Therein lay the effectiveness of her performance and the reason it could not be successfully imitated.

Maud’s debut performance of *The Vision of Salome* took place on December 26, 1906, before an invited audience. Two other dancers, much younger than the thirty-three-year-old Maud, were also performing – for the first time – in Vienna. Ruth St. Denis, one of the most important figures in the evolution of modern dance, was appearing at the Ronach Theatre. (Some thirty-five years later she and Maud would be working in the same California aircraft factory, Maud as a draughtsman, St. Denis as a riveter.) The other dancer was destined for a shorter career, greater notoriety, and a more unpleasant end: Mata Hari, executed in 1917 (unjustly, according to some modern biographers) as a spy by the French government of “Tiger” Georges Clemenceau.

The reviewer of the *Illustreites Wiener Extrablatt* summarized *The Vision of Salome* as “a few interesting movements by the extremely talented Miss Allan.” Predicting that her “honest attempt to invent a new dance is bound to fail,” the reviewer nevertheless added, “Why should this be of any concern to the directors of variety shows?” His point was valid enough, for it was at the Palace, London’s leading variety theatre, that Maud had her enormous success.

Ten days earlier, this newspaper had reported that at a dress rehearsal “this beautiful dancer, allegedly a native of San Francisco, had caused concern due to her piquant lack of costume.” At the demand of an unnamed princess deeply committed to supporting the Court Opera and as deeply offended by Maud’s perceived nudity, a second rehearsal was held, attended by Court Opera director Mahler and senior members of his staff. This time, the newspaper reported, “Maud Allan’s body was covered by more veils while she danced *The Vision of Salome*, to the accompaniment of [Remy’s] authentic Arabian music.” The controversy no doubt provided good publicity.

Maud’s next engagement, at the Király Theatre, Budapest, indicates the response *The Vision of Salome* could gen-
erate from a public audience. On January 4, 1907, she was a guest artist in *The Sho Gun*, which had been a Broadway success. During the second act she performed several dances and an excerpt from *The Vision*. She was apparently an overnight sensation, for her engagement was extended to three weeks. According to newspaper accounts she was also invited to perform “Greek” dances to the music of Chopin and Rubinstein at private evening parties.

The day after her debut in Budapest, Maud and her local agent, M. Szydow, were interviewed by a journalist from the *Magyar Szinpad*. On entering her hotel room, the journalist was struck by Maud’s grace: “She walks towards me with marvelously rhythmic steps; her walk is beautiful, her upper body follows her every step with exciting movement.” Szydow took over the interview, for Maud was exhausted. Only at the end did she speak of her studies and her admiration for Wilde’s *Salome*. Finally, she gave her account (not necessarily accurate) of what had happened in Vienna:

We were called in by Mahler. At the rehearsal he was delighted. Everyone who saw it was conquered. Then the police brought up some moral questions. They said my dance was immodest. I invited the members of the city council and performed the dance for them. They were in awe and congratulated me after the dance. Nevertheless they decided I had to wear a leotard. Never! I chose rather to leave. I do not make compromises. No! Never! I signed a contract with the Carl Theatre [Vienna]. Then I received an offer from Laszlo Beothy. It appealed to me but was difficult. The Kiraly Theatre [of which Beothy was owner/manager] had to pay a lot of money for me. We shall see if it is worthwhile for Beothy. My feeling is that they will appreciate me here.

Later in the week the same journalist interviewed eleven members of the Budapest theatrical community and published their views on the “naked dancer.” Opinion was sufficiently mixed to allow Maud to defend her stage cos-
tume in a letter to a newspaper, a letter clearly designed both to attract publicity and to serve as a credo. “The dancer’s body,” she argued, “is her instrument, the raw material, just as the violin is to the violinist, and clay is to the sculptor. Is it really possible to cover up this raw material when it is precisely this that brings about the desired artistic effect?”

Controversy over her state of undress was not the only result of her debut recital in Budapest. Six months later, on June 30, 1907, the Herald of Augusta, Georgia, printed a story (the last paragraphs of which, continued on another page, are missing from the newspaper’s records) titled “The American Girl Who Danced Salome With a Real Head.” Although the tale has all the markings of a press agent’s invention, there is no question that the more credible part of the tale took place and a real possibility that melodrama also occurred. The credible incident was reported in a Budapest daily, and is noted in Maud’s personal Jottings made in the late 1930s (“Budapest: I dance in a lions’ cage”). It was vividly related to close friends in 1945, when Maud demonstrated how she had “hypnotized” the lions by the skilful use of her marvellously expressive hands.

The Augusta Herald story ran as follows: prominent among the leaders of the high-living nobles of Hungary was a certain Count Géza Zichy, scion of one of Hungary’s most powerful families. His shibboleth, as the Herald put it, was courage. During a dinner given in Maud’s honour, the conversation “turned to the manifold virtues of courage and its multitudinous manifestations.”

“It takes tremendous courage,” said Miss Allan.
“What does?” chorused the nobles.
“Why – to come out on the stage before hundreds with feet bare, with shoulders bare, with little dress,” she said.
“Ha, ha, ha,” laughed Count Zichy.
“It does indeed,” said the little dancer earnestly. “Every time I appear, until the spirit gets into me, it is as though I were about to undergo martyrdom. Don’t you think that is
courage— to fight down and go out and face the thing you
dread?"

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed the Count again, thinking doubt-
less of boar hunts and duels and other blood curdling spe-
cialties.

"Hundreds peering at you from the darkened house," said
the dancer. "Eyes of men, eyes of women. In how many are
there other lights of contempt— of desire? Each time I dance
I think of it and I dread it."

"What you call in America brag," said the Count. He
was not in a very good mood tonight.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed the Count unpleasantly. "You would
think you had the courage to dance in a den of lions. Pouf!"
Miss Allan thought for a moment, while the nobles
laughed with the Count.

"How much will you bet?" she said suddenly.

"That you won't dance in a den of lions? Ten thousand
Marks," replied the Count.

"Done!" said Miss Allan.

The upshot was that Maud, "robed as Primavera" (pres-
sumably a reference to Botticelli's Birth of Spring, which,
Maud always maintained, first inspired her art), arrived at
the appointed time and, in front of Count Zichy and his
cronies, entered and immediately began to dance in the
lions' cage. Shortly thereafter entered "two little cubs,
gambling and playing like a pair of kittens. . . . There
was a perfect cyclone of laughter from the crowd. Count Zichy
was mad all over. It was a fraud, a Yankee trick. He would
not pay." But he did pay in the end, so the story goes, and
Maud turned over the 10,000 marks to the hospital. So much
for known fact.13

To obtain his revenge, Count Zichy invited Maud to give
a private performance of The Vision of Salome in the hall of
one of Budapest's great palaces. Towards the end of the
performance, reported the Herald,

to Maud Allan, swaying like a passion flower in the last
steps of the Seven veils, a giant negro brought upon a great
salver Johaan. Her eyes half closed, the dancer raised by its dank hair the ghastly prize of Herodias' daughter. She leaned towards its lips. Gently the severed head touched her wrists, and there shot through her a terrible tremor, a shivering of the soul. Upon her white flesh were the stains, dark crimson clots. It was blood. Her body rigid as though carved in marble, the dancer slowly forced her eyes to the face she held aloft. It was the face of a man not long since dead. As one from whom life passes very quickly, she crumpled to the floor. From her hands dropped the head. It rolled upon her breast and fell beside her, leaving upon her white body a crimson trail. So was the dancer Maud Allan taught that it is not well to jest with a Noble of Hungary.

Zichy may have devised the scheme as an original if cruel prank, but circumstantial evidence suggests another, more sinister, possibility. Twelve years earlier, the *New York Times* of December 26, 1895, had reported that Count Géza Zichy was quietly married in New York's St. Stephen's Roman Catholic Church. "Count and Countess Zichy drove to the Windsor Hotel, where the latter has been living since she returned here from South Dakota."14 Blanche Lamont was from Dillon, in the neighbouring state of Montana, which she left only a few weeks before she was murdered by Theo in April 1895. The following November, Theo had been found guilty of her murder. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the new Countess Zichy was familiar with the "Crime of a Century" proceedings, which were reported throughout the United States, and she recognized Maud Allan as Theo's sister. If she resented her husband's interest in Maud, what more diabolically horrifying means of terminating a liaison, real or imagined, than to confront Maud Allan with the most intense of her private feelings?

In April, Maud travelled to Munich for an engagement to include *The Vision of Salome*. However, the Munich Men's Club for the Fight Against Public Immorality got wind of its controversial nature and successfully persuaded city authorities to ban her performance. With the active support
of the artistic community, led by two prominent painters of the day — both of whom did at least one portrait of Maud as Salome — a “libel action” was launched against the club. The result of the action is unclear — other than that Maud was well publicized, and the whole imbroglio inspired a piece of doggerel titled “Something New About Salome” published, on April 22, 1907, in the München Neuest Nachrichten.

Later in the month Maud went ahead with her scheduled recital — without Salome and without the success she sought. “First of all,” reported the Berliner Tageblatt, which had covered the affair in a series of brief despatches, “she did penance for her Salome sins by presenting Schubert’s Ave Maria. Other pious dances followed” before a sparsely filled house.

On May 7, Maud joined the program of Le Théâtre des Variétés in Paris. Her debut in Paris was deliberately timed to coincide with the Paris premiere of Richard Strauss’s opera Salome. The Strauss work, conducted by the composer, caused real excitement; Maud’s debut attracted favourable attention without reference to Isadora Duncan. The critic of Le Figaro, for example, praised her grace, her mime, her dramatic feeling, her modesty. Maud was on the threshold of conquest.

Following this encouraging engagement, she toured France as a member of Loie Fuller’s troupe; but, according to her Jottings, she had business problems (“the manager who tried to frighten me into a contract; I return — broke — to the Berlin of my student days”). In her autobiography she writes at some length but not specifically of her bitter experiences with her early managers; she omits any reference to her humiliating return to Berlin. Maud does not write directly of her association with Loie Fuller, who had done her an unidentified good turn a few years earlier, though in a paragraph of cunning charm she very thinly disguises a reference to Fuller and a companion — probably Gabrielle Bloch, her lover, or Mary Bran, a concert agent, a proud and unabashed lesbian: