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Theatrical Texts and Contexts: Poe and Hawthorne's Fictional Women

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

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Edgar Allen Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne are arguably two of the most highly read and heavily debated nineteenth-century antebellum authors in America. Their writings fascinate readers, while their character depictions, particularly their characterizations of fictional women, prompt intense academic debate. This thesis examines the previously less-studied historical developments surrounding Poe and Hawthorne in the antebellum era that shaped their approach to writing fiction. In particular, this study scrutinizes the effects of the development of a newly popular art form, ballet, the ascendancy of female authorship, and the impact of American theatrical reform upon antebellum authors' authorial faculties, especially Hawthorne and Poe.

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The Beginnings: Female Authorship, Theater Reform, and Fanny Elssler

On January 19, 1855, Nathaniel Hawthorne, referring specifically to Maria Susanna Cummin's lucrative sentimental novel *The Lamplighter* and more generally to the proliferation of successful female authors in antebellum America, infamously lamented to his publisher William Ticknor that, "America is now wholly given over to a d----d mob of scribbling women ... What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of the *Lamplighter*, and other books neither better or worse?"¹ Hawthorne's dismay at the growing recognition of women in the literary arena signals the increased threat that these female competitors posed to their male counterparts in the literary field. No longer did male writers dominate the market. Instead, men and women alike competed for readership from the American public, a circumstance made possible, surprisingly, for women by the beliefs disseminated by the cult of domesticity. This ideology, propagated in the early to mid-1800s, declared that women were "naturally designed for the home and the private sphere" and "women who felt legally restrained were unnatural." By mid-century, society had raised the female image of virtuous womanhood into a "national model."² Furthermore, this domestic ideology now made it socially acceptable for women to pursue a literary career as long as both they and their fictional female characters embodied a "radiant, nun-like innocence, which aided men in retaining self-control by transmuting their lust into reverent admiration."³ These ideals of domestic purity so infiltrated the literary market that male authors would likely have been impressed with or aware of the notion that they had little chance of comparable success unless they made efforts to conform to the dictates of middle-class moralism. Historian and literary critic David S. Reynolds argues that preeminent authors would have been acutely

1 Hawthorne, *Letters of Hawthorne to William D. Ticknor, 1851-186*, Vol. 1, 75.

2 Baym, "Portrayal of Women in American literature, 1790-1870," 213.

3 Herbert, "Hawthorne and American Masculinity," 70.

conscious of what he terms the era's "conflicting reform impulses," with some writers like Hawthorne interested not so much in the doctrine of reform culture itself but in exploring the ambiguities and paradoxes inherent in efforts promoting moral edification. Reynolds claims that the "moral dimension of Hawthorne's fiction has long been recognized but not fully interpreted in the context of its times." He further contends that along with considering reform literature, Hawthorne unearthed fodder for his "literary themes and devices in his contemporary popular culture."⁴ Reynolds additionally notes that Hawthorne's literary contemporary Edgar Allan Poe was quite aware of and immersed in antebellum popular culture and society. Reynolds declares that, "Poe was very much a product of nineteenth-century Americanism in all its complexity ... Of all our major writers, Poe was the most obviously engaged in popular culture."⁵ Evidentially, Poe and Hawthorne were informed of the cultural developments in their time, especially such largely female cultural products as periodicals like *Godey's Lady's Book*, women theatrical performers, and reform and temperance literature. Considering the breadth of existing scholarship analyzing the socio-cultural forces impelling the authors of this era, one must take into account not only the more apparent ideological and cultural changes of antebellum America but also examine previously unconsidered and unexplored developments that would have swayed the way that male writers chose to craft their fiction. This thesis posits that Poe and Hawthorne's immersion into popular culture and their knowledge of American audiences and readers' increasing visually consumptive proclivities and spectatorial appetites shaped these two authors manner of writing of about women, a manner that to this day presents a divisive yet intriguing subject of analysis. Furthermore, this study analyzes the differing methods and extent to which

4 Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 113-115.

5 Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 43.

Hawthorne and Poe, through their literature, both appealed to their audiences and engender intense scholarly discussion to this day.

While most previous scholars only tangentially examine the influence of new, highly popular theatrical phenomena in America upon American authors' literature, this thesis scrutinizes how the advent of the highly publicized art form, ballet, altered the literature produced in the antebellum era. This same epoch, creating new opportunities for female writers while promoting the image of the virtuous woman, also witnessed the advent of this largely female and entirely physical art form to America, embodied by Fanny Elssler, the wildly famous Viennese ballerina. While ballet was a not an alien phenomenon before Elssler's arrival, it was significantly different from the kind of ballet that Elssler introduced. Before 1840 when Elssler began her tour of the United States, ballet amounted to either a light pantomime supplemental to or incidental within a play, or a showy, acrobatic display of agility as part of a larger circus act. Writing about Philadelphia's Olympic theater in 1816, historian Glenn Hughes notes the "dazzling array of equestrian acts, ballets, and pantomimes" that nevertheless paled in comparison to the debut of famed actor Edwin Forrest, whose appeal derived from his powerful, hyper-masculine style of acting in tragedies.⁶ Antebellum actor and theater manager Noah Ludlow, in his vast account of theatrical developments in the nineteenth-century, wrote of a number of dancers who performed in America before Elssler's arrival. Noting French dancer Madame Celeste's 1827 debut in the Bowery Theatre, he characterized her as a "great danseuse and pantomimist," with the latter term referring to a silent, melodramatic form of acting typically set to music. According to Ludlow, she added much-needed "variety to her performances [by playing] pantomic melodrama."⁷ Such magazines as *Godey's Lady's Book* make mention of

6 Hughes, *A History of the American Theatre*, 114-115.

7 Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It*, 513.

ballet as well, for example in a story titled “Nice People” contained in an 1836 issue. However, ballet is only incidental within the larger narrative of a young man navigating the immoral environs of the Opera house. The fictional speaker encounters an audience member who drinks, smokes, and loudly converses, employing “coarse” language.⁸ In this instance, the ballet performance forms the backdrop for an implicit condemnation of the vices of the theater. In America, pure ballet performed not in tandem with drama, pantomime, or circus but for its own sake was a rare occurrence until Elssler’s arrival, since before her debut, ballet had attained low cultural esteem due to its status as an immoral form of entertainment.

In his description of Elssler, Ludlow declared Elssler to be “the best artist in her line in America,” an opinion solely based on her ballet performances and not in conjunction with other talents that previous dancers had utilized to heighten the audience’s enthusiasm.⁹ Making her American debut at the Park Theatre on May 17, 1840, Elssler directed the national gaze towards the display of the female body in a manner that American society, paradoxically, largely embraced. The American periodical *The Dramatic Mirror, and Literary Companion* offers a prime example of the enthusiasm surrounding Elssler’s highly celebrated performances. Written in September of 1841, an article titled simply “Fanny Elssler” declares:

The engagement of this distinguished and fascinating *danseuse* has filled the boxes of *Old Drury*, every evening of her performances with the elite of the city ... Some of the loveliest female countenances, we ever beheld were there seated, with eyes lit up in resplendent loveliness, glowing with admiration at the grace and elasticity of step, which characterizes this truly popular dancer.¹⁰

8 “Nice People,” In *The Lady’s Book*, 83.

9 Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It*, 536.

10 September 11, 1841, “Fanny Elssler,” *The Dramatic Mirror, and Literary Companion*.

In *Cultures of Letters* current scholar Richard H. Brodhead analyzes the public's surprising approval of female performers including Elssler, explaining that, "the same cultural processes that worked in one direction to delimit women to dephysicalized and deactivated domestic privacy also helped open up an enlarged publicity that women could inhabit in the entertainment field."¹¹ As women gained prominence in the literary market, their participation as theater audience members became increasingly acceptable as well, which in turn facilitated the growing acceptance of female performers. This rise of prominent female performers and the simultaneous increase of middle-class citizens advocating women's place in private, household spheres helped perpetuate the notion of "woman being publicly created into a creature of private space."¹² However, in keeping with the ideals of virtuous womanhood and the cult of domesticity, the "radiant, nun-like innocence"¹³ women were expected to uphold in the home applied to women on the stage as well.

On the whole, American reviews praised newly prominent ballet dancers including Elssler and her biggest competitor, Italian dancer Marie Taglioni, although individuals who disparaged theater in general, such as Horace Greeley and Lyman Beecher, certainly continued to disapprove of ballet as well.¹⁴ For example, in William Lloyd Garrison and Isaac Knaap's newspaper *The Liberator*, an excerpt written by a self-titled "Advocate of Moral Reform" denigrates Elssler as an immoral participant upon the "licentious stage." The article goes on to chastise her art form for serving to "widen and deepen the channels of lust, whose turbid waves still sweep on, daily bearing their victims, the young and lovely, to untimely graves!"¹⁵ It is little wonder then that patrons of ballet endeavored to portray Elssler as an uplifting influence so that

11 Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 54.

12 Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 49.

13 Herbert, "Hawthorne and American Masculinity," 70.

14 Guest, *Fanny Elssler*, 170, 178.

15 "Disgraceful," *Liberator* 108. July 2 1841.

they might escape public rebukes from such periodicals as *The Liberator*. In general, American critics could not or would not typify Elssler as simultaneously human and divine. Instead, they felt the necessity of divorcing her spirituality from her physicality. In keeping with the ideologies of domesticity, critics attempted to eradicate accusations of harboring impure thoughts by declaring a ballerina to “be a spirit, not a woman.”¹⁶ A spirit is typically considered not to embody a human form but to be composed of ephemeral substance. Therefore, critics could defend their own supposed virtuousness by conspicuously ignoring the ballerina’s physique in favor of praising her divinity, with some contemporaries sardonically observing: “The public have raised this danseuse to the position of a goddess, and actors and managers are offered up as sacrifices to their idol.”¹⁷ Utilizing such thought processes and characterizations, the audience could observe this physical art form with free consciences. But this binary tendency, made increasingly apparent from the American critical reaction to Fanny Elssler, encouraged men to dichotomize female humanity and spirituality, which perpetuated a gendered divide between males and females in both society and fiction.

Such titans of periodical publications as Sarah Josepha Hale of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and Horace Greeley of the *New-York Tribune* either dismissed the ballerina as undeserving of attention or staunchly repudiated ballet as a lascivious influence that corrupted the minds of its observers and elevated prostitution. Hale depreciated the widespread praise of Elssler as simply “ridiculous and absurd stories,” while Greeley proclaimed that Elssler possessed not even “the common excuse of necessity for a life of wantonness and shame.”¹⁸ Detractors of ballet, an art form that directs the gaze on the silent display of the body, contended that ballet was simply too

16 Costonis, “The Personification of Desire: Fanny Elssler and American Audiences,” 51.

17 “The Dramatic World,” in *The New World*, 14.

18 “Description of Fashion Plate: City Chit Chat of Fashions,” in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, 96; Quoted in Guest, *Fanny Elssler*, 170.

sexually promiscuous. Historian Jennifer Homans explained the potential for sexual suggestiveness that ballet might elicit for some spectators, positing that even “If ballet is not inherently sexual, it is often highly sensual and erotic: the human body publicly revealed.” But at the same time, Homans clarified, in the West, ballet has “also always been of two worlds”; both sensual and “ephemeral and fleeting,” ballet offers itself to interpretation of “the dream world of the Western imaginary.”¹⁹ Newly arrived in America, immediately popular, and constructed as socially permissible on the whole, ballet could not have failed to influence spectators’ perception of womanhood both in society and literature. Fanny Elssler and the ballet dancers that followed in her footsteps certainly shaped general perceptions of femininity, although how they did so depended on the interpretation of the individual spectator. American critics of dance felt obliged to cloak recognition of the dancer’s sexuality under a gauze of quasi-religious admiration for the ballet dancer’s morally inspiring qualities. In general, American authors who witnessed ballet certainly felt required to portray womanhood in this manner as well. Female authors, increasingly dominating the literary market and against whom male writers now competed, certainly compounded this tendency. Historian Rosemarie Zagarri explained that, “Because of [women’s] ability to shape the morals, manners, and ideas of men, women, it was claimed, should direct their abilities toward reforming society, enlightening its culture, and strengthening its values.”²⁰ As writings of the era, especially magazines and periodicals, grew “dependent on women’s contributions, women sensed increasing opportunities- and more power.”²¹ Interestingly, the heavily discussed literature with which this thesis engages emerged in the throws of this intensifying “power” and ballet’s growing role as a cultural influence.

19 Homans, *Apollo’s Angels*, xxii.

20 Zagarri, “The Postcolonial Culture of Early American Women’s Writing,” 23.

21 Zagarri, “The Postcolonial Culture of Early American Women’s Writing,” 26.

A great number of influential authors including Nathaniel Hawthorne, Fanny Kemble, Edgar Allan Poe, Margaret Fuller, and Ralph Waldo Emerson avidly attended ballet performances, made manifestly more popular in the years immediately after Elssler's 1840-42 tour of the eastern United States.²² Antebellum male authors, especially those familiar with the ballet phenomenon, tread a tenuous and often confusing boundary in their portrayals of women in an effort to maintain female readers; their livelihoods depended on it. Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne, authors to whom ballet was a familiar art form, attempted to negotiate this line, resulting in depictions of women that continue to intrigue scholars of antebellum American literature. One must consider the results of the collision, or collusion of the middle-class domestic ideologies and ballet's American ascendancy to further comprehend the multifaceted and often convoluted conceptions of womanhood and woman's roles in early to mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, examining the socio-cultural crossroads of domesticity and dance and this intersection's effect upon the faculties of male authors aids in elucidating their sometimes contentious and often convoluted characterizations of fictional women.

Antebellum Female Ideology and Education

In the years surrounding the Revolutionary War, Americans swiftly comprehended the impact that women's domestic influence effected upon public thought-culture. Women possessed the power to sway "hearts and minds of the people"²³ through the formation of republican motherhood, a movement that allowed them to exert political and moral change in public while remaining largely in their domestic realm. Male American leaders realized that achieving

22 Guest, *Fanny Elssler*, 177; Kemble, *Records of Later Life* Vol. 2, 23; Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, 109.

23 Zagarri, "The Postcolonial Culture of Early American Women's Writing," 22.

national independence required motivating the spirit of the combatants, a feat that could not easily be accomplished without the support of women. As Zagarri explains:

It was now understood that women, though creatures of the domestic realm, had a political role to play... Recognition of women's political contributions accelerated the expansion of women's educational opportunities, which in turn spurred tremendous increases in female literacy.²⁴

Republican motherhood, affording new political clout to women, demonstrated to males and females alike the potential influence that educated wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters might wield for guiding and inspiring Americans. The movement spotlighted the importance of fostering female literacy, prompting the creation of a remarkable number of female academies that taught a variety of academic disciplines including reading and writing.²⁵

As educational opportunities multiplied, women recognized that socio-cultural power, only marginally afforded to them by their forays into the public arena, could be more easily and effectively obtained through their influence within the home. This comprehension gave rise to the so-called "cult of domesticity," the ideology pronouncing that women were "naturally designed for the home and the private sphere" and should be "pleasing, conservative, and virtuous, a comfort and delight to her husband, an ideal to her children."²⁶ Intriguingly, this middle-class ideal, promoting female virtuousness as a manner of exerting influence over the minds of those within their domestic arena, also helped women attain control over their own bodies. T. Walter Herbert explains that as the "ideal of purity became a defining virtue of the domestic angel," married women, by encouraging male purity, might abstain from seemingly obligatory sexual relations. Herbert claims:

24 Zagarri, "The Postcolonial Culture of Early American Women's Writing," 22.

25 Zagarri, "The Postcolonial Culture of Early American Women's Writing," 23.

26 Baym, "Portrayal of Women in American literature, 1790-1870," 212-213.

‘Pure’ women were expected to display a radiant nun-like innocence, which aided men in retaining self-control by transmuting their lust into reverent admiration. Since a virtuous wife prompted her man to pay her adoring attentions that would not get her pregnant, her purity was a form of psychic birth-control ...²⁷

Women exercised control that they had not previously experienced by casting themselves as chaste domestic icons and promoting purity of both sexes. With the rise of literacy and educational opportunities, they found that these ideals could be effectively reinforced through their pens. Historian Mary Kelley explained that reading women were “sustained both by models they found in books and by the encouragement of other women with whom they read and exchanged opinions about their reading.” Increasing female scholasticism directly encouraged reading as a “woman’s pursuit,” because educated women who read, “offered in themselves models of committed readers.”²⁸ These circumstances in turn promoted education for women in a cycle of mutual reciprocity. As women increasingly came to represent a large portion of literary consumers, print media publishers progressively shifted the content of the materials that they accepted and printed to attract female audience in order to maintain and increase profits.²⁹ Authors, publishers, and consumers intensified the demand for such works that reinforced the necessity of education, virtuousness, and domesticity. Because of the growing demand for this certain type of literature, this circumstance lent women new power in the literary market to dictate the types of works that authors had to create in order to sell their writing.

Furthermore, women not only became avid consumers but also producers of literature, especially within the popular periodical field. As increased literacy promoted female education,

27 Herbert, 70.

28 Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America,” 403, 404.

29 Zagarri, 25.

more women began to write, inaugurating the era of “mass circulation fiction” of “America’s best first-seller novels,”³⁰ and women’s ascendancy in the realm of the periodical. Sarah Josepha Hale, notable editor of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* for forty years starting in 1837, exemplified how the power of the pen could be used to mold readers’ morals.³¹ In the introduction to her massive catalogue of accomplished women in *Woman’s Record, or, Sketches of All Distinguished Women* (1855), Hale makes her motivation for writing and promoting other female writers clear with the assertion that, “on the right influence of women depends the moral improvement of men ... the condition of the female sex decides the destiny of the nation.” She goes on to declare:

So female Genius is made visible only where God’s Word has cleared from the mental horizon the gross clouds of heathen error ... these stars are required to show the true progress of moral virtue through the waves of temptation and sin that roll over the earth. The greater the number, the more light they diffuse, the greater will be the safety of society.³²

Hale implies that to achieve success and the approbation of one’s peers, authors must promote a strict moral code in their work, a requirement she enforces through her promotion or disparagement of her peers based on their adherence to such precepts. Furthermore, Hale testifies that women possessing “female Genius” must not only be pure, but they must also be many, another factor that helped promote the growth of authorship.

Susan Warner, upon whom Hawthorne focused his resentment towards women’s literary success, demonstrates the potential for substantial acclaim derived from reinforcing the cult of domesticity and promoting reading as a womanly pursuit through her work of sentimental fiction, *The Wide, Wide World* (1850). In fact, her book “attained a circulation ten or even twenty

30 Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 30.

31 Wood, “The ‘Scribbling women’ and Fanny Fern: Why Women Wrote,” 5.

32 Hale, *Woman’s Record*, vii, ix-x.

times that of previous American fiction,” and “went on to become one of the four or five most widely read American novels of the whole nineteenth century.”³³ The popularity of Warner’s work may be attributed to the enormous prominence and influence of the cult of domesticity in America and to Warner’s consistent promotion of the cult’s dictums in the novel.

Essentially, *The Wide, Wide World* concerns fictional Ellen Montgomery’s character-improving journey from willful girl to morally correct, Christian young woman. This alteration is made possible by the various tribulations Ellen successfully endures, from the death of her mother Mrs. Montgomery, to her residence with her unkind and demanding Aunt Fortune, to her removal to live with overbearing relatives in Scotland. During her time living with Aunt Fortune, Ellen also gains moral edification from her friendship with the archetypally angelic Alice, who embodies the ideals of the cult of domesticity’s quintessential woman. For Ellen’s successful negotiation of the trials encountered within her sphere, evidenced by her increasingly apparent spiritual attributes, Warner rewards Ellen with the promise of marriage to the exemplary John Humphreys. The entire book demonstrates Warner’s successful underscoring of the primary importance of domestic duties, a condition that heightened the novel’s success on account of its bolstering of culturally prevailing moral dictums.

Indeed, the very opening chapters exhibit this tendency as seen by Warner explaining: “To make her mother’s tea was Ellen’s regular business ... It was a real pleasure”; her emphasizing the need for constant strivings to bear up and improve oneself under affliction as seen in Mrs. Montgomery’s entreaty to Ellen to remember: “God sends no trouble upon his children but in love; and though we cannot see how, he will no doubt make all this work for our good”; and her establishing reading and writing as essentially womanly, moral pursuits shown by

33 Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 30.

Mrs. Montgomery imploring Ellen to “ ‘read me a little ... [from] the twenty-third psalm,’”³⁴ paradigms that the novel’s succeeding chapters consistently reinforce. As previously noted, the opening pages of the first chapter scrupulously detail Ellen’s careful preparation of her mother’s tea, highlighting the notion that even such seemingly trivial domestic duties are beneficial, even necessary for spiritual development. Warner imbues the novel with such depictions, exculpating herself from accusations of neglecting her own household duties in favor of more mercenary, ostensibly male endeavors. Warner’s efforts are made even more apparent through Mrs. Montgomery’s assertion to Ellen: “You know, my dear, that I am not apt to concern myself overmuch about the gain or the loss of money. I believe my Heavenly Father will give me what is good for me.”³⁵ Furthermore, Warner centers the novel around the acts of reading and writing, implicitly privileging literacy as vital to Ellen’s spiritual and intellectual development. Ellen gladly reads aloud to her mother when she is sick, bringing wholesome relief to Mrs. Montgomery and impressing Ellen, along with readers of *The Wide, Wide World*, with the sense that reading constitutes an integral domestic component. Later, Mrs. Montgomery ensures that Ellen possesses all the materials necessary for the acts of reading and writing before Ellen departs for Aunt Fortune’s dwelling. As mother and daughter enter a bookstore, Ellen accentuates the pleasure to be gained from reading in her exclamation, “Oh, what a delicious smell of new books!” Warner dedicates almost the entire third chapter to detailing Ellen’s search for a writing desk, paper, and ink. Yet Warner assures her readers that these are not useless, frivolous pursuits through Mrs. Montgomery’s entreaties to Ellen, “I wish you to be always neat, and tidy, and industrious; depending upon others as little as possible; and careful to improve yourself by every means, and especially by writing to me.” During Ellen’s residence at Aunt

34 Warner, *The Wide, Wide World*, 11-14.

35 Warner, *The Wide, Wide World*, 11.

Fortune's house, her virtuous friend Alice questions Ellen as to how Ellen can make her grandmother's life more pleasant. Alice reminds Ellen that Jesus " 'went about doing good'" and entreats her to do the same. Ellen's solution to do good is to read the Bible aloud to her grandmother. The grandmother responds by "hug[ging] her close to her bosom, kissing her forehead and cheeks and lips, and declaring that she was 'a great deal sweeter than any sugar plums.'"³⁶ Warner's numerous inclusions of writing and reading demonstrate Warner's conviction of the primacy of such acts that she wished to emphasize. Appealing to her readers, Warner explicitly equates literary pursuits with spiritual edification.

This association between moral improvement and the acts of reading and writing appears throughout the novel, not only in the early chapters but also in the final pages. At this point Ellen, now Mrs. John Humphries, again revels in the wholesome pleasures Warner associates with reading in her delight upon her new reading room her husband has built. She declares, "What a delicious place for reading!" and John affirms, "Whatever has to do with the highest perfection of body and mind I will seek and have, both for you and for myself."³⁷ *The Wide, Wide World*, sold and read in unrivaled numbers,³⁸ affirmed the powerful socio-cultural influence women now possessed through their pens. The novel set the standard for women's fiction, shaping not only the contents of literature but also the course of American society. A review in Sarah Hale's influential *Godey's Lady's Magazine* praised Susan Warner, or "Elizabeth Wetherell" as she was known by her pen name, for writing such a work. The review proclaims: "*The Wide, Wide World* is a work of much merit and interest. Written as it is for young people, the Christian spirit which prevails in it, the elevated Christian principles which it inculcates, cannot be too highly commended." The article does disparage the book's ostensible

36 Warner, *The Wide, Wide World*, 29, 31, 242, 245.

37 Warner, *The Wide, Wide World*, 566-577.

38 Tompkins, Afterword to *The Wide, Wide World*.

lack of patriotism and scant promotion of American pro-revolutionary ideals, claiming that Ellen exhibits deficient patriotic principles. Yet the article closes with, “We should never have taken the trouble to praise at all, had we not found in the work so much to praise.”³⁹ Such comments attest that books that promoted both female literacy and high moral standards received significant approbation. Conversely, not only works but also individuals and institutions that strayed from the middle-class moral precepts were disparaged, prompting restructuring in many branches of society, and most pertinently for the purposes of this study, in American theater.

Theater Reform

The increase in female authorship and subsequent expansion of readership in the decades before the Civil War meant that women possessed unprecedented power for enforcing domesticity’s standards both within the domestic sphere and in the societal arena. The popularity of domestic fiction not only increased women’s chances to achieve lucrative careers as authors, but it also perpetuated a fundamental alteration in the nature of antebellum theatrical entertainment. The power of the pen wielded monetary pressure upon writers, but it also shaped other, not solely literary aspects of society, especially theater.

In the first few decades of the nineteenth-century, men primarily attended the theater to “escape the confines of ‘good society,’ to mingle with men, and also, perhaps, to encounter the pleasures of the ‘loose’ ladies of the third tier.”⁴⁰ Managers, attempting to attract their primarily male audiences, offered prostitutes free admittance into the third-tier, the notorious upper level of the theater. “Higher-class prostitutes” escorted by their clients might even enter the theater freely and sit not just in the third tier but wherever they pleased.⁴¹ This circumstance, while

39 “Editor’s Table,” 185-186.

40 Saxon, “ ‘A Pair of Handsome Legs’: Women on Stage, Bodies on Show, in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Theatre,” 30.

41 Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences*, 69.

certainly attracting men, barred the majority of women who desired to be deemed respectable from entering the theater. Women rarely attended performances unless specifically accompanied by males and intentionally displaying indicators of their status as proper women through dress, comportment, and speech. Even then, the danger existed that they might be mistaken for prostitutes. Considering middle-class domesticity's increasingly powerful hold on a growing number of societal facets, the practice of allowing prostitutes to unreservedly roam one section of the theater began to pose a massive problem for "theatrical economics," and for the "extent to which theater was accepted and supported in the nineteenth century."⁴² In 1832, William Dunlap published a frank and thorough account of the American theatrical institution. In his conclusion, Dunlap expressed his fear that theater would succumb to a "scene of licentiousness," declaring:

And if, as now in most theatres, they see a display of the votaries and victims of vice in one part of the house, and the allurements to inebriation to another, they may have just grounds to believe that they are indeed in the palace of Circe, instead of the temple of the muses.⁴³

Writing centuries later, theater historian Richard Butsch corroborated Dunlap's associating early nineteenth-century debauchery with theater attendance with the assertion: "In the 1820s, theater was a male club."⁴⁴ The enclave of the theater provided men with a seemingly acceptable space to make noise and mingle with other men and with prostitutes. Butsch describes the smoking, drinking, spitting, sexual freedom, and verbal chatter that accompanied a typical night out at the

42 Johnson, "That Guilty Third Tier: Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century American Theaters," 575.

43 Dunlap, *A History of American Theater*, 407.

44 Butsch, "Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies: The Re-Gendering of Nineteenth Century American Theater Audiences," 374.

theater, and women who attended not only risked damaging their reputations but also hazarded physical harm in such a space.⁴⁵

At the same time that the dissolute practices in male-dominated theater continued, middle-class respectability progressively gained a foothold upon the American consciousness, requiring that theaters begin upholding new standards of propriety to attain any sort of social credence. Rampant prostitution was increasingly prohibited as it posed a barrier to potential female audience members who, with their growing success in the literary market, could more easily transgress the boundary between public and private spheres. However, as long as lewd behavior still flourished in theaters, no respectable woman, even one more at liberty to negotiate the ex-domestic sphere, would frequent such places. Noah Ludlow, actor and theater manager in the Southwest United States, detailed his efforts to reform his playhouses such as refusing admission to “women of the *pave*” and anyone lacking the appearance of “respectability.” Apparently satisfied with the effects of this new stricture, Ludlow notes, “The result of these rigid measures was that the third tier in our theatres was as quiet and orderly as any portion of the house.”⁴⁶ Replacing disreputable working girls with respectable women heightened the morality of the theater, helping to ameliorate obscene behavior and ensure that middle-class women, the “signifiers of respectability”⁴⁷ could safely and decorously visit the theater as well.

The growing ban on prostitution necessitated the redesign of theater, however, because as the ban increased, the number of male patrons tended to lessen. The practice of prostitution had formerly dictated the very manner in which the physical structures of theater buildings were constructed. The buildings usually designated the gallery for prostitutes, and they gained

45 Butsch, “Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies: The Re-Gendering of Nineteenth Century American Theater Audiences,” 379, 382.

46 Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It*, 478.

47 Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences*, 71.

admittance through separate and relatively unseen side staircases that opened directly from the street into the third tier.⁴⁸ As the power of domesticity increased, however, theater owners increasingly felt the need to reform their venues accordingly. To attract women, proprietors such as Moses Kimball and P. T. Barnum disguised their theaters as “lecture rooms” attached to museums. They also applied marketing techniques to attain a veneer of morality by banning not only prostitution but also such vices as alcohol, thereby promoting decency and recasting attendance as a way women might fulfill their moral responsibilities.⁴⁹ Richard Butsch observes that Kimball and Barnum’s success encouraged the creation of museum theaters throughout the northeast. They helped to establish the “respectability” of theater attendance and to institute “new norms of decorum for audiences.”⁵⁰

These changes that occurred in theater structure and clientele also served to lessen the stigma that female performers had previously endured. Managers had typically promoted shows that exemplified strong male lead actors known for their “‘manly’” virtues.⁵¹ Edwin Forrest was a prime exemplar of this tendency, and contemporary reviews praised his powerful acting style. In 1828, *The New-York Mirror* gushed:

Whatever his imperfections may be, he continually breaks through and rises above them, with a flight as aspiring, and a power as grand, as the eagle ... The striking elegances of his attitude, the proud and lofty bearing which breathed through all his gestures ... and the noble bursts of passion, which so well seemed wrung from a soul unwilling and

48 Johnson, 580.

49 Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences*, 71.

50 Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences*, 72.

51 Butsch, “Bowery B’hoys and Matinee Ladies,” 380.

unaccustomed to yield to any human foe, and, like the sinewy lion, biting the dust in which irresistible force had laid him prostrate, roused all the feelings of the spectators.⁵²

Alternately, female performers had been typically seen as little better than the prostitutes that frequented the audience. But now, resulting largely from the reform theaters had undergone, women more freely entered the theaters not only as patrons but also as respectable performers. Anna Cora Mowatt, author of the play *Fashion* that premiered at New York's Park Theater in 1845, also pursued a career on the stage. In her 1854 memoir, *Autobiography of an Actress; or, Eight Years on the Stage*, Mowatt recollects that her opinions of the "the stage, and my estimate of the members of dramatic companies, had undergone a total revolution."⁵³ She quotes the writer of her memoir, Mary Howitt, in declaring that the stage could potentially become the one of the most important means of "human advancement and improvement," so long as performers were not only talented but also fervently religious. Mowatt includes Howitt's declaration expressing support of virtuous female performers:

Welcome, then, and doubly welcome, be all such reformers as come amongst us not only with the high argument of their own pure and blameless lives, but ... who teach, through the persuasive power of genius, and the benign influence of a noble womanly spirit.⁵⁴

Furthermore, Mowatt defends women who might be reviled for their professional performance careers, despite their exemplary private lives. Mowatt demonstrates how far the public opinion had altered towards theater, from a period when respectable women could hardly attend the theater without contumely, to a time where women could not only participate as spectators but also might perform on the stage itself without massive repercussions. It was during this moment in time, when the dramatic sphere was being reformed and moral strictness was reaching new

52 *The New-York Mirror*, 71.

53 Mowatt, *Autobiography of an Actress; or, Eight Years on the Stage*, 214.

54 Mowatt, *Autobiography of an Actress; or, Eight Years on the Stage*, 215.

heights, that Fanny Elssler, the Viennese ballet dancer, brought codified, classical ballet to America for the first time, altering how women were generally viewed, treated, and written about.

Elssler Arrives

In 1839, Fanny Elssler, the most formative rival to Italian dancer Marie Taglioni (a ballerina who exemplified the delicate Romantic-era style), was dancing in Paris when Stephen Price, manager of New York's Park Theatre, sent his friend Henry Wikoff to persuade Elssler to visit America to perform. Price hoped that engaging an international star like Elssler would help revitalize the Park Theatre's lagging sales.⁵⁵ To Price's surprise, Wikoff succeeded in his request, and Elssler agreed to a six-month tour. It was "an ambitious decision" for Wikoff and Price to attempt to persuade Elssler to embark on a performance tour because "no dancer of Elssler's caliber had yet appeared in America,"⁵⁶ and many Americans had never seen a truly classical dancer, leaving the possibility that they would find no interest in Elssler. But it was also a risky personal choice for Wikoff, who became Elssler's impresario after Price's death; in Paris where Wikoff first met Elssler, he experienced difficulty in convincing his American female friends to even meet the dancer. In America itself, Wikoff exerted immense effort to prove that Elssler was a respectable dancer and that "an opera dancer was not a show for men only."⁵⁷ Part of Wikoff's efforts to increase the publicity and stir up excitement over Elssler's imminent American debut involved actively eradicating the stigma some people still insisted on harboring towards the ballerina. To this end, Wikoff had a pamphlet, offering a seemingly factual account of Elssler's career, published in 1840 in the *New York Morning Herald*.⁵⁸ Wikoff's largely

55 Guest, *Fanny Elssler*, 106.

56 Delarue, "Historical Background to America's Elsslermania," 2.

57 Delarue, "Historical Background to America's Elsslermania," 6.

58 Delarue, "Historical Background to America's Elsslermania," 12.

fabricated and factually inaccurate text, *The Memoir of Fanny Elssler*, persistently emphasized Elssler's allegedly excellent morals and virginal innocence. The *Memoir* opens by narrating:

The most extraordinary woman was born in Vienna, in Germany, in the year 1818, of respectable parents, who had no connexion with the opera;—she being the first of her line who ever entered public life. Every one must hope however ... that she may be ‘the mother of a race of— dancers—all as excellent and graceful as their gentle mother ...

Their father [was] a prudent man, who had other views in life [for Elssler].”⁵⁹

In an effort to represent Elssler as worthy of acceptance from all members of society, Wikoff noted that she had no familial connection with the theater business but that she pursued a performance career simply for her love of ballet. He also endeavored to show that Elssler was fulfilling a divine calling through her dancing, with the pamphlet detailing:

To prove ... that the sacred fire pervades her mind as well as inspires her feet, we will translate here *literally* an expression which fell from her lips, when speaking of her feelings on her first visit to the Opera ... ‘When I went in, and the light fell over me, I thought the place was heaven, *illuminated in honor of God’s victory over Satan!*’⁶⁰

This instance constituted one of many explications of Elssler's supposedly Christian values found in the publication. By equating Elssler's impression of the Opera as “heaven, illuminated in honor of God's victory over Satan,” this portion implicitly attested that Elssler received divine approval of her pursuit of a balletic career.

The reforms that had occurred and were occurring in theaters made women's presence as audience members and performers increasingly acceptable, as Anna Cora Mowatt corroborates. Still, despite such reforms and the efforts on Wikoff's part to highlight Elssler's propriety, some

⁵⁹ *The Memoir of Fanny Elssler*, 17.

⁶⁰ *The Memoir of Fanny Elssler*, 18.

people demonstrated only reluctant approval or even active disparagement at the notion of a decent society acknowledging a ballet dancer and celebrating her for performing in front of diverse male and female audiences. As a ballerina, Elssler was particularly susceptible to slanderous censure because her art form consisted of completely physical movement performed by a woman for the audience's enjoyment. Englishwoman Harriet Grote, an arts enthusiast with whom Elssler had made special acquaintance while preparing for her visit to America, strove to muster support for Elssler among Americans, as she was well aware that some might denigrate Elssler for her profession. She wrote in a letter that she would be willing to "incur, personal obligations to such of my American acquaintances as will hold out the hand of sympathy and good feeling to this gifted member of a debased profession, on her arrival at New York."⁶¹ Grote's trepidations proved well-founded, because aside from Grote, some of Elssler's most staunch detractors turned out to be women who did truly consider ballet to be a "debased profession." In the years leading up to Elssler's arrival, respectable women would almost never attend the theater alone, much less perform on the stage for crowds of spectators. Wikoff had no trouble introducing Elssler to his male American friends who were with him at France at the time of his first meeting with Elssler. Predictably, however, their wives were not as obliging, with one Adeline Welles remarking about Harriet Grote and Elssler that, "'if Mrs. G possesses common sense she will not undertake to make reforms among opera-dancers ... there must a line drawn between a woman *sold* and a woman *given*."⁶² Through this comment, Adeline Welles equated Elssler's profession to prostitution, as her assertion implied that Elssler's profession amounted to nothing more than the display of her body in exchange for money. Sarah Hale's *Godey's Lady's Book* also attempted to cast aspersions on Elssler, claiming indifference to her talents and

61 Guest, *Fanny Elssler*, 110.

62 Guest, *Fanny Elssler*, 113.

incredulity at the “accounts of the fulsome adulations which have been paid her.” The magazine closed the entire August 1840 issue with the assertion, “She has been seen and liked- has drawn good houses- been called upon by some few persons, and will be forgotten in a week after she has left, for the next new lion.”⁶³ Of course, the massive furor both before and upon her arrival belied this prediction.

Although it had taken significant efforts on Wikoff’s part to persuade his acquaintances that ballet was not simply a form of titillation for male audiences, he was able to utilize Elssler’s already considerable celebrity status as a ballet dancer to publicize her impending arrival.⁶⁴ According to historian Allison Delarue, “No luxury import ever had more fashionable puffs in the press.” On May 9, 1840, the men’s sporting journal, the *Spirit of the Times*, recorded the excitement surrounding her upcoming debut at the Park Theatre. *Spirit* reported:

The arrival in the “Great Western” on Sunday last of Fanny Elssler has produced an excitement in theatrical circles, which has not been known here since Fanny Kemble and her father arrived among us. Early on Monday morning the ticket-office of the Park was thronged with applicants for seats ... Every seat in the house for the first three nights of Mad’lle Elssler’s performance was taken in the course of the day ... A good seat cannot now be had for a less sum than five dollars, if for that.⁶⁵

Scholar Lawrence W. Levine explains that Elssler exemplified how celebrity status could affect a whole society. “Fanny Elssler” was a household name, with parents even bestowing her namesake upon their offspring. “Fanny Elssler” brand clothing, cigars, and even alcohol yielded massive profits, and worshipful fans would unhitch her horses and pull her carriage through the

63 “Description of Fashion Plate: City Chit Chat of Fashions,” in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, 96.

64 Delarue, “Historical Background to America’s Elsslermania,” 6.

65 May 9, 1840, “Things Theatrical: The Park Theater,” *The Spirit of the Times*.

streets themselves. Congress even had difficulty convening on days when Elssler performed.⁶⁶ As evidence of her popularity, minstrel shows even featured caricatures of Elssler, presenting “white men masquerading as black men pretending to be white women pretending to be French ballerinas.”⁶⁷ Upon popular demand, she even agreed to extend her six-month stay into a two-year tour.⁶⁸ Elssler permeated the essence of society, as evidenced not only through more current historical scholarship but also by the primary texts alluding to ballerinas at the time.

Elssler is a prime example of the rise of “new female celebrities who, first in the 1840s, then ... around 1850, began to appear before newly huge audiences and to be *known* to publics much greater yet.”⁶⁹ The advent of these highly popular performers, particularly Elssler, coincided with women’s growing visibility in the literary market and the increased value placed upon morality and middle-class domesticity. The cult of domesticity and its numerous proponents insisted Americans repress any hint of sexuality and view women as chaste domestic icons. At this moment in time, Elssler brought ballet to the United States, ushering a stigmatized, seemingly sensual art form into the fore and placing spectatorial emphasis on the female form in an unprecedented and paradoxically acceptable manner. Because of her apparent ubiquity, antebellum authors even, or perhaps especially attended Elssler’s performances and undoubtedly could not have avoided being moved by her to an extent at least comparable to the rest of the population. The ways that the convergence of middle class domestic values, female authors’ increasing power, and Elssler’s physical art form influenced Poe and Hawthorne’s perception of women has yet to be fully elucidated, however.

66 Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, 108.

67 Needham, *I see America Dancing: Selected Readings, 1685-2000*, 137.

68 Delarue, “Historical Background to America’s Elsslermania,” 4.

69 Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 52.

The introduction to this thesis foregrounded the formation of the cult of domesticity within middle-class antebellum America, tracing women's burgeoning power in the literary market aided by their reinforcement of domestic values through literature. As such, the introduction examined Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, analyzing Warner's promotion of both women imaged as conservative, spiritual beings and women as active readers and writers. In addition, the introduction detailed how women's new literary dominance, shaping perceptions of femaleness, also prompted theater reform, forcing proprietors to recast theater attendance as a way women might fulfill their moral duties. The introduction concluded by examining Fanny Elssler, the ballerina who galvanized the public perception of woman through her introduction of classical ballet to theaters across the American East Coast, an event made possible by the recent theater reforms. Chapter one of this thesis juxtaposes American critics with their European counterparts in their reviews of Elssler. By typifying the ballerina as more spirit than woman, spectators revealed a stifled prurience, sometimes manifested in literature, that European critics felt comparatively little reticence in repressing. Furthermore, in their praise of Elssler's supposed spirituality, Americans actually succeeded in perpetuating a gendered divide by masking recognition of Elssler's corporeality while she engaged in an entirely physical art form. As a result, viewers tended to consider ballerinas not to be real women at all, denying them not only bodies, but by extension, voices as well. After comparing Americans' critical reactions to dance with their European counterparts as seen in journals, letters, and newspaper archives, the chapter will explore authors' individual interactions with and reactions to Elssler. The chapter specifically examines Poe, Hawthorne, and their literary contemporaries' response to ballet, assessing how their reaction informed their attitudes towards femaleness and analyzing the ways that such attitudes surface in their respective fictional works. Chapter two turns to Edgar Allan

Poe, analyzing his short stories, “Ligeia” (1845) and “Hop-Frog” (1849). This section investigates how the cult of domesticity and Poe’s recorded knowledge of ballet informed and challenged his literary imagination and fueled the creation of his fictional women. The final chapter scrutinizes Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*. This third portion particularly concerns itself with assessing the novel’s unreliable narrator, utilizing the antebellum domestic ideology, the soaring popularity of Hawthorne’s female authorial counterparts, and Hawthorne’s knowledge of ballet to deduce Hawthorne’s intended and perhaps unexpected authorial purpose. Analysis not only of nineteenth-century society’s treatment of women but also of the critically ignored importance of Romantic-era ballet upon the American consciousness allows unforeseen insight into Poe and Hawthorne’s divisive portrayals of fictional females in their respective works.

Chapter 1

Cultural Criticism of Performing Women

The mounting popularity of ballet in America during the early to mid-nineteenth century helped bring to the fore the tensions and issues surrounding women's domestic and social roles. At this time, ballet in Europe, developed from centuries of tradition, was not a new phenomenon, and most individuals enjoyed substantial familiarity with the art form and its artists. However, Americans did not experience such significant exposure to ballet until Fanny Elssler's celebrated arrival in the US in 1840. Notably, the critical reactions to Elssler's performances present a marked contrast to European criticism of ballet. While in Europe critics praised Elssler's anatomical attractiveness, facial beauty, and even what they deemed her "pagan" style of movement, Americans strove to repress recognition of Elssler's physicality, instead speaking about her as if she was not a flesh-and-blood creature but an ethereal, often-times agentless being. This tendency to repress recognition of Elssler's corporal presence largely resulted from individuals' attempts to attest to their own high moral standing. Through such efforts, they strove to fulfill the middle-class mandates of purity and conscientious behavior in antebellum America, an ideal that had formed from the development of republican motherhood during the Revolutionary War. However, such treatment of ballet dancers complicated the conception of and attitude towards women, prompting middle-class consumers of ballet to mentally de-sex women in general and to instead cast them as virginally fair, voiceless and agentless beings. Critics' exertions to reconcile the physicality of the ballerina with society's chaste standards prompted the creation of a false dichotomy between the human and the dancer and between humanity and womanhood in general, a construct that manifested in many facets of American

life, not the least including the literature produced by the traditionally canonized male authors of the nineteenth century like Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

This chapter now turns to an analysis of European reactions to dance juxtaposed with American responses. The markedly different mindsets demonstrate the extent to which ideals of purity influenced the conception of women in general. The chapter will then examine the critical reactions of a number of American authors in the era, and it will finally turn to Poe and Hawthorne's impressions specifically. The prevailing attitudes towards Elssler, shaped not only by domestic ideologies but also by female authors who dominated the literary market by emphasizing such ideals in their fiction, resurface in Poe and Hawthorne's fictional women, but through diverse literary strategies, for different purposes, and with differing effects. An examination of their familiarity with, and response to ballet lays the foundation for important insight into their renderings of fictional women in their particular works. Moreover, investigating the extent of their immersion into the dramatic and artistic realm aids in achieving a more complete understanding of Poe and Hawthorne's own authorial choices even beyond their portrayals of women. Recognizing the prevailing societal attitudes toward ballet and these two authors' interactions with the theatrical milieu and theater performers will facilitate the analyses of their respective literature in chapters two and three.

During the years that Hawthorne and Poe were publishing some of their most currently studied works, French writer Théophile Gautier had established himself as the premier European theater critic. As an aesthete, Gautier subscribed to the ideal of *l'art pour l'art* or "art for art's sake." An 1880 article in the London magazine *Temple Bar*, written eight years after Gautier's death, describes him as a "devoted worshipper of beauty, whether animate or inanimate ... an art-critic, romancist, and poet-cosmopolitan."

¹ He maintained that one should not evaluate beauty according to societally enforced constructs of morality. Instead, he believed that the utmost value should be placed upon beauty for its inherent qualities. The same *Temple Bar* article notes Gautier's ardor for all things lovely, remarking:

His innate love of beauty—the sensuous beauty of form and colour—insensibly grew from an untutored instinct into a veritable passion. He recognized neither the beauty of mind nor the beauty of soul nor the *comeliness of chastity*.² These were abstract things, which could not be touched or beheld, and might therefore be said to be non-existent.

Corporeal loveliness, and that alone, was the mothers of all virtues.

As evidenced by the magazine's assertion, Gautier had no use for such "virtues" as chastity or the intangible purity of one's mind and heart. Accordingly, Gautier objected to the idea that ballet must serve a higher moral purpose. Ballet historian Ivor Guest explains: "Demands for 'a clear-cut meaning ... a moral...' he plainly saw, were leading ballet astray ... For him the very essence of ballet was its inherent beauty, conveyed in the plastic forms produced by the dancers in movement and repose."³ In an 1836 article published in the French magazine *La Charte de 1830*, Gautier praises a statuette of Fanny Elssler that had been recently created by Jean-Auguste Barre, an artist famous for his sculptures of Elssler and her rival, Marie Taglioni. Gautier does not suppress his admiration of Barre's ability to capture:

the harmonies of the figure, the contours of arm and shoulder, the distinguishing shape of the head, the lines of the neck, the oval form of the face, all the qualities of beauty and

1 "Theophile Gautier," In *Temple Bar: A London Magazine for Town and Country Readers*, 58-59.

2 Italics added.

3 Guest, Introduction to *Gautier on Dance*, xxi-xxii.

charm that transform the dancer into a woman ... He has succeeded beyond measure in conveying all the provocative decorum that resides in the bend of the body.⁴

Gautier evinced little reticence lauding the sensuality oftentimes inherent in a completely physical, largely female art form. Describing ballet's both physical and spiritual appeal, Gautier declares that, "The very essence of ballet is poetic, deriving from dreams rather than from reality ... Ballets are the dreams of the poets taken seriously."⁵ Gautier's open admiration of what he termed the dancer's "womanly beauty" pushed directly against the American idea that morality and female purity should be most highly valued. For his unabashed celebration of dancers' skill, beauty, and sensuality, his descriptions of the ballerinas he witnessed perform offer a stark contrast to American critical reviews.

Maureen Needham-Costonis, a dance historian, tellingly juxtaposes the disparate American criticism of Elssler's performances with her European reception. The latter, she maintains, applauded the ballerina's apparently sensuous corporal presence on the stage made apparent through her delicate "exhibition of the female form."⁶ Like Costonis contends, European critics generally praised Fanny Elssler's sensual rather than solely spiritual appeal. Furthermore, in noting her physicality and therefore her erogenous corporeality, European audiences implicitly revealed their willingness to also recognize the humanity, and not only the divinity, of the ballerina. Such commentary as an anonymous French critic's review from the *Courier des Etats Unis* demonstrates the possibility of reconciling Elssler's human and ostensibly deific qualities. The critic declares that she is a "work of the divine creation." But the critic also displays no hesitation in noting Elssler's human attributes with such statements as "Elssler humanized the most savage affectation." The author of the article even includes a rare,

4 Gautier, "The Statuette of Fanny Elssler," 3.

5 Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, 135.

6 Costonis, "The Personification of Desire: Fanny Elssler and American Audiences," 51.

candid quote from Elssler voicing her own trepidations: “ ‘I shall not content the public unless I stand on my head.’”⁷ By recounting such seemingly mundane, mortal attributes as Elssler discussing her nerves prior to performing, the critic attests to Elssler’s human capacity for speech, therefore humanizing Elssler as well. But recognizing Elssler’s ability to verbalize suggested that Elssler was also in possession of a fully human body that might awake human desires in others, an implication that many Americans were loath to acknowledge. American critics, in comparison, refused to recognize her corporality and the capacity for speech that typically accompanies the possession of a human body. They “tended to mask, or some might say repress, their reactions to Elssler by talking about her as if she were not a real woman at all.”⁸ One can see this contrast quite blatantly after juxtaposing Gautier and the critic from the *Courier des Etats Unis* with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Philip Hone’s response to watching Elssler perform.

The prevailing notion in the United States appeared to be that one could not be truly beautiful if one was not virtuous. Antebellum domestic ideologies, more fully discussed in the introduction to this thesis, undoubtedly compounded the tendency to consider women in this manner. In her discussion of the connection between war and art in nineteenth-century America, Jane Tompkins posits: “Women, in the pre-Civil war era, were seen as instruments of spiritual and moral refinement, existing to ennoble and spiritualize men. Thus, they share with works of art the status of vehicles of inspiration, existing not as ends in themselves but as elevating influences.”⁹ Respectable women, particularly performers, were expected to personify ennobling principles for society’s edification. Moreover, if audience members or people in general noted a performer or another individual’s physical attributes, to prove their own high morals, they felt

7 “The Stage: Fanny Elssler,” *The New-York Mirror*, May 30, 1840.

8 Costonis, “The Personification of Desire: Fanny Elssler and American Audiences,” 51.

9 Tompkins, Afterword to *The Wide, Wide World*, 607.

compelled to praise the subject of admiration's spiritual attributes as well so that they would not be considered to have fallen prey of fleshly desires. In her 1854 memoir, author and actress Anna Mowatt commends two dancers who, although apparently not meeting the artistic standards set by subsequent European ballerinas she had witnessed, still left a positive impression upon her. In discussing the two ballerinas, she describes the "two Misses Wheatley" as "chastely graceful girls." Mowatt adds that, "I little thought that in after years I should have the pleasure of becoming acquainted with them; no longer children, but most refined and accomplished ladies, exemplary wives, — one of them a mother, — and both gracing the high sphere in which they move."¹⁰ Mowatt's simultaneous representation of the Wheatley's physical gracefulness and also their chastity attests to her desire to show that engagement in corporeal performances does not necessarily imply the performers' lack of chasteness; rather, she endeavors to demonstrate female performers might easily embody harbingers of beneficial spiritual influence. Moreover, her comments upon the ballet dancers' later states of matrimony and motherhood constitute a further attempt to demonstrate their positive roles as upstanding society members. By portraying ballet dancers in this manner, to her readers Mowatt justifies her choice in supporting potentially frowned upon performing artists, as does Transcendentalist author Ralph Waldo Emerson in his own praise of Elssler.

Emerson, a personal acquaintance of Nathaniel Hawthorne and an enthusiastic devotee of ballet, also highlights this thought process through his comments regarding Elssler, whose performances he frequented. During one show he attended with writer Margaret Fuller in Boston, Fuller remarked to Emerson about Elssler's dancing: " 'this is poetry.' " Emerson corrected her: " 'No, Margaret. It is religion.' "¹¹ This comment attests not only to Emerson's zeal for dance but

10 Mowatt, *Autobiography of an Actress; or, Eight Years on the Stage*, 39-40.

11 Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, 109.

also to his desire to heighten the notion that Elssler embodied a kind of piety that transcended the very act of her dancing. His efforts, casting Elssler as morally superhuman, conveyed to others the message that as long as female performers exhibited, or supposedly exhibited impeccable morality, it was permissible to attend ballets and even to admire ballerinas' physical qualities. This notion appears quite explicitly in the seventh volume of Emerson's personal journals, where he discusses his impression of Elssler's performance in Boston. Emerson begins by praising her display of "the whole compass of her instrument," remarking that her "chief beauty is the extreme grace of her movement ... the beautiful erectness of her body." But immediately following this potentiality salacious comment, Emerson attempts to ward off the possibility that people might think he is entertaining immoral thoughts. He declares: "As to the morals, it is called, of this exhibition, that lies wholly with the spectator. The basis of this exhibition, like that of every human talent, is moral ... The immorality the immoral will see ... the pure will not heed it."¹² Writing about women as if they were not humans but spirits lessened the possibility that the writer might be accused of human lust. By doing so, individuals could stave off allegations that they were failing to align with moral codes.

In addition, by not only writing about dancers as if they were divine while lacking flesh-and-blood, but also by diminishing the impression that dancers could cogently articulate beyond the mere capacity to speak, eager audience members might then conscientiously observe ballet performances. Stifling recognition of such a major component of humanness like speaking implicitly reduced acknowledgment of one's complete corporeality and, by extension, sexuality. One-time mayor of New York City and diarist Philip Hone conveys this repressive tendency in his own writing. In his diary in 1840, he relates his impression of Elssler in a performance he attended at her Park Theater debut. He simultaneously equates her to a god-like, levitating

¹² Emerson, "The Dancer," 89-90.

creature by describing her as, “second only in Europe to the immortal occupant of mid-air, the Taglioni.” He then compares her to a celestial being with his description of “Fanny Elssler, the bright star whose rising in our firmament has been anxiously looked for by the fashionable astronomers.”¹³ Hone essentially de-humanizes the ballerina by metaphorically likening her to an inanimate part of nature through this description. In an exceptional instance of American commentators’ recognition of Elssler’s ability to speak, Hone records:

She appeared greatly overcome by her reception, and coming to the front of the stage, pronounced in a tremulous voice in broken English the words “a thousand thanks,” the naiveté of which seemed to rivet the hold she had gained on the affections of the audience.¹⁴

However, that comment simply reinforces the image of a supposedly timorous immortal creature that Hone and others perpetuated. Such a rendering attests to observers’ predisposition to view ballet dancers as beautiful, worship-worthy, and mute entities by casting them as practically incapable of rational and self-assured articulation beyond “tremulous” and meek words of gratitude. Typically, observers rarely recognized or addressed dancers’ capacity for sentient verbal expression while instead choosing to focus on celebrating ballerinas’ divinity. Even Hone’s documentation of a ballerina speaking simply reinforces the ideal of the dancer as a delicately feminine, diffident presence. The efforts of critics to reconcile the physicality of professional dancers with society’s chaste standards prompted the creation of a false dichotomy between the human and the ballerina. This separation, an endeavor to disembodify the ballerina, resurfaces in Poe and Hawthorne’s fictional women, but through differing literary strategies and to different ends.

13 Hone, *The Diary of Philip Hone 1828-1885*, 481, 477.

14 Hone, *The Diary of Philip Hone 1828-1885*, 481.

As has been shown, both Emerson and Hone depersonalize the dancer by praising her spirituality and comparing her to divine beings and inanimate objects. While arguably Gautier objectifies his subject as much as Emerson and Hone, he recognizes the physicality and also the humanity inherent in a woman performing in a completely physical art form. Ballet historian Ivor Guest points out that in comparison with her European rival Marie Taglioni, in actuality Elssler was the “antithesis of Taglioni, projecting herself through her style of dancing as a woman of earthly passions in contrast to the ethereal style of Taglioni.”¹⁵ Indeed, Gautier writes first-hand about Elssler’s completely human vivacity and passion as a performer, characteristics American reviews do not include. In an 1834 review he avows: “Hers is not the ethereal, virginal grace of Taglioni, it is something much more human which appeals more sharply to the senses. Mlle Taglioni is a Christian dancer ... Fanny Elssler is a completely pagan dancer.”¹⁶ Gautier explicitly denies that Elssler is a delicate, chaste immortal. Instead, he classifies her style as distinctly secular, a description that American spectators would not countenance. His description of Elssler contrasts markedly to Hone and Emerson’s reviews, especially for its frank praise of Elssler’s “pagan” style of dancing. Such juxtaposition raises the question of why Americans chose to characterize Elssler as virginal, divine, and at times almost a-sexual. One may derive an understanding into the ways women were spoken and written about in America by considering other cultural factors unique to Americans, such as the earlier-discussed growth of middle-class moral precepts and women’s expanding power in the literary market.

By the time of Susan Warner’s 1850 publication of *The Wide, Wide World*, female authors had achieved unprecedented sway in shaping the tenor of generally acceptable literary content and in establishing a vast base of readers who accepted and reinforced the moral codes

15 Guest, *Gautier on Dance*, 3n1.

16 Gautier, “Opéra: The Revival of *La Muette de Portici*, 17.

that such works espoused. Rufus Griswold, editor of the 1854 compilation *The Female Poets of America*, attributes the “maturity of civil refinement” and ostensibly improving “social manners” to women’s growing authorial prominence in the United States. He notes that female writers increasingly possessed the power to influence not only domestic but also societal and governmental spheres, explaining that, “the increased degree in which women among us are taking a leading part in literature is one of the circumstances of this augmented distinction and control on their part.”¹⁷ Furthermore, Griswold reports that the amount of female writers in the United States both before and at the time of *Female Poets*’ publication outnumbered their counterparts in England at any time in history. As women achieved such influence through literature, they attained the directive to mandate the content of what could be acceptably written and received in American society. Women held great influence in the development of the novel genre, especially, as Jane Tompkins makes clear with her remarks upon the unparalleled “explosion in the literary marketplace” following *The Wide, Wide World*’s publication, the record breaking publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), and the “tremendous hit” that Maria Cummin’s *The Lamplighter* (1854) constituted.”¹⁸ Rosemarie Zagarri corroborates with Tompkins, asserting that, “The emergence of the novel as a distinct literary genre offered unparalleled possibilities for women.”¹⁹ These women, attaining growing opportunities and power, comprised the stiff competition with which Hawthorne and Poe had to compete. Antebellum domestic ideology and the literature that reinforced such moral ideals shaped the entire American consciousness and culture, even theater. Elssler, though not the first ballerina to perform in America, highlighted the paradoxical and often tension-filled manner that society treated, viewed, and wrote about women through her popularization of the controversial art form.

17 Griswold, *The Female Poets of America*, 8.

18 Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, 149.

19 Zagarri, “The Postcolonial culture of Early American Women’s Writing,” 30.

Hawthorne and Poe, like many of their fellow authors, enjoyed viewing Elssler perform and were surely influenced by her dancing. However, if they defied the moral directives enforced by society and by their literary competitors in their reactions to Elssler and their manner of writing about women in general, they would in all likelihood have lost a significant portion of readership. It is necessary to examine not only the extent to which, in their own literature, these two authors ostensibly abided by the beliefs engendered through moral reforms and perpetuated in sentimental fiction but also the degree to which they were familiar with Elssler and ballet itself. Assessing Poe and Hawthorne's awareness of both women's authorial power and their exposure to ballet allows one to deduce the often ideologically clashing influences that helped drive the purpose and shape the meaning behind their characterizations of women in their fiction.

Poe certainly maintained notable familiarity with the art form of ballet. Poe's awareness of the kinesthetic aspects of dance began as early as his childhood and attendance at Manor House, a boarding school in England, from age nine to eleven. According to a bill that Manor House sent to John Allan, the man raising Poe after the decease of both his parents, the boy learned not to play music or to draw but to dance.²⁰ Additionally, in his writings Poe displays a wide-ranging familiarity with classical and social dance steps, evidence that he possessed personal knowledge of dancing steps himself. As Burton R. Pollin points out, he would have acquired that information not only formally at boarding school but also at the University of Virginia and at parties hosted by the Allans. Pollin claims: "Culturally and kinesthetically, then, he was attuned to dancing and the dance,"²¹ an assertion that is corroborated by his alternating residences in New York and Philadelphia, two of the locations where Elssler performed during the larger part of her tour and homes to a significant number of Elssler's less famous yet popular

20 Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*, 73

21 Pollin, "Poe and the Dance," 170.

dancing successors. The rich cultural environ centered around the performing arts and furthered by the sweeping theater reforms and Elssler's performances in America undoubtedly permeated his and others' societal consciousness from the time of his move to the North East from Richmond in 1837.

Furthermore, the reviews, commentary, and even fiction that Poe published in numerous periodicals demonstrate that Poe maintained a deep affinity and appreciation for theater, especially ballet. Poe served as editor of such periodicals as *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, *Graham's Magazine*, and *The Broadway Journal*, where he often wrote about current ballet dancers. As the editor in chief and theater critic for *The Broadway Journal* from 1845-1846, he maintained unlimited access to all the ballets as well, where he took frequent notice of such performers as the ballerinas Fanny Elssler, Marie Taglioni, and Mademoiselle Celeste along with a substantial number of others.²² In one instance, an article from *The Broadway Journal* evaluates the ballet dancers "Miss Partington and Celeste" who performed at Niblo's Garden theater located in New York. The article particularly praises their personal appearance, noting that they were "singularly pretty, light, graceful and well-formed ..."²³ Judging by his criticism of dancers, for Poe a ballerina was not capable of expressing herself through her human capacity for speech but only through her silent, physiognomic personification of beauty. His references to Taglioni especially confirm this tendency. Poe mentions Taglioni, who according to Gautier was Elssler's "virginal" counterpart, quite often in his work. His writing in various periodicals such as *Graham's Magazine* and *The Broadway Journal*, where Poe speculated eagerly over the rumor that Taglioni might conduct a tour of the US similar to Elssler's, attest to this fact.²⁴ In an article titled "Fifty Suggestions" in *Graham's Magazine* of which Poe was the editor in 1841,

22 Pollin, "Poe and the Dance," 171.

23 "Niblo's Garden," *The Broadway Journal*, 375.

24 "City Chit-Chat," *The Broadway Journal*, 18 Jan. 1845.

Poe avows that Taglioni did not simply dance, but that she “laughs with her arms and legs.”²⁵

Poe failed to acknowledge the grueling hours of training Taglioni dedicated daily to develop the astonishing muscular power necessary to hide her physical flaws such as a rounded back and gangly limbs.²⁶ He, along with many other observers, only evinced recognition of Taglioni’s “dainty, candy-coated image” and of her superiority of “lightness, grace, and sentiment.”²⁷ Poe considers Elssler in the same manner. In the July 1845 issue of his *The Broadway Journal*, three years after Elssler concluded her memorable performances, Poe compares a current dancer, “Mademoiselle Desjardins,” to Elssler, claiming that, “Since Elssler we have had no one more graceful.”²⁸ Poe’s writing in such periodicals confirm scholar Kent Ljungquist’s assertion that, “Beauty becomes Poe’s guiding principle, and imagination is the predominant faculty.”²⁹ By comparing the manner in which Poe wrote about dancers and how he depicted women in his fiction, one may see how Poe utilized the dancers he witnessed as both the mental catalyst and the blank canvas for his own imaginative faculty.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, Poe’s literary counterpart, too could not have avoided exposure to the phenomenon of ballet and to his contemporaries’ responses to viewing ballet, especially considering the personal literary circle with which he surrounded himself. Hawthorne worked in the same sphere as previously mentioned Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller. According to scholar Jeffrey Steele, both Hawthorne and Emerson, having read and respected Fuller’s work, considered her to be a close friend, a literary equal, and even at times a formidable authorial

25 Poe, “Fifty Suggestions,” *Graham’s Magazine*, rpt. in *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews*, 1303.

26 Homans, *Apollo’s Angels*, 139.

27 Homans, *Apollo’s Angels*, 136; Kemble, “An Actress at the Ballet,” 51.

28 “The Drama,” *The Broadway Journal*, 30.

29 Ljungquist, *The Grand and the Fair: Poe’s Landscape Aesthetics and Pictorial Techniques*, 82.

competitor.³⁰ Therefore, Emerson and Fuller's vehement admiration of Elssler assuredly reached Hawthorne's ears, especially following Elssler's Boston debut in September 1840 where Fuller and Emerson attested to her supposed embodiment of poetry and religion. In a letter to James Gordon Bennett, editor of the *New York Herald*, Elssler's impresario Henry Wikoff triumphantly remarked that following her debut in Boston, "The philosophers of Boston have been very busy ever since, discussing the philosophy of Fanny Elssler's dancing—and are preparing an analysis of the elements which make up her powers of fascination." Ivor Guest notes in particular that Emerson and Fuller were especially impressed by her performance in the ballet *Nathalie*.³¹ Apparently the Bostonian Transcendentalists took such profound interest in Elssler's "powers of fascination" as to allegedly take the time to analyze why and how she maintained such sway over the collective American consciousness, an interest that assuredly intrigued Hawthorne. The writing pertaining to Elssler in Emerson's journal in particular corroborates Wikoff's declaration of the Boston authors' enthrallment with Elssler. Such impressions expressed by Hawthorne's companions further affected the manner in which he depicted women, especially Priscilla in *The Blithedale Romance*. Hawthorne characterizes Priscilla as a simultaneously waif-like, almost de-physicalized creature and, in a pointed paradox, an enigmatic performing artist who Hawthorne describes as the "Veiled Lady ... a phenomenon in the mesmeric line."³² Such an apparent fictional contradiction finds tangible resonance in the comments of authors Samuel Gray Ward and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, other individuals apart of Hawthorne's literary circle.

Longfellow, a New England poet, was a college classmate and frequent reviewer of Hawthorne's writing and also Hawthorne's personal friend, as Longfellow's journal reveals.³³ In

30 Steele, Intd. to *The Essential Margaret Fuller*, xxii.

31 "Letter to Gordon Bennet," rpt. in *Fanny Elssler*, 145; Guest, *Fanny Elssler*, 145.

32 Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, 5.

33 Samuel Longfellow, *The Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, vol.2.

The Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Longfellow's personal correspondence shows that Longfellow and Hawthorne often dined together and that Longfellow admired both Hawthorne's writing and companionship. As confirmed by Longfellow, the members of Hawthorne's literary acquaintances were intimately connected and undoubtedly exchanged ideas and exerted influence upon one another. Longfellow was also an "eminent admirer" of Elssler, along with Hawthorne, Fuller, and Emerson. Before Longfellow witnessed her performances, Samuel Gray Ward sent Longfellow a personal letter with his impression of Elssler's performances in New York. In the missive, Ward offered his candid opinion on the ballerina, commenting:

She is a charming dancer. The ideal of a fascinating mistress. Her eyes charm the Pit and Boxes by a mightier spell than the boa constrictor's. He who yields to her influence must, for that moment, become a voluptuary. Her influence is sensual, her ensemble the incarnation of seductive attraction.³⁴

These observations constitute a significant contrast to the typical praise of Elssler's virginal purity that most Americans expressed. Following Ward's description, Longfellow later saw her dance in Boston for himself, an event that inspired him to write the drama *The Spanish Student*, published in 1843. In fact, in Longfellow's drama the female protagonist, a gypsy named Preciosa, is largely based off of Elssler. Preciosa performs the cachucha dance for which Elssler was renowned, and the character was, according to Ivor Guest, a "dancer of unassailable virtue."³⁵ In one instance in the play, the character Don Carlos questions the Count of Lara, "Of course, the Preciosa danced to-night?" to which Lara replies, "And never better. Every footstep fell as lightly as the sunbeams on the water." Don Carlos rejoins that, "She is as virtuous as she

³⁴ Cited in Ivor Guest, *Fanny Elssler*, 146.

³⁵ Guest, *Fanny Elssler*, 146.

is fair ... The only virtue that a Gypsy prizes is chastity.”³⁶ Ward’s frank comments on Elssler’s sensuality to Longfellow followed by Longfellow’s deliberate characterization of the exact opposite qualities in his fictional Elssler, Preciosa, constitute an instance of intriguing irony. The same socio-cultural factors that prompted Anna Mowatt, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Philip Hone to discuss Elssler as if she were an virginal, ethereal being and not a corporeal woman undoubtedly impelled Longfellow to cast the ballerina in this same light as well under the guise of fiction. Hawthorne must have been aware with this occurrence, as his familiarity with the afore-mentioned individuals and his circle of literary acquaintances would suggest.

However, one might still contend that Hawthorne’s exposure to Elssler was not substantial enough to effect an alteration or augmentation of his authorial intent. But the fact that his close acquaintances, some such as Margaret Fuller he names personally in *The Blithedale Romance*, exhibited such enthusiasm over Elssler and that he makes explicit mention to Elssler in his short story first published in 1842, “A Virtuoso’s Collection,” would seem to indicate that Elssler certainly maintained notable influence over his sensibility.³⁷ In this tale, the narrator explores a museum containing a number of mythic and historic artifacts; in one part of the story Hawthorne details that the narrator “examined Cinderella’s little glass slipper, and compared it with one of Diana’s sandals, and with Fanny Elssler’s shoe, on which bore testimony to the muscular character of her illustrious foot.”³⁸ In this instance Hawthorne compares Elssler with such icons as Cinderella and Diana, equating her fame with theirs.

Also, Hawthorne was quite familiar with female authors of sentimental fiction’s powerful influence in the literary marketplace, and he certainly felt twinges of jealousy over their success, as his comments upon the “d-----d mob of scribbling women” indicate. Hawthorne, witnessing

36 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Spanish Student*, 11-13.

37 Guest, *Fanny Elssler*, 177.

38 Hawthorne, “A Virtuoso’s Collection,” 442.

his contemporaries' responses largely shaped by middle class moralism and sentimental fiction to Elssler, utilized his cultural milieu as fodder for his fictional creations that are still enormously discussed today. Scholar Michael Davitt Bell details why Hawthorne's frustration might have arisen, explaining: "One thing is certainly clear: Poe, [and] Hawthorne ... never came close to matching the sales achieved by Warner, Stowe, Cummins, and Fern."³⁹ The highly successful authors of sentimental fiction constituted a major force that shaped the tenor of American literature, ideology, and even thought processes towards women. Bell further explicates upon the antebellum women writers' hold upon the cultural consciousness, positing that Hawthorne came into his "full powers at precisely the same time of the rise of the best-selling women writers of the early 1850s, and [he was] soon compelled to exercise [his] powers in the context created or revealed by these best-sellers."⁴⁰ Hawthorne's amusement and also his frustration at societal double standards, an issue highlighted by Americans' treatment of Elssler, manifests in his fictional creations and is especially apparent in *The Blithedale Romance*.

The differences between criticism of ballet dancers in Europe and the United States reveal more than simple divergence in artistic taste. Instead, such contrast attests to fundamental ideological and socio-cultural forces swaying the market and the minds of American citizens. As Rufus Griswold observed in *The Female Poets of America*, the antebellum nineteenth century witnessed the unprecedented proliferation and success of female writers in the United States. Their success in publishing their work derived from their reinforcement of the ideals of morality and chastity increasingly emphasized during this period. Jane Tompkins clarifies that, "The impact of sentimental novels is directly related to the cultural context that produced them ... Sentimental fiction was perhaps the most influential expression of the beliefs that animated the

39 Bell, *Culture, Genre, and Literary Vocation*, 183.

40 Bell, *Culture, Genre, and Literary Vocation*, 184.

revival movement and had shaped the character of American life in the years before the Civil War.”⁴¹ What Tompkins terms this “influential expression of beliefs” shaped the manner in which people thought and acted, and this moral ideology certainly effected a construct by which individuals regarded ballet dancers and at women large, especially following Elssler’s popularization of the art form. By juxtaposing American and European responses to Elssler, one can see the massive impact that middle-class morality generated in America, an impact that perforce shaped the way authors of that era treated women in their writings. As has been demonstrated, Poe and Hawthorne, striving for literary success in the midst of female authors’ resounding accomplishments, certainly enjoyed ballet along with many of their peers. Their literary circle also took part in spectatorial roles and commented upon Elssler as a performer as well, a circumstance that assuredly influenced Poe and Hawthorne’s opinions. However, analysis of Poe’s literary works demonstrates his subscription to the societally constructed ideal of the virtuous, silent personification of beauty surrounding Elssler. On the other hand, Hawthorne’s writings, especially in *The Blithedale Romance*, reveal his sardonic disillusionment with ballet dancers’ supposedly sex-less, deific qualities that society upheld and with which his literary contemporaries were so enamored. This thesis now turns to a literary analysis of Poe’s fiction, in particular his short stories “Ligeia” and “Hop-Frog,” in order to assess how Poe’s exposure to the American ideal of the balletic female informed his depiction of fictional women. Moreover, Poe’s enthusiasm for the arts proved formative not only to his female character portrayals, but also to the plot lines and even intentionally chosen diction that he employed in his still heavily studied works.

41 Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, 149.

Chapter 2

The Dancer Phenomenon: Female Dichotomy in Poe's Fiction

The previous chapters demonstrated the massive societal impact that the growing popularity of theatrical entertainment, particularly the art of ballet, effected in society, especially upon antebellum era authors. It also considered the power that female authors' ascendancy and their works of sentimental fiction enacted upon the literary market and the collective American mindset. Furthermore, the chapters examined the culture of prurient spectatorship shaped in part by growing ideals of middle class moralism and by the concurrent rise of the spectator-driven theatrical environ. Notably, Edgar Allan Poe actively engaged with this latter socio-cultural setting, as his work upon numerous periodicals and journals and his own theater criticism demonstrate. This chapter analyzes the manner and extent to which Poe's familiarity with theater, particularly ballet, and his immersion into the contemporary cultural milieu shaped his short stories, specifically "Ligeia" (1845) and "Hop-frog" (1849).

Out of the numerous nineteenth century writers in antebellum America, arguably few other authorial figures remain such a massive influence upon popular culture and simultaneously the center of intense academic debate as Edgar Allan Poe. Gothic horror, always scintillating to spectacle-obsessed societies like Poe's own, pervades Poe's fiction, with women, central to many of his tales, existing as beautifully mute accessories to male protagonists' agendas. Critics wrestle with such depictions, often attributing Poe's characterizations to factors like gender stereotyping or the deaths of women in his own life for perpetuating his female conception. For example Joan Dayan, author of "Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves," explains what she defines as "Poe's gothic" and terms his "insistence on the subordination of women" by claiming: "Poe's ladies, those dream-dimmed, ethereal living dead of his poems, have been taken as

exemplars of what Poe called "supernal Beauty"—an entitlement that he would degrade again and again.”¹

Considering that Poe’s work not only fascinates the general public but also engenders academic discussion to this day, one may posit that this circumstance, to quote scholar Mark Neimeyer, is due to “Poe’s concern to make his work pleasing to a large audience ... [which] may help explain his widespread adoption by popular culture.” Neimeyer clarifies that, “Such an appropriation has its own logic since Poe himself integrated the popular culture of his own day into his tales ...” and that “Poe clearly ... sought popular success during his life time.”² If Poe’s enduring recognition derives from his own awareness of and immersion into his contemporary socio-cultural developments and forms of entertainment, one must examine the antebellum cultural trends that impacted Poe’s authorial faculties and facilitated the debate and intrigue surrounding his tales. This study will consider the social and cultural setting in which Poe immersed himself in tandem with an evaluation of Poe’s fiction to achieve a heightened understanding of Poe’s hotly contested authorial intent, inspiration, and success. I begin with a synopsis and analysis of Poe’s highly discussed short story “Ligeia.”

In “Ligeia,” told from a male, first person perspective, Poe makes clear that the narrator conveys the story following his wife Ligeia’s death. The unnamed narrator opens with the disclaimer that he cannot recollect any of the circumstances surrounding his introduction to Ligeia. Immediately following this cryptic avowal, Poe’s narrator dedicates almost four pages of the text to describing her striking physical appearance, detailing such attributes as the “incomprehensible lightness and elasticity of her footfall,” her face comparable to, “an airy and spirit-lifting vision more wildly divine than the fantasies which hovered about the slumbering

1 Dayan, “Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves,” 240-241.

2 Neimeyer, “Poe and Popular Culture,” 209, 207.

souls of the daughters of Delos,” her white teeth reflective of “every ray of holy light,” her facial structure indicative of her “free-spirit,” and her hair that he describes as “raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally-curling tresses” (111-115). The narrator also praises Ligeia’s enormous knowledge, and in multiple instances he comments upon the general sound of his wife’s voice, describing it as low and musical. As the story progresses, the narrator recalls her untimely death and his subsequent marriage to the blonde haired, blue eyed Rowena, who he abhors compared to Ligeia. It is of note that Poe does offer two direct quotations from Ligeia prior to her death, while he permits Rowena no direct quotation, instead only offering tangential references to Rowena’s act of speaking. Shortly after their nuptials, Rowena also falls gravely ill and dies, according to the narrator. Her breathing and skin color appear to reanimate three times, but following each revivification, Rowena’s pallor and appearance sink still further into decrepitness. Finally, the shroud-enveloped figure totters into the center of the room, when, to the narrator’s shock, it is Ligeia who emerges from beneath the veil. To compound the fantastic elements of the story, Poe leaves the audience unsure of the verity of any aspect of the tale, since the narrator conveying the tale is self-reportedly “a bounden slave in the trammels of opium, and my labors and my orders had taken a coloring from my dreams” (118). He reiterates this point in multiple instances such as when he attests that he thinks he sees a “shadow of angelic aspect” pass by Rowena’s sick chamber; however, Poe stimulates readers’ speculation since the narrator is again “wild with the excitement of an immoderate dose of opium” (122) at that moment. Even today, scholars remain intrigued and baffled by the story’s improbable ending. In fact, the entire story is borderline absurd to an extent that one may posit Poe himself was endeavoring to attract his contemporary voyeuristic and spectacle-obsessed society as readers of his story while also unconsciously subscribing to that same society’s purported ideals of femininity, postulations

with which this analysis concerns itself. One must consider the socio-cultural emergences with which Poe was quite familiar, in order to assess how and why Poe seemingly propagates a seemingly gendered double standard through his fictional women and how Poe's fiction manages to both generate scholarly contention and compel popular audiences in the past and at present.

Poe possessed kinesthetic familiarity with the art of dancing and experienced vast exposure to ballet as an adult living in the north east United States, evidenced by the numerous accounts of his recorded commentary upon ballerinas like Fanny Elssler. During that time, America underwent a strange combination of gendered conservatism and theatrical liberation; female performers increasingly received societal approval and adulation instead of the disrepute they had formerly endured, while at the same time women at home were expected to exist as ideals of purity or "domestic angels" to allay male sexual desires and channel men's supposed lust into morally upstanding reverence. Such tendencies fostered a kind of prurient repression that audience members might relieve through vicarious spectatorship at the theater. The people who observed theatrical performances might engage their own imaginative fantasies and project their latent desires upon the performers, especially artists like Fanny Elssler who performed the largely female and vocally mute art of ballet. Generating massive acclaim and idolatrous audience members, Elssler increasingly concentrated the national gaze upon the female form and served as a blank canvas upon which the progressively spectacle obsessed society might project their own imaginations. Discussing the literature produced during this time of theater development and rapidly growing attendance, Richard H. Brodhead explains that:

Literary works ... do not produce their own occasions. They are always produced within some cultural situation of the literary, within the particular set of relations in which literature's place is at any moment socially determined. Literature's situation in America

in the late 1840s and early 1850s was that it was being ... placed into the new and intertwined relation publicity ... and to vicarious consumption.³

Yet those who examine how popular entertainment increasingly facilitated this “vicarious consumption” rarely examine how ballet, an astonishing and innovative art form, impacted not only the minds of audience members but also sharpened the spectatorial appetite of Americans in general. Understanding Poe’s awareness of the public’s desire for “vicarious consumption,” or hunger for imaginative fulfillment through spectatorship and, by extension, readership, offers insight into why Poe wrote about women, in the words of Karen Weekes, as a “receptacle for their narrator’s angst.”⁴

It is vital to establish Poe’s knowledge of and enthusiasm for popular culture and theater, particularly the rise of Romantic era ballet as form of mainstream entertainment. The masses who flocked to theaters and fulfilled the spectatorial role, especially the crowds who thronged to watch ballerina Fanny Elssler perform in her tour, attest to the increasing appetite for visual consumption occurring during nineteenth-century antebellum America. Poe scholar Barbara Cantalupo describes Poe’s awareness of the growing tendency towards avid spectatorship found in American theatergoers with the explanation:

Not only was Poe attracted to the art he saw, but he was also intrigued by the very act of seeing. The act of seeing plays a pivotal role in many of his tales ... especially in “Ligeia” ... Poe was keenly aware of the public’s fascination with extraordinary visual phenomena. He also understood people’s willingness to see otherworldly visual occurrences as real ...⁵

3 Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 66.

4 Weekes, “Poe’s Feminine Ideal,” 150.

5 Cantalupo, *Poe and the Visual Arts*, 103.

Poe's acute awareness of the power of vision and perspective undoubtedly derived from his exposure to theater and dance both personally and as a spectator. Cantalupo's assertion affirming the public's "fascination with extraordinary visual phenomenon" certainly finds resonance in the American commentary upon dance from such sources as *The Spirit of the Times* discussed in previous chapters. For example, on May 16, 1840, an article from this periodical described Elssler by claiming: "The enthusiasm of her reception was only equaled by the surpassing beauty with which the wondrous creature expressed her acknowledgements; it was done with a grace which seemed not of this earth" and by characterizing Elssler's dancing as:

Electrical. She was at once the divinity of the night; with Circean power she floated in mid air with motions graceful as a bird's, surrounded by fluttering hearts, whose silent eloquence too deep for words, told by that fair enchantress, in whatever related to the brilliant, delightful, voluptuous Ballet, was enshrined amongst us, and is henceforth to be regarded as the goddess of our idolatry.⁶

As another example, describing a minor ballet dancer who achieved some popularity in America in 1839, actor and manager Noah Ludlow claimed that she was "as beautiful as a *houri*⁷; and as lithe and graceful as a fawn. She literally bounded into the hearts of her audience."⁸ Such depictions are representative of the thought processes of many who willingly set aside belief in reality when viewing human performers, instead reinforcing a selective gendered construct for the audience's viewing pleasure. As a devoted theater patron himself, Poe knew the imaginative power that could be elicited through suspending subscription to reality in order to see what one desires; in "Ligeia," Poe channels that craving for temporary mental suspension sought by members of actual society into fiction, creating a story upon which readers may project their own

6 May 16, 1840. "The Park Theater." n.pag. *The Spirit of the Times*.

7 A *houri* is a virginal nymph.

8 Ludlow, "Dramatic Life as I found it," 513.

fantasies. This intention compels audiences to this day but also prompts intense debate over the misogyny that some claim is inherent in the story.

Readers hotly contest Poe's characterizations of Ligeia and Rowena, with some like J. Gerald Kennedy equivocating that, "Gratifying as it may be to place Poe in the vanguard of male feminists, this political rehabilitation claims both too much and too little for his portrayal of women" and others like Nina Baym positing that in Poe's depiction of women there exists "an equation of the feminine with death, and a depersonalization or transmutation of woman into symbol."⁹ This "depersonalization or transmutation" that Baym explicates certainly seems to find tangible resonance with the narrator's opening characterization of Ligeia:

I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia ... recollection flashes upon me that I have *never known* the paternal name of [Ligeia] ... Was it a playful charge on the part of my Ligeia? or was it a test of my strength of affection that I should institute no inquires upon this point? Or was it rather a caprice of my own?

The narrator himself does not know, or does not share, his knowledge of Ligeia's past, allowing the readers to project their own latent desires upon Ligeia's identity. Karen Weekes contends that, "The romanticized woman is much more significant in her impact on Poe's narrators than in her own right" and that in his works, "The concept of using females merely as a means to a (male) end appears ..."¹⁰ This fictional tendency certainly reflects the society in which Poe created his works, especially the manner in which individuals wrote about dancers like Elssler. As discussed in the previous chapter, critics stifled recognition of the performers' capacity for speech that typically accompanies the possession of human bodies. The idea that ballerinas

9 Kennedy, "'Ligeia' and the Problem of Dying Women," 114; Baym, "Portrayal of Women in American Literature, 1790-1870," 221.

10 Weekes, "Poe's Feminine Ideal," 148.

retained the power of articulate speech would have implied that they also possessed female bodies, a situation that could not occur if spectators were to maintain their veneer of probity. The effort of critics like Philip Hone and Ralph Waldo Emerson, both who endeavored to convey their impressions of Elssler's quasi-divine and essentially voiceless spirituality, prompted the creation of a false dichotomy between the human and the dancer.¹¹ Poe similarly utilized this method to attract the same audience that frequented the theater.

It is gratifying and less complicated to claim, as J. Gerald Kennedy does, that "'Ligeia' offers the definitive projection of Poe's tortured thinking about women."¹² But by considering the American theatrical milieu with which Poe was highly familiar, Poe's contemporaries who constituted his primary literary audience, and the actual text of "Ligeia," I postulate that Poe successfully attracted those drawn to avid theatrical spectatorship, but notably, he also satirized their subscription to the ideals of femininity disseminated during his lifetime. After all, the narrator of the tale falls in love with Ligeia who he repeatedly admires for her "rare learning" her "free spirit," and the "knowledge of [her eyes] expression," qualities that attest to Poe's recognition of this character's intelligence. One can find further indication of Poe's desire to attract mass audiences upon examining the poem, written by Ligeia, that she bids the narrator recite to her on her deathbed. It includes the words: "Lo! 'tis a gala night/ ... An angel throng/ ... sit in a *theatre* to see/ A play of hopes and fears/ While the orchestra breathes fitfully the music of the spheres/ ... that motley drama! Oh, be sure/ It shall not be forgot!" (116-117) The lines constitute an extended metaphor likening life and death to a theatrical performance, comprising a blatant appeal to Poe's intended audience. Directly following, the narrator recounts two direct instances of Ligeia speaking, including her exclamation, "Man doth not yield him to the angels,

11 Chapter 1, p. 7-8

12 Kennedy, 114.

nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.” The unnamed narrator marries Rowena following Ligeia’s death; however, Poe never affords her a direct quote. Instead, she is simply the catalyst for the speaker’s “fierce moodiness” (120). Finally, to the narrator’s astonishment, Ligeia resurrects by taking over Rowena’s corpse. Upon examination Ligeia, the woman who possesses the most power, is also the one who maintains the most agency, while her voiceless counterpart serves as simply the recipient of the narrator’s “loathing” and the receptacle for Ligeia’s re-incarnation.

Poe’s engagement with the popular forms of theatrical entertainment of his day speaks to his mirroring of a theatrical, choreographic tendency in writing. Roger Copeland, author of “Dance, Feminism, and a Critique of the Visual,” claims, “In nineteenth century ballet ... the choreographer—almost invariably a man—imposed abstract patterns on the bodies of *others* (usually women)”¹³ As Copeland points out, Poe creates the space for his readers to impose their imaginative projections or “abstract patterns,” upon his literary characters. Cantalupo explains that Poe crafted “Ligeia” so that “the denouement depends entirely on the reader’s response to the fantastic visual occurrences described by the narrator ... [“Ligeia” shows] Poe’s keen interest in demonstrating the human propensity to see what is desired and not what is actually there.”¹⁴ As Cantalupo clarifies, Poe crafted his stories specifically to appeal to his popular audience. But as I have pointed out, Poe also masterfully criticizes his readers by allowing the female character with the most agency to prevail; Cantalupo demonstrates the same conviction with her declaration that in “Ligeia,” one may see “a decided critique of his readers’ vulnerability to fictional and visual manipulations—the same susceptibility that attracted his readers to the

13 Copeland, “Dance, Feminism, and a Critique of the Visual,” 139.

14 Cantalupo, *Poe and the Visual Arts*, 107-108.

productions of ‘veiled ladies’ [and] mesmerists.”¹⁵ The ending of “Ligeia” offers a reflexive critique of society’s subscription to the ideal of the silent woman, even if Poe did not set out to explicitly accomplish this, working against some individuals’ opinions that Poe was anti-woman. Does Poe exhibit gender stereotyping? Absolutely. But so did the mass culture to which he endeavored to appeal. One can derive a heightened understanding behind the motivations and inspirations for the tale’s fantastic and complicated plotline, unreliable narrator, and initially one-dimensional fictional females existing ostensibly to fulfill the male agenda, by considering American spectators’ visually consumptive appetite and Poe’s efforts to appeal to that audience.

In his short story “Hop-Frog,” Poe also drew on his familiarity with and immersion into popular culture and dance. However, in this tale, his perverse proclivity for the gothic constitutes a stark contrast to the morally uplifting domestic fiction disseminated during his day. Moreover, in this horrifying tale the influence of theatrical and balletic developments upon his authorial faculties is both surprising and, following scrutiny, undeniable. The plot of “Hop-Frog” centers on the deformed, eponymous dwarf and a fellow dwarf Trippetta, both who serve in the court of a vile and corpulent king and his seven council members. Poe describes Hop-Frog as a crippled court jester who earned his namesake on account of his awkward manner of movement: “an interjectional gait—something between a leap and a wriggle” (216). In contrast, Trippetta, despite her diminished stature, is a graceful female “of exquisite proportions ... a marvelous dancer [of] exquisite beauty,” who uses her influence whenever possible “for the benefit of Hop-Frog” (217). Finally, the king and his seven ministers are all “large, corpulent, oily men.” Because they are “so fat,” they apparently find it challenging, “to make up their minds” to do anything besides frequently abuse Hop-Frog. (217) In Hop-Frog’s presence, the King strikes Trippetta and throws wine in her face in retaliation to her imploring the king to cease bullying

15 Cantalupo, *Poe and the Visual Arts*, 109.

Hop-Frog, and he then orders Hop-Frog to think of costumes for the king and his entourage to wear to upcoming masquerade. Hop-Frog suggests that they dress as “ourang-outangs,” to the king’s pleased approval, and Hop-Frog arranges for the king and his ministers to enter the ball covered in tar and flax and bound by chains. At midnight, the disguised king and counselors enter, to the crowd’s initial fear and then amusement. However, Hop-Frog secretly contrives to attach a hook, lowered from a hole in the ceiling, onto the group’s chains. The hook and chain suddenly draw the eight revelers into the air at Hop-Frog’s signal, and to the crowd’s horror, Hop-Frog sets the captives on fire. Poe describes this occurrence in gruesome detail with, “The whole eight ourang-outangs were blazing fiercely ... The eight corpses swung in their chains, a fetid, blackened, hideous, and indistinguishable mass” (224). Hop-Frog escapes through a hole in the roof, and Poe concludes the tale with, “It is supposed that Trippetta ... had been the accomplice of her friend in his fiery revenge, and that, together, they effected their escape to their own country, for neither was seen again.”

Poe’s utilization of facets of ballet, popular culture, and American individuals’ yearning for spectacle is apparent in “Ligeia,” from his description of the two mysterious and beautiful yet essentially voiceless females, the fantastic, improbable elements of tale, and his characterization of the unnamed, ambiguous narrator that allows readers to project their own imaginations upon the women and story as a whole. However, nineteenth century ballet’s influence upon “Hop-Frog” specifically is initially less apparent, besides Poe’s brief mention that Trippetta is “a marvelous dancer” (216). In fact, throughout the tale Poe repeatedly emphasizes the king and his counselors’ stupidity and obesity, seemingly equating the two with such statements as, “Whether people grow fat by joking, or whether there is something in fat itself which predisposes to a joke, I have never been quite able to tell,” and “they found it difficult, on account of being so fat, to

make up their minds” (215, 217). The ending of the tale, depicting the flaming corpses in graphic and violent detail, seems to exist as a complete juxtaposition from anything Poe wrote about and witnessed in ballet performances. However, close scrutiny of Poe’s periodical *The Broadway Journal* over which he maintained editorial control over from 1845-1846 allows insight into his narration of the “Hop-Frog” as a whole. Although in its reviews of ballet performances *The Broadway Journal* typically focused upon the dancers’ “singularly pretty, light, graceful, and well formed”¹⁶ physiques, in one unusual instance in February of 1845, Poe’s *The Broadway Journal* denigrates the “indecent[t]” attempt at a “bath scene, where there is a miserable attempt at the representation of water and women bathing in it.” The article conveys anger and disgust that ballerina Clara Webster was forced to perform with great reluctance in “this gross show of tinsel ... as natural and agreeable to the eye, as the stiff, tawdry French pictures smeared on band boxes ... It was too painful and revolting to produce any other feeling than an uncomfortable disgust.” With relishing macabre, the article then relates how her dress caught fire on stage. She was “immediately enveloped in flames, and ran about the stage shrieking for help, avoided and shaken off by the other dancers ... She was taken home to die- *and the play went on to the conclusion.*”¹⁷ This article detailing Clara Webster’s horrific death absolutely informs Poe’s authorial choices in “Hop-Frog,” through not only his characterization of Trippetta but also, notably, the bizarre, fiery revenge enacted upon the fictional foul king and his counselors.

Undeniably, Poe’s exposure to ballet both as a participant and as a spectator influenced his characterization of women in his writing. His knowledge of the culturally constructed ideal of the silent, flawless ballerina greatly shapes his treatment of Trippetta and the other characters. Poe makes his tendency to equate outward appearance with inward character traits evident in his

16 *The Broadway Journal*, “Article 1—No Title,” 375.

17 Duyckinck, “Barbarities of the Theatre,” 71.

1846 essay, “The Philosophy of Composition.” In it, he claims that when, “men speak of Beauty, they mean ... not a quality ... but an effect—they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of the *soul* ... which is experienced in consequence of contemplating ‘the beautiful.’” Poe avows that in writing, “Beauty” should be the “sole legitimate province.”¹⁸ This idea certainly mirrors his admiration of ballerinas’ grace, beauty and lightness, and his disgust, expressed in “Barbarities,” for anything “tawdry” or “gross.” Therefore, it is not surprising that the corpulent king embodies a nasty tyrant, that deformed, hideous Hop-Frog represents a vengeful plotter, and that the lovely yet persecuted dancer Trippetta exemplifies purity and goodness. As discussed in this thesis’s previous section on the documented critical reception of ballerinas, American critics tended to laud dancers’ beauty, equating their appearance with ostensible divinity and virtuousness; they rarely recognized dancers’ ability to perform mundane human activities like speaking, however. This gendered construct surrounding ballerinas surely informed Poe’s fictional ballerina, helping to explain Trippetta’s prominent presence yet absence of agency. If a person lacks the ability to exert will, she cannot be culpable for the actions of others and herself, even if those actions include assisting in murder. Poe renders Trippetta as an aesthetically pleasing dancer, mentioning her at every crucial point in the novel. Like the actual ballerinas he witnessed, however, Trippetta never utters direct quotations, even when imploring the king to spare Hop-Frog. Also, her only significant actions in the short story consist of attempting to benefit Hop-Frog, “as an accomplice of her friend in his fiery revenge” (224).

Karen Weekes argues that, “Poe’s poetic and fictional females lack individual development,” and that “The most significant trait of his [feminine] ideal ... is her role as emotional catalyst for her partner. The romanticized woman is much more significant in her impact on Poe’s narrators than in her own right.” She further claims that his “female characters thus became a receptacle for

18 “The Philosophy of Composition,” 546.

their narrator's angst ... a *tabula rasa* on which the lover inscribes his own needs."¹⁹ Poe surely derived such ideas from his role as a ballet spectator, where the ballerinas became the "receptacle" of audience members' stifled prurience and imagination. Consequently, Poe places no blame on Trippetta for her role in taking revenge upon the king and his court, as she simply aids in Hop-Frog's retaliation upon the king.

Poe depicts the monarch and his entourage's graphic death scene ostensibly as a result of Hop-Frog's vengeance for the king's striking Trippetta and throwing wine in her face. However, the death scene portrays remarkable similarity to Clara Webster's violent death recorded in Poe's *Broadway Journal*. In "Hop-Frog," the foul king, personifying the "revolting" and "horrible"²⁰ nature of the show itself where Webster burned alive, conversely perishes in flames instead of the dancer. In real life Clara Webster, engulfed in flames, ran shrieking before a torpid audience. After her collapse, she was carried offstage, and the show continued. Poe's fascination and at the same time his obvious disgust at this cruelty likely prompted him to enact revenge through his most powerful weapon, his pen, by portraying the evil characters being burned alive while this time the fictional dancer survives. Many scholars wonder over this horrible punishment, illustrated with such vivid detail and seemingly disproportionate to the king's petty cruelties. Examining Poe's fascination with ballet, the account of Webster's actual death, and the callousness of the audience and the other performers who witnessed the conflagration greatly elucidate his revenge fantasy and sympathetic description of the dancer Trippetta in "Hop-Frog."

Both "Ligeia" and "Hop-Frog" fascinate readers and prompt intense scrutiny to this day. In order to more fully understand Poe's character portrayals, narrative choices, and authorial inspiration, it is necessary to examine the less thoroughly studied socio-cultural developments of

19 "Poe's Feminine Ideal," 148-150.

20 Duyckinck, 71.

Poe's time that would have impacted his literary choices. An assessment of antebellum American cultural trends uncovers a bizarre conglomeration of conservative thought processes and the rise of theatrical phenomena like ballet. Such a collusion proved fortuitous in Poe's imagination and fiction. Burton Pollin explains that, "Poe loved dancing ... again and again we see how Poe felt about the ballet dancers of his own day ... Poe was incredibly sensitive to aspects of the arts that hadn't even been discussed in his own day. He was willing to plunge into them or suggest them."²¹ Poe's love of dance as a form of popular entertainment, his immersion into the expanding theatrical locales, and his desire to attract the masses that flocked to the theaters as his literary audience certainly impacted his writing, as scrutiny of these factors coupled with an analysis of "Ligeia" and "Hop-Frog" demonstrate. In "Ligeia," Poe fully utilized his knowledge of the American spectatorial appetite fostered by the expanding popularity of theater, imbuing the short story with elements of fantastic and uncertainty while also providing two female characters upon whom readers might project their fantasies, using the inscrutable and nameless narrator as a means to do so. On the other hand, examination of Poe's *The Broadway Journal* reveals that the tragic conflagration of ballerina Clara Webster influenced the gruesome, seemingly unwarranted revenge fantasy in "Hop-Frog." Moreover, Poe's subscription to the ideal of the silent, flawless ballet dancer and his equating of beauty and goodness expressed in "The Philosophy of Composition" help further account for the dancer Trippetta's ubiquitous presence yet absence of agency, aside from her actions aiding the male character Hop-Frog.

21 Cantalupo, "Interview with Burton Pollin," 120.

Chapter 3

Hawthorne's Disembodied Women in *The Blithedale Romance*

In 1842, the year Fanny Elssler concluded her tour of the United States, Nathaniel Hawthorne first published the short story, "A Virtuoso's Collection." In this tale, the narrator recounts his exploration of a museum filled with ancient artifacts and well-known curiosities, including "Cinderella's little glass slipper ... one of Diana's sandals, and ... Fanny Elssler's shoe, which bore testimony to the muscular character of her illustrious foot."¹ Hawthorne's direct mention of Fanny Elssler categorizes her dance slipper as notable among such mythical relics as Alexander the Great's horse Bucephalus, a taxidermied form of Ulysses' dog Argus, Prospero's magic wand, and a remnant of the mythological Golden Fleece. Such an authorial choice demonstrates Hawthorne's awareness of Elssler's vast cultural status and fame that helped to engender audiences' increased theater attendance. However, one will find more a more implicit yet also a more powerful awareness and critique of antebellum American culture's visually consumptive proclivities in Hawthorne's 1852 novel, *The Blithedale Romance*. The benefit of examining Nathaniel Hawthorne's literary creations, especially *The Blithedale Romance*, in the context of mid nineteenth-century America's socio-cultural and historical emergences cannot be denied. The burgeoning cultural phenomena of the epoch, specifically the introduction of codified ballet through Fanny Elssler to America and the culture of spectatorship fostered by theater expansion, effected not only Edgar Allan Poe's manner of writing but Hawthorne's as well. Understanding how Elssler, to her audiences, represented both transcendent, spiritual separation and corporeal, womanly sensuality aids readers' of *The Blithedale Romance* in comprehending Hawthorne's seemingly inscrutable depictions of the

1 Hawthorne, "A Virtuoso's Collection," 443.

main female characters of the novel, Priscilla and Zenobia. These two characters personify the artificially constructed duality of female performers' presence. In addition, they attest to Hawthorne's fascination with the dichotomy, and the union, between Elssler's public and private existence and audiences' and critics' treatment of this apparent doubling. While simultaneously dazzled by her waifish transcendence and astonished at her covert sexual appeal, baffled spectators attempted to reconcile these facets without implicating their own veneer of morality. Hawthorne's attempts to portray and also to lampoon this conjunction in *The Blithedale Romance* compelled him to create two female literary personifications representing this single, culturally conceived female ideal.

Furthermore, while Poe utilized the culture of avid spectatorship in an effort to attract the same masses of people who eagerly attended theater as readers of his work, Hawthorne uses the deluded narrator Coverdale to engage in a satire of society's avaricious observational tendencies and to subtly ridicule such attitudes towards women and women performers to which individuals like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Philip Hone fastidiously clung. Both men and women increasingly encouraged the idea that women's home was their domain, but that their voice should not be heard outside their domestic sphere. Hawthorne scholar Alison Easton explains that, "Hawthorne was to explore the multiple implications of this socially constructed doubleness." She continues by positing that this so-called "doubleness" perpetuated a "duality of image and actuality,"² a paradox explored both in the arts and, either consciously or intentionally, in literature. Hawthorne subtly satirizes the ideal of women as lovely, sex-less, and silent creatures through the dichotomized portrayals of *The Blithedale Romance*'s sensual and therefore doomed female character Zenobia and her essentially sex-less yet enduring counterpart Priscilla, to whom the narrator Coverdale unexpectedly confesses his love. Since the readers

2 Easton, "Hawthorne and the Question of Women," 80.

view Priscilla and Zenobia through the lens of the unreliable and sometimes contradictory first-person perspective narrator, however, Hawthorne prompts speculation regarding the accuracy of Coverdale's depictions. By extension, he also questions American audiences' general conception of women performers like Elssler and Taglioni, while simultaneously engaging the audiences attracted to such entertainment phenomena in the first place. This final chapter, basing itself upon the historical and literary cultural situation for men and women discussed in the introductory chapter and the growing audience oriented theatrical environ examined in chapter 1, turns first to a brief summary and then a subsequent analysis of Hawthorne's novel, *The Blithedale Romance*.

The Blithedale Romance follows the lives of the residents of the Blithedale commune, focusing specifically upon the intertwined fates of Miles Coverdale, Priscilla, Zenobia, and the domineering philanthropist Hollingsworth. The story, told from the narrator Coverdale's first-person perspective, begins with Coverdale recounting his attending a theatrical performance of "The wonderful exhibition of the Veiled Lady ... a phenomenon of the mesmeric line" (5). The next day, Coverdale travels to the Blithedale community, where he immediately meets a fellow resident, the woman Zenobia, who he describes as beautiful, sensual, and intelligent. Hollingsworth arrives to the community shortly thereafter, bringing with him a young, frail, and mysterious girl named Priscilla. During their residences at Blithedale, both Priscilla and Zenobia increasingly demonstrate desire for Hollingsworth's love and attention. Zenobia, despite her ostensible confidence and assertiveness, consistently defers to Hollingsworth's opinion and corroborates his often-sexist statements concerning women's proper place. Coverdale soon leaves Blithedale to reside in a hotel in Boston; to his immense surprise he discovers that Priscilla, Zenobia, and Hollingsworth have also left Blithedale and are living in the lodgings

across the street from the narrator. Coverdale decides to attend a performance at the Lyceum that evening, where he observes the same presentation of the Veiled Lady that he had attended at the beginning of the novel. The Veiled Lady appears to be in a trance. Hollingsworth, also at the performance, calls to Priscilla, and as if set free from enchantment, she revives and leaves with him. Two days later Coverdale returns to Blithedale and again encounters Zenobia, Priscilla, and Hollingsworth. Hollingsworth declares that he loves Priscilla, so Zenobia, frantic with anger and grief, declares her intention to join a nunnery. That night Coverdale experiences a sense of foreboding and calls upon Hollingsworth to look for Zenobia. They find her drowned in the river, her knees bent and body rigid as if she had died in the act of praying. Years later, Coverdale briefly encounters Hollingsworth and Priscilla walking arm in arm; the once powerful and prideful man now leans on Priscilla and evinces a “self-distrustful weakness,” while formerly powerless and frail Priscilla supports Hollingsworth with a “protective and watchful quality” and maintains a “veiled happiness in her fair and quiet countenance” (242). Coverdale never returns to Blithedale, and at the novel’s conclusion he reports that he is now a middle-aged bachelor and has been conveying the story from memory many years afterwards. Bizarrely, in the final sentence of the novel Coverdale confesses that, “I—I myself—was in love—with—Priscilla!” despite the fact that throughout the story he displayed sexual and personal desire for Zenobia but no such attraction for Priscilla. In fact, Coverdale typically depicts the latter as waif-like, frail, and hardly possessive of a corporeal existence. Therefore his choosing Priscilla as the object of his love despite his obvious attraction to Zenobia prompts debate over why Hawthorne chose to insert this incongruous ending. In fact, Hawthorne’s characterization of *The Blithedale Romance*’s main characters, especially his characterization of passionate Zenobia who commits suicide and seemingly passionless Priscilla, who prevails and who Coverdale and Hollingsworth

choose over Zenobia, is initially questionable and seemingly unclear, unless one considers the social and cultural setting in which Hawthorne created this work.

Numerous critics have noted the ways in which male authors in early to mid-nineteenth America engaged with femaleness, especially how such perceptions of femaleness were shaped by the rise of middle-class domesticity. Allison Easton explains how “new role sex role distinctions,” relegating women to the home, facilitated the “middle-class home, re-imagined as a private sanctuary ... So, powerful ideological images came to dominate bourgeois women’s lives and thinking about women mid-century.” Society idealized the proper woman as a domestic icon to be revered, a silent, devout, “asexual, [and] submissive,” symbol. However, Easton also observes that in actuality at the time, women were not “‘passionless’; rather, the evidence is that sexual experience was highly valued but extremely private,” and that Hawthorne explored the many inferences of this “socially constructed doubleness,”³ in his literature. Along with Easton, Nina Baym also highlights the “depersonalization or transmutation of women into symbol,” in much of the antebellum era literature, especially as found in male authors’ general propensity to create “works with figures that are only ostensibly women but in fact represent ideas.”⁴ This fictional tendency certainly finds tangible resonance in not only the way middle-class women but also performers were typically viewed and treated in the early to mid-1800s.

Most critics and writers, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, tended to subscribe to moralistic middle-class dictates in their recounting of dancers’ performances. Of Emerson, Baym posits, “He appeared to feel that in the ideal order of things men would be brave and energetic, women beautiful and virtuous,”⁵ and this tendency is certainly apparent in the records of Emerson’s moralizing and didactic writings describing his impression of Elssler. Both the

3 Easton, “Hawthorne and the Question of Women,” 80.

4 Baym, “Portrayal of Women in American literature, 1790-1870,” 221.

5 Baym, “Portrayal of Women in American literature, 1790-1870,” 218.

massive acclaim of Elssler and Taglioni and the prudish yet thinly disguised lascivious reactions to the ballerinas pervaded Hawthorne's social circle, and he could hardly have avoided knowledge of spectators' sanctimonious glorification of the dancers. In "Hop-Frog," Poe leaves the reader no obvious indicators that he challenges American society's one-sided, seemingly misogynistic conception of female performers. In fact, Trippetta embodies an exemplary literary portrait of the culturally conceived ballerina through her physical beauty, weak agency, and role in catering to the male agenda. Hawthorne, however, both imitates and satirizes the public's propensity to dichotomize the woman from the performer. This propensity is made especially apparent through his characterization of *Blithedale's* narrator Miles Coverdale.

Just as American critics attempted to ignore Elssler's sensuality, *Blithedale's* Coverdale endeavors to stifle his attraction for Zenobia, Hawthorne's fictional representation of Elssler's sensual qualities. Coverdale reveals his suppressed fascination with such fleshly aspects embodied in Elssler through his awkward interactions with Zenobia and his thinly veiled obsession with her body. With voyeuristic pleasure, after first meeting her he observes that, "She was dressed as simply as possible ... but with a silken kerchief, between which and her gown there was one glimpse of a white shoulder. It struck me as a great piece of good-fortune that there should be just that glimpse." Shortly following, he declares, "She was ... an admirable figure of a woman" (15). Zenobia flirts with Coverdale, exclaiming, "'As for the garb of Eden,' added she, shivering playfully, 'I shall not assume it till after May-day!'" To this, Coverdale ruminates, "Assuredly, Zenobia could not have intended it ... but these last words ... brought up a picture of that fine, perfectly developed figure in Eve's earliest garment." Deluded Coverdale convinces himself that Zenobia, because she is a woman, could not possibly be flirting with him or openly displaying sensuality. Instead, he notes her sexuality while simultaneously praising her

supposed virtuousness through such attestations as, “Her ... modes of expression often had this effect of creating images which, though pure, are hardly felt to be decorous, when born of a thought that passes between man and woman” (17). Certainly *Blithedale*’s equivocal narrator represses his sexual desire for Zenobia, just as American critics endeavored to stifle notice of Elssler’s physicality. Coverdale repeatedly admires such carnal aspects as Zenobia’s “full bust—in a word, her womanliness incarnated”(44) and her “passionate womanhood” (103), likening her to “exotic wine” (48), and repeatedly noting the luxuriant flower in her hair, a metonymic symbol indicative of Coverdale’s perception of her eroticism. He simultaneously praises the “homely simplicity of her dress,” and claims, “the stage would have been her proper sphere” (45). Through Coverdale’s absurd attempts to repress his enthrallment with Zenobia’s sensuality by attempting to characterize her as a chaste, sexless creature, Hawthorne lampoons both Coverdale and critics of ballet in their consideration of sex, or even taking note of one’s sexuality, as unnatural. In “Thwarted Nature: Nathaniel Hawthorne as Feminist,” Nina Baym elucidates Hawthorne’s intentions further by explaining that in his writing, Hawthorne “shows men who, while rejecting real women who unavoidably inhabit physical bodies, substitute fantasies of them that are truly unnatural, fantasies of lust ... These fantasies are the outgrowth of the unnatural male psyche.”⁶ Moreover, while employing his fiction to highlight and ridicule such proclivities, Hawthorne also demonstrates the preposterous American delineation between women as either sexual beings or transcendent spirits, a delineation highlighted especially by society’s thought processes regarding ballet dancers like Elssler. Baym contends that, “Hawthorne could not agree that ... society was some sort of monstrous accident bearing no relation to the human nature of the human beings who lived within its framework.”⁷ Therefore,

6 Baym, “Thwarted Nature,” 66.

7 Baym, “Thwarted Nature,” 71-72.

one need not consider the examination of Hawthorne's correlation between society's reaction to Elssler the ballerina and Coverdale's treatment of Zenobia to be a baseless enquiry. Instead, such an analysis comprises a mindful endeavor to uncover historical occurrences that further elucidate Hawthorne's frequently analyzed, seemingly murky character portrayals.

Zenobia's counterpart Priscilla, the other main female character, plays the role of the mysterious Veiled Lady in *Blithedale*. Of her performance, Coverdale describes her with, "Sitting there, in such visible obscurity, it was perhaps as much like the actual presence of a disembodied spirit as anything that stage-trickery could devise" (201). By attesting still further to the narrator's ignorance through this unintentional irony, Hawthorne highlights the equivocalness of American audiences who pruriently spoke of actual performers like Elssler as other-worldly creatures similarly to Coverdale's portrayal of Priscilla as a disembodied spirit. In contrast to Zenobia, Priscilla, according to Coverdale, dwells in a "mist of uncertainty," not human enough to obtain "a decided place among creatures of flesh and blood" (49). Because of her absence of corporality and accompanying asexuality along with Coverdale's ardor for Zenobia but lack of articulated fervor for Priscilla, Coverdale's ultimate confession of love for Priscilla appears to be an incongruent ending. Almost everyone who reads *Blithedale* questions Coverdale's reliability as a narrator. In "New Light on Hawthorne's Miles Coverdale," Joan D. Winslow rightly claims that, "Few narrators have evoked as much debate as Miles Coverdale in Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*. There is no question that the attitude he displays toward his story is disconcerting in one on whom we must rely for our information." But Winslow then goes on to back up that claim with the declaration that, "much of the perplexity Coverdale causes arose from Hawthorne's incomplete awareness of the central importance his narrator had taken

on.”⁸ She cites such evidence as the advice of Hawthorne’s critic and acquaintance, Edwin Percy Whipple, who may have influenced him to add the novel’s final chapter and modify the ending to include Coverdale’s declaration, “I—I myself—was in love—with—Priscilla!” (247). However, Coverdale’s mirroring of mid nineteenth-century American critics’ reluctance to look beyond Elssler’s supposed spirituality suggests that Hawthorne intended this contradictory ending to comment upon the duplicity of the American public. As evidenced by the writings of Emerson, Fanny Kemble, and *The Spirit of the Times*, contemporaneous reviews of Elssler tended to praise her untouchable divinity and her supposedly “unspotted character,”⁹ while ignoring such obvious components of her dance as her physicality. Hawthorne’s decision to introduce Priscilla as a contrast to Zenobia signals, in Nina Baym’s words, the “introduction of a social dimension to his works,” in an effort on his part to “understand the genesis of his fantasies and particularly to investigate the ways in which they might be accounted for as responses to social pressures or even social products.”¹⁰ In creating *Blithedale*, Hawthorne speaks to this social dimension by utilizing Priscilla as an exhibition of socio-cultural trends that tended to censor Elssler’s corporeality while praising her alleged spirituality. Priscilla, in Baym’s words, is “the second woman . . . used by the men in the story to obliterate the first.”¹¹ Priscilla certainly supplants Zenobia in *Blithedale*, since Zenobia dies while Priscilla survives, and Coverdale displaces his true passion from Zenobia to a socially approved love for Priscilla.

In scholar Richard Brodhead’s analysis of *Blithedale* coupled with his exploration of the antebellum culture that helped shape American literary production, he affirms: “Behind the Veiled Lady [of *Blithedale*] we could see arrayed the new female celebrities who, first in the

8 Winslow, “New Light on Hawthorne’s Miles Coverdale,” 189-190.

9 May 9, 1840, “The Park Theater,” *The Spirit of the Times*.

10 Baym, “Thwarted Nature,” 69.

11 Baym, “Thwarted Nature,” 70.

1840s, and then more decisively in the 1850s, began to appear to newly huge audiences.”

Brodhead further specifies that Priscilla as the fictional veiled performer could indeed “find her likeness in Fanny Elssler, the Viennese dancer who made a triumphal tour of America.”¹²

Priscilla illustrates “the cultural construction of a certain version of ‘woman’” and further signifies the public’s prevailing view of “‘woman’ as something separate from or opposed to bodily life and force.”¹³ Moreover, Brodhead argues that Coverdale’s “prurient interest and yet insurmountable terror of female sexuality are read as the masculine by-products of the cultural construction that disacknowledges, or requires the veiling of, woman’s erotic embodiedness.”¹⁴

As previously discussed, Coverdale attempts, unconvincingly, to suppress recognition of Zenobia’s bodily appeal. His consistent depiction of Priscilla’s almost complete lack of physicality combined with her “shadowy grace” and “mysterious qualities” certainly mirror the American public’s tendency to esteem the supposed “poetic inspiration” and “supernatural sentiment” expressed by antebellum actress and writer Fanny Kemble regarding Elssler’s performances. After viewing a ballet performance, Kemble wrote in her memoir that the dancer, “floats, or flies, or glides ... What an exquisite, pathetic dream of supernatural sentiment that was!”¹⁵ In actuality, however, ballet historian Jennifer Homans points out that Elssler’s “style ... was earthy and voluptuous” and her dancing was “overtly sensual.”¹⁶ That many of her American critics at the time ignored these facets of her performance, instead focusing on her spiritual attributes, points to not only women’s figurative disembodiment during Hawthorne’s time but also helps explain why Hawthorne dichotomized Elssler by creating Priscilla and

12 Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 51-52.

13 Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 50-51.

14 Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 60.

15 Kemble, *Records of Later Life*, 25.

16 Homans, *Apollo’s Angels*, 164.

Zenobia, satirizing the public's praise of Elssler's supposed ethereality through his descriptions of Priscilla.

Coverdale first introduces Priscilla as "a figure enveloped in a cloak. It was ... a slim and unsubstantial girl" (26), and shortly thereafter depicts her "shadow vibrating on the fire-lighted wall" (27). Indeed, Coverdale indicates that he certainly considers Priscilla, unlike Zenobia, to contain no hint of voluptuousness or truly any aspect that would indicate her sex. Not only is Priscilla seemingly sex-less, but also she is scarcely a functioning human. Coverdale describes Priscilla's "peculiar charm" in the "weakness and irregularity with which she ran ... she had never yet acquired the perfect use of her legs ... she ran falteringly, and often tumbled on the grass" (73). Coverdale barely recognizes Priscilla's human qualities, instead suggesting her spirituality by describing her as "a shadow, fading gradually into the dimness of the wood" (125) and by relating her "slender and shadowy grace, and those mysterious qualities which make her seem diaphanous with spiritual light" (129). Throughout the novel, Hawthorne portrays Priscilla as irksomely vapid and spineless, constantly lurking in Zenobia's shadow and barely able to run without flopping over. Such blatantly exaggerated renderings of a socially and morally acceptable woman prompt readers to question Hawthorne's personal approval of such feminine ideals.

At the book's conclusion, Zenobia experiences the ultimate ruin, a suicidal death, conveyed through Coverdale's report of Zenobia's brutal demise and grossly disfigured corpse. This portrayal epitomizes Hawthorne's disparagement of the public's severe rejection of any performing woman who defied moralist, middle-class dictates by promoting lustful thoughts. Hollingsworth, the personification of moral hypocrisy, searches the water for Zenobia's body by viciously stabbing a hooked pole, used to retrieve well-buckets when the rope is broken, into the

depths. Coverdale observes that Hollingsworth proceeded to “mak[e] such thrusts ... as if he were stabbing at a deadly enemy” (233). Finally, the group retrieves her corpse, and Coverdale exclaims:

She was the marble image of a death agony. Of all the modes of death, methinks it is the ugliest. Her arms had grown rigid in the act of struggling, and were bent before her ... in the attitude of prayer. (235)

Hawthorne utilizes Zenobia’s harsh punishment for prompting immoral thoughts in Coverdale to further critique prurient yet censoriousness audience members in nineteenth-century America. Zenobia’s body is fixed unyieldingly in a prayer pose but appears, according to the narrator, “as if she struggled against Providence in never-ending hostility. Her hands! They were clenched in immitigable defiance” (235). This description characterizing Zenobia as dying in paradoxical prayer and moral defiance further highlights the trenchant and often incongruous dictates that socio-cultural moralism forced upon its adherers, including performers and audience members.

Following Zenobia’s decease, Coverdale unexpectedly declares his love for Priscilla. Although little evidence suggests Coverdale’s affection for Priscilla in the entire novel up to this point, his confession should not surprise those who studied the cultural milieu in tandem with the critical reaction to ballet at the time Hawthorne created *The Blithedale Romance*. Some people account for the novel’s strange conclusion by citing Hawthorne’s authorial shortcomings or blaming Whipple for convincing Hawthorne to tack on Coverdale’s ultimate confession shortly before publication of the novel.¹⁷ Yet as Baym points out, in his work, Hawthorne tends to show men who reject real physical attraction for women by outwardly shunning women’s and their own human sexuality¹⁸ If this is indeed the case, as *Blithedale* heavily indicates, then Hawthorne

¹⁷ Winslow, “New Light on Hawthorne’s Miles Coverdale,” 191.

¹⁸ Baym, “Thwarted Nature,” 66.

does not, in fact, offer a scattered, haphazard ending simply affixed to a seemingly unfinished novel. Instead, through Coverdale's obvious attraction towards Zenobia contrasted with his incongruous, ostensibly unsubstantiated confession of love for Priscilla, Hawthorne reflexively demonstrates the contemporaneous tendency to reject the idea that women were human beings in human forms and to instead emphasize their spiritual traits. Coverdale embodies an extension of American audiences' repressed erogenous tendencies and purposeful recognition of only one facet of ballerinas' existences. Similarly, Coverdale confesses his love for the practically disembodied, spiritual Priscilla while ignoring his actual attraction for Zenobia. Studying *Blithedale* while considering historical emergences surrounding Hawthorne increases the possibility of better understanding his depiction of the two women. Furthermore, exploration of the American public's critical reception of the artist Fanny Elssler aids the reader in comprehending Coverdale's unexpected and amorous confession about Priscilla, an admission some would otherwise contend Hawthorne created under coercion or in a simple instance of poor authorial judgment.

Nineteenth century America witnessed the rise of "new female celebrities who, first in the 1840s, then ... around 1850, began to appear before newly huge audiences and to be *known* to publics much greater yet."¹⁹ The advent of these highly popular performers, particularly ballerinas Taglioni and Elssler, coincided with female authors' growing cultural capital and monetary power in the literary market, especially for authors like Maria Susanna Cummins and Susan Warner. Such writers who reinforced the epoch's increased valuing of morality and middle-class domesticity in the 1800s were able to achieve heightened success, as Poe and Hawthorne were well aware. These latter two authors, as this thesis has demonstrated, also maintained familiarity both with the increasingly popular art form of ballet, with the ballerinas

¹⁹ Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 52.

themselves, and with the critical reception of these women. While European audiences lauded both the sensual and spiritual aspects of the ballerinas, American audiences “engaged in ... psychological device[s] to protect themselves”²⁰ from accusations of immorality by divorcing physicality from spirituality, privileging the latter while rejecting the former. As a result, viewers tended to consider ballerinas not to be real women at all, while they still satiated their spectatorial appetites by projecting their fantasies onto the female performers. Poe’s “own seeking after popularity and his assimilation of the popular culture of his own day”²¹ undoubtedly shaped his manner of composing “Ligeia.” The two female characters Ligeia and Rowena essentially serve as blank canvases onto which the anonymous narrator and by extension his readers may project their latent desires. Poe filters the story through the enigmatic and unreliable narrator and situates the two beautiful fictional women as central to the tale yet whose sole essential purpose is to feed the narrator’s and the reader’s imagination. He certainly endeavored to attract his contemporary popular culture by utilizing their tendency to engage in prurient spectatorship and exploiting his audiences’ proclivity to visually and imaginatively project onto performers, or in Poe’s case, the literary characters. Poe’s same authorial propensity resurfaces in “Hop-Frog,” where the fictional dancer Trippetta similarly mirrors his and others’ attitude towards female performers and by extension females themselves. Poe’s exposure to dance both as a participant and a spectator helps explain his seemingly misogynistic portrayals of aesthetically pleasing yet silent, subservient women. Furthermore, his *Broadway Journal* article titled “Barbarities of the Theater,” recounting the senseless and gruesome death of a ballerina caught on fire, significantly enlightens the controversial revenge fantasy contained in the conclusion of “Hop-Frog.” Hawthorne too witnessed the burgeoning celebrity of ballerinas and

20 Costonis, “The Personification of Desire: Fanny Elssler and American Audiences,” 61.

21 Neimeyer, “Poe and Popular Culture,” 222.

American audiences' repressed reactions. *Blithedale*'s Priscilla and Zenobia may initially seem to affirm Hawthorne as well as Poe's acceptance of such moralism. However, examination of Coverdale's narrative perspective elucidates Hawthorne's satirization, not acceptance, of critics' veneer of virtuousness towards performing women. Analysis not only of nineteenth-century society's treatment of women, but also of their perception of newly prominent ballet dancers, allows unforeseen illumination regarding Hawthorne and Poe's divisive treatment of their fictional females.

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