The Female Performer between Exhibitionism and Feminism in Novels by James, Hawthorne, and Zola

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Nodhar Hammami Ben Fradj

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2021

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-6633-1
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-6633-0

Dedicated to the Memory of my Mother
Chalbia Khlaf

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INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century was an arresting period that brought great change to Western societies in light of the Industrial Revolution that swept through Europe and the United States. Urbanization, productivity, prosperity, and ideals of democracy intensified towards the second half of the century and altered people's style of living. The abolition of slavery that ensued from the American Civil War nourished the principles of self-government and liberty. With the upsurge in modernity, sweeping ideas of autonomy, emancipation, and republicanism started to haunt the minds of American citizens as a challenge to the Old World's political, religious, and social institutions of authority. In the United States, in view of this trend of freedom seeking, women raised questions of citizenship and suffrage. After a long struggle to declare themselves as autonomous individuals with political identities, American women were partly granted some rights towards the last decades of the century; they were allowed to vote first in the territory of Wyoming in 1869, then in the territory of Utah in 1870. They also constituted a part of the workforce as a response to the appeal of the Industrial Revolution, becoming involved in new professions and fields that had been limited to men. It was something that disrupted the economic dependency on men and challenged the norms of gender and sexuality not only in the United States but also in Europe.

In the midst of this social and economic transformation, literature played a crucial role either in fostering these ideals of freedom or in reinstating the traditional order. As a cultural force capable of controlling minds and determining history, literature found a route into the communities that were suffering from subjugation and injustice, and blazed a trail for personal and social change. Harriet Beecher Stowe's antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) had a great impact on Afro-Americans and was the spark that set off the Civil War. Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* (1862) installed in the collective consciousness the value of freedom and justice while finding a reconciliation between revolution and religion. The production of these books that were consumed by oppressed and weakened categories of people, like women, black people, or poor classes, contributed to the alteration of minds by either energizing the readers to attain freedom or reinforcing the existing oppressive political system. In the issue of

women's emancipation, there were similarly two different trends of writing. The first, mainly occupied by female writers and less frequently by males who carried the slogan of freedom for women as full citizens, incited women to fight for their social and financial independence, political representation, active social involvement, and literary and artistic participation. The second led a campaign for the reinstatement of the cult of domesticity and restoration of society to its long-established order. With the intention of eradicating the seeds of social "disorder" and the risk of remapping gender roles, some male writers took a stance against women's emancipation and crafted literary works that were oriented toward the representation of the ideal figure of the Angel in the House, paralleled with a thought-out portrayal of the modern woman as odd and immoral.

Feminist critical discourse has been based on the study of this stereotyping of women in literature in order to uncover the inadequacies of the patriarchal cultures and help women attain citizenship in their home countries. Feminist criticism is a political practice that affixes the image of women in literature to their real position in essentialist governments. The feminist critics are preoccupied with literature as a cultural form and a discursive power that strongly affects minds and contributes to the reinforcement or alteration of the established norms in the culture in which it takes place. The investigation into sexual inequality through the analysis of literary texts is a part of the struggle and a commitment to the social and political activities on behalf of women's rights and interests. By analysing the images of women in male literary texts, Anglo-American feminist critics discovered the man-made female portraits that had been fashioned to buttress the patriarchal ideology. Feminist critics endeavour to reveal the representational identities of women in male or female-authored texts.

The feminist critical approach is used to not only detect the authors' feminist or misogynist views but also understand the cultural background that stands behind these views. Certain male writers tend to distort the image of women by installing patriarchal rules in the fictional worlds of their literary works and presenting them as norms. The misogynist tendency was unveiled by a number of Anglo-American feminists who extracted the negative stereotypes of women in the literary canon. Mary Ellmann presents in *Thinking about Women* (1968) a catalogue of derogatory female typecasts in the works of male writers and reveals the allocation of passivity, submission, piety, irrationality, and materiality to women. In like manner, the image of the hysterical and mad woman was profusely present in these texts. Judith Fryer correspondingly speaks of the use of women to reflect cultural myths in *The Faces of Eve: Women in the*

Nineteenth Century American Novel (1976) when she extracts a chain of female stereotypes like the temptress, the American Princess, the Great Mother, the witch-bitch, and the New Woman. The American pragmatic feminist Sandra Gilbert looks at new systems of female oppression which have been elaborated with regards to history, searches for the origins of social practices in order to change them, and shows concern over theorizing for political purposes. Gilbert's pragmatism functions as a counter-power to the previous male texts which constitute a powerful cultural mass that transforms female biology into a gendered identity, as Simone de Beauvoir sees it when she claims in *The Second Sex* that, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1989, 301).

The issue of women's representation in literature has remained cardinal in the reading of history and disclosure of underlying ideologies. Among the figures that were in some measure neglected or de-emphasized in nineteenth-century literary texts and critical works, one can refer to the female performer who was socially and politically significant, but perhaps included infrequently in literary works. A feminist critic may find in such an overlooked portrait an array of signs that can divulge the social view towards women's liberation. The reaction to the emergence of a publicly visible and mobile working woman can be extricated from the image of the performer in literature. The present book is concerned with two types of female performance, namely political speaking and acting. These two modes pertain to women's public display before a mixed audience in either preaching or acting. These activities belong to the realm of art and theatricality since they rest on the actor's degree of intelligence, eloquence, articulacy, intellect, histrionic faculty, and sensitivity to art to be qualified to persuade the watching mob. Women's cogent harangues and convincing artistic performances have been able to control the audience and upend the conventional images of women.

In the context of the performing arts, performance is generally related to the theatre and its entertaining aspect, but, in a more philosophical account, it can also represent a politics of intervention that is not merely used to empower the status of the performer but more importantly prop up a certain political project and implement a strategy of manipulation. Even though performance, with its dramaturgical side, is deeply rooted in social life, characterizing social interactions and daily situations, the focus here is on the theatrical side that typifies entertaining spectacles as well as political speeches. In public shows, the performer is "framed by 'special settings' such as theatres or lecture halls" (Leith and Myerson 1989, 4) which give them a sense of formality that allows them to position themselves as the

centre of attention in the midst of arranged public gatherings. In the theatre, the actor plays their role in front of an audience that is aware of the theatrical nature of the performance, whereas in lecture halls the performer delivers a political speech in a framework that gives the illusion that they are authentic. These politicians are in fact performers who play their parts with a high theatricality in a way that makes presentation and appearance substitute for policy and ideology. In *The Power of Address*, Dick Leith and George Myerson identify theatricality in the dramatic as well as political fields as "the performer's technique," which consists in the "bodily operations" that are added to the text of the performance or the script to convey the intended message while using "voice, posture, gesture and face" (1989, 8). Belonging to the art of manipulation, performances, whether theatrical or political, require much skill and firmness. The examination of women in performance covers their artistic power both in the theatre and in politics, since art manifests itself in thespian performances and the rhetorical poetics of politics. When the performer is a woman, the view of the observer changes because of a heavy heritage of prejudiced stances and slanted stereotyping. Women's noteworthy appearance as performers in the nineteenth century can be explored in the realistic fiction of the period which mirrored and assessed situations and new phenomena of the time.

However, despite the importance of this popular figure in the nineteenth century, the literary repertoire does not seem to be sufficiently furnished with such outstanding female characters as spokeswomen, orators, lecturers, politicians, preachers, singers, dancers, or actresses. This book is interested in the way these characters were represented in nineteenth-century fiction, given that the female performer, as a type of woman who defied the norms and disrupted the traditional understanding of womanhood, prospered in that specific period. The central figure here is the American author Henry James (1843–1916), who is a ubiquitous subject in the two comparative studies conducted. He was an author who dealt profoundly with the issue of female performance, to the point of titling one of his chief novels *The Tragic Muse* (1890) and focussing it on the figure of an actress. He similarly creates a strenuous and rebellious heroine in *The Bostonians* (1886) as a spokeswoman for the feminist movement. The characters' successful orations and skilful performances track James's affirmative standpoint towards women's participation in public life and deliver a rare and eccentric positive view towards their emancipation in the nineteenth century through the liberated character of the performer.

Even with the debate instigated by James's ambiguous style and open language about his attitude towards women's emancipation as a whole,

James remains one of the few male writers to have bravely tackled the subject of feminist activism and women's acting. His fiction is so enmeshed in social, cultural, and political matters that the reader may not only decipher the author's ideology but also read history through it. His interest in the woman question and the fostering of women's liberation can be detected through his conception of an ideal figure of the female performer: talented, brainy, and skilful in the art of public speaking, and proficient, powerful, and adroit in acting. As a writer who joins these two forms of performance for women in his oeuvre, he remains the pivotal figure of the present work, serving as the fork of its bifurcating comparative chapters. The book tends to be an exploration of one of James's most significant portraits of women that bears ideological and political dimensions. The figure of the female performer is analysed in his narratives and dissected along with select works of fiction by other writers so as to comprehend its representation in the literature of the era.

James's positive portrayal of the female performer impelled me to dig deep into that figure in the literary catalogue of that epoch in an attempt to fathom the position of this class of women in society and how they were received in a culture deeply rooted in essentialism. The female orators, with their booming voices, were present in nineteenth-century American and British narratives as a reproduction of the female rhetors of the temperance groups. The social discourse of these female preachers helped shape a feminist literary discourse through the fiction of a number of novelists like Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot, who also learnt to raise their voices. Christine Krueger contends that, "Following the models of the female preachers, women writers not only seized the opportunities offered to them by evangelical teaching and practice to appropriate interpretive and literary authority, but also sought to make their feminized social gospel prevail, calling on male writers to repent" (1992, 6). Characters like Dinah Morris in George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), Mademoiselle Reisz in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), Becky Sharp in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847), and Ethelberta in Thomas Hardy's *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876) stand for the figure of the talented and powerful female speaker. Unaccomplished performers, they may not be compared to James's Verena Tarrant as a well-defined public speaker in *The Bostonians*. The female character that seems closer to Verena than others in the literature of the time is Zenobia, the feminist preacher in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64). As James's source of inspiration, *The Blithedale Romance* lends itself to a comparative study with *The Bostonians*, with a particular emphasis on the figure of the political performer. The second chapter is therefore devoted to the examination of

the feminist note in the two narratives through the shared affirmative representation of the female public speaker.

Since the second mode of female performance that is pointed to in the book is acting, the focus in the third chapter is on the representation of the actress in nineteenth-century fiction. After reaching the possibility of drawing on the similarities between two contemporary literary works revolving around the same figure to determine the existence of a favourable view towards women's preaching, this research studies another type of public appearance for women that can lead to conflicting attitudes, unearthed through opposing portrayals of the figure of the performer. American or Victorian novels like Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), Wilkie Collin's *No Name* (1862), George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), and Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half-Sisters* (1848) displayed an interest in the figure of the actress, yet not as thoroughly as James's works. In addition to his full-length novel *The Tragic Muse*, James included the figure in other short stories like "Nona Vincent" (1893) and "The Private Life" (1892). The point is to compare Miriam Rooth, the protagonist of *The Tragic Muse*, with another work dealing with the portrait of the actress in the same period in order to assess attitudes about that bourgeoning unconventional figure.

Emile Zola (1840–1902), though a French author, was selected because he centres his novel *Nana* (1880) on an actress, and because he provides a disparaging representation of his heroine that goes against the Jamesian ideology. *Nana* is a book that perfectly suits a study in contrasts between the characters of Miriam and Nana. What makes the selection of Zola more reasonable is the entanglement between the French, British, and American literary schools in addition to the closeness between the French and American theatres. The literary works that dealt with the French theatre in the nineteenth century treated the same issues as the works that discussed matters related to the British or American theatres. This was due to the common features between these theatres and the physical mobility of actresses and barnstormers between Europe and the United States, which created a shared identity among the European and American female performers. With the idea that the focus of the book is exclusively on the male authors who wrote about the emancipated figure of the performer, it was possible to include Dreiser in the comparative study. However, Carrie Meeber, the protagonist of *Sister Carrie*, does not seem appropriate for studies in similarities or contrasts with James's heroines, as she is a controversial figure who does not utterly fall under the Jamesian category of the gifted and dignified female artist, and cannot be equally classified as the purely exhibitionist entertainer who uses the theatre as an expansion of

her streetwalking. It is difficult to typecast her as a fallen prostitute or a successful actress since she attains her destiny through neither virtue nor vice, and remains constantly subject to change. Similarly, the illegitimate Magdalen in Collins's *No Name* is not a fully-developed actress, despite her histrionic character. She uses the stage for transient labour to earn some money, but cannot sustain her career as a performer and prefers to pursue her inheritance. Contradictorily, the Zolesque Nana is typically and blatantly portrayed as an actress-courtesan. Her representation in the novel is at variance with the Jamesian portraiture of the performer.

What makes the present book distinct is not in fact the choice of its subject of study, but perhaps the authors and books that are selected for comparison. James has been compared to many authors, but I have failed to find a work comprehensively dealing with female performance as a common issue between *The Bostonians* and *The Blithedale Romance*, or one comparing the image of the actress in *The Tragic Muse* with that in *Nana*. There are studies that analyse the relationship between James and Hawthorne like Richard Brodhead's invaluable essay "Hawthorne among the Realists: The Case of Howells," which shows how authors as varied as Melville, Howells, James, and Faulkner learned from Hawthorne's model. Likewise, the comparison of James with Zola in the book's last chapter is a reminder of other critical works in the literature on James that compare him with other French authors. In *Flaubert and Henry James: A Study in Contrasts*, David Gervais studies the contrasts between the narrative strategies of James and Flaubert and the different characters of their novels. It also explores James's own readings of Flaubert. It is meaningful to compare James to a writer about whom he wrote reviews or critical works. The choice of Hawthorne and Zola makes sense because James composed insightful essays about them and offered perceptive analytic studies of their works. Nineteenth-century French authors are associated with their British and American contemporaries in many books, for example in Rachel Bowlby's *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola*, in which she argues that the spectacular development of early consumer society in Britain, France, and the United States had a profound impact on constructions of femininity and masculinity and commercial and cultural values during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her study reveals the common cultural background that affected the choice of themes and design of characters for the three authors, although their characters were designed in different fashions that suit their political convictions and social outlooks.

In an attempt to facilitate the understanding of the selected texts in the present book, there is a need to consult history. Covering the sociocultural background of the female performers provides an awareness of the popular view of them, and reading the narratives in the light of these historical conditions creates a useful reconciliation between history and fiction, and facts and fancy. Hence, before delving into the comparative studies, the first chapter gives a brief account of the figure in the nineteenth century, starting from the circumstances that triggered women's desire to flee the patriarchal mode of living until they progressively acquired a new social position that hastened their valiant manifestation in public spaces. The chapter is concerned with the female performer as a prominent figure in that epoch and her engagement in religious and political performing activities. The negative repercussions of women's involvement in theatrical pursuits are similarly covered through an emphasis on the threatened reputation of actresses when equated with prostitutes. Their likely entrapment by the capitalist system through the theatrical industry is another point that highlights the limitations of a woman's public career. What renders the reference to history momentous in the present work is James's realistic reproduction of the figure of the performer and her surrounding conditions.

Historical and cultural circumstances were behind James's preoccupation with performing women in his fiction, especially given that the eminence of staging and prominence of the actress as celebrity characterized the contemporary era. Technological innovations on stage by the middle of the century contributed to the rise of the theatre and proliferation of the dramatic material. James's fixation with the theatre allowed him to develop a network of friendships and acquaintances with actresses, playwrights, and actor managers. His connections included Elizabeth Robins, Ellen Terry, Fanny Kemble, G. B. Shaw, A. W. Pinero, William Archer, George Alexander, Johnston Forbes-Robertson, Edward Compton, Augustin Daly, and Harley Granville-Baker (Carlson 1993, 409). His care for the female genius on the stage created an intimacy with the famous actress Fanny Kemble, who made her debut in 1829, fourteen years before his birth. James was enthralled by her art and fond of her as a person, describing her as "one of the consolations of [his] life" (Karelis 1998, 3). After her death in 1893 he wrote a tribute to his dear friend in a letter to her daughter Sarah: "She went when she could, at last, without a pang; she was very touching in her infirmity all these last months … and yet with her wonderful air of smouldering embers under ashes, she leaves a great image … a great memory" (Karelis 1998, 3). The appealing images of actresses in his fictional works were inspired by his female companions in the thespian field.

James's captivation with the theatre and devoted playgoing almost to the end of his life resulted in an adept spectatorship, and made him a brooding observer and connoisseur of stagecraft and acting. His meticulous investigation of contemporary French, English, and American theatre gave birth to "a body of dramatic theory," as suggested by Allan Wade (1957, xxiv), who collected James's essays on the theatre in a book entitled *The Scenic Art: Notes on Acting and the Drama 1872–1901.* As a critic and theorist, James composed thirty-two essays on English, French, and American theatre, actors, and playwrights from 1872 to 1901. He pondered male and female performances and looked upon them with a sharp critical eye, yet gave more room to the criticism of female performances than male acting. His appreciation of Mademoiselle Aimée Desclée, for instance, in an essay on the Parisian stage, is recognizably pronounced when he describes her as "the first actress in the world" and rates her rendition in *La Gueule du Loup* highly, saying: "She has been sustaining by her sole strength the weight of [that] ponderous drama" (James 1957, 9). He wrote a whole essay about Madame Ristori in which he comments on "the abundance of her natural gifts [which] makes the usual clever actress seem a woefully slender personage, and the extreme refinement of her art [which] renders our most knowing devices, of native growth, unspeakably crude and puerile" (29). In another essay on the Parisian stage in the same book, he classifies Madame Judic as the favourite actress of the day before Céline Chaumont (46). He calls Mademoiselle Favart "a great talent" in "Le Théâtre Français," and admits that she seems to him "a powerful rather than interesting character" (87). As far as Madame Plessy is concerned, he thinks that she has "a certain largeness of style and robustness of art" (90).

In his essays about London theatres, James confesses his admiration for several actresses in spite of his criticism of their recitals, which is always constructive. He refers to Mrs Kendal as "the most agreeable actress on the London stage. This lady is always pleasing and often charming" (1957, 108). Ellen Terry appeared to him an exception in her feminine side on the English stage, and he claims that she has a "remarkable charm" and is "very natural" (142). As a comedian, Mrs Marie Bancroft is depicted as a "delightful actress with an admirable sense of the humorous, an abundance of animation and gaiety, and a great deal of art and finish" (149). The criteria of James's judgement of female performances were related to the extent of the actress's shrewdness, powerfulness, naturalness, charisma, and femininity. He ached for a performer who would unfetter her talents and cease to be a victim of culture, and criticized the actress who took too lightly her gift in order to obey the traditions. He comments on London actresses, averring: "The feminine side, in all, the London theatres, is regrettably weak, and

Miss Terry is easily distinguished … to represent the maximum of feminine effort on the English stage" (142).

As a reformer, James asked the female performers for more gusto, mettle, and fearlessness in order to procure the requisite freedom that would allow them to represent their own sex. This idea is made evident when he observes: "The actresses are classically bad, though usually pretty, and the actors are much addicted to taking liberties" (1957, 76). In his works, he contrives an ideal picture of the performer that stands for the prosperous unshackled woman who feels committed to a political venture aiming at revolutionizing her existence and elevating the status of her sex. He applauds the efforts of Miriam Rooth to become a successful woman and complete artist while condemning Verena Tarrant's destructive weakness and inability to protect her career as orator. In order to figure out the literary view of such women, the Jamesian perspective ought to be compared with other points of view. Hawthorne joins James through the assertive presence of the female voice in *The Blithedale Romance*, while Zola opposes the Jamesian-Hawthornean feminist philosophy to echo an uncompromising perception of women's manifestation for a male public as a form of whoredom and the overt practice of prostitution. The figure of the female performer remained caught between the bodily display that reduced her performances to the realm of the spectacular and engagement in a political project that made her quit the private circle and cross the threshold of the theatre as an emblem of the public sphere.

CHAPTER ONE

A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE FIGURE OF THE FEMALE PERFORMER: FEMINIST REFLECTIONS

Introduction

The spatial shift that occurred in the lives of American and European women from the home to the stage in the nineteenth century represented a leap of insubordination that shook their history. That transformation from domesticity to social visibility was gradually established in the bosom of the two continents. It marked women's deviation from the prescribed cultural manifesto into their pursuit of emancipation and self-confirmation. The present chapter seeks to investigate the historical background that led to the emergence of women as public speakers and performers during that time. It explores their social manifestation and physical mobility, and analyses the advantages and limitations of that public exposure. Defining the historical aspect of women's participation in public life is crucial in comprehending the conditions behind the stereotyping of women in the literary works of that epoch. An understanding of the patriarchal paradigm is fundamental since it was the chief motive behind women's noncompliance; their desertion of their home life was mutinous enough to drag them into the roles of pastors, politicians, public speakers, and performers. That unruly physical display and intrepid confrontation with the audience made the nineteenth-century performer a centre of interest as well as a source of anxiety.

During the nineteenth century, women were seen by American and European societies as naturally attached to the domestic sphere. The man thought that he was foreordained to possess and protect the woman because of her physical frailty, and believed that she was destined to be respondent to his tenet. Yet, after an extended brawl with traditions and cultural norms, women started to protest against their mode of living and commenced their journey for freedom. They became aware of their rights as human beings and called for a viable participation in social life. The economic and

demographic conditions helped them invade the public sphere to seek independent regular incomes. Nineteenth-century working-class girls began to get some education, first in schools provided by the church, then in state schools. Women obtained paid occupations like teaching and handicrafts and paid work in industry; they also participated in charity work and religious campaigns. Ultimately, they mounted public theatres as spaces open to mixed audiences. The social prominence of women extended to an onstage exhibition in direct confrontation with male spectators. Women became public performers, using their bodies as symbolic mediums for self-manifestation in the external world. They were balloonists, equestrians, dancers, singers, and actresses. By occupying such exhibitionist vocations, the woman proved that her body could be used as a means of liberation instead of being her first source of imprisonment, and proclaimed its release from the jail of domesticity. The free movement of her body on stage went hand in hand with her desire to get unchained from the dogma of patriarchy and cultural traditions. Through her feminized spectacles, she tended to discharge her repressed sexuality, deconstruct her gendered identity, and establish a new subjectivity.

The Patriarchal Paradigm

In the nineteenth century most women felt enslaved at home through the patriarchal institutions of marriage and motherhood. In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1845, Margaret Fuller compares marriage to slavery, claiming, "there exists in the minds of men a tone of feeling towards women as towards slavery" (1994, 17). Since husbands were the only holders of resources and wives had no independent means of subsistence, women had to maintain their subservience to men. Parents were convinced that marriage was the destiny of every girl, and the latter moved from the authority of the father to the enslavement of the husband on a continuum that perpetuated women's submissiveness. Fuller argues that the father, "sells his daughter for a horse, and beats her if she runs away from her new home," because of the belief that, "she must marry, if it be only to find a protector, and a home of her own" (1994, 43). The woman who remained single cultivated social disapprobation and pity; she was a sign of oddity and subject of censure. Girls received less education than boys, were barred from universities, and could obtain only low-paid jobs.

After marriage, the man would be a legal owner of everything his wife possessed, including money or inheritances,[1] in addition to his exploitation of her body. Law and religion legalized women's possession by men, starting from the wife's written vow and verbal engagement to obey her husband in the marriage ceremony,[2] and going through the marital laws that were in favour of the husband. Every man had the right to force his wife into sex and childbirth. He could also take away his children without reason and send them to be raised elsewhere, on top of his right to strip his wife of all her possessions. A wife could not easily obtain a divorce; if she could not tolerate the quality of life in marriage and decided to run away from home the police could capture and return her, and her husband could imprison her. Furthermore, adultery was not a sufficient reason for a woman to divorce her husband, whereas it was enough for a man to divorce his wife.[3] All this was sanctioned by the church, law, custom, and history, and approved by society in general.

Society created two stereotypes of women: the wife, an idealized domestic "true" woman; and the vilified prostitute, a temptress and dark woman standing for feminine evil. "The Cult of True Womanhood" (1820–60) is a term coined by Barbara Welter to describe the process of acculturating women to this ideal in America. She extracts four cardinal virtues in the true woman (piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity). Since virtuousness required submissiveness, women's moral superiority contributed to their sexual inferiority. Elizabeth Allen laconically wraps up women's situation: "the idealization of woman's moral influence in the domestic sphere obscured the glaring contradiction of ascribing woman a superior moral virtue and yet rendering that superiority inferior to masculine legal, social and economic restraint" (1984, 12). The true woman was asked to make sacrifices for her household and think only in altruistic terms to

[1] Before the passing of the 1882 Marriage Property Act, when a woman got married, her wealth passed to her husband. If she had an income, this also belonged to her husband.

[2] On September 12, 1922, the Episcopal Church voted to remove the word "obey" from the bride's section of the wedding vows. Other churches of the Anglican Communion have their own authorized prayer books. However, brides and grooms had to wait until 2000 to select one of the two versions of vows and decide whether to use the one which did not include the promise of obedience.

[3] The 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act gave men the right to divorce their wives in cases of adultery contrary to the wives who could not ask for divorce for the same. Once divorced, the children became the property of the husband who could deprive their mother of them. Wives had to wait until 1891 to get the right to hold the decision of whether to stay with their husbands or not.

save her family. She was supposed to preserve the serenity of the house and afford the appropriate private atmosphere for the husband to be productive outside of it. In his essay "The Subjection of Women," J. S. Mill supports equality between the two sexes and discusses the issue of women's compulsory sacrifice, saying: "All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women and all the current sentimentalities that it's their nature, to live for others, to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections" (1869, 27).

A woman had to merge materiality and spirituality to be at the same time the object of a man's sexual desire and the domestic paragon. She was given the epitaph "Angel in the House" for her supposed innate spirituality, and was expected to be her husband's spiritual adviser. Furthermore, she had to return his sexual appeal by a passive responsiveness while trying to preserve her purity; she had to abnegate her own desire and limit her conjugal life to the satisfaction of the husband. These patriarchal premises marked a long history of women's silence and denial of the right of self-expression; the chasteness of women required them to lose sensuality and combat their sexual instincts. As mentioned in women's private diaries, if the wife was fervid, she would feel guilty about the pleasure that went against her presumed purity. Allen quotes William Wasserstrom when he explains what true womanhood meant in the nineteenth century: "womanliness came to mean sexlessness and in the 1840s and later fiction relied on this conviction whenever it presented an ideal woman" (1984, 31).

Therefore, the true woman should be asexual or passionless; otherwise, she could be identified as a prostitute or an anomalous woman. Up to the nineteenth century, women had been perceived as oversexed and thus the originators of men's fall into the world of dissipation. Women with strong sexual desires were defined in fiction as temptresses, sorceresses, and whores who caught men with their feminine lassos. These figures were built around the popular image of Eve as the epitome of feminine evil, and were represented as characters that used their femininity to seduce men and cause their downfall. That is why a true woman was forewarned of the model of Eve and summoned to follow the example of Mary the Paragon. Donna Dickenson describes this condition of true womanhood and expounds the stereotyping of women in society in the introduction to Fuller's book, saying: "A new ideal of female 'passionlessness' emerged in Anglo-American culture in the late eighteenth century; the natural woman was sexless; prostitutes were unnatural" (1994, xxvi).

In American and European societies alike, women learned to disavow their own sexuality in the apprehension of a repressive patriarchal law. In *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature*, Robin Gilmour assesses Victorian religion, science, and politics in their own terms and in relation to the larger cultural politics of the middle-class challenge to traditionalism. He deals with the religious principles that were taught within an institutional framework and criticizes the role of religion in instilling in women the necessity of loathing their own bodies and adhering to their spirituality; he asserts that "if the great evil of evangelicalism was bullying the conscience, that of Tractarianism was teaching the Victorians to hate their own flesh" (1993, 86). In the nineteenth century, these religious institutions were an integral part of the patriarchal society; their role was to assert the contemporary didacticism among the different categories of society, essentially women. They were supported by biological determinism, which regarded the social and sexual dependency of women as natural. They equally legalized men's double physical control over women's bodies in both sexual and domestic matters.

Women's Incursion into Male Territory

The pursuit of freedom was the main factor that fuelled women's actions in both America and Europe. The conditions of the American woman were not unlike those of the European woman, including the French, German, and Victorian woman, especially since transatlantic voyages and immigration from Europe to the "dollar land" by the end of the American Civil War in 1865 made women live the same situation in two worlds. Seeking liberation, political participation, and economic independence, women deserted the domestic fences of their mothers and invaded the man's public sphere; they were rummaging around for another identity that would restore their dignity and detach them from a history of subjugation. Politically speaking, "women, largely absent from all institutional sites of the public – from polling places, city councils, public offices, the newspaper rooms, and political clubs – were an extreme case of the social exclusions of early American republicanism" (Ryan 1992, 265–66). As a reaction to the antagonistic relationship between women and the ruling political circles, feminist figures insisted on attaining public visibility and a political contribution. After succeeding in launching a series of reform movements in the nineteenth century incorporating political reform and the suffrage movements, as well as social, health, moral, and economic reform, active feminists demonstrated women's political and social maturation. The development of women conditioned the overthrow of the patriarchal parameters of true womanhood.

By 1835, only a limited number of paid occupations were open to women in housework, handicrafts and industry, and school teaching (Cott 1985, 6). Women's growing literacy opened the way for them to be journalists and fiction writers (Cott 1985, 7).

Women's non-domestic pursuits were not restricted to primary-school teaching and magazine publications, but extended to public confrontations like religious preaching, political addresses, and stage acting. On the religious level, and particularly during the Second Great Awakening (1790–1840), more than one hundred American women who belonged to the evangelical religious group passed through the United States and swept over Europe as travelling preachers to hold public meetings in barns, schools, and fields; they were the first group of women to speak publicly in America (Brekus 2009, 20). After the crisis of faith caused by the rise of empiricism, positivism, and Darwinism, religious movements in England like Tractarianism[4] called for the reinstatement of lost Christian traditions of faith. Female preachers participated in the attempts at theological reconstruction, aware that "preaching was fundamental to its devotional practice because it was through preaching that the individual soul was reached and converted" (Gilmour 1993, 73).

The evangelical contribution to nineteenth-century culture was not only intellectual but also moral, through the organization of public campaigns against slavery or child labour. Evangelicalism's nursery of Victorian values was a point of intersection between religion and politics, the two areas in which women actively participated and concretized their reformist disposition through homilies and orations. During the nineteenth century, America and Europe experienced major economic, political, cultural, and social changes, and the rise of capitalism and entrepreneurship incited women's partaking in the public sphere. The 1830s became a turning point in women's economic participation, public activities, and social presence. Women showed up first as workers and preachers, then as rebels; the first industrial strikes in the United States led by women protesting wage reductions occurred in 1835. Women's voices started to rise progressively in the public arena, and they began to play a part in moral crusades and reform movements while appealing for equal rights, including voting and education, financial autonomy, and control over reproduction. Many

[4] Tractarianism or Oxford movement (1833–45) developed within the Church of England to emphasize its Catholic inheritance and defend it as a divine institution against the threats of liberal theology, rationalism, and government interference ("Oxford Movement," *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia* 2011).

rhetoricians took to public podiums to mobilize women. Among them, one may list Maria W. Stewart (1803–79), Kate Chopin (1850–1904), Sarah Grimke (1792–1873), Margaret Fuller (1810–50), Sojourner Truth (1797–1883), Frances Harper (1825–1911), Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906), Sarah Winnemucca, Anna Julia Cooper (1858–1964), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902), Fannie Barrier Williams (1855–1944), Ida B. Wells (1862–1931), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935) (Ritchie and Ronald 2001).

Women took part in multifarious reform movements to improve education, instigate prison reform, ban alcoholic drinks, and, during the pre-Civil War period, free slaves when it was not considered respectable for women to speak before mixed audiences of men and women. The abolitionist sisters Sarah and Angelina Grimke of South Carolina, who brashly said their piece against slavery at public meetings, received approval from at least some male abolitionists, including William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Frederick Douglass, who supported the right of women to speak and take part equally with men in antislavery activities ("Women's History in America" 1994, 3). Some women like Stanton, Lucy Stone, Lucretia Mott, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth drew similarities between the position of women and that of the slaves in society where both categories were considered as passive, devoted, and obedient ("Women's History in America" 1994, 4). Women's political addresses like those of the American Mary Elizabeth Lease, a leading populist spokeswoman in the 1880s and 1890s in Kansas who had been hankering after labour reform and birth control, were unconventional, unusual, and transgressive. They were just like the lectures of Margaret Robins when she led the National Women's Trade Union League in the early 1900s ("Women's History in America" 1994, 4). The participation in the abolition movement gave lessons to women and triggered them to launch a feminist movement to ask for their rights. In *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights in the United States*, Eleanor Flexner and Ellen Fitzpatrick declare that:

> It was in the abolition movement that women first learned to organize, to hold public meetings, to conduct petition campaigns. As abolitionists they first won the right to speak in public and began to evolve a philosophy of their place in society and of their basic rights. For a quarter of a century the two movements, to free the slave and to liberate women, nourished and strengthened one another. (1996, 80)

For the sake of their own emancipation, women challenged the dismal conditions of domesticity and defied the ideal of true womanhood while fancying an eminent public involvement.

The female performers who led political campaigns and raised their voices in public spaces encountered a counter-campaign that denied them the right of self-expression. Their public leadership was deemed to be deviant since it went against women's sacred domestic roles and was therefore considered a sign of social and moral digression. Fuller contends that:

> Women who speak in public, if they have a moral power, such as have been felt, from Angelina Grimke and Abby Kelly; that is if they speak for conscience sake, to serve a cause which they hold sacred, invariably subdue the prejudices of their hearers, and excite an interest proportionate to the aversion with which it had been the purpose to regard them. (1994, 72)

In like manner, she quotes Abby Kelly in the Town-House when she argued for man's scornfulness of the female public speakers:

> The scene was not unheroic – to see that woman, true to humanity and her own nature, a centre of rude eyes and tongues, even gentlemen feeling licensed to make part of a species of mob around a female out of her sphere … She acted like a gentle hero, with her mild decision and womanly calmness. (1994, 72)

In the same vein, Nancy Cott exposes the situation of the nineteenth-century woman and shows the unacceptability of her public manifestation: "Women's public life generally was so minimal that if one addressed a mixed audience she was greeted with shock and hostility" (1985, 5).

Male aversion to the female public speeches was not simply caused by women's abandonment of the precincts of the home but also by their physical manifestation in open spaces and the use of their bodies that were a source of piety as a tool in these speeches. The hands, voice, and gestures of a woman became a medium of her public addresses after being her means for doing the domestic work. Political or theatrical performances require the mediation of the body, since "speaking the text involves speaking with the body" (Aston and Savona 1991, 117). Leith and Myerson elucidate the performer's usage of the body as a technique of performance; they claim that "from acting to preaching, political oratory to storytelling – are the resources of the body which are generally grouped under the term delivery. We may refer to *voice*, *posture, gesture* and *face*" (1989, 8). On the stage or

political daises, the movement of the human body and the gestures of the performer – like showing, pointing, knocking on the desk, applauding, or making facial or hand gestures – are referred to as "kinesics." That interaction of the body motion is deemed a central element in delivering an expressive discourse and assuring an effective transmission of ideas. In face-to-face communication, the performer uses body language like the gaze or facial expressions to alter, stress, or intensify her spoken words. These non-linguistic cues are able to convey social and emotional information in combination with the verbal statements. Likewise, the voice remains one of the most significant technical elements in speeches – whether in a religious sermon, political address, or theatrical scene, the female performer is expected to use her voice in terms of stress patterns, intonation, and volume. Sometimes, the female body is more influential in the recitation of certain roles than the male body. In acting, Aston and Savona (1991) refer to some nineteenth-century actresses whose physical features fitted certain stage roles like Sarah Bernhardt. While playing her part, the performer was aware of the power of her body to achieve the desired effect on the targeted audience. The visual and verbal components of the performance compelled her to use her corporeality on public stages, a fact which put a woman's beauty on display in an eccentric breach of conventional rules.

In political as well as theatrical performances, the body plays a pivotal role in persuading the onlookers; in that period, it was taken as a source of power for female performers to destabilize the bromidic age-old view towards it. The female body became a vehicle of self-expression and a mode of liberation. "Performance (written and acted)," states Helene Keyssar, "deconstructs sexual difference and thus undermines patriarchal power" (1996, 1). The theatre became a proper place to jettison polarities and dump the idea of spirituality that adhered to women by making them a presence, an existence, centres, and subjects with stupendous mental capacities. According to Viv Gardner, "in 1840 there were about three actors to each actress, two to one in 1851 and by 1891 actresses were just in the majority" (1992, 8). That growing increase in the number of actresses in the nineteenth century reflected women's awareness of themselves as human beings and full citizens who had the right to participate in cultural life. With the female involvement in the theatrical domain, the theatre ceased to be a traditional mime and cultural reproduction of sexual difference and became a woman's space for self-assertiveness and the reformulation of a new individuality. This was the point where a woman was released from the domestic orb and inscribed herself within a new system of an active public manifestation. It was on the stage that actresses could blur the border between thespian roles and real identities, performance

and reality, femininity and feminism, and just be representatives of the female liberated sex. Fuller explains the political motives behind a woman's invasion of public spaces: "As to her home, she is not likely to leave it more than she now does for balls, theatres, meetings for promoting missions … in hope of an animation of her existence" (1994, 19). She also admits the mental and physical talent of such stage women:

> As to the possibility of her filling with grace and dignity, any such position, we should think those who had seen the great actresses, and heard the Quaker preachers of modern times, would not doubt, that woman can express publicly the fullness of thought and creation, without losing any of the peculiar beauty of her sex. What can pollute and tarnish is to act thus from any motive except that something needs to be said or done. Women could take part in the processions, the songs, the dances of old religion, no one fancied their delicacy was impaired by appearing in public for such a cause. (1994, 19)

In order to voice her refusal of the exploitation of her body and being consumed at home, the woman made an investment of her own body in public life – she was determined to attest that she alone had power over her body. In her essay "Female Daredevils" (1992), Helen Day shows how women made spectacles through their bodies as daredevils, parachutists, and balloonists. In the nineteenth century, female daredevilry was depicted in press reports, pictorial representations, and public reception. Women partook in public shows and flowed into the entertaining theatres that were restricted to men. They worked as balloonists and parachutists who launched large gas balloons and performed trapeze acts. These female spectacles spread across the United States and Europe, including England and France. Some Victorian women followed the path of the French aeronaut Sophie Blanchard[5] such as Dolly Shepherd (or Britain's "Queen of the Air," as she was known) who ballooned in spectacular feats. The undaunted confrontation with death was the main challenge for those women who used their bodies to perform spectacles in space. Female parachutists deconstructed the belief in the superior power of men and demurred to the idea of women's physical frailty. Their exhibitions were fearless adventures that pertained to a whole political project that aimed to unsettle the rules of popular culture. In effect, these performers were iconoclasts who defied culture and nature in acts that exposed them to the danger of unpredictable wind and fire and violent landings, just to

[5] Sophie Blanchard was the first woman to work as a professional balloonist at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century; she used to balloon in official festivals with Napoleon Bonaparte.

demonstrate that their physical capacities were not unlike those of men, and that their corporeality was not a source of weakness and humiliation but of potency and dignity.

Women correspondingly utilized their bodies to perform entertaining spectacles: female circus performers leaped from buildings, walked tightropes, and played tricks. During that period, show women captivated many male spectators with their extraordinary spectacles; some renowned female stars performed shows that were judged to be dreadful and unmanageable for women because they required an elevated extent of bravery, force, and masculine vigour. Signora Josephine Giradelli or the "fire queen" was a well-known exhibitionist who held boiling oil in her mouth and hands, in addition to Bess Houdini who worked in the circus with her husband Harry. Likewise, May Wirth was a famous equestrian, known for her somersaults and other stunts while riding a running horse. There were equally tightrope walkers like the performer who went by the name of the Female Blondin who superbly ventured out across London's River Thames from Battersea to Cremorne in August 1861. Through the performance of such arduous adventures that were supposed to be the arena of men, women were struggling to speak their bodies, using them as an upwelling of strength rather than emblems of feebleness as they used to be. Their power lay in not only the heftiness of their muscles but also their struggle for dignity. Their journey for a different identity and quest for equality were revealed in their self-exposure to death as a way to quit death-in-life in a society that buried them in the home.

Parachuting, performing fireworks, stunts, and death-defying exploits were not the only ways to verify that women were equal to men and capable of acting as similarly unfettered adventurers as them. Acting was also a means to subvert the sexual division of roles and disturb the patriarchal social order, mainly when women appeared in male clothing to portray travesty roles. Actresses mockingly adopted masculinity by imitating the male body and using male costumes, replacing male actors and fighting heroically on the stage. Charlotte Cushman played Hamlet in 1851 in the American theatre while Alice Marriott played the same role in 1861 in the English theatre. In such roles, women intentionally concealed their bodies under male costumes primarily to deconstruct the contradictory binary uniform of sexualized subject/object, and second to evidence that they can meritoriously replace men and perform their roles not merely onstage but more significantly in real life. The theatre thus became a public space wherein women could destabilize the prevailing male hegemony. It offered "'a place from which to speak' in which women [could] be at home

in public"; and "simultaneously occupie[d] and create[d] a public sphere, a legitimate place and occasion, for women's speech" (Kruger 1996, 68).

The image of these actresses reflected the image of the New Woman who strove to be man's compeer and flouted the notion of femininity by trying to acquire a mannish presence through male costumes and hairstyles. This is how Gardner describes the New Woman:

> The New Woman, then, was seen typically as young, middle class and single on principle. She eschewed the principles of fashion in favor of more masculine dress and severe coiffure … and was certainly a devotee to Ibsen and given to reading "advanced books." She was financially independent of father and husband … She affects emancipating habits, like smoking, riding a bicycle, using bold language and taking the omnibus or train unescorted. (1992, 4–5)

The New Woman was unruly in her appearance, with a recalcitrant comportment that voiced her dissatisfaction with the social categorization of the sexes. Her keen desire to subvert the rules and violate the conventions was obvious through her repudiation of the dress code. The choice of a masculine look for certain prostitutes in the nineteenth century could similarly be interpreted as a desire to be men's equals in manipulating their own bodies. In an extreme position, some women might have preferred prostitution over other forms of sex slavery, thinking that it was a vocation that could allow them a margin of discretion in monitoring their bodies, as opposed to married women who were, according to them, caught in the patriarchal institutions of marriage and motherhood. Engaged in commercial sex, certain women could experience the feeling of being in possession of their bodies either through the choice of their partners or the elopement from the legal aspect of compulsory heterosexuality. In same-sex relationships, women could also feel released from the social constraints of marriage. While dispensing with the presence of men, they could borrow a masculine behaviour for full sexual gratification. Kristen Pullen argues that the masculine style of the New Woman as a feminist or a prostitute was not accepted by society: "the spectre of the masculine woman – either the feminist who took dress reform to the extreme and adopted male clothes or the prostitute who eroticized the female body with close-fitting pants, hats, and other accoutrements of masculine style – alarmed and aroused outright hostility" (2005, 120).

The theatre was used by a number of women to deconstruct the patriarchal premises – not specifically by adopting masculinity, and more daringly by using their own femininity. Some performers ascended the stage