advertisements placed on this company as “the original” served the purpose of making everyone else seem imitators, leading the audience to think of themselves as having been duped by previous impresarios. The apparent reversion of causality (the troupe that came later was the original, the ones preceding it were copies) served the agenda of selling the novelty by creating confusion in the minds of the spectators: individual spectators could only found their aesthetic judgments on memories of past performances, whereas the management of the Ballets Russes relied on evidence of the European success of this particular company.

By this I do not mean (as we have been told) that all reporters swallowed whole everything the Metropolitan Musical Bureau fed them in the form of advance publicity—although many did. Most Americans writing of the Ballets Russes were not dance specialists and had neither seen the company in Europe nor read European reviews. However, this made them no different from most of their European colleagues, who did not read Russian reviews and, until the modernist choreographies of Nijinsky in 1912–1913, had published quite uncritical acclamations of anything the troupe produced, fed to them by the impresarios of the company.<sup>9</sup> What is curious is how quickly and efficiently the American critics’ opinions were silenced and left outside the hegemonic history of the company, and how the only Ballets Russes work ever to premier outside of Europe (*Till Eulenspiegel*) was not canonized. Also, what the Americans had to say was and remains incompatible with the canonical view that the Ballets Russes, led by Diaghilev, was the supreme form of dance in the period, the artistry of which could not be reached by any other company. Early hegemonic accounts of the company trusted the reminiscences of Diaghilev’s close collaborators and associates, all of whom were Europeans and nearly all of whom had something to gain in narrating the history their way. The later hegemonic historiography followed their view even in America, where only reviews that corresponded to the European opinion were cited as exemplary.<sup>10</sup>

In 1916 the Ballets Russes simply was not what it had been in the prewar years. The company was much smaller in size and it had been put together mostly for the tour. The ensemble had not trained to work together and many of the dancers, including principals, were relatively inexperienced. For American reviewers, the troupe, lacking the stars on whom the advance publicity had centered (especially Nijinsky and Karsavina), appeared

over-publicized and unable to live up to expectations.<sup>11</sup> In America as well as in Europe, the audiences of the Ballets Russes were above average in education and income, and the company's success was part of a general interest in performed theatrical dance. In the past two decades, articles and books on dance had proliferated in the wake of the success of the art form, and the Ballets Russes figured very prominently in them. E. L. Bernays, "the father of modern public relations" and the publicist of the Ballets Russes tour, says he prepared the advertising campaign for the company on such existing material, months before he saw the real thing.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the preconceived ideas of the tour managers present in the publicity materials have attained truth value over the decades since. For example, the American audiences' alleged inability to differentiate between the Ballets Russes and free-form<sup>13</sup> dance groups such as the Denishawn Company was far from universal—this was a preconception of the promoters of the Russians, subscribing to the view of themselves as high culture connoisseurs educating the common people about a new art.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, critics in the major cities of the East Coast clearly professed an understanding of what was good and bad in art dancing generally, and specifically in ballet. As Montrose J. Moses noted in the *Bellman* of January 29, 1916:

We have had within the past ten or fifteen years all the healthy and unhealthy dancing that it has seemed possible to invent: the naturalistic methods of Isadora Duncan, the oriental methods of Ruth St. Denis, the exceptional beauty of Genée, with the continuous perfection of Pavlova. Therefore, we know something in regard to the art of the ballet. Yet even if we did not, we would instinctively feel the perfectness of virtuosity, when we saw it on the stage.

Notably, Moses then drew an interesting conclusion: "there was *nothing in the dancing to raise the Russian Ballet above the average expectation*. Alas for Karsavina and Nijinsky!" (emphasis added).

Moses's list of different forms of art dance presented on American stages by 1916 points to how the Ballets Russes was merely one form of dance, and not necessarily even very modern. American pioneers of free-form dance—Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Maud Allan, and Ruth St. Denis with her husband Ted Shawn—had made their names in Europe but they had all toured America as well; the 1916 Denishawn tour even coincided with the first tour of the Ballets Russes. Apart from the biggest names on the dance circuit, various smaller dance troupes and individual performers had also familiarized Americans with dancing as an art form. Partly because dancing was taught as physical exercise for girls (see Dunham 1918; Tomko 1999), American free-form dance was such a success by this time that it even had its first trade paper, the *Modern Dance Magazine*, founded in 1914 (Malnig 1999, 39). Those in the audience who came to watch *dancing* (and not just the fashionable Ballets Russes) did not necessarily have a preference for ballet as it had been privileged in France or Russia. In the Anglo-American context, ballet was not a source of nationalist pride—rather, it was associated with entertainment and the music hall (vaudeville) and was thus not inherently worth more than other dance forms. Some Americans, like Henry Adams Bellows of the *Bellman* (November 13, 1915; March 4, 1916)

thought the Ballets Russes was an expensive import, an entertainment that could not even be called art.

Publicity materials advertising unknown dancers as equal to the missing stars were insulting to critics who were knowledgeable about dancing: dance connoisseurs were keen to point out that the ballerina Xenia Maclezwowa did not merit the title, and when Alexander Gavrillov was dubbed “Nijinsky’s pupil” in the advance publicity, it was remarked that he was not on par with his teacher.<sup>15</sup> This focus on the dancers’ technical skills is in itself noteworthy because at their best, American reviews are far more elaborate about the shortcomings of individual dancers or the specific qualities of the ensemble than contemporary European sources. Some critics even noted there was a certain lack of variety in the choreography: “Adolf Bohn [*sic*] uses the same leaps and contortions in his Tartar dance as in the amorous exultations of the negro in ‘Scheherazade.’ And there is no great difference between the steps of the harem ladies and those of the maidens of the enchanted forest.”<sup>16</sup> Apparently, the similarity of the step sequences noted by this critic was due to Bolm almost single-handedly reviving the Fokine repertory in 1915 after the company had dispersed for over a year. However, such practical concerns also raise questions about the fabled ethnographic accuracy of the Russian Ballet.<sup>17</sup>

Quite apart from the expectations of the audience and the virtuosity—or lack thereof—of the dancers, the publicists of the Ballets Russes had trouble realizing that America was not Europe. In Europe the Ballets Russes was an elite company for the social elite, and the names of these patrons of art were prominently displayed in society columns, reviews, and programs of the company (for example, *Le Matin*, May 17, 22, and 28, 1909; *The Lady*, October 26, 1911; the *New York Sun*, April 25, 1916.) Although in reality, as Edward Pessen (1971) has comprehensively shown, American fortunes were amassed over generations and intellectual as well as financial capital had concentrated on the small social elites at least since the 1840s, America reveled in the cult of the self-made man. Importantly, this myth of equal opportunities produced, in the years preceding the First World War, a backlash against elitism in American culture, which brought about a new, nonindividualized corporate culture and forms of virtually anonymous philanthropy that hid the role of inherited wealth in both fields (McConachie 1988, 190–91).

In reproducing the European accolades, the publicity campaign failed to take these cultural differences sufficiently into account: the Ballets Russes was still marketed as an elite organization for the social elite. The only concession made to American values was the emphasis on “democracy” that appears in texts by the publishers of the company. For example, the reporter of *Musical America* (January 13, 1915)—a magazine with close ties to the Metropolitan management—claimed that the Russian Ballet epitomized the new art of Russian people because “While it is aristocratic politically, Russia has remained democratic artistically” (cf. Bernays, pseudonym of Aybern Edwards, in *Vanity Fair*, December 1915) Here, “democracy” simply connotes an interest in folk culture and nature, in “the spectral shadows of the Siberian wilds and the mysterious monasteries and kremls.” Although most of the Ballets Russes spectacles were not set in Russia and bore no relation to Russian folk art, “the rich folklore of the country . . . has freed the Russian

ballet from decadent artificiality, preconceived emotions and fossilized formalities of the French-Italian schools [of ballet].”

During a world war, “democracy” was perhaps a safer word than “nationalism,” but it still strikes an odd note in conjunction with a notably elitist organization like the Ballets Russes. It is a long leap from this “democracy” to any policy of equality for the artists involved in the productions, or even to the claims by European critics that Russians had a mysterious racial ability to melt their souls together (Jacques Rivière in *La Nouvelle revue française*, August 1913). As it was, claims to a “democratic” Russian Ballet came to be read as an attempt by the management to patch up the absence of the stars on whom the preliminary publicity had focused, a justification for the considerable expense of importing this European art.<sup>18</sup>

## Foreigners

Unlike in Europe, where the star dancers were the public face of the company, for the American tour Diaghilev himself personified the Ballets Russes. Diaghilev’s condescending attitude toward America reflected the aristocratic European view that equated great art with centuries of tradition and with art institutions and schools. All of his more positive statements about American art offered his own enterprise and Russian nationalist art as a model, claiming Americans knew not what was truly original about America and, worse, that they could not have real American art until they did:

America will produce much great art when she has realized herself, but not before. Broadway is one of the genuine places in America. . . . But Americans, while they love it, will always deny its existence in their drawing rooms. It is unrefined! And they copy Europe. Copy Europe, and continue their futile attempts to establish here the art which is a result of centuries of culture.<sup>19</sup>

Notably, Diaghilev was not advocating popular entertainment (Broadway) or saying that it was high art, merely that American culture *had no art* other than the popular. Moreover, the impresario claimed that Americans slighted the little they had in terms of original culture in favor of copies (again, anti-art). In another interview, Diaghilev urged Americans to first build an artistic tradition of their own before attempting to form an American ballet.<sup>20</sup>

No doubt, Diaghilev was being sincere. The great American artists of the day tended to make their careers in Europe, from Whistler to Isadora Duncan to Henry James, but this did not mean they went unappreciated in their home country.<sup>21</sup> However, it hardly warmed Americans to Diaghilev when he claimed they knew nothing of themselves or of art. The impresario’s patronizing attitude alienated people who otherwise might have allied with him in defense of the potential American art had in “native” traditions (that is the traditions of white European settlers).

Although there had been a long-standing dispute over whether American art should follow European models or strive for something typifying “Americanness,” both Lawrence Levine and Leo Braudy have noted that by the outbreak of the First World War, the



“true American artist” had already been constructed. He (note the gender!) was personified by people like Emerson and Whitman, represented as someone who had “natural” talent and loved the wilds; was empirical and practical in his life as well as his work, like the pioneers had been on the frontier; and was ultimately a professional that shunned useless refinement and aristocratic privilege. Advocates of such American art strongly emphasized that Americans should owe nothing to Europe—in actuality, they construed American art *against* Europe.<sup>22</sup> Importing a ballet company with the demeaning attitude that America was a cultural backwater simply did not fit this atmosphere.

Throughout the first tour, some American reporters consistently stressed how the Russian Ballet was a foreign company and even implied that ballet was a European art form. Others claimed the Russian Ballet was “virtually started by” American free-form dancers, Isadora Duncan in particular (see, for example, *Musical America*, January 22, 1916; Caffin and Caffin 1912, 44). The fact that the Ballets Russes programs were printed in French caused indignation, at least for the critic of *Musical America*.<sup>23</sup> Others placed great emphasis on Diaghilev’s refusal to speak English:

Mr. de Diaghileff came smiling from his seat in the orchestra circle down the aisle to where Mr. Gatti-Casazza, John Brown, and the other heads of the Metropolitan were standing, and said *in French*: “America is saved!” . . . “The reception the American public has given the dancers,” Mr. de Diaghileff said *in French* last night, “indicates that the taste is no different from that of European nations, and at the same time makes ridiculous the attitude of the police.” (*New York Times*, January 23, 1916; emphasis added)

This statement referred to the debacle caused by the reputation of the Ballets Russes as a sinful and decadent import. Despite the efforts of the producers to downplay the notorious reputation of the company—E. L. Bernays (1965, 107) remembers retouching the pictures of Bakst’s costumes after *Ladies Home Journal* had refused to publish them—the reality of the performances soon proved to confirm the worst fears of the propagators of public virtue: both *Schéhérazade* and *L’Après-midi d’un Faune* were served with indictments for indecency in New York, within days of their first performances.

With *Faune* such a reaction could perhaps have been anticipated—after all, the scandal the work had caused in Paris in 1912 was well-known across the Atlantic. Based on the reviews, it seems that the version Léonide Massine danced (relying mostly on the recollections of people who had not danced in the work in 1912–1913) created a work similar to the rest of the repertory, accentuating the angularity and unison of the dancers’ movements and enhancing the sexual quality of the last gesture of the Faun.<sup>24</sup> The other problematic work, *Schéhérazade*, depicted an orgy with white women being fondled by black men (white dancers masquerading as blacks, not minstrels in blackface, a tradition familiar to American audiences). In a racially segregated country, this simply *did not do*.<sup>25</sup>

In both instances, a European company collided with the values of the United States. In America public morals were guarded by various Christian “morality groups” enforcing censorship; and Americans had, then as now, ideas that essentially differed from Europeans in terms of what was and was not “appropriate” for public consumption. The Catholic

Theatre Movement, an organization that saw as its duty the expurgation of morally dubious forms of entertainment from American stages, responded to reports of the Ballets Russes by appealing to the police, who sent in undercover agents to verify claims of indecency (see the *New York Times*, *Tribune*, and *Herald*, January 25, 1916). Representatives of the Metropolitan Opera and Diaghilev were asked to appear in a court hearing, with the result that the police recommended *Faune* and *Schéhérazade* be modified. “Shaking with emotion and his voice raised to a pitch,” Diaghilev was indignant:

I am surprised that a free country should raise such objections. “The Faun” has been given fifty times and “Scheherazade” 150 times in other countries without the slightest objection. The Queen of Belgium, the Queen of England, the Emperor of Germany, all Paris, all Europe, saw without objection. [In *Faune*] [t]his committee found things I never saw; heard comment I never heard; found ideas that were never in Nijinsky’s mind, never in Bakst’s mind, never in my mind. The ballet is a classic, and I would as soon change it or modify it as I would change the conception of Fokine. It would be like changing the music of Stravinsky.  
(*New York Tribune*, January 26, 1916)

Mr. Edmond, the business manager of the ballet company, echoed Diaghilev, but Mr. Brown, the business manager of the Metropolitan, stated in the same press conference that the objections would be heard and changes made.<sup>26</sup> Some reports pointedly remarked how the Faun just stared at the veil and that the dancers’ make-up lightened after the debacle, but whether this changed anything for the better was another question.<sup>27</sup> Diaghilev’s rhetoric, appealing to the opinions of European aristocrats, did as much harm as good when the company had been accused of “European” sins. As with his statements about American lack of culture, his claim that America was a free country in name only insulted the audience and presented the United States as a cultural backwater.

American critics were writing for Americans and were keen to see through the ballyhoo. The critic of the *New York Evening Journal* (January 25) pointed out how “There has been much rhodomontadic [*sic*] nonsense written concerning the creation of a new art in the ballet as conceived by the Russians,” and he claimed people had been swept off their feet by what has been said of the spectacle. Although this critic went on to praise *Petrouchka* as finally justifying all the praise, some reviewers were keen to pick apart the publicity as well as the spectacles.<sup>28</sup> This irreverence makes them far more informative than most European reviews, which centered on description rather than analysis. Importantly, this irreverence even encompassed the biggest star of the troupe, Nijinsky, who arrived from Europe in time to dance during the last few weeks of the second appearance of the company in New York.

### Across America and Back Again

Despite his almost total absence from the public eye since 1914, in 1916 Vaslav Nijinsky was still very much a celebrity. Nicknamed “Le Dieu de la Danse,” Nijinsky’s image had graced both theatrical and regular press, ladies journals, art reviews, humor magazines,

and popular illustrated newspapers since 1909, first as a dancer and figurehead for the company, and then as a controversial modernist choreographer. The Metropolitan management, who had relied on Nijinsky's fame in the publicity campaign, spared no effort in trying to get Nijinsky to the country before the company began its cross-country tour. They failed.

Of course, the absence of Nijinsky, Karsavina, and other stars was not the sole reason for the financial failure of both the first season in New York and the subsequent cross-country tour. First of all, America was very large, and mustering supporters in New York did little good amongst the different elites of Chicago or Hollywood, who tended to dislike being treated as of secondary importance.<sup>29</sup> Outside of New York and Boston, American elites also did not aspire to social status through patronage of dance, or at least not through patronage of a *European* import. The Metropolitan had clearly overestimated the interest in some of the places where the Ballets Russes gave more than one performance (such as Chicago): in the wake of the negative East Coast reviews, the expensive tickets of the company did not sell. For the first time in its history, the company had to perform to half-empty auditoriums. In terms of reviews, however, much of the hostility was directed at the producers rather than at the dancers, and the press actually had mostly positive things to say of the performances.<sup>30</sup>

For Diaghilev, this lukewarm reception seems to have been a great humiliation. Later, in the reminiscences and reports published in Europe, the empty seats became "evidence" of how Americans neither knew nor cared about ballet. Diaghilev also claimed that in America, the box office always went before artistic value, indicating that his company would have succeeded had he been willing to sacrifice their aesthetic principles on the altar of commercial entertainment.<sup>31</sup>

As Lynn Garafola (1988, 129) has detailed, Diaghilev's insistence on Otto Kahn's personal approval for the slightest of changes, and his disregard of Kahn's appointed officials, made management of the tour cumbersome and was responsible for some of the misfortune. But the Metropolitan officials also did not do what they should have: as Bernays (1965, 133) notes, there was no other way of knowing the conditions of the theaters in advance than to travel to see them—which he did do for Caruso in 1917 after failing to do so for the Ballets Russes the year before. Together with a relatively tight travel schedule, this led to complaints about delays, long intermissions, and changed programs:

The intermissions were exasperating. So were they at the *matinée*, which ended a full hour later than it should have. On both occasions, the audience expressed its impatience very pointedly. Why does not the management put a stop to this nuisance? In the majority of cases the *entr'actes* are longer than the pieces themselves, and the patience of the public is not improved by these interminable waits.<sup>32</sup>

The long intermissions were probably due to practical problems with the sets. As Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs (1997, esp. 154) have noted, scene changes in British and American theaters grew longer at the beginning of the twentieth century because the drops could not be hung in grooves like in France. Besides being of the French standard, the Ballets Russes *décors* were also too large for many of the local stages—when, that is, there was

actually a stage when they came to town. (*Boston Evening Transcript*, November 2, 1916; Armitage 1946, 25–26.)

By April, when the company returned to New York, public interest in the Ballets Russes was at its lowest ebb—audiences had dwindled, the allure of novelty had abated, and negative criticisms had resurfaced in the press. (For example, the *Musical Courier*, on April 6, 1916, reported “lukewarm” applause.) For the Metropolitan management, Nijinsky’s arrival must have seemed a godsend. Here was the major star the audience wanted,<sup>33</sup> who could be the center of publicity, unlike the grumpy Diaghilev who, when he did not shy away from publicity, made statements that aggravated the situation and caused further problems for the management. And then Nijinsky refused to dance.

### The Striking Premier Danseur

Thanks to the publicity campaign the Metropolitan launched in September 1915, Nijinsky was perhaps the best-known individual never to have appeared on American stages. The campaign included a eighty-one-page booklet with articles about the Ballets Russes ready for printing. Thirteen of its pages were devoted to Nijinsky, the second largest share going to the decorator Léon Bakst.<sup>34</sup> Nijinsky’s potential release from internment as an enemy alien in Hungary—which had originally made his travel with the company impossible—was considered newsworthy in several American papers, in part because American officials in Europe had played a prominent part in his release (*New York Times*, March 2, 1916; *Musical America*, April 1, 1916; *New York Tribune*, April 4, 1916). However, accounts of his numerous steps on the road to America also reproduced another great myth of the United States as the land of liberty, and American audiences expected him to be truly grateful.

Reporters met the dancer and his family on board the ship as soon as it docked on April 5. From this point onward, hegemonic histories of the Ballets Russes again diverge from contemporary primary sources. The *New York Herald* ran a meticulous account on how journalists preferred to listen to Mme Nijinsky rather than the cumbersome process of interpretation: unlike sometimes claimed, there was an interpreter present other than Romola Nijinsky.<sup>35</sup> As it turned out, Mme Nijinsky had quite a lot to say, and what she said quickly became a nasty scandal: her fanciful tales about the family’s life as prisoners of war were soon revealed to have been exaggerations. This certainly influenced the public image of her husband and his credibility in the eyes of the Metropolitan management.<sup>36</sup>

The press followed the great dancer’s every movement. On April 6 Nijinsky’s attendance at the rehearsals of the company was spotted by the *New York Times*, and the following day the *New York Herald* reported audience members had already inquired when the dancer was to appear. But the next day, Nijinsky suddenly stated that he had no contract with the Diaghilev Ballet and therefore could not appear with the organization until a satisfactory agreement had been reached. He made a particular point about *Faune*, which he claimed Diaghilev had had no right to mount without his supervision.<sup>37</sup> The management immediately claimed Nijinsky was demanding way too much, “terms that would make Mr. Caruso’s nightly salary check look pale” (*New York Herald*, April 8, 1916), and attacked the dancer for having hired an attorney to defend his rights.<sup>38</sup>

The attack on Nijinsky was in part a defensive move. Diaghilev had led the management of the Metropolitan to think the dancer was under contract. The officials now attempted to turn the tide of public outrage following Nijinsky's announcement *and* his negative criticism of the ensemble:

As a whole, yes [the company is good]. But as regards to individuals, no. The only real artist is Adolf Bolm. They need an artistic head. It is for my services as an artistic director, as well as for my dancing, that I am standing out for a good financial guarantee. Money is still coming to me for my last season with the Ballet Russe in Europe. In my present case, that does not matter, but I must have satisfactory terms.

"Then you may not dance here?" someone suggested.

Mrs. Nijinsky replied to this question for her husband, saying that it is possible he may not appear at all. (*New York Herald*, April 8, 1916)

For Nijinsky to side with the critics of the ensemble must have been scathing for Diaghilev and embarrassing to the officials of the Metropolitan, who had spared no amount of time and money in getting this obvious expert in dance to the same continent as the company. However, Nijinsky was justifying his demands for a high salary by offering to act as a *régisseur* and choreographer as well as a star dancer, and he grounded his argument on the company's apparent lack of artistic direction.

The dancer's demands seemed unreasonable both to the Metropolitan managers and to many reporters (although not to all; see, for example, *New York Dramatic Mirror*, April 22, 1916). Neither had any guarantees that a choreographer or a *régisseur* could improve the quality of the company, let alone that Nijinsky would be the man of choice for such a job. The star seemed simply ungrateful toward the people who had helped to free him from internment. Even if some of the company members looked forward to dancing with the great Nijinsky (see, for example, Kachouba 1979), the management—Diaghilev in particular—was far from eager to relinquish the reins to the former star.

Considering the fight over Nijinsky's contract took only three days, the press it received was out of proportion. Behind the scenes, personal grudges made matters worse. Diaghilev and Romola Nijinsky apparently hated each other: to Diaghilev, Mrs. Nijinsky was the woman who had stolen his lover, star, and choreographer and could therefore only desire his ruin; to Romola, Diaghilev was trying to lure away her prize catch with his foremost love, ballet.<sup>39</sup> In 1916 Nijinsky would have been acutely conscious of nearing the end of his dancing career; in addition, he was twenty-seven and the sole provider for his family. In 1914 he had won a lawsuit in London against the absent impresario for unpaid salaries, and he now set out to collect the enormous sum of half a million gold francs.<sup>40</sup> As the two men lived together for five years, Diaghilev had ensured Nijinsky was paid well for engagements outside the company, but Diaghilev had also borrowed from these funds to cover his debts. In a letter to Stravinsky (of November 26/December 9, 1913; see Stravinsky 1997, 2181–82), Nijinsky claimed Diaghilev never paid him for his dancing in the company or for his three choreographies of 1912–1913.<sup>41</sup> Yet, with only the word of one against another, it was impossible to know who was right.

Diaghilev never paid Nijinsky, but the management (perhaps Otto Kahn personally) arranged for him to receive \$13,000 for the season and an additional \$1,000 for each of the eleven performances in New York. Nijinsky therefore earned more per performance than many Americans earned in a year—quite a compensation for something not regarded as “real work.”<sup>42</sup> Nijinsky’s contract was not made public, but information about it leaked to the press at a time when the public had not yet had the chance to see whether the dancer merited his pay, and much was made of how much Nijinsky actually got per performance.<sup>43</sup> Yet, high salaries were already a relatively reliable indicator of an individual star’s magnitude (see, for example, *New York Dramatic Mirror*, April 22, 1916; Braudy 1997). The artistic terms gave Nijinsky permission to re-rehearse the ballets given by the troupe, and the management also conceded to his demand that *Faune* not be performed as it was. Vexed by this cancellation, on April 27, 1916, *Musical Courier* complained that “Though the ballet goes under the name of Diaghileff it appears, since the arrival of his capricious star, as if the real power behind the throne and the repertoire is no other than Nijinsky.”

All the same, the public interest in the fortunes of the striking dancer was not only due to his stardom. The affair touched on many issues that had been brewing in the minds of American spectators and critics of lyric theater over the past few years. One of these was the aforementioned dispute over what was *American* art; another was whether European stars were worth more than native talents, and if so, why. On April 22, the *New York Dramatic Mirror* complained that Nijinsky was not the first foreigner to benefit from the American bias for illustrious foreign stars:

He observes, as the Sicilian day laborer does immediately upon his arrival in New York, that the scale of prices is higher in America than abroad, and that in the American theater *the exotic artist thrives better than the indigenous plant*. . . . The metropolitan bird cage is open only to Americans who have won European approval. . . . So the Russian is sure of a handsome salary in New York, greater than any American could hope to get if we had American men who could dance as the Russians do, which we haven’t. (emphasis added)

Although Nijinsky’s dancing was here noted to be without peer, his success in extracting cash for his services became a moral parable about the unpatriotic American impresarios getting what they deserved for favoring the foreign over the domestic. Finally, on April 12, Nijinsky danced.

## Nijinsky Dancing

After the forced sojourn of internment and a long ocean voyage, no dancer could be expected to bounce back with his usual vigor, and with Nijinsky, what was and was not usual had acquired mythical proportions. Several reports indicate that Nijinsky did not meet the expectations of the critics in the first performances. For example, the *New York Evening Post* reported on April 13 that he was recovering from a recent illness, and after attesting Nijinsky had no peers, the reporter for the *New York Tribune* similarly noted on April 19 that his first performances were not up to par with European

ones. Again, regardless of whether critics had seen the Ballets Russes in Europe, they obviously could judge the quality of a dancer, particularly in relation to others in the same company.

Through American descriptions of Nijinsky and other dancers of the company, we gain insights unavailable from European reviews. For example, American critics readily *compared* Nijinsky to other male dancers, both in and outside of the troupe.<sup>44</sup> In preparation for Nijinsky's April appearances, the second New York season introduced *Le Spectre de la Rose*, one of the roles that had made Nijinsky famous in Europe. After Gavrilov's attempt at tackling the part of the Spectre,<sup>45</sup> reporters were ready to see the star execute the same role, and literally every paper noted the difference. To again quote Sigmund Spaeth of *Opera Magazine* (May 1916):

When the master took the place of the pupil, a remarkable change was effected. What had before been prosaic and commonplace became suddenly an actual dream fantasy, with all the intangible grace and lightness of its imaginative conception. The simple story of the girl who falls asleep after a ball and dreams of dancing with the rose-prince became really significant under Nijinsky's influence, for he not only danced with an amazing beauty of rhythmic motion, but pervaded the entire action with his personality and even supplied his partner with new steps and a new lightness.

American critics differentiated between technical skill and the dancer's expressive abilities, between the formal and the narrative demands of a given work. Whether or not they liked Nijinsky's execution of the role (and by no means all did), the critics were unanimous about his being superior to any dancer they had seen in the Ballets Russes.<sup>46</sup>

Notably, the American critics were quite able to make up their own minds about the dancing, regardless of what we think of the "authenticity" of a particular performance or interpretation (see note 82). As with the other ballets, critics who had not seen the company in Europe were more likely to favor the interpretations of dancers who first performed the roles in America, probably because the American performances had been their first, "original," experience of these works. In *Petrouchka*, for example, Massine's performance tended to be received better than Nijinsky's, although some papers emphasized how the latter added clarity and meaning to the pantomime.<sup>47</sup>

Also, American critics generally found Massine and Bolm better suited to their ideals of staged masculinity. American popular culture already favored the muscle man of the pioneer type, a self-reliant macho adventurer who reproduced the individualism that was characteristic of American popular culture.<sup>48</sup> By contrast, "Men who danced in ballet were an affront to America's pride in its manly, rugged pioneers. It was generally thought male dancers were likely to be deviates" (Bernays 1965, 103). Interviewed for the *New York Dramatic Mirror* on May 13, Ted Shawn attacked Nijinsky's dancing quite viciously as an example of degenerate European art: "He represents the decadent, the freakish, the feverish. . . . But to Americans he does not represent our idea of wholesome beauty." The title roles of *Le Spectre de la Rose* and *Narcisse* (premiered in 1911) seemed particularly ludicrous to the (male) critics.<sup>49</sup> Only the *New York Times* stopped

to wonder on April 13 why on earth anyone would have a man dancing a rose in the first place.

Yet, as in Europe, some critics found Nijinsky's dancing in these works masculine enough because it actively used the stage space and included physical feats known to be difficult, particularly his famous jumps. On stage, Nijinsky exuded self-confidence, marked by the precision of his movements, which many reviews cited as a distinctive quality in his dancing:

While the effeminate quality, almost inseparable from the male ballet-dancer, is quite visible in Nijinsky, he has at the same time, a certain masculinity of strength and rhythm which counteracts the other impression. His rhythmic sense, unlike that of the average dancer, is highly developed, and one feels a sense of security in his motions which is singularly restful. Every bound, every step, is calculated to the smallest fraction of a second.<sup>50</sup>

It is always unwise to underestimate the power of the heteronormative matrix, and as Alan Sinfield (1994, vii, 26–27) has noted, at this time, “effeminacy” did not necessarily connote homosexuality. With Nijinsky's marriage, the proposition that Nijinsky would himself be perverse was more or less taken out of the equation, regardless of whether his former relationship with Diaghilev was known by the reporters. Whereas in Europe Nijinsky was often attributed with the characteristics of his roles, American critics stressed the difference between the man and his role.<sup>51</sup>

Nijinsky's presence boosted the box office. On April 15 the *New York Herald* noted that the audience attending Nijinsky's second appearance was by far the most brilliant that the Ballets Russes had mustered, and on April 27 it reported that the house was “Packed as on a “Caruso Night” After Weeks of Mild Interest.” On April 22 *Musical America* made a similar comparison between the dancer and the famous singer.<sup>52</sup> As the *New York Tribune* (April 30)—the same paper that had been so hostile toward Nijinsky at the beginning of the season—summed up, Nijinsky's “arrival gave a final lustre to the season and atoned partially for many previous disappointments.” The fame or the dancing of one individual cannot account for this. Nijinsky took prompt action with regard to the ballets: he re-rehearsed the repertory, adding lost detail to the works he knew. *Opera Magazine* (May 1916) spoke of Nijinsky's arrival as “timely . . . for this much heralded star not only made the giving of new works a possibility, but revised those which New York had already seen so that they became almost novel creations” (emphasis added). Although no doubt the tour had welded the company into an ensemble, making this kind of re-rehearsing much easier, the critics were virtually unanimous in crediting Nijinsky with giving the company a new life. *Musical America* noted how both *Les Sylphides* and *Schéhérazade* were “noticeably improved through Nijinsky's skill as a stage manager,”<sup>53</sup> while the *New York Times* (April 15) attributed the change to Nijinsky's example and the dancers' desire to match the star's accomplishment in a performance the critic deemed “one of the best the organization has yet given here.” Were it not for the recent harsh words of these very critics, one might think this a successful publicity trick on the part of the company management.<sup>54</sup>

For once, novelty was not necessary for the Russian Ballet to gain media attention:



How different is the Russian Ballet under the exacting and inspiring Nijinsky, eager that it do its best and fullest for its new public in America, from the Russian Ballet under the careless and chafing Diaghilev, dulled rather than stimulated by new conditions, *stands clearest out of the performances in which none of the pieces is new* and most of them relatively familiar. (*Boston Evening Transcript*, November 11; emphasis added)

In Western Europe, reviews of works of earlier seasons or of second or third performances of novelties are extremely rare, and Russian dance critics took this as proof of Western disinterest in the art of ballet (Järvinen 2008). But Americans again proved a match for their Old World colleagues, a fact not necessarily flattering to Diaghilev or his coterie.

## The Second Tour

After the disastrous first tour, Diaghilev's inability to get along with the management of the Metropolitan was reported to the public:

The subscribers—law-givers in the theatre that they provide annually with working capital—have missed their opera and repined under evening after evening of dancing and miming by the same company to the same pieces. Outside of New York *the financial losses of the tour have been heavy*, since nowhere, except in Boston and a “one-night-stand” or two, did the ballet attract paying audiences; there have been endless bickerings between the representatives of the opera house and *Mr. de Diaghilev, as exacting as he is unstable; the un-business-like methods of the Russian director, with his repeated failures to fulfil his agreements, to assemble the promised dancers, to produce the promised ballets*; the intrigues and the jealousies, old and new, that keep the company in continuous and seething discord, have disgusted the little group of business men who “financed” the tour. [If Diaghilev] has learned nothing else in the past four months, he must have discovered that *the American stage and the American public are not European*.<sup>55</sup>

Were it not for the fact that the “unstable” Russian director, scolded in this article, is Diaghilev and not Nijinsky, this text would simply prove true everything said of the second American tour of the Ballets Russes.<sup>56</sup> The utter failure of Nijinsky's leadership of the company was a myth actively propagated by Diaghilev, who had many reasons for wanting Nijinsky's last ballet and his management to be seen as failures—for one, the myth turned attention away from Diaghilev's own mistakes. Nijinsky had also hurt Diaghilev both personally and financially, and the success of the choreographer without the impresario went against Diaghilev's increasing need to portray the Ballets Russes as his *personal* creation.<sup>57</sup>

For the Metropolitan, however, Diaghilev was dispensable; Nijinsky the star was not.<sup>58</sup> Obviously, this was another humiliation to the impresario, but Diaghilev desperately needed the cash paid by Kahn for Nijinsky to hire the dancers in order to reassemble his company for the next season in war-torn Europe. On paper, he received \$20,000 in

advance, with the promise of \$9,000 a week plus half the net profits of the tour. These were not bad terms, especially as the Metropolitan would pay for the orchestra, travel costs, and the \$60,000 salary for Nijinsky, who would stage two novelties (Garafola 1988, 131–32). Unfortunately, most of Diaghilev's expected profits went into the pockets of his debtors. Strained for cash, he put pressure on the Metropolitan Musical Bureau, and in the end he broke his end of the deal by refusing to pay the dancers who had remained in America, who, in turn, starved and blamed the tour management.<sup>59</sup>

The second tour was set up as one of Otto Kahn's philanthropic enterprises, expanding across the whole continent and into Canada. However, it seems the Metropolitan had learned little from the mistakes of the first tour.<sup>60</sup> The troupe was even smaller in size than before—as *Musical America* reported on September 23, there were now only forty dancers. Importantly for the subsequent accounts of what happened, Nijinsky took the opportunity to fire the long-term *régisieur* of the company, Sergei Grigoriev, who remained with Diaghilev in Europe.<sup>61</sup> After the summer season in Italy and Spain, Diaghilev also kept with him a core group that comprised some of the best dancers in the company, including Tchernicheva, Massine, Woizikovsky, and Idzikovsky.<sup>62</sup> The management spent most of the summer and even the beginning of the tour in a hunt for a Russian prima ballerina, on the grounds that Lydia Lopokova was not sufficiently novel or refined (after all, she had performed in variety theaters). Refusing to even try hiring Bronislava Nijinska, they secured Margarita Frohman and Olga Spessivtseva, who stranded the company halfway through the tour.<sup>63</sup>

But the major difference in the tour was in the artistic direction. Nijinsky, who had recently developed his version of the Stepanov notation to write down his authoritative text of his first choreography, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* (*Musical America*, April 15, 1916), was very exacting about works of art but had no experience of the provincial theaters the tour would be using. Possibly in an effort to please the audiences outside of New York, in advance of the season the Metropolitan management had sent these theaters forms in which they could specify what ballets they wanted. This meant they could order ballets that were not in the repertory—as is evident from the program scheduled for Washington, D.C. (*Mephisto Valse*, *Le Dieu Bleu*, and *Sadko*, of which only the last was available).<sup>64</sup> But if the management were obstinate in holding onto decisions made without consulting the artistic director, Nijinsky was equally obstinate, insisting, for example, that *Schéhérazade* would not be given in a theater without adequate stage machinery.<sup>65</sup>

Unlike Diaghilev, Nijinsky bore no financial responsibility for the tour. Consequently, he does not seem to have cared that the audiences became entitled to refunds if he did not appear or if they did not see the ballets that had been advertised. Audiences that complained if Nijinsky did not dance in two of the three ballets of an evening were simply unreasonable, particularly as the touring schedule was tighter and distances much longer than during the European seasons of the Russian Ballet. Moreover, both the audience and the management expected the star to appear in the leading role, unconcerned by the fact that the star was also the director taking care of numerous practical details. Nijinsky changed roles with other dancers, preferring to take the mimed parts such as the Chief Eunuch in *Schéhérazade*, which were physically less demanding than dancing leading roles and perhaps

also supported his increasingly egalitarian ideas about the company. That such changes in the expected casting were not always advertised may have been a conscious decision on the part of the management, increasingly in need of all the money they could get to cover immediate expenses (particularly after Diaghilev refused to pay the dancers).<sup>66</sup>

It is characteristic of dance historians to ignore practical matters of touring such as these, just as we tend to pay little attention to the daily practices of dancers that occupy most of their time. As a result, we give curious explanations to mundane matters and dismiss disasters that change historical events. The delay in the beginning of the 1916 autumn season is a case in point: in the rehearsals of what was to be the opening work, *Till Eulenspiegel*, the only Ballets Russes ballet ever to premier in the United States, Nijinsky sprained his ankle. Rather than interpret the worst injury of his professional career as evidence of his impending mental illness or incapacity to direct a dance company, it should be noticed that Nijinsky was under a great deal of stress: he had had only three weeks to get the dancers into shape after their return from Europe, train several newcomers, and stage *Till*, a large ballet for the whole company.<sup>67</sup> This was far less time than he had had with any of his earlier ballets, and now he was also expected to direct the company and deal with its internal disputes, as well as represent it in public.<sup>68</sup>

The second tour began after a fortnight's delay on October 16. It received less publicity than the spring tour, but the reviews were more favorable (see Kinney and Kinney n.d., 308). Beyond the bafflement caused by the altogether unshocking *Faune*,<sup>69</sup> the company was seen as in good form, a fact generally credited to Nijinsky's efforts as a director:

It is not new to say that the Russian Ballet contains an aggregate of technical ability, which cannot be equaled elsewhere in the world over. But it is new to say that this ensemble has been whipped into something like its true form by the energizing and disciplining rehearsals of Nijinsky.<sup>70</sup>

Contrasting the first appearances of the company as “ragged,” although later aided by the appearance of Nijinsky, Hiram Kelly Moderwell concluded his article by stating that only now had the company become “almost as good as it was in Europe,” with Lopokova, Bolm, and an excellent orchestra conducted by the Frenchman Pierre Monteux. Similar reports followed in other newspapers during the tour.<sup>71</sup>

As the public face of the company, Nijinsky was far more appealing to American audiences than Diaghilev. Not only was he a star of unquestionable ability, he was a family man who seemed unassuming and friendly in private life, despite all the hyperbolic gossip about aristocratic ladies swooning in his presence.<sup>72</sup> Aside from being more consistent with European reports of the star's private appearance as a modest young man, Nijinsky as a married man and a father was far more appealing to American morality than a sexualized stage presence; at the time, American film studios were actively using marriage and family life to safeguard their stars from the potential scandals associated with the theatrical arts.<sup>73</sup> Even if part of this image was just publicity—no shop clerk could afford the elegant suit or fur-lined coat Nijinsky was seen wearing—the fact remains that Nijinsky was represented in generally positive terms:

To tell the truth the greatest male dancer impressed me as a pleasant, simple young fellow, interested in his wife and baby, and totally unspoiled by all those love letters. His face is not in the least handsome and in the business suit he wore he looked like any of a thousand middle sized, unnoticeable young men you might meet on Broadway.<sup>74</sup>

Nijinsky's lack of English was never commented on in the hostile tone employed with regard to Diaghilev's use of French. Portrayed as interested in sports—"an all-American half-back gone wrong," as the *San Francisco Bulletin* put it—cars, and airplanes, Nijinsky was even quoted as opinionated about American local politics.<sup>75</sup> But most importantly, there was *Till*: the world premiere of a major modernist choreography in New York placed American audiences on equal ground to those of Europe. In a brilliant maneuver, Nijinsky employed a young American artist, Robert Edmund Jones, to design the sets and costumes and praised his work generously in the press. Even Monteux's sudden refusal to conduct the music of Strauss, an ardent German nationalist, acted as advertisement for the work.<sup>76</sup>

In *Till* Nijinsky turned to the sociopolitical ideals of the Russian Realists, a dogma of art in the service of society that Diaghilev and his friends had opposed in the *Mir iskusstva* and since.<sup>77</sup> It is rather remarkable that the biggest box-office success of the Ballets Russes seems to have been a work in which

Nijinsky has made *Till* the champion of the downtrodden, the hater of hypocrisy, whom hypocrisy duly brings to the gibbet. You see him flouting, in turn, the bourgeoisie, the priesthood and the social elect, and all with their own peculiar weapons. It is superb, but it is not Strauss—which, perhaps, does not very much matter. . . . Nijinsky makes one understand what Paris became excited about.<sup>78</sup>

In ballet, social significance had always limited itself to praise directed at the patron of the art form—be it seventeenth-century aristocracy or the eighteenth-century Romantic artist. In comparison to theater or literature, seizing the day had hardly ever been fashionable in ballet: realism and naturalism had bypassed Russian ballet, and the harems and sylphs of ballets seen on Western stages were a world away from Ibsen's plays or Balzac's novels. This had influenced both the way ballet fell out of favor in the nineteenth century and the reappraisal of ballet as nostalgic artifice by the Symbolist generation to which Diaghilev's prewar collaborators belonged. By contrast, *Till* seems to attest to Nijinsky's new Tolstoyan ethos that dominates much of his *Diary*: the notion that art's highest goal was the service of moral transformation (Tolstoy 1956). During the first tour some American critics had complained that the Ballets Russes was too remote from everyday life (for example, Bellows in the *Bellman*, March 4, 1916.) Yet, considering that *Till* mocked the rich and the clergy, its reception indicates the audiences applauded it as a comic fairy tale, where any political subtext was aimed against European or Russian social conditions.

## Conclusions

In a famous interview in the *Graphic* in 1929, Diaghilev took his revenge on American audiences:

From our special point of view, *America is a poor country*. This sounds strange, but is nevertheless quite true. Wealthy America cannot make it worth our while, and poor old Europe can.

A tour of twenty weeks in the United States is considered almost a record, whereas *in Europe we can go on much longer*. In London, for instance, we have had a season of fifty-eight weeks without a break, giving a performance every night, in addition to some matinees, and we had good houses all the time. We also had very long stays in other European cities, such as Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Madrid, Milan, Rome, Budapest, and Warsaw. *We have our public wherever we go.* (emphasis added)<sup>79</sup>

No matter what Diaghilev may have thought of America before the tour, it is abundantly clear he came to dislike everything America stood for, and he professed his dislike of the country and its people to his friends.<sup>80</sup> Diaghilev died shortly after this interview was published, before the October stock market crash that led to the Great Depression. Part of his resentment may have stemmed from watching America become the epitome of the new century: as European empires—Russia included—collapsed, America began to stand for everything new and exciting in culture, from jazz music to the movie industry. This produced a counter-reaction in which Diaghilev's statements fitted perfectly, and as Diaghilev became a canonical figure, his opinion became hegemonic to the extent that the American fortunes of the Ballets Russes have received little attention in discussions of dance of this period.

Understandably, every word of praise for the Nijinsky-led enterprise was a blow to the reputation of the spring tour under Diaghilev's aegis. Later, contradictory stories in the American press were used to construct more or less real "reminiscences" of the 1916 Nijinsky, filtered through hearsay and a hefty dose of hindsight. Later fictions were "remembered" as true by people who had actually been present, and research literature has even given authority to people who were not on the same continent when the events they report took place.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the discrepancies between the accounts of various speakers, misattributions and misinterpretations in contemporary press, and the erratic behavior of Romola Nijinsky were all attributed to Nijinsky and interpreted as signs of his later illness (see, for example, Amberg 1949, 21–23; Haskell 1955, esp. 267–68; Bernays 1965, esp. 119; Lee 2002, 256; Ostwald 1991).

The crux of the matter is that Nijinsky's presence during the 1916–1917 tours revealed in glaring detail what had been lost in his absence. The hegemonic dance authors of the interwar years were concerned with preserving "the original choreography" because as canonized masterpieces, these originals were of crucial importance to ballet's modernist aesthetic—an aesthetic of form that stressed the choreographer as the absent author of dance. Lynn Garafola sums up this view: "But his [Nijinsky's] concern also implies that

in the brief period since Fokine's departure from the company, his ballets had changed. What America was seeing was the first copy of an original, rather than the original itself."<sup>82</sup> Yet, this statement illustrates how the hegemonic preserves itself in the face of changing aesthetic preferences: just as the formalist concern for the "original" makes little sense in the context of the Ballets Russes and the loose way ballet "originals" were understood in the prewar years, it makes little sense today, when dance practice challenges formalist notions of authorship.<sup>83</sup>

The existence of notable differences in the works of 1916 could become dangerous to the reputation of the Ballets Russes because such changes indicated that a similar erosion of detail might have taken place after the 1916 season, particularly as few who had danced in the prewar spectacles remained with the company. This pointed attention to just how much in the company repertory depended on retaining the same dancers from one season to the next. In other words, it focused the attention on the *performer* rather than on the new author(ity) of dance—the choreographer. As such, it threatened the expertise of people such as Sergei Grigoriev, the company *régisseur*, who was responsible for ensuring the continuity of the repertory; and Diaghilev, increasingly seen as the Wagnerian genius directing every minute detail of the great art on stage. At the same time, even small changes, attributed to poor performers and second-rate stage managers, could explain why the prewar works lost their appeal as aesthetic preferences shifted away from the Orientalist narrative spectacles of the prewar Ballet.<sup>84</sup> If the aesthetic value of the abstraction called "choreography" was eternal and true, the prewar works could always be regarded as exemplary, safely meriting their canonization and reproduction as well as the reputation of both those who created them and those understanding the alleged genius of these individuals.

Diaghilev's little scam was also easy: America was an ocean away and his audience mostly resided in Europe. Nobody ever read the original American reviews of the ballet, or even if they did, they read them with the prejudice that Americans simply could not know anything about culture, let alone European culture such as ballet. Many of the dancers who had taken part in the tour had Diaghilev to thank for their postwar fame, and their loyalties lay with the impresario. Nijinsky had promoted dancers based on their ability—for example, Kachouba and Nemchinova—which may have contributed to the hostility toward him in the reminiscences of other dancers and their spouses. Certainly, the reminiscences of Kachouba and Nemchinova were not listened to, not even when they were interviewed for that purpose.<sup>85</sup> Those who stood to gain from the failure of Nijinsky's last ballet invented and spread the story of such failure quite deliberately, and many have repeated it ignorant of the facts.<sup>86</sup>

More importantly, however, downplaying the expertise of American dance critics causes a curious distortion in the history of dance. Thanks to the same nationalist rhetoric whereby the Ballets Russes was an alien import, America seems to have produced dance entirely separate from Europe, unrelated to European variety stage entertainment such as skirt dancing (see Au 1993, Jowitt 1989, Reynolds and McCormic 2003, 1–32; St.-Johnston 1906) and to European "affectations" (listed by Shawn in the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, May 13, 1916; see also Kendall 1984, 119–21). The important historical links between

different forms of staged dance—call them inspirations or influences—disappear in the depths of the Atlantic.

## Notes

1. Diaghilev had been conducting negotiations with the officials of the Metropolitan Opera since 1910, but only the First World War gave the Metropolitan enough bargaining power for an actual contract with Diaghilev to materialize.

2. For a detailed account of the tours themselves, see Macdonald (1975, 136–213).

3. For the contemporary European view of North (and South) Americans as cultural barbarians grown rich on the natural riches of the land, see, for example, Huesca (2001, 172–73). The implication of this view was that although money enabled wealthy Americans to obtain noble titles through marriage—as many wealthy Americans did—this was unable to procure the lasting values of refinement and taste proper to European civilization. In the minds of the European poor, in particular, the New World was a mythical land where gold could just be picked up from the ground. Upon Diaghilev's break-up with Nijinsky in 1913, *Peterburgskaya gazeta* (September 3/16, 1913) illustrated this belief in a cartoon depicting Diaghilev as a grumpy hen roosting in Europe and Nijinsky as a proud rooster in America. The caption read "Mr. Diaghilev is angry and demands that Mr. Nijinsky alone peck the American gold." (For Russian sources, I include double dates that refer to the calendar difference between the Imperial Russian Julian calendar and the Gregorian one used in most European countries and the United States.)

4. It is unlikely that Diaghilev would have founded a touring dance company had he not had such prospects. Astruc Papers, New York Public Library Dance Collection (henceforth NYPL). The papers of Gabriel Astruc contain evidence of the everyday work of the impresario: correspondence and telegrams, contracts and their drafts, propositions, inventories, accounting, etc. In this way, they offer a wonderful view "backstage" into the actual running of the Ballets Russes as an enterprise. See also Garafola (1992, 180, 186, 202–5).

5. On *Faune* see the *New York Times* (June 2 and 3, there were two entries on this date, and June 14, 1912); *Boston Evening Transcript* (August 24, 1912 and April 4, 1913). On *Jeux* see the *World* (May 17, 1913). On seeing the Ballet in Europe see Caffin and Caffin (1912, 44–45).

6. On Lopokova and Volinine, see the *Bellman* (February 4, 1911). On Hoffman, see *Theatre Magazine* (July 1911) and *Current Literature* (August 1911). See also Algernon St. John-Brenon in *New Jersey Telegraph* (August 9, 1911) in the Nijinsky Clippings file (NYPL); Caffin and Caffin (1912, 44–45); Levy (1990, esp. 13, 49–65); and Cohen (1979).

7. Pavlova's was the first "Russian ballet" in America, but her work and that of other Russian troupes, including Hoffman's, were sometimes discussed together. Pavlova had been written about since 1909 in the *Bellman* of October 9, 1909, March 19, 1910, February 4, 1911, July 6, 1912; and on the Russian troupes, August 3, 1912. Mordkin was interviewed in *Literary Digest* (February 10, 1912); see also Macdonald (1975, passim, esp. 206); Levy (1990, passim, esp. xiii, 1–2.)

8. On April 15, 1916, the *New York Sun* complained: "M. Nijinsky is so resentful of criticism [*sic*] that he has so strictly limited the number of occasions on which he dances. Anna Pavlova dances every day if necessary and sometimes twice a day. But three times a week is the average which the Russian set." See also Garafola (1992, 207).

9. Early French and English reviews of the Ballets Russes generally report the narratives of the works presented, sometimes directly copied from program notes. Very little gets said of the steps or the movement qualities of the dancers, of choreographic forms, or other formal aspects of art dance that we tend to expect in a review—even star dancers are often mentioned just by name. Russian dance critics took this to mean the audiences in the West did not understand ballet as an art form (Järvinen 2008).

10. For example, of the two critics writing for the *Boston Evening Transcript*, Henry Taylor Parker's reviews have been praised as extraordinary and been republished (1982). The rather different opinions of Hiram Kelly Moderwell, an early advocate of Wagner in the United States and an important music critic, have received little or no attention in dance history.

11. In the *Christian Science Monitor* (January 18, 1916) we learn "the solo artists . . . come somewhat short of the Russian models hitherto familiar in the United States, both in brilliancy of execution and in depth of interpretation." Similar views were expressed by the *Nation* (January 20) and even in *Musical America* (January 22). In Diaghilev's earlier contracts, Nijinsky was the only dancer for whom no option was given (Astruc papers, NYPL, esp. letter to Mess. Beyfus and Beyfus, August 1, 1911). See also Bernays (1965, 107–8). Van Vechten wrote: "I do not believe the coming to this country of any other celebrated person had been more widely advertised, although P. T. Barnum may have gone further in describing the charitable and vocal qualities of Jenny Lind" (1917, 158).

12. For example, *Musical America* published a series of articles on July 13 and 20, 1912, on the history of performing arts in Russia, partly as publicity for the Ballets Russes. Besides American volumes like Kinney and Kinney (n.d.), volumes originally published in England were either simultaneously published in America (Flitch 1912) or republished there (Whitworth 1913), and others were translated from other languages (*The Dance* 1900). On Bernays, see *Musical America* (January 13, 1917); on using the library of Fred A. King, a ballet enthusiast, see Bernays (1965, 104); and on the first Bakst exhibition, see Bernays (105).

13. I prefer to use the contemporary term "free-form dance" for any staged art dance that was not ballet, both because this term lacks the aesthetic implications of "modern dance" (from formal "modern" qualities to apparent opposition to nonmodern, that is, "classical" dance) and because contemporary definitions of "modern dance" included also "classical" forms like ballet or the "classical" style of Isadora Duncan (Flitch 1912; Kinney and Kinney n.d.).

14. See Bernays (1965, 103–4) on his own disinterest and the assumption that few people knew of ballet. His account (102–29) is an admirable record of how little he cared for the Russian Ballet. See also Kendall (1984, 118, 83–85, 117–20). She writes: "That this new dancing stemmed from historical sources in the theater was an idea alien to most Americans. . . . In America people failed to grasp that a dance was a construct in space and time, involving principles of composition as palpable as those in painting or sculpture" (85). In this regard, there was really no difference with Western Europe. Kinney and Kinney (n.d., 269–81) are optimistic and point out that dance merely faces the same prejudices opera and concert music had earlier; see also Thomas (1995, 61, cf. 72–79).

15. On Maclezova, see *Boston Evening Transcript* (February 1 and March 2); *New York Tribune* (January 18), and the *Nation* (January 20). On Gavrillov, see *Musical Courier* (January 27); *Opera Magazine* (May 1916); and *Boston Evening Transcript* (February 4).

16. *New York Mail* (January 19). See also *Boston Evening Transcript* (January 24) and the *Nation* (January 20).

17. *Musical Courier* (May 4). Fokine's famous "Five Principles" (*The Times*, July 6, 1914) included a demand for accurate characterization of a nation and period, and his interest in collecting "authentic" dances has earned him a special place in dance research (Garafola 1992, 9–13). In actuality, Fokine placed all sorts of interesting conditions on "authenticity"—such as subjecting everything to ballet's aesthetic of beauty and grace (see Fokine 1961, 103–4, 153–55). This was typical of his contemporaries as well (Rath 1914, 19–23; Kinney and Kinney n.d., 264–266).

18. The *Bellman* (January 29); Van Vechten (1917, 150–54).

19. Diaghilev interview in the *New York Times* (January 23, 1916). See also, the *New York Evening Post* (January 24, 1916). Buckle reads this as a vanguard attitude (1993, 300–301); a similar distortion happens when Diaghilev is quoted in Haskell (1955, 296).

20. In *Musical America*, in an article entitled "Diaghileff Prophecies Ballet Americaine" (January



22); and in the *Washington Post* (March 25); see also Buckle (1993, 304), quoting a *Milwaukee News* reporter who apparently tried to get Diaghilev to say something disparaging about America and failed. Diaghilev simply shared the views of his contemporaries, who thought America, plagued by materialism and democracy, had no real culture (Portes 1988, 80–82, 90).

21. See Bougault (1997, 71–78); Kendall (1984, 55–69). Yet this did not mean the American criticisms would be merely “instinctive” (Kendall 1984, 117–19; Levy 1990, passim, esp. 13 and 40–42).

22. Levine (1988, passim, esp. 140–46; 213–19, 236–37, 253–54); Braudy (1997, passim, esp. 507–13); Levy (1990, 30–31, 67, 102–3, 270–71, 333–34, 386n94, 436n1); Thomas (1995, 24–44).

23. *Musical America* (April 8); Macdonald (1975, 138); Thomas (1995, 24–27, 39–42, 60–61, 104–6).

24. See the *New York Tribune* (January 19); H. K. M. in *Boston Evening Transcript* (January 24); and note 69 below. Of the company, Lydia Sokolova, Olga Khokhlova, and Grigoriev's wife Lubov Tchernicheva had appeared in the ballet under Nijinsky's supervision; of these, only Sokolova came for the second tour. Sokolova (1960, 40–41); Jeschke and Nectoux (1990).

25. On January 18, Grenville Vernon's review in the *New York Tribune* called the work “repulsive,” and the *Christian Science Monitor* commented it “should be kept out of decent circulation” (January 18). *Musical America* explained on January 29 (probably in an effort to curb accusations of the Metropolitan Opera's responsibility in the matter) that “amorous passages between white women and negroes are resented in this country, where the negro is a problem. Not so, however, in Europe and especially Russia and the East. We must remember this in judging M. Diaghileff's motive.” The author then emphasized the immorality of the lust depicted in *Schéhérazade* and finished by citing an outside authority on how “there is something degenerate in the Russian Ballet.” In other words, the author verified that the racist and moralist response of “real” (that is, white) Americans to the Ballets Russes was still the “healthy” and right one.

26. The *New York Sun* of January 26 headlined that Diaghilev was calling censorship “A Most Idiotic Affair.” See also *New York Mail* (January 25); the *New York Herald* and *Boston Evening Transcript* (January 26); and *Harper's Weekly* (February 12).

27. With apparent approbation, the *New York Herald* noted on January 27, that “[T]he hue of the negroes was at least two shades lighter Mocha than at previous presentations of the ballet.” This racist quote can be read as evidence of Diaghilev's concession on the issue of make-up. But, because *Schéhérazade* still represented miscegenation and sex on stage, critics now pointed out the theme of the work as impossible to excise. *Musical America* attacked the censorship as “a banal concession to a hypocritical modesty!” (January 29); and the *New York Tribune* made a snide remark on how “A moral ‘Schéhérazade’ is about as possible of realization as a continent Don Juan; and if it were realized it would be about as interesting” (January 27).

28. Of the former, Ivan Narodny [pseudonym of Jaan Sibul] in *Musical America* (January 22); of the latter, Krehbiel in *New York Tribune* (April 6), or the *New York Times* (April 15). See also Van Vechten (1917, 149–57).

29. *Boston Evening Transcript* (February 7); Macdonald (1975, esp. 157–60); Schouvaloff (1997, 43) quoting *Chicago Daily* and *Sunday Tribune* (February 20): “It appears that we are repaying with but scant contributions of money the *disinterested benevolence of the solvent New Yorkers* who have sent hither the Ballet Russe. That is to say that the present carnival of dancing at the Auditorium theater is proceeding to no accompaniment of substantial gratitude” (emphasis added).

30. *Musical Courier* noted empty seats in Cincinnati (March 23); *Musical America* (April 15) in Pittsburgh; Lynn Garafola also noted this in her research (1988, 129) about the performances in Chicago; see also, Ansermet to Stravinsky, quoted in Stravinsky and Craft (1978, 510), and Macdonald (1975, 151–67) on the tour outside New York.

31. See note 79. See also Kinney and Kinney (n.d., passim, esp. 269–73); and de Meyer in *Vanity Fair* (November 1916). See also Nijinsky (1999, 25): “Audiences like to be astonished. They know little and are therefore astonished. I know what is needed to astonish an audience,

and therefore I am sure to succeed.” See also Nijinsky’s comments on applause as not being an opinion (203).

32. *Musical America* (April 22); H. T. P., in *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 7); Macdonald (1975, 176 and 202).

33. Nijinsky’s absence from the company—with or without Karsavina—was the most often invoked reason for its aesthetic failures, or, indeed, for any negative comments on the Ballet in the press. See *Boston Evening Transcript* (January 24); *Current Opinion* (March 1916); *Musical America* (January 22); and *Vanity Fair* (March 1916).

34. A copy of this booklet is in the Diaghilev Clippings file, NYPL.

35. “[W]hen reporters began to deluge him with questions through an interpreter they suddenly learned that Mrs. Nijinsky spoke excellent English. The interpreter then took up his position in the background and the smiling little woman told their story” (*New York Herald*, April 6). Although Romola Nijinsky made comments on her husband’s situation, she by no means dominated the conversation, as Macdonald claimed (1975, 169–70).

36. In particular, the *New York Tribune* (April 8 and 9) attacked Romola Nijinsky’s tales by citing Austrian and Hungarian sources on how the niece of the former mayor of Budapest and the daughter of a celebrated diva could hardly have suffered much. According to them, Secretary Lansing of the State Department had warned the directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company that if Nijinsky would not dance, under the international treaties the United States had signed he would have to be returned to Austria-Hungary as a prisoner of war. In 1916 Romola Nijinsky was by no means the greedy and egotistical harpy she has been made out to be by her detractors, but she had no scruples about rewriting history. See the *New York Herald* (April 6); the *Bellman* (December 30), and the Nijinsky Clippings file (“un-attributed clippings,” NYPL). Nijinsky (1980, 225–39) repeats the essence of these. Notably, Nijinsky repeatedly refused to comment on their experiences in Hungary, and when he did, he disagreed with Romola’s recorded views. See *New York Evening Mail* (April 5), and Molineau in the *Bellman* (December 30); even Romola Nijinsky admits this (1980, 250–51).

37. See the *New York Times* (April 8): “‘The Afternoon of a Faun,’ should not be given as the organization is now presenting it. That ballet is entirely my own creation, and it is not being done as I arranged it. I have nothing to say against the work of Mr. Massin, but the choreographic details of the various roles are not being performed as I devised them. I therefore insisted strongly to the organization that it was not fair to me to use my name as its author, and continue to perform the work in a way that did not meet my ideas.” And, in the *New York Herald* (April 8): “The tempos of the orchestra, the general ensemble should be changed, from *the reports which I have heard*” (emphasis added). This indicates Nijinsky had not seen the ballet yet. *Musical America* (April 29) claimed the cancellation was due to Nijinsky and Diaghilev not reaching an agreement about who—Revalles or Tchernicheva—would dance the leading Nymph.

38. *Musical America* (April 15) claimed Nijinsky “wanted Caruso’s salary and as a climax insisted that he have control of the artistic direction” and had engaged an eminent attorney. According to Garafola (1988, 129), Henry Russell had cabled Nijinsky a \$7,000 advance in early March.

39. Lifar (1945, 295) blames Romola for the estrangement in 1916–1917 between Diaghilev and Nijinsky. Bernays (1965, 118, 126) repeats rumors on the Romola-Nijinsky-Diaghilev-Massine imbroglio; see also Romola Nijinsky (1980, esp. 261–64, 370–83); Tamara Nijinsky (1991, passim, esp. 102–3, 111, 113–22).

40. Diaghilev and Ida Rubinstein had similarly fought in court over her contract in 1913; see *Variety* (June 6, 1913). Diaghilev seems to have assumed there was no need to have a contract with his lover: see Astruc’s letter of August 1, 1911, to Mess. Beyfus and Beyfus in Astruc papers (NYPL): “As for Mr. Nijinsky, Mr. de Diaghilev has declared to me that due to his friendship with the said artist it will not be necessary to sign a contract [of engagement] with him. Mr. de Diaghilev has further added that in all the countries where he has organized the Russian Ballet,

he has been assured of the assistance of Mr. Nijinsky and that he has no worries on the matter. ["Quant à M. Nijinsky, M. de Diaghilew m'a déclaré qu'étant donné ses relations d'amitié avec cet artiste, il n'avait pas besoin de signer d'engagement avec lui. M. de Diaghilew a d'ailleurs ajouté que dans tous les pays où il organiserait le Ballet Russe, le concours de M. Nijinsky lui était acquis et qu'il n'avait à ce sujet aucune inquiétude."]. See also Vaslav Nijinsky (1999, 47, 77–79, 164–65); Turnbaugh (1992, 150–51) claims Stravinsky prompted Nijinsky to make the demands but that Romola was in the end responsible for both the lawsuit and the hiring of lawyers both in Europe and the United States. On the lawsuits, see Romola Nijinsky (1980, 215, 259–63), and Vaslav Nijinsky (1999, 47, 77–79). See also Matz (1984, 109) and Kobler (1988, 66–67).

41. Diaghilev apparently persuaded Nijinsky to lend him 100,000 francs before the South American season of 1913 to cover the debts from the 1912 and 1913 seasons. According to Haskell (1955, 263), Drobecki claimed the impresario had previously borrowed (and paid back) 17,000 francs for a similar purpose, yet he also criticized Nijinsky's financial terms as unreasonable (Haskell 1955, 263–67). Nijinsky speaks of Diaghilev asking him for money (1999, 164–65); see also, Nijinska (1981/1992, 486–87).

42. On Nijinsky's salary, see *New York Tribune* (April 8 and 9); Nijinsky Clippings, NYPL; Garafola (1988, 130); Garafola (1992, 203) quoting the contract in the Metropolitan Opera Archives; Matz (1984, 109); Kobler (1988, 66–67); and Turnbaugh (1992, 150–52). Americans did not consider ballet dancing or being an impresario "real work": see Bernays (1965, 110) on Diaghilev never having worked a day in his life. On patriotism, see Dizikes (1993, *passim*, esp. 370); on "real" work, see Dizikes (1993, 382–83) and Franko (2002, esp. 1–3).

43. Or per second spent performing on stage, as calculated in one newspaper (Nijinsky Clippings, NYPL).

44. Nijinsky was compared with Mordkin, for example, in the *New York Tribune* (April 19) and *Musical America* (April 22).

45. The *New York Herald* (April 4) deemed that "last night's interpreters evidently followed his [that is, Nijinsky's] ideas as much as possible. *With a better spectre* it would have been more interesting" (emphasis added). Interestingly, the work is here credited to the male star, not to the choreographer Fokine.

46. *New York Mail* (April 13): "Spectre de la Rose,' which had hitherto seemed an exceedingly dull and commonplace 'pas de deux,' yesterday became suddenly a thing of life and poetry."

47. *New York Sun* (April 13); Spaeth in *Opera Magazine* (May 1916); *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 8); *New York Evening Post* (April 13).

48. deCordova (2001, 102–5); Braudy (1997, 517, 528–31, 538–40, 545–47, 551–52).

49. *New York Tribune* (April 13); see Cohen (1979, 44–48, esp. 44) on how Nijinsky was parodied "as the image of his most popular roles, and as a kind of human rubber ball," not for his effeminacy; on Nijinsky, see also Levy (1990, 334–39).

50. *New York Evening Post* (April 13). According to the critic of *Musical Courier* (April 20), Nijinsky was "not free from that touch of feminism which for many people is a detrimental factor in all his work"; this was even apparent in the way he took his bows: see *Musical America* (April 22).

51. Several articles in the Nijinsky Clippings file (NYPL) comment on Nijinsky's private self as quite ordinary, like "a shipping clerk or a plumber's apprentice," as *Modern Dance Magazine* (December 1916–January 1917) put it. See also *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 9); the *Bellman* (December 30).

52. See Romola Nijinsky (1980, 263) on Caruso as an insult (that is, synonymous with old-fashioned); "Enrico Caruso: Why He Is the Greatest of All Singers," *Vanity Fair* (January 1916).

53. *Musical America* (April 22); "Nijinski Puts Life in Ballet Russe," *New York Times* (April 13); "The Happy End of a Hapless Tour," *Boston Evening Transcript* (April 28).

54. See *New York Tribune*, *New York Mail*, and *New York Sun* (April 13 and 15). Even Fokine acknowledged Nijinsky's exceptional memory for detail (1961, 132–33).

55. H. T. Parker in *Boston Evening Transcript* (April 28); emphasis added. Similarly, Armitage (1946, 25–26) lists problems with the tour such as difficulties with scenery and lighting and labor unions, no rehearsal time, delays in opening times and long intervals, and Diaghilev's insistence on circulating everything through Kahn.

56. Haskell: "The [first] tour was a huge success. They visited forty towns, with full houses everywhere" (1955, 296). This was blatantly untrue. Haskell also writes that "The American tour under the artistic direction of Nijinsky was a lamentable failure, both artistic and financial" (298). Similarly, Spencer (1974, 88) places blame for the Ballets Russes never again performing in America squarely on Nijinsky's shoulders; Garafola (1988) manages to forgive Diaghilev for not paying the dancers, but not Nijinsky if he "dithered" over programs until he saw what kind of a theater the company had; see also Armitage (1946, 25–26); Bernays (1965, 116).

57. The *New York Evening Post* (January 24) quotes Diaghilev: "I am the Ballet Russe. It has been a great effort for me." Also quoted in *Musical America* (January 29), where Mephisto's Musings further asked if this was egotistical. "[Till's] failure proves the great part played by Diaghileff and his *entourage* in Nijinsky's work" (Haskell 1955, 268). See also Vaslav Nijinsky (1999, 157–59, 103, 110–11).

58. According to Bernays (1965, 121–22), Romola wanted to get rid of Diaghilev; Kobler (1988, 67) says it was Kahn, as does Garafola (1988, 131); Matz (1984, 110) blames Gatti-Casazza.

59. Diaghilev complained of the matter to Stravinsky on November 20/December 3, 1916, in Stravinsky (1997, 2:390–91); see Garafola (1988, 131–32, 136–37) on Diaghilev's breach of the agreement.

60. See Matz (1984, 104–5) on the Pavlova tour and on the Ballets Russes (111–13). Kahn also believed in American art, according to Kobler (1988, 58–59) and Turnbaugh (1992, 152–53).

61. In Grigoriev's absence, much of the running of the company was divided between three "ballet husbands": Nikolay Kremnev (married to Sokolova), Randolph Barrocchi (married to Lopokova), and Stanislaw Drobecki (married to Fanny Pflanz). Kremnev lacked authority with his fellow artists, whereas Barrocchi and Drobecki did not get along with them at all. Even Sokolova (1960, 86–87) admits Kremnev was tactless, prone to outbursts, and had no authority over the dancers. Contrary to what Bourman says (1938, 285–88), he and his wife Klementovich parted company with the Ballets Russes at this point. Not only could Bourman not have witnessed the tour, his account bears a curious resemblance with Romola Nijinsky's (1980, esp. 257–92). She left the tour much later, in Chicago (Nijinsky 1980, 364). See also Levy (1990, 133).

62. Van Vechten (1917, 167) discusses how the weaker troupe probably influenced Nijinsky's choreographic decisions in *Till*; see also Buckle (1998, 440). Apparently, Nijinsky insisted Tchernicheva be replaced by Revalles in 1916, perhaps as revenge against her husband Grigoriev for firing him in 1913.

63. See Garafola (1992, 207, 449–50; 18–19); Garafola (1988, 125, 132, 136). On Spessivtseva, see Bernays (1965, 123–24).

64. *Washington Post* (November 21). The form is reproduced in Macdonald (1975, 198). Aside from *Mephisto Valse* never materializing, Garafola (1988) accuses Nijinsky of dithering over scheduled works until press deadlines were missed and not caring about the consequences of his not appearing. Similarly, Macdonald (199) presents Nijinsky as going mad, refusing to dance, and changing the programs at whim. See also Bernays (1965, 110–11, 116), who was exasperated with Diaghilev for much the same list of reasons. See also Armitage (1946, 25–26).

65. *Kansas City Star*, paraphrasing Nijinsky, according to Macdonald (1975, 202). Nijinsky decided to replace *Les Sylphides* with *Cléopâtre* in Vancouver after seeing the stage—75 feet by 50—"which he declared to be the largest encountered since the company's appearance in Philadelphia," according to Todd (1977, 15–16); see also Jackson (1991, 28–31). Kachouba (1979) says there were huge problems with the theaters (tiny stages, no lights, etc.), but unlike many researchers, she never attributes these problems to Nijinsky.

66. It seems to me that the claims that Nijinsky let Gavrilov or Zverev dance his roles under his name were true, but there is little to go by in terms of reliable contemporary sources. Certainly, this would not have been as unreasonable as the hegemonic interpretation has painted it. Macdonald (1975, 201–2, 207, 209–11) quotes (and disbelieves) contemporary press and the programs of the tour. On the tour, see Diaghilev Programmes, NYPL; Kachouba (1979); Nemchinova (1975); Sokolova (1960, 91–93); Nijinsky (1980, 271, 279–91, 298–301). On the Tolstoyans, see Ostwald (1991, 148–50).

67. The *Christian Science Monitor* (November 7) praised the company for having attained new team spirit and individual prowess: Gavrilov for having attained solo dancer status, Bolm for security, Lopokova as more facile and light, Revalles for new charm.

68. Bernays (1965, 125) says the tour was “marked by factional warfare between Nijinsky and Diaghileff’s administrators,” but he also accuses the dancers, especially Spessivtseva, of an uncooperative attitude (123); see also Nemchinova (1975).

69. See the *New York Post*, *Sun*, *Times*, *Tribune*, and *Herald*, as well as *The World*, for October 25; see the *Boston Evening Transcript* (February 9) on Massine and on Nijinsky in *Faune* (October 27).

70. As “H. K. M.,” Moderwell also lauded Nijinsky’s *Faune* in the *New Republic* (January 22), in the *Boston Evening Transcript* (October 24), and in a piece on Robert Edmund Jones, the costume and set designer for *Till Eulenspiegel*, in *Theatre Arts Magazine* (February 1917).

71. H. T. P., in “The Russian Ballet: A Return that Much Excels the First Visit” in *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 7), explains his title: “it proffered a more diversified and interesting bill than it was sometimes wont to do last February, the ensemble was smoother and more alert; the secondary dancers and mimes of clearer individual ability; and the whole performance of more exactitude and animation.” The Nijinsky Clippings, NYPL, includes several articles from papers outside of New York, such as the *Cincinnati Star*, *Minneapolis Tribune*, and *Musical America*, in particular, that reproduced press notes about the progress of the tour. See also Levy (1990, 334), although she dismisses Nijinsky’s interviews as nonsense; Macdonald (1975; 200–11); and Buckle (1993, 317).

72. See *The World* (May 17, 1913). Romola Nijinsky wanted Nijinsky to be portrayed as aristocratic, as wildly adored by women, and as mysterious *at the same time* as he was to be the perfect husband and model father dedicated to nothing but his art and his family. Her obvious disdain for people who were not high society worked against the idea of “all-American” democratic art that much of the Metropolitan publicity had attempted to muster around her husband and the Ballets Russes. At the same time, her stories appealed to the desire for romance and melodrama the popular culture of the day propagated and were considered in bad taste by precisely the high society in which she so desperately wanted to shine—the hyperbola typical of such “low” forms of culture, according to disgruntled audiences that had come to see and be seen in a decidedly high-culture environment of the Ballet. See Nijinsky Clippings, NYPL, for unidentified cuts, including “Nijinski’s Mail Order Love Trust” and articles commenting on it by Paul Morris and Charles Welton. Macdonald (1975, 208) quotes Indianapolis newspapers with similar stories; *Modern Dance Magazine* (December 1916/January 1917) contains an article entitled “World’s Greatest Dancer Walks Broadway Unnoticed”; see also Bourman (1938, 205). Bernays (1965, 117) describes Romola as “a cocky young woman.” An article appeared in the *New York Evening Mail* (April 5) was entitled “City Unsafe, Wife to Guard Nijinski. Madame Says New York Is Dangerous Place for Men and Will Chaperone Dancer.”

73. See deCordova (2001, 104–7). On Nijinsky in private, see Kachouba (1979).

74. Nijinsky Clippings “unattributed,” NYPL. In the same file there is an article where the reporter is unsure if her typewriter can take the shock of spelling Nijinsky’s name on paper.

75. Both of these articles are from the Nijinsky Clippings, NYPL, but only the *San Francisco*

*Bulletin* piece is attributed. The *Diaghileff Ballet Russe Courier* (a press material publication in the Diaghilev Scrapbook, NYPL) included a story of the Ballets Russes seeing a football game, which may have influenced Baily's interview. See also H. T. P[arker] in *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 9, 1916).

76. See the *New York Times* (September 27), "Monteux Balks at Directing Strauss," as well as October 1; *New York Herald* (October 22 and 24); *Vogue* (November 1916); cf. *New York Evening Mail* (October 24), which did not believe the excuse and claimed Monteux simply would not familiarize himself with the new score; Bernays (1965, 115) insists this was not a planned publicity stunt.

77. The art-for-art's-sake aestheticism of the *Mir iskusstva* is often represented as a direct attack against the social realism dominant in Russian fine arts circa 1870–1890 (the so-called "Golden Age" of Russian art). As Bowlt (1982, 1989) has shown, there was no absolute break between the *peredvizhniki* and the *miriskusstniki*, but the latter tended to appreciate in the former matters of form rather than of content. Moreover, Diaghilev was relatively moderate in his views, promoting *peredvizhniki* art in the journal against the advice of his collaborators.

78. The *New York Journal* (October 24). See also H[iram]. K[elly]. M[oderwell] in *Boston Evening Transcript* (October 24); and H[enry]. T[aylor]. P[arker]. in *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 7). These Americans apparently headed the "German conspiracy" to which Diaghilev, in a letter to Stravinsky dated November 20/December 3, 1916 (Stravinsky 1997, 2:390–91), attributed the success of *Till*.

79. This is from the *Literary Digest* (August 24, 1929) and the *Graphic* (July 20, 1929), quoted in Schouvaloff (1997, 38). This interview was republished in *Dance Magazine* in 1979 as something that had "never appeared in print" (Diaghilev 1979, 48).

80. Ibid. See Sert (1953, 121–22), and Armitage (1946, 26) on Diaghilev's dislike of the United States; Carbonneau (1999, 219); Grigoriev (1953, 110–11) shared this view. However, see also Stravinsky's letter to Roerich dated June 19/July 20, 1910 (in Stravinsky 1997, 1:226): Diaghilev thought going to America would be a good deal. See Diaghilev to Stravinsky, November 20/December 3, 1916 (in Stravinsky 2:360–61) on not getting his money.

81. Famously, Sokolova (1960, 86–93, esp. 90–91) on the company choreographing the second act of *Till* (a one-act ballet): she (or her editor) "verified" her reminiscences from Grigoriev and Stravinsky (1975), and she contradicted the book in later interviews. See Macdonald (1975, 199–200). Similarly, see Bernays (1965, 123) on the premiere of *Till* as having taken place without Nijinsky. See also note 61.

82. Garafola (1988, 130). She goes on to claim that today's versions fail because they are but a copy of a copy; similarly, see Schouvaloff (1997, 10) and notes 83 and 84.

83. See Krauss (1988, 160–68) on the notion of the copy as the underlying condition of the original; Burt (1998); and Carter (1998) on how "the original" and "the authentic" are problematic notions in dance.

84. Changing aesthetic preferences have rarely been cited as the cause for why the fabled prewar works of the Russian Ballet have not appealed to connoisseurs later. See Fokine (1961, *passim*, esp. 133–34, 151, 174–75, 177–78); Ambrose (1951, 73); Bowden (1999, 27); Amberg (1949, esp. 25, 32), an early critic of the Fokine hagiography; and Acocella (1984, 283n17): "we may simply have lost the taste for histrionic dance."

85. Nemchinova (1975) and Kachouba (1979) are interrupted by their interviewers as soon as they start to appraise their closeness to Nijinsky and the hostility of the more established dancers, such as Kremnev, who discouraged Nemchinova.

86. Or despite facts: Schouvaloff (1997, 42–48) prefers Grigoriev's and Sokolova's accounts of failure to the American reviews he obviously has had access to; in a similar vein, see Buckle (1998, esp. 449); Buckle (1993, 317); even Garafola (1988, 133–36); and Kirstein (1987, 295).

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