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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

BEYOND BERENICE
EDGAR ALLAN POE AS A MAGAZINE EDITOR, CRITIC,
AND SUPPORTER OF WOMEN

by

Karen Affinito Greco

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

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Abstract

While Edgar Allan Poe was editor of the New York-based *Broadway Journal* and the *Literati of New York* in the mid 1840s, he was very supportive of female writers of the time period. Poe gave women writers including Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, and Frances Sargent Osgood key placements in the *Broadway Journal* and the *Literati of New York* and most often favorable reviews. These actions and feelings of support were in contrast to the overall feeling of the time period, which was that women should not venture outside the domestic arena into the literary world.

This thesis is divided into three main parts. The introductory chapter details American culture in the nineteenth century as well as the traditional roles of men and the changing roles of women. It also details Poe's professional and personal relationships with a number of prominent women writers of the time period.

Chapter One looks at four short stories written by Poe – “Berenice,” “Morella,” “Ligeia,” and “Fall of the House of Usher” – all which have central female characters. Through Poe's portrayal of silent, strong women and weak, fearful men, he is able to draw parallels to the society of the time. Poe's women symbolize the intelligent and talented women writers who were entering the scene.

Chapter Two includes a close reading and analysis of Poe's reviews of both male and female writers that appeared in the *Broadway Journal* and the *Literati of New York*. It is clear that Poe favored female writers and gave harsher reviews and less constructive criticism to male writers.

Overall, this thesis explores Poe beyond his role of poet and short story author. It explores Poe as a magazine editor and critic, as well as a man who possessed a love and admiration for women and their writings.

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AND SUPPORTER OF WOMEN**

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Montclair, NJ

2010

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Introduction

Women in the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century was an important time for women in America. While their long-established roles of wife, mother, and domestic keeper were fully developed, some women were beginning to bend these roles to encompass more, including a place in the literary world. Due to these changing roles, many men were unsure of the effects of women entering an arena that had typically been just for them. However, famed American author Edgar Allan Poe was openly supportive of the female writer and played the role of mentor to some. Not only was his encouragement of women evident in his writing and reviews in the *Broadway Journal* and the *Literati of New York* in the 1840s, but also he crafted a number of female characters to show the power of the nineteenth-century woman. By creating characters Berenice, Morella, Ligeia, and Madeline Usher, Poe made a statement about the power, intellect, and potential of women of the time. The male counterparts to these four women were portrayed as fearful, weak men. Through these four female characters, Poe enabled his writings to reflect American society of the nineteenth century and show the power, intelligence, and strength of the female, specifically the emerging female writer.

I. Domesticity in the Nineteenth Century

In 1966 Barbara Welter wrote the article “The Cult of True Womanhood” which explored the nineteenth-century American woman, the rules she followed and her role and place in society. Women of this time were considered a “hostage in the home” (151). Her role was simple: be subservient to her husband and keep her talents limited to the domestic arena. Welter writes:

The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided in to four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power. (152)

For the most part, women of the nineteenth century were content in the roles society and men had carved out for them. Domesticity and religion were regarded highly during the time: “One reason religion was valued was that it did not take a woman away from her ‘proper sphere,’ her home. Unlike participation in other societies or movements, church work would not make her less domestic or submissive, less a True Woman” (Welter 153). Women’s roles were centered in the house and no pursuits, literary or intellectual, should take them away from the home and the Lord (Welter 154).

There was a clear, but uneven division of power between man and woman and husband and wife and the “marriage night was the single great event of a woman’s life, when she bestowed her greatest treasure upon her husband, and from that time on was completely dependent upon him, an empty vessel, without legal or emotional existence of her own” (Welter 154-5). Once married, a woman was no longer considered a person in her own right, but rather an extension of her husband.

During this time, women had a passive, but key role in the household. Writers like Catharine Beecher glorified these female roles as the keeper of the house while Poe wrote female characters, who seem subservient to males, yet possess tremendous strength and

power. Through Poe's depiction of his female characters he revealed the inner workings of the male characters: "Poe's representation of female characters reveals much more about nineteenth-century male psychology and a patriarchal ideology that objectifies women as objects of beauty and pleasure than it does about women's subjective experience" (Person, *Poe* 138). Through Poe's exploration of the female characters, readers find a window into the souls and minds of the men. The reader sees that the males' violence stems from insecurity and confusion over the women's potential for greatness: "As if mocking the reforming power of piety and other domestic values, Poe transforms this particular domestic 'angel' into an uncomplaining victim and then, finally into a corpse. The Angel in the House becomes the Dead Wife in the Basement" (Person, *Poe* 134). Hidden within violent actions, Poe opposes trends of the time showing that females hold the power, not males.

II. Women's Changing Roles

As noted in Welter's article, the role of the nineteenth-century woman was clearly defined. Most women of the time strictly adhered to it, but a small portion of the sex began to test the waters and enter areas of society that were male-dominated. They began to enter the "public sphere, the realm of politics, education, labor, and commerce, the world of men. Advanced women, new women, manly women, and wild women: these labels convey the visions and fears engendered by women going public" (Peiss 817). During the middle part of the nineteenth century, a wave of yearning for more came over a portion of the gender. It was no longer enough for some women to be placed on a

pedestal where their “role as wife and mother was geared to this necessary strife among men, in addition to showing her menfolk a perpetually cheerful smile” (Barker-Benfield 45). While this movement did not reflect all women of this period, a minority of forward-thinking women did attempt to enter male-dominated parts of society – the world of politics, literature, and art. Women such as Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, and Frances Sargent Osgood began publishing their works for the first time during the middle of the nineteenth century.

During this time period, women did not tread lightly, but rather began to enter the cultural, political, and public sector of society with tremendous gusto:

Women’s extra-domestic activity signified gender inversion and, conversely, that unconventional cross-gender behavior represented women’s assault on the public realm. Thus women’s entrance into the public sphere was tracked not only by their explicit grasping for political power and economic independence but through a number of symbolic acts, such as smoking, wearing bloomers or comfortable dress, and riding bicycles. (Peiss 818)

One of the most interesting elements of women entering the literary world was the level at which they began writing. Toward the middle of the century, “American women poets began publishing prolifically in magazines and newspapers and they offered new competition for their male peers in the realm of public admiration” (Richards, *Lyric* 271). They quickly became a force to be reckoned with: “Women writers produced a far greater proportion of radical reform literature than their canonical male peers” (Karcher 785). Because of women’s unique and untapped talents, many male writers including, but not

limited to, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Rufus Griswold were often unwelcoming and unsupportive of their attempt to change the parameters of their roles and enter the literary world. Although Edgar Allan Poe was not the only supporter of women writers, he openly endorsed them as they entered the literary realm.

Because women in the nineteenth century were expected to be silent and subservient to men, Poe began writing poems and stories that drew “our attention to women’s significant silence, and we in turn, pay tribute to that silence by explicating it in the text” (Richards, *Women’s* 13). Some women began to break free from the traditional domestic roles of the time and exert their own freedom and individualism. Among these women were Margaret Fuller, Lydia Maria Child, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Harriet Beecher Stowe (Richards, *Women’s* 13). These women not only began to write, but also to explore their sexuality by showcasing their voices in their works. Fuller “redefined Emersonian self-reliance when she called on women to help each other develop self respect and learn self help. Taught from childhood to distrust their own powers and to depend on men – women could not be expected to practice self-reliance without special assistance” (Karcher 786). These women entered the literary world and did not stay relegated to the romance genre, where one might have expected, but rather took on powerful and even taboo topics.

In addition to Fuller, Child, Phelps, and Beecher Stowe:

No group of women writers responded more boldly to the challenge of overcoming voicelessness and speaking the unspeakable than did African Americans. Harriet Jacobs braved the humiliation of baring her sexual history as

an unwed slave mother to white readers in order to awaken them to what slavery meant for black women – unending sexual harassment, enforced the constant threat of rape, the perpetual flouting of their deepest values, and the rupture of their family ties. (Karcher 788)

African American women writers took on topics, not typically spoken about; to showcase the struggles and obstacles their race and gender were forced to overcome.

Reflecting society of the time, “women’s letters and journals as pieces of literature were placed in a secondary category only because of aesthetic prejudice” (Guruswamy 103). Women were considered a lesser gender and they were expected to stay out of the public eye, a role forced on them by the societal pressure (Guruswamy 104). Imagine then, the shifting perception and uncharted territory that American society was forced to undergo when women shattered the traditional gender roles they occupied and attempted something new, entering areas that had always been relegated just to men. Nothing had prepared men for women’s new roles and this shift caused them to fear. It is possible the fear was from an unknown competition, one that they had never faced, as well as fear of domestic chaos as women took on more responsibilities outside the home than ever before.

Although many new women writers were determined to move beyond the limited literary world of their forebears, they found that their newly-defined artistic endeavors were thwarted by two related sources: male colleagues who resented the threat of encroachment on their exclusive preserve, and a male-dominated

publishing industry that continued to assess their work based on rigidly defined gendered categories. (Grass 101)

It is possible that fear of competition prevented male writers from supporting women writers during this pivotal time in American history, but the lack of support was not just limited to the literary arena. Government still held true to the traditional belief that “the colonial family displayed a hierarchical structure in which the father-husband controlled all relationships and judges often resisted and undermined legislation that liberalized women’s rights” (King 63-4). Women had many obstacles to overcome as they took this leap into society. In the literary world specifically, Poe could not take credit for the success of any one particular female writer, but he did provide encouragement and vehicle of support that many other men did not.

III. Poe’s Relationship with Women: Personal vs. Professional

Poe was a lover of women and had a very complex relationship with most women in his life from as early as two years old, when his birth mother passed away (Quinn 1). It can be argued that Poe was a supporter of the female writer due to his romantic and sexual love affairs as well as his relationship of love and loss with his birth mother and other motherly figures in his life. Keep in mind the “famous sequence of beloved women that Poe lost too soon to illness: his mother Eliza; his foster mother Fanny Allan; his childhood friend’s mother Jane Stanard; his child bride Virginia” (Richards, *Women’s* 10). The female presence in his life was never consistent and more often than not weak from illness, a theme that appears time and again in Poe’s short stories. However, what is

most interesting is the strength that counters this female weakness that he depicts in Berenice, Morella, Ligeia, and Madeline Usher. During the short stories, these characters are weak, but in the end each woman does not allow herself to succumb to the attempts on her life. Instead she rises from the dead or returns to life in another form. There is nothing stronger than beating death.

Poe was romantically linked to “a number of women poets and wrote poems to many of them, especially Annie Richmond and Fanny Osgood. Sarah Helen Whitman alone is delivered to us across the ages packaged as Poe’s obsession” (Richards, *Lyric* 274). It is also important to note that Poe’s professional praise for women was reciprocated, and the women writers that Poe supported as a magazine editor, promoted him in turn, especially after his death (Richards, *Women’s* 11).

As Eliza Richards notes in her 1999 article *Lyric Telegraphy*, during his lifetime:

Poe played out public romances with prominent women poets, including Sarah Helen Whitman, promoting fantasies that lyric poetry enables like minds to meet and mingle. Their poetic exchanges in newspapers and magazines stressed spiritual twinship, and their powers formally registered this theme by blending signature traits of both authors. During their courtship, Whitman and Poe embodied their ethereal connection in a shared language of psychic rapport, which emerged from a mutual interest in the occult. Both were pioneer investigators of telepathy, transubstantiation, metempsychosis, and other forms of trans-identific experience. They both shared ties with prominent thinkers who were crucial to the rise of the Spiritualist movement in the 1850s. (270-4)

The line between his professional and personal relationships with women was often blurred, and because of this variety of reasons and feelings behind his support, Poe became an ally for nineteenth-century female writers.

IV. Poe as an Editor and Supporter of the Female Writer

As women began to publish their works, few male writers were as openly supportive of them as Poe. He was supportive of their work and often gave women writers positive reviews while he was editor of the *Broadway Journal* from 1845 to 1846. He also provided key placements in the publication, favorably showcasing their works. He was a harder reviewer on his male peers (Richards, *Women's* 11). During the time of Poe's involvement with the *Broadway Journal*, much of the nation's literary works took "place upon the pages of the new nation's popular press – its newspapers, urban magazines, and popular fiction" (Smith-Rosenberg 482). Therefore Poe, using the *Broadway Journal* to show his support of women, made a bold statement at the time. Through the popularity of this emerging media form, Poe was able to bring the writings of women to a large, mainstream audience. Without placement in magazines like the *Broadway Journal*, women writers may not have been able to achieve the same level of exposure.

Poe's relationship with women professionally and personally is complex and provides a window into the way he developed his female characters: "Poe wrote about women writers; he wrote to women writers; women writers contributed heavily to both the journals that he edited and those to which he contributed; he attended the literary

salons of women writers; he became romantically involved with women writers” (Richards, *Women’s* 11). Poe was one of the first important American critics to “develop and to refine his critical theories through the media of book reviews and magazine articles. At a time when many writers thought that magazines were exerting a harmful influence on literature, Poe consistently defended them” (Parks 1). Unlike most critics of the time, Poe developed a keen aesthetic for the magazine age. He composed his strong opinions in a way that was aesthetically a perfect fit for the magazine age and favorably highlighted the talents and works of female writers.

Poe responded at length to the works of women writers and “in his later years, was devoted to women writers both sides of the Atlantic.” He reviewed the works of many women including Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, Lucretia Davidson, Margaret Davidson, Amanda Edmond, Elizabeth Ellett, Hannah Gould, Sarah Josepha Hale, Felicia Hemans, Mary Hewitt, Stella Lewis, and Frances Sargent Osgood. He also commented on the works of other prominent women writers of the time, including but not limited to, Elizabeth Bogart, Maria Brooks, Lydia Maria Child, Emma Embury, Margaret Fuller, Caroline Kirkland, Anne Lynch, and Ann Stephens (Richards, *Women’s* 11).

Poe’s interactions with this set of female peers extend far beyond his criticism. While he was editor of the *Broadway Journal*, he frequently devoted the lead position to a woman’s poem, often one that alluded to his relationship with women. Poe applied a different set of criteria in judging works by women than he used in his assessment of his male peers. (Richards, 11-3)

Poe was developing into a mentor and enabler of the female writer. It was a bold statement to give key and limited real estate in the magazine to women. He allowed their work to be showcased and put them at an advantage with access to tremendous exposure, while putting male writers at a disadvantage. This was an important decision on Poe's part. He was savvy enough to know the value of these placements in the *Broadway Journal* and he was deft at using his leadership at the magazine to help give women a push towards success.

Poe's devotion and attention to these female authors offered the *Broadway Journal* the potential to embark on some lucrative opportunities. Poe realized that these women writers were producing pieces unlike many of their male counterparts. He realized the importance of female writers and their ability to draw an audience different than his own and his engagement with women authors must be "analyzed for evidence of his immersion in market culture; for his attempts to harness their profit-making capabilities; for his desire to engage a popular audience" (Richards, *Women's* 12). Women offered types of writings and a point of view that had not before been in the literary world and Poe saw that there was an open space for this type of writing – a need and desire for it. Women writers produced "some of the nineteenth century's most intellectually serious, politically radical, and artistically innovative prose" and as an editor, Poe was able to capitalize on it (Karcher 782). Poe was able to quickly learn what his audience wanted, both as a magazine editor and a poet and short story author. He knew "what scared the nineteenth-century reader, and he consciously strummed those inner chords buried deep in his readers' minds" to provide exactly what was needed to please and engage his reader (Burduck 103). The readership for magazines and

newspapers during the middle of the century was unmatched and by positively reviewing and showcasing women writers he was able to offer two groups two different and important opportunities. He offered the audience access to the works of new, up-and-coming women writers and reviews of these pieces as well as enabling women writers to reach a mass audience that came to magazines for interesting and unique content. His support as an editor of the *Broadway Journal* enabled Poe to have a mentor-like position for women writers of the time. He was making an effort to showcase their work, review them positively, and help them get the exposure they needed.

Frances Sargent Osgood was a woman writer and poet who particularly benefited from Poe's support and mentorship: "She purposefully maintained an interaction with Poe that affected both parties' writing, reputation, and personal lives" (De Jong 31). Poe became a fan of Osgood's writing and began noticing her work when he was on the editorial staff on *Graham's Magazine* in 1841. Three years later, when took over leadership at the *Broadway Journal*, "each issue began with a poem, frequently a selection that promoted one of his. The first woman poet to occupy this position of honor was Osgood" (De Jong 39). As an editor, Poe offered women writers his support as well as the opportunity to contribute to literary magazines of the time.

Based on the emergence of women into the cultural arts, literary world, and overall society of the time, Poe created some of his female characters in an effort to symbolize women's power over men. Poe was openly supporting women writers, often on a very uneven playing field. Giving women key placements and favorable reviews was a way that Poe could use his power and influence in the literary world to make sure that the magazine-audience was seeing the works of these women.

Chapter I

**A Reflection of the Time: A Look at Gender Roles Through
“Berenice,” “Morella,” “Ligeia,” and “The Fall of the House of Usher”**

I. Poe's Characters Mirror the Times: Silence, Strength, and Weakness

By creating the characters in his short stories, "Berenice," "Morella," "Ligeia," and "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe attempts to showcase the strength and intelligence of nineteenth-century women writers and also expose the lack of support that male writers were showing women writers. The men of these stories, Egaeus, the unnamed narrators in "Morella" and "Ligeia," and Roderick Usher, all possess a desire to harm and kill the females. Their attempts on the females' lives stem from a combination of insanity, which most all of Poe's characters possess, weakness, and a fear of the power of women. By crafting the women characters of Berenice, Morella, Ligeia, and Madeline Usher, Poe is able to portray the nineteenth-century women writers' talent, power, and intelligence. His writings express gender roles and conflicts in society and mirror the changing roles of women as they developed powerful and intellectual voices.

In the four short stories, Poe crafts male characters that harbor the desire to control the female characters, but at the same time, are fearful of these women and intimidated by their potential for greatness. It is important to note the difference between the male characters Poe creates in these four short stories and Poe himself. Poe crafts weak men who fear women as a way to shed light on the lack of support towards women writers from much of the male literary community. Therefore his male characters are created as the opposite of Poe himself. Poe was not fearful of women, but rather adored and supported many of them, even acting as a mentor to some. The male characters Poe creates are not to be taken as role models; rather Poe highlights their inferiority and their weaknesses, showing that they are closed-minded for trying to suppress women.

Despite Poe's love and admiration towards women, his male characters have a love/hate relationship with the female characters in each of the four short stories. According to Leland Person, in his article "Poe and Nineteenth-Century Gender Constructions," "In the nineteenth century, middle-class men's work was vital to their sense of who they were. If a man was without business, he was less than a man. The married narrators of 'Berenice,' 'Morella,' and 'Ligeia' do not seem to be breadwinners" (Poe 158). In this, we are able to find more reasoning for the weakness and fear Poe invokes in his male characters – they have limited purpose and are portrayed as less-than the nineteenth-century's ideal man. Their intelligence does not equal that of the women nor does their handsomeness. They do not uphold their duty of having a business and providing money for their wives. On all accounts, Poe crafts his male narrators to be less than what society expects of them.

The female characters in these four tales fight death and do not let the male characters succeed in killing them. There is nothing stronger than beating death, either by rising from the dead or by returning in another form: "Most commonly, a dead woman is rejuvenated, returning to life before a male's imagination with such force that she all but destroys the male characters" (Person, *Aesthetic* 25). Readers find strength, beauty, and intelligence in these four women and weakness and frailty in the men.

The women of these tales appear to be the nineteenth-century ideal – they are silent and allow the men to shine. It can be argued that silence is a form of power. These are not loud women, screaming their praises of superiority, thus their lack of voice adds to an almost mysterious form of power. Despite not speaking often, these four women possess a strength that allows them to rise above hardship, adversity, violence, and even

death. These women do not speak often or at all – even Madeline Usher is only mentioned by name several times in the tale – but they do not perish. Women possess talent and power feared by and unattainable to the male gender and Poe’s women represent the possibility of female greatness. The desire, attempt, and subsequent failure to harm or kill the female characters are consistent in these four tales – the men do not succeed in oppressing the women. Readers learn that Poe’s legacy lies not only in his masterful portrayal of his demented male narrators, but also in his skillful portrayal of his female characters whose frail and quiet exteriors belie their power, a power far superior to the vocal, violent, demented power of the male narrators.

In contrast to Margaret Fuller and other outspoken women writers of the time, Poe’s works illustrate female silence. For instance, Madeline Usher never speaks a word during the story and in fact is hardly present at all, but she possesses a power so strong that she terrifies her brother. Poe does not allow his “female characters subjectivity or a voice, while he repeatedly emphasizes his male characters’ verbal control over them” (Person, *Poe* 137). Despite their lack of voice, these women are responsible for terrifying and intimidating men through their beauty, intelligence, and their innate power. The way that Poe, as an author, constructed the “male persona depended on his gentlemanly treatment of women, but it also depended upon exercising verbal control over women as literary constructs” (Person, *Poe* 133). Although the females are silent in these tales, their very being – their bodies, sexuality, intelligence and beauty are in contrast to the characteristics of the male characters. The silence of Poe’s female characters is striking because “a large number of highly verbal women, both literate and loquacious, surround Poe during his lifetime; indeed, some of the women who appear in his writings as mute

objects of adoration were themselves prolific poets” (Richards, *Women’s* 11). By muting his female characters, Poe forces his fictional women to exert power rather than having them tell the reader they are powerful and intelligent.

However, the women’s surprising strength, which appears at the end of each story, is what sets Berenice, Morella, Ligeia, and Madeline Usher apart from the norm of the time where men were considered strong and women were considered homemakers, lacking power. According to Person, “part of American manhood became the resistance of the feminine. Men were expected to make themselves by competing with other men in the marketplace but to throw off that self-made mantle when they entered the domestic sphere,” (*Poe* 130). Each of these four women also possesses great power and strength, although it is not seen initially. Despite fatal illness or attempted murder by man, none of these women stay dead. The strength and power of these women is significant because it differentiates them from the majority of women of the time who were settled into their roles of silence and domesticity. As D.H. Lawrence writes about Poe’s female characters in 1923’s *Studies in Classic American Literature*, “Beware, oh woman, of the man who wants to find out what you are. And, oh men, beware a thousand times more of the woman who wants to know you or get you” (Lawrence 76). The strength of Poe’s female characters aligns them more closely with women writers of the time like Fuller who were attempting a shift in traditional roles and beginning to break free from their expected gender stereotypes to become influential writers.

II. “Berenice”

A close look at Poe's "Berenice" highlights the strange struggle between the sexes and the attainment and relinquishing of power. Poe develops this story to mirror the literary society of the time. He creates Berenice to emerge at the end as a strong woman, like many of the female writers he favored, and he develops the male character, Egaeus, to be frail and weak. The narrator, Egaeus says, "Yet differently we grew – I ill of health and buried in gloom – she agile, graceful, and overflowing energy" (226). Poe is crafting a gender battle of weak men versus strong women.

As Berenice becomes ill, Egaeus becomes fearful of her approaching death and her sickly appearance. He says, "And *now* - now I shuddered in her presence, and grew pale at her approach; yet, bitterly lamenting her fallen and desolate condition" (229). Berenice no longer represents the gracefulness and energy that she once did and the change in her frightens Egaeus.

The most important element of this short story is the narrator's fixation on Berenice's teeth. The teeth possess a quality worthy of obsession for the narrator. Egaeus says, "I coveted them so madly! I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason" (231). The narrator believes that the teeth hold the power of his salvation, the ability to bring health and sanity to him. They, of course, possess no such quality, and their removal is a result of the male narrator's insanity and violence upon women. "These usually passive, vulnerable, even dead, women are ripe for objectification, the epitome of which is to fragment the female into parts and idealize or fetishize one aspect of her body, such as her eyes or teeth" (Weekes 153). The beautiful white teeth of Berenice represent her power, something Egaeus strives for, but does not have.

The narrator becomes fixated on Berenice's demise. He wants to remove Berenice's teeth in an attempt to take away her power. By showcasing this attempt to destroy a female's power, Poe again sheds light on the times. Egaeus' actions remind us of male writers of the time and their lack of support of the female author. "When Berenice's teeth, her distinguishing feature, signs of her identity, are disclosed the narrator encodes them as his central fixation. Like hands, an adult woman's teeth give her a certain autonomy" (Pfister 44). Teeth are a symbol of Berenice's womanhood and the male narrator's desire to remove them is an attempt to strip her of her sexuality, in some sense a form of rape against her. According to Sigmund Freud, in *Interpretations of Dreams*, teeth in dreams are symbolic of castration: "The dream-work represents castration by baldness, haircutting, the loss of teeth, and beheading" (236). By removing the teeth, Egaeus eliminates any danger of his own castration and the threat of any type of disempowerment. Through his brutal extraction, he hopes not only to take away all that makes Berenice a woman and sexual being, but all that empowers her as well. Just as Berenice doesn't give up in the face of this violence and thus allows her teeth to continue to haunt the narrator, Poe advises his readers "not to retreat in the face of fear. Although enduring stress often proves painful, Poe knows that the human soul must suffer its own disintegration, consciously, if ever it is to survive" (Burduck 109). Once the teeth are in Egaeus' possession, they do not bring him any peace. Rather, this violent act is a device by Poe to showcase the ever-present madness of the narrator in his tales and the strength of Berenice.

Berenice remains alive and the removal of teeth does not destroy her, "thus she [Berenice], like other Poe heroines, is buried alive, though disinterred briefly to undergo

ensorship with some ‘instruments of dental surgery’: her distinctive ‘idées are yanked with Berenice (who won’t roll over and play dead) screaming toothless in the grave” (Pfister 45). Poe allows Berenice to defy death, leaving the male character unsuccessful in his attempts to destroy her. Readers see once again that Poe is creating strong women who cannot be kept down or destroyed. It becomes clear through analyses of these female characters that Poe adores and respects the gender and therefore crafts strong women characters in his tales.

III. “Morella”

“Morella” is yet another of Poe’s tales which captures the innate power struggle between men and women, competing for talent, beauty, and intellect. Not only is Poe’s Morella beautiful, she is intelligent and her husband, the male narrator, looks up to her keen mind more than anything. He says, “Her powers of mind were gigantic. I felt this, and, in many matters, became her pupil” (234). In this tale, the male is well aware that he is not the intellectual equal of Morella, and, in fact, she is far superior to him. The narrator says, “I abandoned myself implicitly to the guidance of my wife, and entered with an unflinching heart into the intricacies of her studies” (234). The male narrator surrenders himself to Morella, and at first he worships her for her mind, but soon grows to hate her and wishes for her death. Unlike the male narrator in “Berenice,” the “Morella” narrator does not physically harm Morella although mentally he wills her to die. Her intellect frightens him. The narrator says that he would “linger by her side, and dwell upon the music of her voice – until, at length, its melody was tainted with terror, -

and there fell a shadow upon my soul – and I grew pale, and shuddered inwardly at those too unearthly tones” (235). What had once been the appeal and reason for his worship begins to disturb the narrator.

When Morella dies, she is reincarnated in her daughter of the same name. She, like Berenice, does not remain dead because Poe’s women cannot be destroyed by evil thoughts or actions. The daughter, Morella, possesses adult powers and is the image of her mother in mind, body, and spirit and “although the narrator does what he can to forget that Morella ever existed, never even speaking her name to their daughter, Morella is clearly manifested in the unearthly knowledge of their precocious offspring” (Weekes 157). Morella’s powers prevail, and as also revealed in “Berenice,” the evil and violent thoughts and actions of the male narrator cannot destroy or keep a woman down.

Poe’s women have the ability to match and even surpass the men in intellect. The men can wish for death of the women, attack them, and even kill them, but they do not succeed in keeping the women down. Poe’s women rise from the tomb or are reincarnated and terrify the men. The fear of these women and their power to escape death increases the insanity of the men and causes their downfall in the form of extreme melancholia, madness, or even their own death. By allowing the men to fail in suppressing or harming the women, Poe reveals female perseverance and the male inability to stifle and destroy. By reappearing as her daughter, Morella is able to control her husband after her death: “Because Morella is well aware of his (the narrator) developing hatred for her, she curses him by reappearing in the person of their daughter” (Weekes 157). Morella holds the power and control in her ability to curse the male narrator, who wished for her death, even after she has passed on.

IV. “Ligeia”

According to the narrator, Ligeia is a specimen of perfection. She is described by the male narrator as having “skin rivalling the purest ivory and the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally-curling tresses” (263). Her beauty is unconventional and exotic and the narrator/husband tells the reader that, “no maiden ever equaled her” (263). While Morella is deemed, by her male narrator as intelligent, it is often said that Ligeia is written as the most intellectual of Poe’s female characters. Poe writes her as the most knowledgeable of his women, but also as the literary image of himself. Karen Weekes writes in “Poe’s Feminine Ideal,” “Rather than his ideal as a partner, Ligeia is Poe’s ideal of him. She is Poe’s own version of Madeline Usher: his haunting, beautiful twin” (Weekes 160). Ligeia is more than just one of Poe’s Dark Ladies; she is a reflection of the author in a unique mix of beauty, intelligence, and strength.

Ligeia’s male narrator feels that Ligeia is far superior to him and while her depth of knowledge is reason for his worship of her, it is also his reason to fear. The narrator says, “In the classical tongues was she deeply proficient, and as far as my own acquaintance extended in regard to the modern dialects of Europe, I have never know her at fault” (266). While Ligeia may be different and her intelligence more pronounced than that of Poe’s other female characters, the male narrator fits into the mold of all Poe’s stereotypical men:

Although Ligeia differs in significant ways from other Poe females, the Ligeia narrator is as repetitive as ever, a weak-willed, fearful narcissist who escapes from

memories of his wife by spending her bequest on travel, opium, and a macabre bedroom for his new bride. The brevity of his solitary state is in keeping with his self-absorption at Ligeia's deathbed. (Weekes 159)

During Ligeia's illness, her husband worships her the most because she is at the weakest point of her life and he hopes that because of her frailty, he can control her. Readers see once again, a male character who wants to control the female character, but cannot.

Ligeia surpasses the narrator in strength, intelligence, and beauty. Poe has again created a female-centric story that demonstrates the strength of the nineteenth-century woman.

Soon after Ligeia dies, the narrator marries Rowena, the stark opposite of his first wife in both beauty and intelligence. Physically, Rowena looks different than Ligeia. She is described by Poe's narrator as "fair-haired and blue-eyed" (279). Rowena does not possess the power, control, or independence of Ligeia and the male narrator therefore does not fear her, rather he develops tremendous hatred for her. She pales in comparison to Ligeia's strength and knowledge, which brings no cause for the same fear or terror that he felt for Ligeia. The narrator despises her because she is the opposite of his beloved Ligeia in every aspect. He says, "I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man. My memory flew back, (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed" (272). His hatred of his new wife is based on the fact that Rowena is simply not Ligeia. She does not possess the same intelligence or beauty, which the narrator found magical and appealing in his first wife. "The narrator of 'Ligeia' had substituted one woman for another and then watched passively – even petrified – as his effort proved unsuccessful" (Person, *Aesthetic* 39). He marries Rowena in an attempt to fill the void of Ligeia, but does not succeed in doing so,

hence heightening his disgust with Rowena. In each of these tales, Poe does not allow the female character to be destroyed. Rather, he crafts each so that she is one who escapes death and is a metaphor for strength at the end of each short story.

Both Ligeia and Morella “challenge the narrator in ways that Poe’s stereotypical feminine heroines do not. For the narrator, the true horror in these particular ‘tales of terror’ is that a beautiful woman can wield her own power” (Weekes 159). Ligeia’s resurrection or reincarnation in Rowena after her death proves that those with the will to live cannot remain dead in Poe’s works. “In these tales, possession, multiple haunting, and identity dissolutions suspend gender difference as a component of identity. One thing remains certain: the dead do not die. They will not stay buried” (Dayan 244). Yet again, a female has achieved the ultimate experiment in strength and has beaten death. Ligeia proves stronger than the male narrator when she returns to life in another form, thus not remaining dead.

The level of love and adoration from the narrator to Ligeia is extraordinary. “Ligeia” is a tale of “love pushed over a verge. And love pushed to extremes in a battle of wills between the lovers. Ligeia is still the old-fashioned woman. Her will is still to submit. She wills to submit to the vampire of her husband’s consciousness. Even death” (Lawrence 74). At the heart of the story, readers find an unbelievably strong and intelligent woman and a man, weak with love and fear of his bride. However, as noted by Lawrence, we still see Ligeia with qualities similar to those of traditional nineteenth-century women. Her power over the narrator is obvious, but we also see her fitting into some of the molds of the women of the time. The difference is that while Ligeia may submit to her husband’s consciousness, as Lawrence notes, she wields all the power at the

end because, once again, the women in Poe's works do not remain dead. By returning to life through Rowena, Ligeia is a specimen of strength and power.

V. "The Fall of the House of Usher"

"The Fall of the House of Usher" contains more images of palpable male fear toward the female character than "Berenice," "Morella," and "Ligeia." Madeline Usher possesses the most innate power over her male counterpart, Roderick, and also the male narrator. While the male narrator, has an overall fear of the eerie situation upon his arrival at the Usher home, Roderick Usher's fear is far more complicated. His fear of his twin sister, Madeline, runs deep. He is petrified of the implied pressure to reproduce with Madeline and experiences worry over her God-given ability to carry a child and keep the Usher family name alive. The basis of the fear for both the narrator and Roderick is a worry over sex and incest, concepts that seem to fester within the walls of the house.

Roderick is jealous, envious, and intimidated by the idea that it is Madeline who has the potential to carry on the aristocratic line, rather than he. Madeline's power goes against the patriarchal nature of the aristocracy system. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe "attempts to liberate the creative power of women" (Person, *Aesthetic* 24). Again, looking at the history of the time, it was the responsibility of the man to control the woman and the family, but it can be argued that because of women's ability to conceive and give birth, it is really they who control the concept of family.

Madeline's power terrifies Roderick and it is this terror that pushes Roderick to bury Madeline alive, in an effort to do away with her, free himself from the possibility of

incestuous relations with his sister, and allow the Usher family name to die. “As fraternal twins, Roderick and Madeline complement each other; here, in assuming a male guise, Madeline is much more a narcissistic mirror-image of her brother – as if in burying her, Roderick has meant to repress her sex, her womanhood” (Person, *Aesthetic* 39). Roderick speaks of the implied incest that has happened in the past in the Usher family and may happen again as a “constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy – a mere nervous affection, he immediately added, which would undoubtedly soon pass off” (322). Roderick’s remedy to prevent incest from occurring and female power to reign supreme is to bury Madeline alive, effectively taking sole power over the Usher legacy and ending it. If Madeline dies, so does the line of the incestuous Ushers. However, as long as she lives so does the potential to carry on the name. Poe’s women, including Madeline, “will not stay buried. As we read the compelling narratives of the men who wait and watch for the inevitable return, we sense how much the terror depends on the men’s will to remember, their sorcerer-like ability to name and to conjure the beloved” (Brown 244). Through his portrayal of the Usher family’s behavior, Poe highlights the power of the female gender and the weakness of men.

Roderick’s fear of his sister’s return is palpable and reaches its height when he can no longer deny the fact that he was unsuccessful in his burial and Madeline remains alive. He says, “Not hear it? – yes, I hear it, and have heard it. Long- long- long – many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it – yet I dared not – oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am! – I dared not speak! We have put her living in the tomb!”

(334). Once again, we see a woman who cannot be destroyed by a man. Madeline triumphs when she comes back to haunt her brother.

The act of Madeline rising from the dead is another example of the strength of Poe's female characters. She has power and strength over Roderick and the narrator, yet she is silent. Her silent statement of rising from the dead proves that she cannot be destroyed, but that she has the ability to destroy her brother. "In returning from the dead, Madeline subverts male designs and appears in her own person, ironically, to cause the death of the male twin who has repressed and unsexed her" (Person, *Aesthetic* 39). Although silent and ill, Madeline has the strength to escape from the burial Roderick and the narrator administered:

Madeline (who up until now has merely been making some barely perceptible noise down in the cellar) suddenly has the impossible strength to break through a screwed-down coffin lid and open a heavy iron door, and the house, whose sentience was previously described as delusion of Usher's, now actually seems animate, if only for the time it takes to fall. (Peeples 184)

Madeline's strength, seen at the end of the story, seems unprecedented due to her silence and illness throughout the tale. However, the reader can see a will similar to that of Berenice, Morella, and Ligeia. If Poe's women have a desire to live, they will find the means to do so, whether like Madeline and Berenice, fighting to rise from a premature burial, or like the actions of Morella and Ligeia, passing on, but returning in another form to torture the male narrators.

Madeline's rise from the cellar and the hollows of death prevents Roderick from seizing control over the situation, his future, and the future of the Usher bloodline. Madeline rises, and by doing so literally and figuratively brings down the House of Usher. Her rise is the power that in the end eliminates the family line and dictates the future of all characters in the tale. The tangible house falls, thus killing the characters inside and effectively killing off the legacy of the Usher family, the family name, and the bloodline which can no longer be sustained.

As in the other stories:

Rowena assumes the form of the dead Ligeia, Morella's daughter assumes her mother's name and appearance, Egaeus repossesses the teeth of the entombed Berenice, and Madeline Usher returns from her town to accuse her brother of having killed her. In these stories, the male who tries to deny or change a woman in her most challenging aspect is haunted by the image he has resisted and repressed. (Person, *Aesthetic* 23).

Once again, Poe showcases the strength of women by having Madeline rise from her burial. We see the same pattern played out – attempts to keep women down are futile and destined to fail.

By creating Berenice, Morella, Ligeia, and Madeline Usher, Poe is able to show a basic concept: women have the ability to be more powerful than men. It is an idea opposite of that of the times, but one that Poe attempts to prove. Poe supported women writers of the nineteenth century more so than many other male literary figures did. He did not fear these women, but rather marveled and appreciated their talents and works. By

creating male characters in these four above mentioned stories, Poe shows how fear cannot keep women down or prevent their success. He liberates his female characters just as he attempted and hoped to help liberate and support women writers and welcome them into the nineteenth-century literary world.

Chapter II

Poe as a Magazine Editor and Critic

As examined in the previous chapter, Edgar Allan Poe was a prolific writer of women-centered short stories. However, he also played a valuable role as an editor and critic during the development of magazines in the 1840s. Poe was the “first important critic to develop and to refine his critical theories through the media of books and magazine articles” (Parks 1). Despite an effort to be an honest and fair reviewer, many scholars believe that Poe was openly biased towards women writers when reviewing their works, which deserves further investigation (Richards, *Poe* 13). Although Poe’s reviewing methods may seem like an unfair double standard, Poe helped give women writers the exposure and support they needed to become an integral part of nineteenth-century literary community.

According to Richards, “Poe was a leading – and by far the most rigorous – critic of women writers” (*Gender* 36). As a reviewer and editor for the *Broadway Journal* and the *Literati of New York* during the 1840s, Poe reviewed the writings of many nineteenth-century authors – both men and women. His criticism towards the work of men and women differed depending more on gender and less on the actual work. He tended to criticize the writing of women authors and poets constructively, while using a more severe tone towards the work of his male peers.

Poe’s extensive interest in women’s poetry suggests that he imagines women as the power generators of poetic discourse. His reviews of women poets outnumber those of male poets in his criticism. These frequently positive reviews are usually dismissed as either a display of vapid gallantry or an aberration in taste bearing

little relation to his more serious considerations of male peers such as Hawthorne” (Richards, *Gender* 36).

The truth was simply that Poe thought of women differently than many male peers of his time. He did not see them as merely docile creatures, confined only to the home and matters of domesticity. As seen through the development of his female characters, to Poe, women were intelligent, insightful, and could even surpass men intellectually and creatively. However, many male critics gave female writers less than stellar reviews in newspapers and magazines as they felt women should not venture away from their domestic roles and therefore did not belong in the literary world. Contrary to these common male ideas, Poe fought against the literary cliques “entrenched in Boston and New York City that could make the reputations and fortunes of those authors, editors, and publishers with whom they were in league, and that could ruin those who were outside the pale or who threatened their interests” (Moss 1). Poe used his top positions at the *Broadway Journal* and the *Literati of New York* to praise the work of women and openly show his support for the gender as they entered the literary arena.

In addition to the *Broadway Journal* and the *Literati of New York*, Poe contributed on several occasions to other literary forums, including *Godey's Lady's Book*; a popular nineteenth-century journal targeted towards women readers. In contrast to Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne “only contributed one story to *Godey's*, “Drowne's Wooden Image” (1844), a story replete with all the worst stereotypes about the artist/creator of the perfect woman” (Elbert 25). Poe's writings in *Godey's*, which were read almost exclusively by women, and his prominent placement of works by female writers in the *Broadway Journal* and the *New York Literati* illustrate his support of the nineteenth-century woman writer. In

addition, his description of women writers including Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, and Frances Sargent Osgood, possess similarities to his fictional female characters, specifically Ligeia. Poe characterizes these women writers in many of the same ways he writes about Ligeia, his most intelligent creation.

I. Poe Reviews Women

a. Margaret Fuller

Margaret Fuller was perhaps the most provocative of the American women writers of the time. According to Carolyn Karcher, author of the article “Reconceiving Nineteenth-Century American Literature: The Challenge of Women Writers,” what scandalized her contemporaries was:

Fuller’s outspoken denunciation of the sexual double standard, which she urged women to combat both by ostracizing male seducers and by acknowledging prostitutes as their sisters. Her most well-known piece of writing, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, is slowly winning recognition not merely as a groundbreaking feminist treatise, but as a bold experiment in creating a new style of rhetorical argument. (Karcher 787)

However, at the time when Fuller was writing, her works were not well reviewed by most male writers and reviewers. On February 28, 1845, a review was published of Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* in the *Boston Post* and was not favorable. While the reviewer cannot be completely confirmed, it was likely written by the paper’s founding editor, Charles Gordon Green. The review “articulates skepticism about the cause of women’s rights held by a significant segment of the Boston community and beyond”

(Scholnick164). It wasn't until after her death in 1850 that Fuller became widely regarded as a key female writer in American literary history.

Despite unfavorable reviews by many men, Poe's admiration of Fuller's literary skill and courage as a writer is well documented in his review of her work in the *Broadway Journal*, also in February 1845. Despite the feminist nature of the text and the uproar it caused when published, Poe is unafraid to share his positive views on the work of this female writer. When describing Fuller, Poe writes that she is a "woman of more powerful intellect, comprehensive thought, and thorough education, than any other American authoress, with whose productions I am acquainted. Her style is vigorous and significant, abounding with eloquent passages" (*Reviews* 197). Poe also acknowledges the difficult subject matter which she writes about, but he defends her and the courage it took to write the piece. He says that the book "is written in a free energetic spirit. It contains a few passages that will offend the fastidiousness of some readers; for they allude to subjects which men do not wish to have discussed, and which most women dare not approach" (*Reviews* 197). Fuller brought issues of feminism and sexuality to the public that were taboo in society and not regularly spoken about. Poe appreciated her approach and freedom to explore any and all topics, while many did not.

Poe uses the *Broadway Journal* and the *Literati of New York* as vehicles of support to praise Fuller. Readers of his magazines read Fuller to be as Poe described her, a "voice in literature: deep, rich, and strong" (*Reviews* 197). Poe chivalrously endorses Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and says of it in the *Literati of New York* that: "Few women in the country could have written [it] and no woman in the country would have published, with the exception of Miss Fuller" (*Works* 453). Poe appreciates Fuller's

writing talent and determination to publish her work, knowing that much of society would oppose or reject it, as its views on gender roles were too radical for the times.

In his reviews, Poe does criticize Fuller's writing, but in a constructive way and he also makes excuses for the faults in her work. His style of criticism towards Fuller differs drastically from the harsh and curt negative criticism he offers towards male authors. After complimenting her style, Poe says: "But it is sometimes rough in construction, and its meaning is not always sufficiently clear. This does not arise from affectation, or pedantic elaboration; it is the defect of a mind that has too many thoughts for its words; an excess by no means common, either in men or women (*Reviews* 197). Poe admires Fuller and thus justifies her lack of clarity by turning it into praise, saying that she is simply too intelligent and creative to get all her thoughts clearly organized on paper. This is quite complimentary towards Fuller. To Poe, she is simply too intelligent. She has a wonderfully creative mind, so full of ideas, that she cannot clearly articulate them all.

Poe's female characters, specifically Ligeia, resemble Fuller in intelligence and power. Although "Poe did not know Margaret Fuller when he published 'Ligeia' in 1838, it is tempting to add Ligeia's name to the short list of exceptional women Poe associated with Fuller. Like the powerful Fuller, Ligeia reverses the conventional power imbalance between husband and wife" (Person, *Poe* 135). Poe's praise towards Fuller's writing and intellect resembles that same male adoration seen in the characters of Morella and Ligeia. It is no wonder Poe is drawn to Fuller and her work, as she closely resembles his beloved Ligeia. Poe even comments on Fuller's physical attributes, specifically her eyes, in the

Literati of New York. He refers to Fuller's bluish, grey eyes as "full of fire" (Works 459). From this description, we see another similarity between Poe's Ligeia and Fuller.

b. Elizabeth Barrett Barrett

Another example of Poe's support towards women writers can be seen in his review of Elizabeth Barrett Barrett's work. In the beginning of his January 1845 review in the *Broadway Journal*, Poe comments on the need for equality in literature. He says: "There should be no sectional feelings in literature or art. No political barriers or geographical distinctions can prevent our sympathies from embracing the whole world of mind" (*Reviews I 2*). As an editor, Poe strives to offer fair criticism, although his reviews, more often than not, favor the women writers and their works. "In a time of literary back scratching and head bashing, he [Poe] sought to achieve an honest, fearless, independent criticism, based on international rather than personal standards" (Parks 94). Poe believes that women deserve to be part of the literary world and he wants the public to read praise for their works in his publications.

Poe highlights Barrett's beautifully written passages dispersed throughout her piece, "The Drama of Exile." He writes: "Her [Barrett's] wild and magnificent genius seems to have contented itself with points – to have exhausted itself in flashes; but it is the profusion – the unparalleled number and close propinquity of these points and flashes which render her book one flame, and justify us in calling her, unhesitatingly, the greatest – the most glorious of her sex" (*Reviews I 6-7*). He carefully chooses to explore passages that showcase her brilliance. The characteristics of her poetic style are not all that different from Poe's own traits as a writer. While reviewing her work, Poe writes that

there is “a Homeric force here – a vivid, picturesqueness which all men will appreciate and admire” (*Works* 70). Poe hopes to present Barrett’s works in a positive way, so that others will learn to appreciate her.

In another review of Barrett’s work, Poe prefaces it “by making an apology for treating her as a poet instead of as a mere female. This was a compliment, Poe implied, for he intended to speak the truth, which no other American reviewer had done” (Jacobs 356). While he criticizes Barrett and certain aspects of her writing, specifically certain details of Romanticism, it is important to note that he was featuring her in his well-read magazine and therefore showcasing her work in an arena that had almost always been relegated just to men. He is therefore supporting her as a new female writer, even when he criticizes portions of her work. Just by publishing and reviewing Barrett and other women, Poe is openly supporting their efforts in the literary world. His reviews and influence as a magazine editor show that Poe was attempting to change the times and buck the stereotypes that kept women out of the public realm and areas of literature and art (Jacobs 357). Barrett, like Poe’s female characters, is strong and talented. She does not possess the ability to bring her writing to the magazine audience so Poe does it for her and other women writers. Therefore, “one might speculate that his [Poe’s] way of animating the hushed and not-so-hushed women on the literary scene is through his own verbal talents” (Elbert 24). Poe, in many ways, becomes the voice for unknown women writers. He uses his editorship and his positive reviews to speak for women, like Barrett, and help showcase their intelligence and help their voice to be heard.

c. **Frances Sargent Osgood**

Poe had a close, personal relationship with Boston-born poet Frances Sargent Osgood. She is most well known for her poem “Elfrida,” which Poe reviews along with other pieces including “The Music Box” and “The Unexpected Declaration.” As editor and owner of the *Broadway Journal*, Poe:

Began publicizing Osgood’s work and his relation to her. He gave nearly five columns of a December issue to reviewing a new volume of her poems. He praised her for versatility in experimenting with different poetic forms, correct grammar, and originality, although to the credit of his integrity he also gently criticized her tame imagination, deficient rhythmic sense, and sometimes affected diction. (Silverman 286)

Whether the relationship between Poe and Osgood was romantic or platonic – one may never know the full details – it is clear that Poe possessed an affection for Osgood and favored her writing and literary style. By devoting so much space in his magazines to her, Poe enabled Osgood to reach readers and become part of the literary world. Osgood took full advantage of her relationship with Poe and “recognized her status as literary commodity, cultivating a lyric personality that anticipated, promoted, and responded to the desires of magazine readers” (Richards, *Gender* 80). Knowing that magazines were a dynamic and growing part of the future of the literary world, Osgood must have been able to sense the importance of her professional relationship with Poe.

In another review of her work, Poe discusses Osgood’s style saying that her writings and creations come strictly out of a passion for the written word and language rather than out of the desire for praise or inclusion in literary circles. Poe is enamored with Osgood’s refreshing writing style:

The warm abandonment of her style – that charm which now so captivates – is but a portion and a consequence of her unworldly nature – of her disregard of mere fame. In the world of poetry, however, there is already more than enough of uncongenial ambition and pretence. (*Works* 393)

Her works seem even more impressive to Poe as a reviewer because she did not seem concerned with acclaim from the predominantly male literary circles. Poe feels that Osgood does not appear to seek male approval, but rather is confident in her talent and strength.

When describing Osgood's physical appearance in the last paragraph of his review, Poe writes: "In fragility, graceful whether in action or repose; complexion usually pale; hair black and glossy; eyes a clear luminous grey, large, and with singular capacity for expression" (*Works* 406). Osgood's pale skin and dark, black hair are reminiscent of Ligeia's beauty, physical traits the fictional and real women share. Poe's description of Osgood's eyes invokes the exact image of Ligeia's eyes as well. In an article in *Poe Studies*, Monika Elbert writes: "Luminous eyes, a delightful, sonorous timbre of voice, and an irreproachable intellect – we have the ingredients of Ligeia" (24). There is no mistaking that Poe's description of Ligeia's eyes in his 1838 work and his 1845 description of Osgood's possess more than a striking similarity. It is as if Poe wants his readers to see the similarity between Osgood and Ligeia, to better understand the brilliance of Osgood and her female writing peers through Ligeia, his most intelligent female character.

In his review of Osgood's "The Dying Rosebud's Lament," Poe writes that her works is graceful and almost indescribable:

I cannot speak of Mrs. Osgood's poems without a strong propensity to ring the changes upon the indefinite word 'grace' and its derivatives. About everything she writes we perceive this indescribable charm – of which, perhaps, the elements are a vivid fancy and a quick sense of the proportionate. (*Works* 399)

Like Osgood's style itself as well as Poe's short stories and poems, Poe feels that Osgood's poems cannot be defined completely. He believes that her style is unique and possesses an inventive quality. Like the almost indescribable beauty and intelligence of Ligeia and Morella, Poe feels that words couldn't fully define Osgood's writing. Osgood and these characters escape definition, but impress and astonish others with their talents and intelligence.

Poe's reviews of Osgood's work contrast those of most other male reviewers. Poe has a "tendency to overpraise the works of his friends, especially the feminine poets. Of Frances S. Osgood he writes that 'in no one poetical requisite is she deficient'" (Parks 93). On the other hand, most "men vociferously and publicly opposed their [women's] entrance into the profession, declaring them unsuitable to this most masculine of jobs" (Roggenkamp 34). Therefore, Poe's methods of reviewing women were not consistent with other reviewers of the time period as they were far more favorable.

Poe's positive reviews and support as well as Osgood's works "marked a shift in the possibilities for female poetic expression in a rapidly changing American literary scene. Women's poetry promised to provide the public world of print with a soul" (Richards, *Gender* 65). Women writers tapped into an unexplored part of the literary world, one filled with emotions. The poems and stories written by women, offered readers sentiment and feeling that was not overly abundant in the works by men. Just as

women were the emotional center of the home, they brought those feelings into the literary world and the hands of readers.

II. Poe Reviews Men

Poe also reviewed male writers in the *Literati of New York* in the mid 1840s. Poe's reviews of male authors were harsher and less compassionate than his reviews of women writers. It is interesting to note that, "When one compares his [Poe's] criticism with that of some of his journalistic enemies (Rufus Griswold and others), Poe seems almost restrained. It was a period of cutthroat criticism, under the rules that might govern a street brawl rather than a duel" (Parks 92). Still, Poe's reviews of men do not use the same types of words and descriptions that he uses when examining the work of women. His reviews of men lack the same consideration and support seen in his reviews of Fuller, Barrett, and Osgood.

For example, Poe's reviewed the writings of male authors in the *Literati of New York*, including works by George Cheever, Ralph Hoyt, and Fitz-Greene Halleck. All are mostly negative reviews of either these authors' published works or their talent and ability as reviewers. The most blatantly negative of the three is in regards to Cheever. Poe writes that Cheever is known as the editor of "The Commonplace Book of American Poetry," which he considers:

A work, which has at least the merit of *not* belying its title, and is exceedingly commonplace. I am ashamed to say that for several years this compilation afforded to Europeans the only material from which it was possible to form an estimate of the poetical ability of Americans. Dr. Cheever is without a certain sort

of negative ability as a critic. The verses, which I have seen, are undeniably mediocre. (*Works* 425)

The reviewing and editing abilities of Cheever are condemned by Poe and his review has a harsh tone, which is absent from the majority of his reviews on women. Poe is also less than positive when describing Cheever's physical appearance saying that there is "nothing very observable about his personal appearance" (*Works* 426). Poe's tone is noticeably altered when writing about Cheever from his tone towards women writers.

In a very brief review of Ralph Hoyt's work, Poe criticizes his writing style saying that in: "His continuous and uniform repetition of the first line in the last of each stanza of twenty-five, has by much exceeded the proper limits of the quaint and impinged upon the ludicrous" (*Works* 429). The most striking element of this very brief review is Poe's use of the word "ludicrous." This derogatory word is absent from Poe's reviews of women. While Poe does pay Hoyt a compliment, saying that his work has "some passages of rich imagination and exquisite pathos," (*Works* 429), the use of "ludicrous" makes this review feel harsh and mean-spirited, rather than constructive like his review of Fuller.

Fitz-Greene Halleck was well established in American poetical circles, but Poe calls his fame and notoriety only "fairly entitled" (*Works* 438). Poe says of Halleck's poem "Marco Bozzaris" that it is "without any great amount of ideal beauty. Its author, in short, writes carelessly, loosely, and as a matter of course, seldom effectively so far as the outworks of literature are concerned" (*Works* 440-1). Again, Poe's negative comments are without an element of constructiveness or purpose. Even though Poe bases his comments on his careful examination of the material, his thoughts on Halleck and on

other male authors are unkind and ruthless comments with a purpose of denouncing the male writers and their work (Parks 13).

Throughout Poe's life, he did much good for the literary world. Without his short stories and poems, the literary landscape would be much different today. In addition to his own writings, one of Poe's most important marks left on the literary world was his support for women writers. Poe helped women writers navigate new and uncharted territory and his praise led women to begin to receive the accolades they deserved, from both readers and the literary society.

Chapter III

Conclusion

Edgar Allan Poe was a supporter of nineteenth-century women writers. He used his leadership roles at the *Broadway Journal* and the *Literati of New York* to get the work of women authors and his favorable opinions of them to the mainstream, magazine-reading audience. By showcasing the work of Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, Frances Sargent Osgood and countless others, he brought women's writings to the American masses in the mid nineteenth century.

Women who entered the literary world in the 1800s were faced with many obstacles and were not widely accepted into the male-dominated arena, but Poe's reviews and analyses of female writers rewarded them by welcoming them into the male world of poetry and literature (Richards, *Gender* 37). He helped open the doors of the literary world to them and even though he was notably biased towards women, his support for them helped mold the landscape of the time.

Poe was a man who openly loved women, both personally and professionally, and his adoration can be seen throughout his poems, short stories, and his reviews of their work. His love affair with the gender in general, stemmed from his complicated relationship with women, beginning with his own mother, and can be seen in all his writings throughout his life: "The recurrent centrality of women in Poe's works, particularly dead women, is often considered a product and a sign of a psyche shattered by the repeated early loss of significant female figures: he has been diagnosed with a maternal complex, an oral fixation, a female-dependency syndrome" (Richards, *Gender* 30). However, his multifaceted relationships with women played a key role in Poe as a man, Poe as an author, and Poe as a magazine editor and critic.

In part, Poe created his female characters Berenice, Morella, Ligeia, and Madeline Usher to illustrate the power of nineteenth-century women writers. These characters appear to be silent and weak. However, their strength lies not in their words, but rather their actions: “We cannot hear women’s own words in these stories, and we must grant the male voice poetic license. But in the end, the woman comes back with a vengeance and does have the final say – even if that is accomplished through mute performance, mime or dramatic gesture instead of actual speaking” (Elbert 24). Berenice, Morella, Ligeia, and Madeline Usher do not need to scream their powers, but by rising from the grave and terrifying their male companions, their strength is more than obvious to the reader. By creating these four female characters, Poe made an interesting statement about the time period. In his short stories, he showcased male fear of the female, thus speaking to the general feelings of the time, when men were uncomfortable with women’s changing gender roles, leaving the home and entering once uncharted territory.

Conversely, as a critic and editor, Poe supported women in their creative endeavors, showing their great potential and power. He crafted strong and intelligent women and weak, fearful, and insane men. Poe’s characters as well as their strengths and weaknesses were a reflection of American society of the nineteenth century, the literary world, and the changing gender roles of the time. The weakness and lack of steady work and intelligence of the male characters contributes to the fear and hatred the men possess for the female characters. Berenice, Morella, Ligeia, and Madeline Usher all possess traits that have escaped Poe’s male characters. The women have intelligence, beauty, and power. They use their power to rise from the dead and terrify the men, who “observe, petrified in the process,” (Person, *Aesthetic* 24).

The nineteenth century was an important time for women writers in America and Edgar Allan Poe played a role in their evolution. As women's roles changed from solely domestic in purpose to include involvement in creative and intellectual arenas, there was limited male support towards them. Edgar Allan Poe stood out among male critics as a voice of support and often praise for nineteenth-century women writers. His support of the opposite sex as a short story author, editor, and critic helped propel women out of the home and into artistic and literary society.

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