Baryshnikov. And despite his evident desire to choreograph and the fact that by the age of twenty-three he already had completed two ballets, his works revealed little of the originality of Nijinsky’s *L’Après-midi d’un Faune*, Aliley’s *Blues Suite*, or Robbins’ *Fancy Free*. Biographers often exaggerate the accomplishments of their subjects, but one wonders whether Solway would have advanced the same claims had Stierle died of kidney failure or in a car crash—or if he had been a woman.

In a sense, the artistic questions raised by *A Dance Against Time* are beside the point, since the real subject of the book, as opposed to its setting, has little to do with dance. This, presumably, is what appealed to Pocket Books in signing up the author in the first place: the proposed volume wasn’t a dance book, but a soap opera in which the star was an all-purpose victim—of his family, body, sexuality, AIDS, you name it. No greater contrast can be imagined between this antidance biography and the volumes in the “Dancers of To-day” series. For Adam and Charles Black, dance wasn’t a pretext, but the raison d’être of its books, which dealt unabashedly with the art and artistry of their various subjects. And these books weren’t the only dance items on the publisher’s list, which also included Tamara Karsavina’s *Ballet Technique*, Kay Ambrose’s *The Ballet-Lover’s Companion*, and the *Ballet Annual*, edited by Arnold Haskell. In other words, Black had a genuine commitment to dance and a sense of the public its books were intended to serve. Alas, Pocket Books, with its eye on the dubious mirage of big money, has neither.

WHERE ARE BALLET’S WOMEN CHOREOGRAPHERS?

Women choreographers abound in modern dance; in ballet, by contrast, they are a historical rarity. Even for the twentieth century, the names that immediately come to mind can be counted on the fingers of one hand—Bronislava Nijinska, Agnes de Mille, Andrée Howard, Ninette de Valois, Ruth Page. For the nineteenth century, there are even fewer: Marie Taglioni, whose claim to the title rests on one work, *Le Papillon*; and Katti Lanner, who choreographed the spectacular ballets that figured on the programs at London’s Empire Theatre, a music hall.

Many reasons have been advanced for this absence of women choreographers in an idiom that for nearly two hundred years has been dominated by women as performers. One reason, it is said, is the codified movement vocabulary of ballet—its “stiff and commonplace gymnastics,” in Isadora Duncan’s words—which supposedly limits the play of the imagination. Another explanation is what Susan Manning has called ballet’s “sexual division of labor,” which “defined choreography as a male task and performance as a female task.” Still another is the representational system of nineteenth-century ballet, which presented women as objects of male desire rather than as subjects in their own right.

In our day, explanations have focused on the day-to-day realities of ballet. Ballerina Karen Kain, for instance, has spoken of the unusually heavy burden that performing at the professional level imposes on women: with fewer claims on their time and energy, men can more easily try their hand at choreography. Others have noted the difference in structure between modern dance and ballet classes. Where modern dance classes often include an improvisational or choreographic component, ballet classes for the most part are exclusively devoted to technique. Finally, professional training for women in ballet begins extremely early, and, unlike the training for modern dancers, seldom includes academic learning or exposure to other artistic forms. Thus, women in ballet learn to experience their bodies through the medium of a single all-embracing technique and in isolation from the larger world of ideas.

While all these explanations have some validity, they rest upon a number of dubious historical assumptions. The first is that the authorship of dances—

This essay is based on a paper given at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, University of Michigan, on 21 October 1996.
including those of minor importance—has been generally acknowledged, when, in fact, in many eras this was seldom the case. The second is that dance-making is an activity that has always been identified with the individual choreographer, although the use of this term only became widespread in the twentieth century. The third is that choreography is preeminently an act of individual creation rather than the expression of an institutional style, as was typical in the nineteenth century. The fourth is that the choreographer is chiefly a maker of ballets, although in the past these formed only a fraction of most choreographers’ total output. The fifth is that most ballet choreography was created for the opera house, as opposed to the popular stage or venues like circuses and pleasure gardens that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries routinely presented ballet spectacles and entertainments. The sixth is that the historical record, as this has come down to us, is an accurate reflection of reality. In terms of women, this is tantamount to saying that the only ones who choreographed are those we know about.

As I have said, all these assumptions are problematical. Based on a highly selective reading of the past, they ascribe to it the practices and prejudices of the present, while accepting on faith ballet’s master narrative. This, in a nutshell, views the development of ballet genealogically, as a royal succession of choreographers of genius—Noverre, Perrot, Petipa, Fokine, Ashton, Balanchine. Because few ballets survive even the passage of a generation, such lineages are seductive, even if the order they invoke bears little resemblance to the messiness and contradictions of history. Above all, by viewing the ballet past as a succession of individuals of genius, this approach consigns most of ballet history to the dustbin. Yet it is here, in the now invisible crannies of the popular, the forgotten, and the second-rate, in the everyday chronicle of the ballet past as opposed to the selective chronicle of its most privileged institutions that women made dances. In these spaces, which even today remain largely undocumented, one finds the women choreographers of early twentieth-century French ballet.

I did not set out to unearth their forgotten history: it came to me unbidden, in newspapers, programs, books, and magazines—a history stumbled upon in search of something else. But there they were—women with names like Ariane Hugon, Jane Hugard, Mademoiselle Stichel, Madame Mariquita, Louise Virard, Adelina Gedda, Jeanne Chasles, Rita Papurello—turn-of-the-century ghosts, choreographers invisible to history although they had worked in the theater for years.

It is not my intention to offer a panorama of French women choreographers of this period. Nor is it my aim to make a case for the genius of any one individual. My goal, rather, is to situate these artists institutionally, suggest why certain venues welcomed their talents and others did not, and speculate on the reasons they vanished so completely from the historical record. I then turn to the women choreographers who emerged in the modernist heyday of the 1920s and 1930s. How did they differ from their predecessors? Under what new constraints did they labor? In what artistic contexts did they operate? Finally, and more broadly, what can we deduce about the institutional preconditions for female achievement as choreographers in ballet?

Although today her name is forgotten, in her time Madame Mariquita was among the busiest and most respected choreographers of Paris. Critics spoke of her “exquisite art”; one even dubbed her “the fairy of artistic choreography.” She had “imagination, talent, [and] taste,” wrote Cléo de Mérode, and a “sensitivity” that made dancers “adore” her. From 1898 to 1920, Mariquita was the ballet mistress of the Opéra-Comique, where she produced nearly thirty ballets and the dances in numerous operas. Her tenure at the city’s second opera house (where she succeeded Berthe Bernay, a former Opéra dancer and teacher at the Opéra school) climaxed a long career on the popular stage. Born near Algiers in the 1830s, she made her Paris debut in 1845 at the renowned Théâtre des Funambules, home of the mime Deburau. She danced at the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens, Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin, and Théâtre des Variétés; choreographed early ballets for the “Sktating de la rue Blanche,” a roller derby turned popular theater; served as ballet mistress of the Théâtre de la Gaîté-Lyrique and eventually the Folies-Bergère, which throughout the Belle Époque had a ballet troupe. Katti Lanner regarded her as a rival and closely monitored her doings from across the Channel. As Enrico Cecchetti observed, “Did Mdlle. Mariquita put on ‘Autour de Paris’ in the French capital, Katti Lanner was sure to put on ‘Round the Town’ in London.”

During her years at the Opéra-Comique, Mariquita still kept a foot in the popular theater. In 1900, for instance, she served as ballet mistress at the Palais de la Danse at the Universal Exposition. In 1908, she “arranged” the dances for La Belle au Bois Dormant (The Sleeping Beauty), a “féerie lyrique” in fourteen scenes with Sarah Bernhardt in the double travesty role of the Poet and the Prince. In 1912, she provided some of the choreography for the “galas” given by soloist Natalia Trouhanova at the Folies-Bergère. In 1919, at the Théâtre Vaudeville, she staged the first production of Debussy’s children’s ballet La Boîte à joujoux (The Toy Box), a work later produced by the Ballets Suédois. She even found time to produce the odd trifle for high society. Narkiss, a “story-ballet with singing,” was mounted in 1913 for the Casino in Deauville.

Madame Mariquita (she was never known otherwise) was the most prolific of the era’s women choreographers. When she died in 1922 close to the age of ninety, she could look back to a career spanning more than seven decades of professional activity—a remarkable feat in its own right. Despite its longevity, Mariquita’s career followed a pattern typical of many women choreographers. It unfolded in many different types of venues, included long stints in the popular theater as well as engagements at provincial opera houses, and in the subsidized sector, centered at the Opéra-Comique, not the Opéra.

Compared to the Palais Garnier, the Opéra-Comique was as a stepchild of
the French state. Its subsidy was substantially less than the Opéra’s, and its charter precluded the production of the grand historical operas that were considered the summit of lyric art and the exclusive domain of the Opéra. Although each institution had its own ballet company, only the Opéra had an affiliated school. (One was later started at the Opéra-Comique, but subsequently closed.) Its troupe was larger and better trained, and until well into the twentieth century its senior ballerina was an étoile of international standing, generally imported from Italy. Beginning in the late 1880s, many of the Opéra’s principal ballet masters were foreign as well: Joseph Hansen, who held the post from 1887 to 1907, was Belgian; Ivan Clustine, who served from 1911 to 1914, Russian; Nicola Guerra, who did two stints at the Opéra between 1917 and 1929, Italian. Although artistically and economically favored, the Opéra produced few ballets in the decades before the First World War—exactly seven in the years between 1900 and 1910 (one of which, Iavotte, had been created—by Madame Mariquita—elsewhere).9 At the Opéra-Comique, by comparison, twice as many ballets reached the stage in the same decade—all choreographed by Mariquita. In sheer numbers (if not in technical expertise and the possession of a traditional inherited repertory), it was the Opéra-Comique and not the more prestigious Opéra that was truly a showplace for French ballet. Indeed, by 1921, according to The Dancing Times, “good judges of dancing [were] mak[ing] pilgrimages from all parts of France” to savor the much—esteemed offerings at the Opéra-Comique, where ballet was “a speciality of the management.”10

These figures, however, do not fully reflect the dance activity at either of these theaters. Unlike its Italian counterpart, French opera of the second half of the nineteenth century retained the ballet scenes and divertissements that were a traditional feature of the genre. Practically every new French opera—and under their charters both the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique were compelled to produce a minimum number of new operas each season—had its requisite ballet or divertissement. Today, we tend to dismiss such efforts as “decorative” rather than “inventive” (to borrow Lincoln Kirstein’s distinction between the different levels of creation in choreography).11 This was not the view of earlier generations. For dancers and audiences alike, these ballets were an integral part of the repertory; the entire company took part in them, and they were judged by the same yardstick as independent dance works. (Indeed, in 1947, Léandre Vailalt followed up his book on the Opéra’s ballets with a volume on the ballets performed in operas.)12 Although neither the Opéra nor the Opéra-Comique offered full evenings of dance before the 1920s, full-length ballets—or, at least, works that today we would consider full—length—shared programs with operas. At the Opéra, astonishing as it now seems, Coppélia might be paired with Rigoletto, Salomé with Les Deux Pigeons. And it was not uncommon to follow a long evening of opera with a one-act ballet for a visiting star.13

Hence, for choreographers attached to opera houses in this period, staging dances for operas claimed as much if not more of their time than producing ballets. Mariquita seems to have been an exception to this general rule; at the Opéra-Comique the list of her ballets is longer than that of her operas. But for her colleagues, men as well as women, operas tended to predominate. The post of ballet master or ballet mistress was thus inseparable from the artistic identity of the institution to which he or she was attached. Originality was not a goal, as it would be for the choreographers of the Ballets Russes, so much as serving the repertory with skill, adaptability, and resourcefulness. Mariquita staged an amazing variety of dances during her years at the Opéra-Comique—Greek, Russian, “Hindu,” Spanish, Egyptian, “French” (meaning dances in eighteenth—century style), classical, romantic—whatever the repertory needed. Although her choreography routinely was singled out for its spatial and rhythmic variety, and for “repudiating” the tutu (Cléo de Mérode’s word) in favor of period costuming,14 it was job work tailored to the task at hand rather than the expression of a personal style or vision.

In today’s parlance, Mariquita was a company “man.” As a ballet mistress, she taught as well as choreographed, functions that were regarded as virtually inseparable. At the Opéra-Comique, she was responsible for training the corps de ballet, proving herself, as Cyril W. Beaumont wrote, “an admirable teacher.”15 This involvement in an institution’s day—to-day life was typical of pre—Diaghilev choreographers, men as well as women. Women, however, tended to work at less prestigious institutions than men; they also tended to be concentrated in the popular theater. This was true even of women who began their careers—as several did—on the stage of the Opéra and served their apprenticeship as ballet mistresses at provincial theaters.

Mlle. Stichel (as she was always known, although her real name was Louise Manzini)16 first came to my attention when I was going through a stack of programs for the Théâtre du Châtelet in the years just before the appearance of the Ballets Russes. The theater was famous for its “féeries,” huge evening-long extravaganzas that hung on a wisp of a plot and featured dozens of spectacular decors, hundreds of performers, and an array of dances. Stichel, who had made her debut at the Opéra as a petit sujet in 1881,17 served as ballet mistress at the Théâtre de Monte Carlo in 1891—1892, and staged the ballet Phryné at the Casino de Royen in 1896,18 choreographed a number of these productions, including La Princesse sans-gêne (1907), Pif! Paf! Pout! ou un Voyage endiablé (1906?); Tom Pitt, le Roi des Pickpockets (1905), and Les 400 Coups du Diable (1905). Although she was not the only woman to choreograph such fare at the Châtelet (La Petite Caporalet [1909]), for instance, was by Adelina Gedda, a sometime ballet mistress at Rouen’s Théâtre des Arts19 and a long-time ballet mistress at the Théâtre de Monte Carlo), Stichel’s work must have been exceptional, for in 1910 the Opéra appointed her to the post of ballet mistress. Her tenure lasted only a year, long enough, however, for her to choreograph La Fête chez Thérèse, a ballet to music by Reynaldo Hahn (who would soon compose Diaghilev’s Le Dieu Bleu), and the dances for several operas including La Damné-
tion de Faust and Salomé. Her contribution to La Fête chez Thérèse received high marks from the playwright Fernand Nozière, who reviewed the première in Le Théâtre: “Madame Stichel, the new ballet mistress, has abandoned conventional groupings. She has made the dancers more natural, given them more life. The workers move freely. The guests come and go with fluidity. We no longer see lines of soldiers at drill. This is a great advance.”

After leaving the Opéra, Stichel did some choreography for recitalist Natalia Trouhanova. What she did until 1921 I have yet to discover. In that year, however, she was busy at work, choreographing the ballet in Boccaccio, a light opera produced at the Gaîté-Lyrique, some dance songs for the Gaumont-Palace cinema, and three works for the Opéra-Comique, where she occupied the post of ballet mistress from 1923 until 1925. During this time, she worked steadily at the Gaîté-Lyrique, supplying dances for the operettas that were now its standard fare. She produced her last ballets at the Casino de Nice in 1932–1933.

Another woman who occupied the post of ballet mistress at the Opéra-Comique in the 1920s was Jeanne Chasles. A former dancer at both the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique, she too, did her earliest choreography outside the subsidized theaters where she also occasionally performed. In 1910, she contributed the “magnificently arranged” dances to the opera Quo Vadis? produced at the Gaîté-Lyrique; in 1913, the dances to Faure’s opera Pénélope, which opened at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées only days before Le Sacre du Printemps. During the same period, she also choreographed a ballet for Jacques Rouché’s innovative Théâtre des Arts, as did Jane Hugard, who staged the dances for Ravel’s Ma Mère l’Oye. As a choreographer, Chasles displayed an unusual interest in the dance past. Her ballet for the Théâtre des Arts was to music by Lulli for Molière’s play Le Sixiéme. In 1923, for a charity event, she arranged a Renaissance “divertissement” to fifteenth-century music by Charles Lévéda; two years later, for a revival at the Opéra-Comique, the dances in the third “entrée” of Rameau’s Les Fêtes galantes, an effort that won praise no less than gratitude from critic André Levinson. Such undertakings were of a piece with the remarkable collection of dance-related documents and engravings that Chasles had amassed in the years before World War I.

In 1920, when Mariquita retired as ballet mistress of the Opéra-Comique, Chasles took her place. Although she continued to choreograph for the theater until 1923, she vacated the post after three years, when it went to Stichel. In 1925, Louise Virard became ballet mistress, remaining until 1932, when Carina Ari, a former star with the Ballets Suédois, assumed the post for a year. Finally, in 1933, it went to Constantin Tcherkas, a former Diaghilev star. With his appointment, the era of women choreographers at the Opéra-Comique came to an end.

Although the upper echelons of late nineteenth-century ballet continued to be dominated by men, the role of women was far from negligible. Even at institutions like the Opéra, they held important positions as teachers. Rosita Mauri, for instance, conducted the Opéra’s “class of perfection” from 1898 to 1920, while Berthe Bernay, who wrote extensively about ballet technique, taught the first and second quadrille—equivalent to the corps de ballet—for most of the same period. Like the others who labored in the company’s studios, they upheld the traditions of the house and a style that with the advent of the Ballets Russes became synonymous with the “decline” of French ballet.

The influence of the Ballets Russes and the “free” dance of the period dealt a heavy blow to choreographers identified with the “old” ballet. Initially, however, these currents favored women, especially at the Paris Opéra, which in the years immediately after the First World War actively promoted female talent. Without exception, however, the new choreographers hailed from the Opéra’s eurhythmic section, established by Jacques Rouché in 1917. Today, Rachel Pasmanik, Jessmin Howarth, Jane Erb, Clara Brook, Yvonne Franck, and Alice Bourgat are as forgotten as their female contemporaries at the Opéra-Comique. Yet, for nearly a decade and over the bitter opposition of ballet traditionalists, they challenged the prevailing sexism of the Opéra. After the section was abolished in 1925, Bronislava Nijinska briefly joined the choreographic roster. Her tenure, which was not a success, ended two years later with Impressions de Musichall, in which, to the consternation of traditionalists, ballerina Carlotta Zambelli danced a Charleston. However, as occurred at the Opéra-Comique in the early 1930s, it was the appointment of a Ballets Russes star—in this case, Sergei Lifar—that reinvigorated the ideology of sexism by identifying the creative principle in ballet with the male choreographer.

Although Nijinska was herself a veteran of the Ballets Russes, she was the only woman among Diaghilev’s choreographers, a group that included not only Michel Fokine, her brother Vaslav Nijinsky, Léonide Massine, and George Balanchine, the company’s major choreographers, but also Boris Romanov, Adolph Bolm, Thadée Slavinsky, and Sergei Lifar, its minor ones. Diaghilev certainly respected Nijinska’s talent; he regarded her sex, however, as a liability, a sign of the incompleteness that was the fate of the woman artist. “What a choreographer Bronia would have been,” he was fond of saying, “if only she were a man!”

However, sexism alone does not explain the “remasculinization” of choreography during the Diaghilev period. With the Ballets Russes, the dancemaking art was assimilated into a new ballet star system, one that centered predominantly on men. From this pool of company-made stars, Diaghilev molded a new breed of choreographer, a diva whose glamour, commodity value, and specialized, expert skills commanded power in the marketplace regardless of institutional affiliation. The emergence of this new “high-profile” choreographer brought the era of the choreographic traditionalist to an end. And because the pool created by Diaghilev was almost exclusively male, a phenomenon that should have been propitious to the promotion of women as choreographers ended up excluding them more completely than ever.

However, it was not only as choreographers that women were eclipsed. The male-centered aesthetic of the Ballets Russes explicitly challenged the identifi-
cation of nineteenth-century ballet with femininity. The male body—especially the androgynous or gay male body—became the norm, and in ballet after ballet it dominated the stage, physically as well as dramatically. Just as modern painting self-consciously defined itself as “masculine” as opposed to the “feminine” culture of symbolism, so modern ballet jettisoned the cult of the eternal “feminine” born with romanticism.

The “ballet girl” occupies a special niche in late nineteenth-century French art—an image of charm, innocence, and carefree désâble, wispy, floating tarlatans, and pervasive eroticism. Although women in tarlatans (which were de rigueur throughout the 1920s) continued to labor in the Opéra’s studios, the gaze that had permeated this world with male desire turned elsewhere. With Diaghilev’s sexual revolution and the appearance of large numbers of homosexual men in the audience, the object of male desire ceased to be the female body; it became instead the newly eroticized body of the danseur. This shift—which for obvious reasons could never be fully explicit—complicated the representation of the feminine, at times idealizing it, at others investing it with danger or neutralizing it. In the contesting of femininity the female body became something akin to a theater of war.

Although French institutions may have closed their doors to women in the post-Diaghilev period, the late 1920s and 1930s witnessed the emergence of several female choreographers in England. For the most part, they found their voices outside elite institutions—a point of similarity with their earlier French counterparts—at a time when the English dance world was in a state of flux. Although for decades, London had boasted two resident ballet companies, both were attached to music halls. No “high art” institution existed for ballet, and the academies that offered classical training typically channeled their students into pantomimes and other forms of popular entertainment in venues where many teachers doubled as ballet masters.

The initial seasons of the Ballets Russes did not significantly alter this paradigm, although it prompted a wave of Russian dancers—including the immensely popular Anna Pavlova—to accept highly lucrative engagements at London’s leading music halls. But with the return of the company after the First World War, when it was taken up by intellectuals of all stripes and acquired a broad popular following, dancers, teachers, and critics began to call for the organization of an indigenous “British ballet.” By this was meant a company on the Diaghilev model, a “high art” enterprise that not only brought together the best British talents, but also represented a modernist aesthetic. During the 1920s, various attempts were made to put this into practice. But it was only in the vacuum created by Diaghilev’s death in 1929 that these efforts began to bear fruit.

Like modern dance, “British ballet” was largely a creation of women. The story of Ninette de Valois and the founding of the Vic-Wells company, fore-runner of today’s Royal Ballet, has often been told; so, too, has that of Marie Rambert and the Ballet Club, which later became Ballet Rambert. From these crucibles of modern British ballet emerged the dancers, choreographers, designers, and musical directors of its glory years, along with the body of works that defined the phenomenon stylistically. Of the two, de Valois was the institution builder; Rambert the gleaner and nurturer of talent; among her many “finds” were Frederick Ashton and Antony Tudor. Both women had worked briefly with the Ballets Russes—Rambert in the years just before the First World War, de Valois in the early 1920s—and been deeply marked by the experience. However, it was only after leaving the company that their organizational and mentoring gifts were revealed.

Although they made their greatest mark elsewhere, de Valois and Rambert were also choreographers. Initially, their efforts stemmed from their personal needs as performers. De Valois, for instance, created material for her early recital programs, her performances with the Lila Field company, her opera ballet appearances at Covent Garden, and all the numbers for her short-lived touring group.38 Rambert, for her part, created most of the dances she performed as a recitalist. By the late 1920s, however, with mentoring claiming the greater part of her energies, Rambert largely abandoned choreography. De Valois, by contrast, invigorated by her exposure to the Ballets Russes and especially Nijinska’s path-breaking works, now entered an intensely creative phase. Working principally with groups, she experimented with a form of expressive movement that was indebted to modernism, while remaining anchored to the technical foundation of the danse d’école.

Although, as teachers, both women adopted the Russo-Italian method of Enrico Cecchetti, with whom they had studied, their background embraced far more than ballet. Rambert had trained in eurhythmics at Hellerau, where she worked with Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, while de Valois, after an early exposure to “Greek” dancing, absorbed elements of eurhythmics and the gestural vocabulary associated with Central European dance. For both women, as for Nijinska during her formative years as a choreographer in post-revolutionary Russia, contact with “modern” forms of movement seems to have been the catalyst prompting them to choreograph. Not only were such forms dominated by women, but they were also forms that set a premium on dance-making. Anyone could try a hand at it, and in the marginalized spaces of amateur, semi-professional, and avant-garde performance, many did. Even if the results were unsuccessful, they revealed what Diaghilev knew from experience, that given a modicum of talent, choreography was a skill that could be learned.

Although neither de Valois nor Rambert became a choreographer of the first rank, choreography figured prominently in their vision of modern ballet. This, as Beth Genné has pointed out, was strikingly demonstrated in the name that de Valois chose for her school—The Academy of Choreographic Art. Although “operatic dancing,” as ballet was generally known in England, was the basis of the curriculum, her goal was to make this serve the practice of modern choreo-
oography, not the style "of the eighties" espoused by classical teachers of the old school.

Ironically, given her admiration for Nijinska and her own professional career, de Valois did little to foster choreographic talent in women. Rambert, by contrast, nurtured the careers of two major women choreographers, André Howard and Agnes de Mille, who worked with her during extended visits to London in the 1930s. Indeed, de Mille's experiments with the women of Rambert's company—a choreographic seedbed analogous in function to modern dance groups in America—provided much of the material for her all-important works of the 1940s. Designer Sophie Fedorovitch was another remarkable woman discovered and nurtured by Rambert, who teamed her with Ashton in what proved the start of a long and close collaboration. Albeit on a smaller scale, "Mim" did for women in ballet what Diaghilev had done for men.

Rambert and de Valois profited not only from the vacuum created by the demise of the Ballets Russes, but also from the crisis provoked in the London dance world by the demise of music hall ballet. In Paris, a similar phenomenon, played out on both the subsidized and popular stages, had pushed women choreographers aside. In London, because of the institutional void, the passing of the old guard represented an opportunity that women such as Rambert and de Valois could seize.

The organizations they mothered were fragile and unfunded, positioned—in the case of Rambert's company—on the fringe of the avant-garde or—in the case of de Valois—within the embrace of the repertory theater movement. Like Nijinska's short-lived companies of the 1920s and 1930s, they existed on a pitance and played for the most part to the converted. In nearly every way, they more closely resembled American modern dance groups of the 1930s than traditional ballet companies. This would tend to suggest that the presence or absence of women as choreographers and artistic directors has more to do with resources, social practices, and institutional clout than the use of a particular movement idiom. Indeed, once Rambert and de Valois retired, the companies they founded—which by then had grown into powerful, subsidized institutions—passed into the hands of men. (A similar change took place in the directorship of the Martha Graham Company after its founder's death and in that of American Ballet Theatre after Lucia Chase's retirement.)

In ballet—as in all fields of human endeavor—power is closely tied to gender. Although women have always choreographed, in the nineteenth century they were seldom entrusted with entire productions: indeed, because their choreography usually took the form of isolated dances within a larger work (dances, moreover, that they themselves often performed), their contribution rarely was acknowledged. At the same time, those productions that were entrusted to them tended to exist in less prestigious contexts, often in conjunction with popular entertainment. Finally, as choreographers, women typically were associated with theaters that had little or no interest in choreographic innovation. Viewed by the 1920s as the perpetuators of discredited "house" styles, these women disappeared in the wake of the Ballets Russes and changes in popular entertainment. The rewriting of twentieth-century ballet history that began in the post-Diaghilev period completed the process. In beginning their chronicle of ballet in Monte Carlo in 1911, the year of Diaghilev's first residency there, Georges Detaille and Gérard Mulys necessarily eliminated the various women who had earlier served as ballet mistresses. In this category was Adelina Gedda, who occupied the post for no fewer than eight seasons between 1889 and 1904.

In the post–World War I period, women choreographers emerged in spaces that were either female dominated or allied with movements associated with the intelligentsia or the avant-garde. Typically, these spaces were created by the choreographers themselves; typically, too, they began as makeshift arrangements, growing out of the classes that provided dancers for the group and helped pay its bills. The vast majority of the nearly three hundred ballet companies that exist in the United States today reveal a similar pattern. Not only are they extensions of schools, they are also for the most part headed by women, who often double as choreographers. The chief difference between these companies and those of the 1920s and 1930s is artistic. Where Nijinska or de Valois viewed technique as serving choreography, their descendants typically view choreography as serving technique. As ballet traditionalists, they are closer to the French choreographers I have discussed than to the modernists who followed.

The most important lesson to be gleaned from this is that our narratives of women's practice in ballet prior to the modern period are both partial and incomplete. Indeed, apart from the ballerinas who achieved renown on the most prestigious stages of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we know next to nothing about the subject. Men, to be sure, dominated the very top of the profession. Under them, however, as teachers, ballet mistresses, and, yes, even choreographers, labored women—numerous women. The recovery of their history and that of the institutions and practices they served is crucial to the task of reimagining the ballet past.

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6. For the list of her productions at the Opéra-Comique, see Stéphane Wolff, Une Demi-siècle d'Opéra-Comique (1900-1950) (Paris: André Bonne, 1953).

9. Mariquita created Javotte in 1896 for the Grand Théâtre in Lyon and remounted it three years later at the Opéra-Comique. The Opéra version, which entered the repertoire in 1909, was choreographed by Léo Staats.


13. Thus, in June 1907 at the Opéra-Comique, Vera Trefilova and Nicolas Legat went on after a performance of Carmen, while in May 1909 at the Opéra, those who survived the five-act Monna Vanna could see Olga Preobrazjenska in Javotte. "Courrier des Théâtres," Figaro, 4 June 1907, p. 4; 23 May 1909, p. 5. Elsewhere, as Ann Barzel documents in her fascinating article on the career of Elizabella Menzeli, who "arranged" the dances for the world premiere of Aida in Cairo, dancers often appeared between the acts or in interpolated divertissements in operas lacking ballets. Like Thérèse Eissler, Elizabella was the taller and stronger of two sisters, and often appeared in the male role, en travestis, opposite the lighter Elena. Both Thérèse and Elizabella choreographed the material they danced with their sisters. Given the popularity of sister acts, which allowed women the freedom to perform—and tour—without the encumbrance of a male relative, further investigation is likely to reveal the existence of many heretofore unknown women choreographers. See Ann Barzel, "Elizabella Menzeli," Dance Chronicle, 19, no. 3 (1996), pp. 278-281.

16. I am grateful to Jane Pritchard for this information.
18. Mérode, Le Ballet de ma vie, p. 144. "Madame Stichel," the dancer later wrote, "the well-known ballet mistress, arranged our ensembles and our solos with her usual precision and in a style as Greek as could be imagined."

23. In 1923, for instance, she choreographed "Le Ballet de deux coqs" in Louis Urgel's opérette Amour de Princesse; in 1925, the "grand ballet" in Félix FOURDRAIN's opérette La Husardine.
24. I am grateful to Jane Pritchard for this information.
25. According to Stéphane Wolff, Chasles made her debut at the Opéra as a petit sujet in 1888 and danced principal roles at the Opéra-Comique from 1899 to 1910 (L'Opéra au Palais Garnier, p. 530; Un Demi-siècle d'Opéra-Comique, p. 327).
26. In 1897, for instance, she danced a principal role in the fourth-act "grand ballet" of Mam'zelle Quat'sous, an "opéra-comique à spectacle" produced at the Théâtre de la Gaité. The choreography was by Mariquita ("Courrier des Théâtres," Figaro, 5 November 1897, p. 4.)
29. The ballet, to music by Lulli, was in Molière's Le Sicilien, ou l'amour peintre. Francis de Miomandre, "Théâtre des Arts," Le Théâtre, December 1910, II, pp. 24-25.
30. A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews, ed. Arbie Orenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 129-130. At this time, Hugard may have been a dancer at the Opéra; in 1932, she was definitely on the payroll, although presumably as a teacher or a régisseur. A fluent writer, she contributed an essay on the Opéra, "Du Ballet classique," to the volume Les Spectacles à travers les ages: musique, danse (Paris: Editions du Cygne, 1932), pp. 193-212, and the preface to Gaspard Maillo's album of woodcuts of Opéra dancers, Danseuses (Paris: Le Presse à Bras, 1932). She is identified in the Maillo album as "Jane Hugard de l'Opéra."
34. Bernay's books are La Danse au Théâtre, pref. Gustave Goetschy (Paris: E. Dentu, 1890), and Théorie de l'art de la danse (Paris: Garnier, 1902). She also wrote the concluding chapter on technique in Raoul Carbonnel's La Danse: Comment on dansait, commun on danse (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1900), and the entry "La Danse" in Encyclopédie de la musique et dictionnaire du conservatoire, 5 (1930), pp. 3411-3435. She began to teach at the Opéra in 1890s and remained in its employ at least until 1914. Her 1907 to 1914 contracts with the Opéra are in AJ13/1214, Archives Nationales (Paris).
35. See, for instance, the chapter "Décadence et renaissance" in Boris Kochno's Le Ballet, Where Are Ballet's Women Choreographers? 227


37. Although Ruth Page does not figure in the following discussion since she worked exclusively in the United States, her development as a choreographer reveals many of the same patterns as British women choreographers of the period.

38. I am grateful to Beth Genné for this information.