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THE DELSARTE ATTITUDE ON THE LEGITIMATE STAGE: MARY ANDERSON'S GALATEA AND THE TROPE OF THE CLASSICAL BODY

Taylor S. Lake

Late nineteenth century stage actress Mary Anderson's performances as Galatea in W.S. Gilbert's Pygmalion and Galatea, reveal the convergence of the Delsartean attitude and the metaphor of the classical body with women's social performances of respectable womanliness. Anderson's Galatea reveals the workings of the metaphor of the classical body in American Delsartism and points to the metaphor's significance for the increasing popularity of Delsartean statue posing among women.

One afternoon Samuel S. Curry, a colleague of the preeminent Delsartean Steele Mackaye, and a friend were strolling down Broadway when they passed some photographs of the American actress Mary Anderson (1859–1940). Curry's friend looked at the photographs and commented in admiration, "Do you see the Delsarte attitudes?" When Curry recounted the incident to Steele Mackaye, Mackaye exploded: "They are mechanical and posey attitudes—attitudes exaggerated beyond their cause."¹ Mackaye's chagrin at the notion that Anderson's attitudes were Delsartean was, no doubt, only further exacerbated by George M. Baker's one act satire on Delsartism, *Forty Days With a Crank, or the Seldarte Craze*, in which the character Mary bore an uncanny resemblance to Mary Anderson. Mary works for the eccentric principal of the "Realistic School of Expression," Archimedes Abbott (a thinly disguised Steele Mackaye), quotes liberally from plays for which Anderson was well known, and poses in the "grand display of passion" (7).

Mary Anderson's stage representations offer a salient site for Delsarte scholars. This essay argues that Anderson's performances of Galatea, the classical statue brought to life in W. S. Gilbert's *Pygmalion and Galatea* of 1871,

Mary Anderson as Galatea.

Courtesy of the New York Public Library, Billy Rose Collection.

reveal the workings of the metaphor of the classical body in American Delsartism during the 1880s and 1890s and point to the metaphor's significance for the increasing popularity of Delsartean statue posing among women.² My argument unfolds as follows. First, I briefly discuss what is meant by the term "attitude" and its history as an acting technique and a Delsartean technique, explaining the significant connections between the attitude, the metaphor of the classical body, and Delsartism. Second, I probe the link between Anderson's attitudes in *Pygmalion and Galatea*, her portrayal of an "ideal" woman, and commentary on her Delsartean style in the critical reception of her performances of Galatea. Analyzing three major signifiers at work in the classical metaphor of the body I argue that the critical reception of Anderson's Galatea reveals an intersection between the actress's portrayal of the living statue and Delsartism. This intersection points to an historical moment in which the Delsartean attitude was relocated from professional performances to social performances of embodied femininity.³

The attitude, a fixed pose assumed by the actor and held for a varying amount of time, was an acting technique that linked the actor's pose to certain emotional meanings and character types and evinced actors' and actresses' skill at expressing emotion on stage without losing control. Eighteenth and nineteenth century acting manuals offer an inventory of attitudes, their respective emotional significations, and their appropriateness for high or low born characters.⁴ The attitude took on additional cultural authority during the late eighteenth century when actors turned to painting manuals, historical painting and classical statuary as ideal models of emotional expression and noble characters.⁵

Throughout the nineteenth century actors and actresses were encouraged to imitate the grand attitudes of classical heroes and heroines in Greco-Roman statuary in order to better portray the ideal characters of tragedy and high melodrama that appealed to middle and upper class theater audiences. By the mid-nineteenth century the acting technique of the attitude was closely tied to the image of the classical body. But as the century progressed, the classical body's metaphorical function shifted and with it the attitude's meanings. As the language of domesticity gained momentum in Britain and the United States, constructing white middle class women as moral and spiritual guardians of the family and national republican values, the attitude as a technique and the classical body as an ideal took on the function of signifying embodied femininity through the performance genre of statue posing.⁶ As theater historian Gail Marshall argues in *Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth*, the combined signifiers of the classical attitude/pose and the classical costume (white drapery and veils) constituted a metaphor of the classical body, a cultural space onto which nineteenth-century men and women projected their assumptions and fantasies about the female body and subjectivity (9–10, 40–41). The revealing

white drapery and motionless pose contained the contradictory ideological constructions of the female body, as the site of erotic desire and the embodiment of such Victorian ideals as purity and submissiveness, within a fixed aesthetic ideal of white beauty and grace under the controlling gaze of a male spectator/sculptor.

The social practice of statue posing allowed middle-class women to “play” at theatrical acting by setting stages in the family parlor. By dressing up in “Grecian” drapery and robes, and imitating figures and themes from historical paintings and statues, women could signify respectable middle-class gentility while engaging in the transgressive play of theatrics (see Chapman). Statue posing also enjoyed a brief popularity on the legitimate stage and in museums; and during the 1830s and 1840s it actually became a central feature of New York stage performances, thus further feeding audiences’ fascination with verisimilitude (McCullough 13–17). However as the emphasis on the professional stage shifted toward the exhibition of semi-nude, mostly female “model artistes” in the 1850s and 1860s, statue posing’s legitimacy as a performing art declined as the practice gave way to more explicit connotations of eroticism. Legitimate New York stage and amateur social performances of statue posing dwindled until a resurgence in the 1890s (ibid. 57–113). Ironically this resurgence occurred at the same time as the rise of the domestic drama and dramatic naturalism, and an increased emphasis on “ordinary” characters and ensemble acting that made the theatrical attitude (outside of statue posing) increasingly outdated on the legitimate stage (Downer 1946, 548–561). Critics vociferously debated the appropriateness of the attitude as an acting technique for performing a female character. Some argued that the attitude was an appropriate means of expressing an “ideal,” i.e. graceful, upper-class moral womanliness as compared to the spontaneous uncontrolled expression of emotion that was appropriate for an “ordinary womanliness,” i.e. excitable, lower-class, and not-so-moral. Other critics maintained that the attitude and “ideal” characters were outdated and artificial.⁷

While the critics debated the appropriateness of the attitude as a dramatic technique, two key figures in the development of American Delsartism fashioned their versions of that system around the classical attitude. During the 1870s and 1880s, Steele Mackaye used the theatrical attitude as part of his Delsartean training program for actors. His “Harmonic Gymnastics” offered students an extensive inventory of various attitudes with their specific meanings.⁸ During the 1880s and 1890s, Mackaye’s student Genevieve Stebbins reworked Mackaye’s harmonic gymnastics into a system of exercises designed to strengthen women’s bodies and, at the same time, to cultivate and express a beautiful, graceful, womanly form and spirit. As I have argued elsewhere, Stebbins reformulated the theatrical Delsartean attitude into a social practice. Not only would practicing the Delsartean

attitudes enhance performance; it would also improve the female body's strength and flexibility and free the inner life force to express itself on the body's surface. Whereas Mackaye applied the Delsartean attitudes to professional stage performance, Stebbins used them as a means to improve a woman's everyday behavior, health, and expressive power in activities ranging from stretching and walking to greeting guests and strangers on social occasions (Lake 97–131).

In 1881, Stebbins broke ties with Mackaye and traveled to Europe to study the link between Delsartism and classical statuary. Upon her return to the United States, she incorporated classical statuary and statue posing into her Delsartism. For Stebbins, classical statues and their poses offered the aspiring Delsartean concrete proof of a superior type of mind, body, and soul—an integration that Delsartism could help to manifest through poise and movement. She urged her students to use classical statuary as a model of the “beautiful, true and good,” to visit galleries, study the statues, and then “go home and essay them before the glass” (1902, 150). By the 1890s Stebbins' performances of statue poses were regularly noted and praised in *Werner's Magazine*, a publication devoted to elocutionary performance, Delsartism, and related topics.⁹ Thus, a vital link between Delsartism, the attitude, and the metaphor of the classical body was forged.

The dramatic increase in articles on statue posing and reports on statue posing performances in *Werner's Magazine* during the 1890s indicates a sudden escalation in this activity among female Delsartean (Lake 178). In 1890 F. Townsend Southwick (co-principal with Stebbins of the New York School of Expression) noted derisively that the average Delsartean was a female “in a new aesthetic rig” who attitudinized; and “the limper, and the more lackadaisical and dreamful her appearance in that costume, the nearer she feels herself to be to the ‘keen white soul’ of Delsarte.”¹⁰ Ironically, Southwick's condescending remark points to the complex inter-connection between outer body surface and inner spiritual force that was central to Delsartean statue posing. Delsartean statue posing in order to express an outward womanly beauty; but for them this beauty extended beyond the physical into the depths of the mind and soul. They believed that the connection between body, mind, and soul and Delsartism's (i.e. Delsartean statue posing's) promise to strengthen that connection offered physical and spiritual liberation. They asserted the liberating effects of Delsartean statue posing even as they reiterated the dominant culture's ideological containment of women as spectacle, a visual display for the male gaze.¹¹ The three signifiers of the classical body, the Greek costume, the statuesque body, and the classical/Delsartean attitudes, worked to articulate these connections.

Mary Anderson as Galatea.

Courtesy of the New York Public Library, Billy Rose Collection.



These elements constitute the structure of intelligibility that informed Delsartean amateur statue posing during the 1890s.

Mary Anderson's performances as Galatea during the 1880s and the critical reception of them reveal the same structure of intelligibility that informed the Delsartean's amateur statue posing during the 1890s. Her performances of the living classical statue reveal the subject position that made the Delsartean's strategic appropriation of the sign of the classical body a possibility. This subject position was predicated on the relocation of the classical attitude from the professional performance into the social performance of womanhood and an emphasis on significations of self-control and creative agency. Thus as a Delsartean/classical actress, Anderson's attitudes were read by some critics as mechanical and artificial; but as a Delsartean/woman her attitudes were read by critics as signs of an ideal womanliness. More important than the fact that she had studied Delsartism is that her performances revealed the three signifiers of the classical body at work in Delsartean statue posing: the Greek costume, the statuesque body, and the technique of the attitude. Anderson's performances as Galatea during the 1880s foreshadowed the Delsartean statue posers' appropriation of these signifiers to negotiate the contradictory constructions of embodied femininity as the site of erotic spectacle as well as the site of moral and spiritual purity. For Anderson and amateur Delsartean statue posers, the classical body reiterated their submission to a male gaze, and, at the same time, enabled them to carve out a cultural space in which they were creative agents of their own performances.

In her memoirs, Mary Anderson recalls studying Delsartism sometime between 1880 and 1881. She found the "mechanical exercises," (a clear reference to the aesthetic gymnastics), useful for conditioning the muscles and tendons and giving "strength, suppleness, and control over them all" (DeNavarro 41-42). We can only speculate as to her source. Perhaps it was Steele Mackaye, but that is unlikely. She might have attended one of Genevieve Stebbins performances between 1879 and 1881, and perhaps even studied with Stebbins or another of Mackaye's students.¹² Anderson also learned to perform the theatrical attitudes from her tutor, classical actor and elocutionist George Vandenhoff (DeNavarro 41-42).

Throughout her short career (1875-1890), Mary Anderson struggled with the criticism that her performances were mechanical—specifically that they were too reliant on the technique of the theatrical attitude, which was a contended acting technique throughout this period. In American theater of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, pictorial dramas that included emotionally charged scenes, noble settings, and grandly heroic, morally

Mary Anderson as Galatea.

Courtesy of Bill Nelson, Minneapolis.



sacrosanct characters competed with “modern” domestic dramas that revolved around the social conflicts and problems of commonplace and, often, vice-prone characters. The competition had a discernible impact on acting techniques. The attitude was a valuable technique for pictorial dramas that required the actress to manifest the requisite emotional and physical control appropriate for her character while expressing extreme emotion. In contrast, domestic dramas required acting techniques that magnified emotion and allowed the actress to weep, scream or die with the passion and spontaneity appropriate for a fallen woman meeting her reckoning (Wilson 110–12; Downer 1946, 543–48). In other words, late nineteenth-century actresses’ use of the attitude was embedded in cultural assumptions about women, sexuality, and passion. The critical reception of Anderson’s early stage performances reflects the fault line between the pictorial and the domestic drama. Some critics praised Anderson’s graceful, majestic attitudes, her artistic control over her characters’ emotions and her noble portrayals of spiritually pure, ideal female characters. Others considered Anderson’s attitudes to be too studied, too far above the “plane of ordinary life,” and lacking the necessary womanly passion.¹³

Many of Anderson’s strongest critics changed their tune in response to her performance in the role of Galatea. In W. S. Gilbert’s classical comedy *Pygmalion and Galatea*, the sculptor Pygmalion creates a statue that is an ideal version of his wife Cynisca. When Galatea comes to life, comedic chaos ensues as Pygmalion falls in love with the statue whose ideal beauty and innocent ignorance of male-female relationships (i.e. of sexual and emotional passion) generate comic encounters with the play’s human characters. The comedy centers on Pygmalion’s choice between an ideal and a real woman. Its opposition of the ideal Galatea to her real-life model Cynisca exposes the fissures underlying nineteenth-century ideological constructions of woman as an inviolate source of spirituality and a threatening site of embodied desire in two ways. First, it reifies the choice between an ideal and a real woman as a necessity by returning Galatea to stone; the ideal woman and the real woman thus confront one another but cannot be conjoined.¹⁴ Second, the character of Galatea also reveals the contradictory constructions of embodied femininity. Galatea (her beauty) is the site of erotic desire; yet the fact that she is a classical statue reframes desire for her as an “innocent” appreciation of artistic beauty. When the statue symbolically descends from her pedestal she becomes the dramatic incarnation of ideal womanliness, a living statue.

Critics were almost unanimous in their praise of Anderson’s performance—specifically noting her use of attitudes. She was the perfect embodiment of a living, ideal woman. American theater critic John Ranken Towse described her Galatea as a “most felicitous combination of the human, the poetic and the idealistic” (220). But critics not only praised Anderson’s

Galatea as exemplifying the ideal woman. Fred Winslow Adams, who wrote frequently on Delsarte topics for the *Werner* magazines, declared that Anderson's performances "especially illustrated" the school of Delsartism (42). One might ask what Adams saw in these performances that so perfectly illustrated Delsarte, or what led other critics to see in her the incarnation of ideal womanhood? The answers lie in the metaphor of the classical body, and its implicit identification of the "ideal woman" through the three signifiers: the classical costume, the statuesque body, and the attitude.

The critics' descriptions of Anderson's costume for Galatea suggest that this Greekish garb contained, for the controlling gaze of a male spectator, the contradictory connotations of female eroticism and womanly purity. The mostly male critics conflated the costume's display of Anderson's body with art, disguising their voyeuristic pleasure as aesthetic taste. One reviewer described the Greek costume as "high art in stage dressing"; he praised the designer for weighting the white fabric with pieces of metal to give the garment a "heaviness suggestive of marble." He was equally effusive about the costume's display of Anderson's figure:

The tunic falls over her tall, slender figure in a perfection of graceful drapery... her feet were in stockings that fitted each separate shoe.... If she wore any thing [sic] at all underneath this drapery it was not enough to conceal any movement of her limbs...the exposure of a portion at her side below the arm was just a little too daring, though the effect was palliated by the resemblance to marble.¹⁵

Another critic began with a tribute to the costume's sculptural forms and delicate features and ended in a reverie over Anderson's "soft, clinging draperies."¹⁶

Anderson's comments about her costume, however, like those of amateur Delsartean statue posers in the 1890s, focused on the costume's liberating effects. In an interview for *Werner's Voice Magazine* she emphasized the costume's positive effect on her health. Upon playing Galatea in England she took off her corsets never to put them on again. "I feel better without them," she said (qtd. in Wilber 1890, 52). Not only did the Greek costume free her from the constraints of a corset; it also gave her a physical freedom to express herself artistically through pose and movement:

There was a particular pleasure in merely donning the simple and flowing draperies. Heels and wigs were given up with alacrity to obtain the desired effect, and in freeing one's self from the iron grip of stays (a Greek dress cannot be worn well with them) the figure became immeasurably more supple and graceful; for even when not laced tightly, their stiffness gives a wooden, dead look to the torso, which is the mainspring of easy movement.¹⁷



Compare Anderson's remarks on the classical costume to those of Delsartean Helen Potter who asserted that the "beauty of the dress depends entirely and absolutely on the loveliness it shields and on the freedom and motion that it does not impede" (1892, 193). Another Delsartean, Annie Hayden Webster similarly emphasized the costume's liberating effects over its revealing nature: "True beauty will be yours only when you have removed those superficial decorations that prevent soul expression" (61).

Critics also noted Anderson's "statuesque figure" and its appropriateness for the role of Galatea. A review of Anderson's March 1884 performance in Dublin compared her physical features to those of a classical statue:

She is of rather tall stature, a figure slight but perfectly modeled, her well-shaped head dressed in Greek fashion with the simple knot behind, her arms, which the Greek costume displayed to the shoulder, long, white and of a roundness seldom attained so early in life, her walk and all her attitudes consummately graceful and expressive.¹⁸

The *New York Times* remarked that, in an October 1885 performance of Galatea in London, Anderson's "statuesque beauty" was displayed to good advantage.¹⁹ The critical reception of Anderson's Galatea also reveals a strong tendency

to construct the statuesque body as white. Critics repeatedly used the word "white" to describe Anderson's costume and body (she wore a white wig, which she later discarded, and white makeup on her face, neck, and arms), conflating the whiteness of the costume and its connotations of spirituality with white skin.²⁰ According to American theater critic and Anderson's biographer William Winter, the whiteness of the statue signified a timeless aesthetic and moral ideal: "that white marble statue...that crystal image of purity and truth,—[sic] is no longer now the symbol of sorrow and defeat, but the emblem of a divine triumph" (123–24).

These critics were describing what cultural historian Martha Banta refers to as the "divinely tall, divinely fair" American girl, a model of American female beauty derived from classical statuary that constructed the ideal female body as tall, with long legs, an elongated torso and a Grecian profile (500). As Banta argues, during the late nineteenth century the classical statuary and models of the statuesque body served as an iconographic invocation of American power and moral and racial superiority; its most familiar image was Columbia, the ultimate Amazon Queen (487, 501–529). Nearly a decade after Anderson's retirement from the stage, American theater critic A.C. Wheeler coupled Anderson and popular statuesque icons of American culture and power. Referring to Anderson, he writes:

Mary Anderson as Galatea.

Courtesy of Bill Nelson, Minneapolis.

Long before she arrived, there had been growing up in America a national ideal. Art tradition, mythology and patriotism had been conjointly building a concrete girl out of abstract classicality, manifest destiny, arms and allegory....She was called Liberty, progress, America, Columbia, Freedom. She was in truth Minerva, Venus, Diana, in her robes and attitudes....She menaced barbarism; she frowned at tyranny; she lifted up the orphan; she weighted out justice; she sheltered the injured. Always she was long-limbed and bare-armed, and wore the stately and emotional confession that her origin was in a marble quarry. She had posed so long and so frigidly in the American's fancy that he knew and loved her in all her metamorphoses, but he had never seen her in flesh and blood until Mary Anderson arrived.... She was the national type, altogether statuesque and with a clarion call.²¹

During the 1890s amateur Delsartean also invoked the importance of the statuesque body to statue posing. However, they believed that the beauty of the statuesque body extended beyond the physical into the depths of the mind and soul. Estelle Van Poole, for example, asserted that physical beauty was the manifestation of a harmony among the elements of the Delsartean triune system: body, mind, and soul. But she quickly turned her attention to the model of ideal female beauty in which "the figure is tall, commanding, and elegant, the shoulders broad and powerful, the limbs long, the muscles well developed, the chest and abdomen proportional." She reiterated the increasingly popular "divinely tall, divinely fair" model of female beauty and, moreover, invoked its implications of national and racial superiority. Said Van Poole, "Persons belonging to this type are rulers, leaders...this rule of measurement is not a favorite one except in our own country. The Americans are said to be the only people that cultivate slenderness in their women" (470).

While Anderson made no public comments about her own figure or critical commentary on it, amateur Delsartean statue posers were very vocal on the subject of the statuesque body. Indeed throughout the literature on statue posing in the *Werner* magazines, the statuesque body is presented as a disciplinary model. In 1893, for example, *Werner's* "Question-Box" featured a request for a Delsarte scale of measurements of the body. The editors responded that, while there were no specific Delsarte measurements for the ideal body they would send the reader the "scale of measurements for women according to the gymnastic standard of a perfectly developed woman."²² Helen Potter urged her readers to compare their bodies to those of classical statuary and to mold them accordingly:

If you can, own some photographs of ideal figures in marble and place them in your private room, or where you can look upon them several times a day. If you cannot own more than one, let that one be Venus de

Milo or Diana, or Aphrodite. Fix the lines and proportions of this ideal in the mind, so that you can see them with the eyes closed, and recall any feature or line at will; the nose, the mouth, the turn of the neck, etc. Compare your own face and figure with this model. Note the defects, and practice special exercises which will be given from time to time in "The Studio" [Potter's series on beauty] of *Werner's Magazine*.... Indeed artists often have to make use of many models to produce a perfect figure. (1891, 270)

Not only are certain physical measurements and features essential to the statuesque body, but as noted above, whiteness is as well. Articles and photographs of statue posing in Werner's magazines reveal that whiteness served as an outer signifier of an inner purity. Delsartean literature on statue posing emphasizes the importance of accentuating the whiteness of the costume with powder, wigs, and makeup.²³ Ironically, the same women who embraced the disciplinary model of the statuesque body framed their discussions around the liberating effects of self-control. For example, Potter exclaims, "You will be what you *will* to be [her emphasis]. You will gain mastery over the physical senses and the master can train the body to that master's ideas and desires" (1891, 269).

It is in the classical Delsartean attitudes that the contradictory connotations of the classical body and embodied femininity are clearest. Here the feminine body as a site of eroticism and spirituality and the feminine subject as submissive to male power and the male gaze and as an active, creative agent intersect in fascinating ways. With the exception of transitions in and out of the poses, statue posing imposed silence and stillness on the performers, which, in combination with the revealing costume, reiterated the subordinate position of embodied womanhood in a patriarchal culture.²⁴ However, Anderson and amateur Delsartean statue posers used Delsartism, specifically its codified vocabulary of particular attitudes and their significations, to negotiate between submission and a female power. While the attitude entwined women in a dominant ideology, it also offered a means of expressing resistance to that ideology.

The theatrical Delsartean attitudes contained Mary Anderson in this ideology which subordinated the female body and selfhood to a male gaze. Critics singled out as the most artistic of her poses the attitude Anderson assumed at the beginning of the first act, when Cynisca draws aside the curtain to reveal the lifeless statue motionless on her pedestal. The fact that this attitude occurs before Galatea assumes human life and movement suggests that immobility and silence significantly contributed to the critical constructions of the pose as particularly artistic. Again we return to the metaphor of the classical body's containment effect; the attitude's artistry was predicated on an immobility that posited the performer/Anderson as



submissive and without agency. Critics effused over the artistry of this opening image. One critic wrote, "A perfect wealth of art was displayed in its pose; it seemed to be a realization of the author's conception of a figure which all but breathes, yet still is only cold, dull stone."²⁵ Another critic wrote "Miss Anderson, standing as the statue, when the curtains are drawn aside, will attract as much attention as an art study. Her grace, her attitudes, and her movements are wellnigh faultless."²⁶ Critics applauded Anderson/Galatea's beautiful submissiveness as an aesthetic achievement.

However, a close examination of Anderson's poses suggests that she resisted that construction in two ways. First, she imitated the pose of a specific classical statue that signified feminine power. Second, she also performed poses based not on a specific statue but on the Delsartean principles of grace and repose (what I call general statue poses) that also signified female power. We cannot reconstruct Mary Anderson's poses with absolute certainty because critics do not describe them in detail and the technology that enabled photographers to photograph live performances was not available until the 1890s (see Henderson 49–74). However studio photographs of Anderson posing as Galatea give us a sense of what a few of her poses probably looked like.

In one photograph of Anderson as Galatea, she is imitating the classical statue Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy as depicted in a photograph reprinted in Elsie Wilbor's *Delsartean Recitation Book* (41) Like the statue, Anderson stands erect; her legs and feet are slightly spread, the balance of weight equally distributed. Her left arm hangs at her side, the hand opening downwards. Indeed, but for the fact that Anderson does not hold a dramatic mask in her right hand, her attitude is an exact representation of the statue. The precision of Anderson's imitation could have been read as artistic but, more importantly, her imitation of the Muse of tragedy would have resonated for her and for her audience members. And tragedy's high-culture status among dramatic genres would have reinforced the artistic significations of her attitude.²⁷ Photographs of Anderson in the role suggest that she drew upon her knowledge of Delsartism when she performed as Galatea and that she chose to perform those attitudes that signified power. In the photograph on page 117, for example, Anderson's weight falls on the strong leg which is straight; her other leg, knee bent, rests slightly forward of it. According to Stebbins, "Power is shown in leg when knee is out. In the great statues of Minerva, Diana and Juno, they are always represented with knees out" (qtd. in Wilbor Addendum to Stebbins 1902, 484). Anderson's erect torso also signifies a calm repose and female power. Stebbins asserted that the erect torso throws the moral zone of the body (the heart and chest region that corresponds to the soul) into dominance and indicates that the soul

Mary Anderson as Galatea.

Courtesy of Bill Nelson, Minneapolis.

dominates the being (Stebbins 1902, 207–09). If we read other photographs of Anderson posing as Galatea in relation to Stebbins' guidelines, we may conclude that Anderson combined various leg, arm, and head attitudes to negotiate between female power and submission. According to the Delsartean canon, Anderson's positioning of her legs signifies repose and power. However she qualifies those significations when she positions her head slightly downward, an attitude that signifies veneration, and when she positions her arms across her pelvic area in a gesture of modesty (see Stebbins 175, 221).

Amateur Delsartean statue posers' attitudes similarly negotiated between the poles of submission and power. They often imitated classical statuary that emphasized women's submission—even victimization by men. Delsartean Clara Power Edgerly's *tableaux vivant* (an arrangement of group statue posings) of "The Niobe Group" was very popular among *Werner's* readers during the 1890s. In this *tableau vivant* the performers reenact the moment when the gods turned the defiant Niobe and her daughters into stone. Like the original statue, the women performing Niobe and her daughters pose in bent, submissive attitudes as they shield themselves and each other from onslaught above.²⁸ However, Delsartean enactors enacted assertive statue poses as well. For example, Genevieve Stebbins posed as Melpomene, Diana of Versailles, and Atalanta all of whom were powerful, active figures in Greek mythology—and also as the male "Fighting Gladiator."²⁹ Elsie Wilbor's *Delsarte Recitation Book* includes photographs of Diana of Versailles, Atalanta, and Fighting Gladiator, all of which were "selected from the numerous statue-poses given by Delsartean" (462).

Amateur Delsartean statue posers insisted that the performance practice was a liberating one. For example, Evelyn Aitchison describes statue posing as self-education. It teaches performers to "unconsciously stir up new depths of our soul; and as unused muscles come into play and become supple, we grow strong, expressive, and perchance even beautiful" (434). Edgerly recommends Delsartism as the best training for statue posing, writing that her Delsarte students learn to relax and energize their bodies, to render them "obedient to the will" (1893, 16). Statue posing, in turn, evinces the accomplishments of Delsartean training. As Edgerly explains, it "illustrates the capabilities of the human form and emphasizes the necessity of a thorough physical training." She refers to "relaxing" and "energizing" as physical training techniques; but her discussion of statue posing also emphasizes disciplining the performers to remain still. She recommends requiring performers to hold their poses no more than "half a minute at the start; then to "increase the time with each lesson till they can stand in any position a minute and a half or two minutes" (1890, 317).

Similarly, Anderson proclaims her creative agency in her memoirs when she positions herself as her own sculptor. She asserts that she rebelled against the paternal advice of playwright W. S. Gilbert to play the role as a modern comedy. Instead, Anderson says, she chose to interpret the character as ideal, ethereal and pure. In other words, Anderson used the metaphor of the classical body to express her artistic agency and, at the same time, to resist constructions of the female body as erotic spectacle for the male gaze. Anderson, like Genevieve Stebbins, considered statue posing to be a performance practice in which the female body could be spiritualized through an aesthetics of expression and control. Indeed, some critics acknowledged that Anderson's attitudes as Galatea were evidence of the actress' discipline and creative agency. A critic from the British *Standard* insisted that Anderson had to have studied classical statuary in order to perform such artistic attitudes.³⁰ An 1883 article in *Spirit of the Times* notes admiringly that the actress, while on tour in England, studied statuary at the British Museum.³¹

Yet, overall, critics evaluated the artistry of Anderson's attitudes within the context of her ideal womanliness rather than her skills as an actress.

A London critic observed:

[The role] demands no intensity and little depth of feeling; it is graceful, poetic, classic, and in the outward and visible sense of those adjectives, it depends largely for its emotional value upon a very quiet tone of suggested sentiment and for its humorous charm upon the simulation of naïveté and infantile frankness. Miss Anderson may be fairly said to excel on all these points.³²

Other English critics framed their responses around the dichotomy of an ideal womanly purity versus a real womanly passion. One critic adamantly voiced his preference for English actress Mrs. Madge Robertson Kendal's original interpretation of the part (under Gilbert's direction). Kendal was more passionate, and therefore, more womanly.

Some think and say that Miss Anderson is correct in carrying the statue into the embodied Galatea, and in divesting her of her humanity. If so, I do not understand the play, and never understood it. If so, Mrs. Kendal's reading of Galatea was all wrong, and I was myself demented for praising it and admiring it twelve years ago. I cannot eat my words. I cannot admire a soulless Galatea. When she descends from the pedestal she must be a woman or nothing, a woman with heart, tears, emotion, glow and pathos....Miss Anderson can play the statue but she cannot play Galatea.³³

Note the adjectives the critic uses to describe a “real” woman: heart, tears, emotion, glow, and pathos define “real” womanliness as excessively emotional. The critic is describing the “ordinary” kind of womanliness characteristic of the domestic drama. For him the “ideal womanliness” that Anderson’s Galatea represents is unacceptable. The playwright, W.S. Gilbert, coyly cast his vote for “ordinary” womanliness when he asserted his preference for Kendal’s interpretation of the part over Anderson’s. In his opinion, Kendal’s was dramatically successful whereas Anderson’s was artistically so.³⁴ In other words, there was no place for Anderson’s artistic control over passion on the professional stage. *Acting* like a woman required passion. But, Anderson’s artistic control did have a place—in the social performance of an ideal womanliness.

Critic and biographer William Winter’s defense of Anderson’s performances as Galatea reveals the convergence of a performed ideal womanliness with a (constructed) “natural” one. He confronted criticisms that Anderson’s control over the part and her classical attitudes sacrificed its womanly passion by defining Anderson’s coldness as the absence of “delirium and convulsion,” her intellectual control over the part, and her spirituality (118). He insisted that Anderson’s portrayal of the role brought out the great truth of the play:

Galatea is an intellectual and spiritual ideal that has no place in the actual flesh and blood world of sin and selfishness. Galatea illustrates angelic innocence pervading a pure and sinless but human and passionate love...[that] may be cherished in the heart; such a life may be lived in the mind; but the one can have no fulfillment and the other must be lonely and cold.

Then, Winter makes his point, and in the process supports mine. In Anderson’s Galatea, “the ideal and the actual are confronted but not conjoined.” True passion, he continues, must find an outlet or “burn the human heart to dust and ashes.... [For Galatea] the actual is her enemy and it repudiates her presence” (118–19). In other words, Anderson’s Galatea is the embodiment of a womanly ideal, whose spiritual purity forbids “true” passion and prohibits her from inhabiting the real world. This womanly ideal can be embodied in a statue—yes, but only through a significantly controlled performance of a statue that contains the excessive passion that defines ordinary womanliness. However, by carrying the statue into the living Galatea, Anderson simultaneously divested the real (i.e. the constructed as real) woman of her humanity and invested the real woman with ideality.

Some American critics attempted to contain this contradiction by attributing Anderson’s artistic and spiritual performance to her innate ideal womanliness rather than to her acting skills. They easily slid from her professional performance of an ideal womanliness to her own authentic (ideal) womanliness. American theater critic John Ranken Towse, for example,

asserted that Anderson's Galatea "could have been furnished only by a clever, refined and good woman" (221). William Winter waxed eloquently upon the topic.

The perfect Greek dress, the white loveliness of the statue, the eager radiant face, the subtle suggestion of pain as well as rapture in the process of awakening from the marble, the grace of movement, the consummate repose, the finely modulated action, the honest eyes, the softly musical voice—these attributes and felicities of exterior and graces—and many more *might* [my italics] be named among its felicities of exterior and art...[but] the charm of the personality must shine through the mechanism. It is what the actor is, far more than what the actor does, that conquers in the realm of the human mind. Miss Anderson's performances—because of her constant, healthful high poetic soul, the gipsy-like freedom of spirit with which she is allowed—are remarkable for this victorious power, and it is upon this, their permanent value, that thought inclines chiefly to linger. In acting *Galatea* she has brought out more than all the thought that is in the play. (121–22)

I cite Winter at length because his comments are so revealing. Winter conflates her performance with a natural womanliness (her performance "might" be attributed to art) that he describes not only in terms of beauty, but of art as well. This fusion of Anderson's acting with a natural womanliness cannot be explained as the product of what has been termed "late nineteenth-century star discourse."³⁵ In fact, critics disagreed over how appropriate Anderson's acting style and attitudes were to the characters she portrayed except, and the exception is significant, for *Galatea* (see Lake 140–43). Indeed, Winter invokes all three signifiers of the metaphor of the classical body: the classical costume (the perfect Greek dress), the statuesque body (her white loveliness) and her classical attitudes (her consummate repose). He links these to the art of statue posing; but his qualifying "might" makes all the difference. He attributes these signifiers to Anderson's natural womanliness. The metaphor of the classical body not only signified the character Galatea's ideality; it signified Anderson's interior ideal womanliness.

If Anderson's performances as Galatea during the 1880s reveal a historical moment during which the classical attitude was relocated from the professional performance of a theatrical character to the social performance of an ideal womanliness, amateur Delsartean statue posing reveals the extension of the moment into the 1890s and into the phenomenon of Delsartism. During the 1890s thousands of American Delsarteans practiced statue posing in order to express an ideal womanliness characterized by an external beauty that extended into the depths of the mind and soul. Genevieve Stebbins eloquently

articulated Delsartism's boundlessly optimistic promise of physical, mental, and spiritual rejuvenation and perfection. In an article on statue posing Stebbins set forth its possibilities:

Artistic statue-posing is not a mere external imitation of a Greek marble. It is something infinitely greater. It is a creative work of intellectual love. It is a spiritual aspiration toward a superior and definite type of beauty, in which lives and moves a human soul. (1894, 257)

Mary Anderson's performances as Galatea point toward amateur Delsarteans' appropriation of the metaphor of the classical body and their practice of statue posing as the social performance of an ideal embodied femininity. The classical body's ideological function of containing the contradictory connotations of embodied femininity as the erotic site of desire and the embodiment of Victorian ideals such as purity and spirituality would encourage women during the 1890s to embrace statue posing as a means of expressing a feminine beauty and a mental and spiritual beauty that transcended the flesh. Like Mary Anderson, American Delsarteans would carve out a space in which they could claim a female agency over their bodies and performances. Yet, as Anderson's Galatea foreshadows, the Delsartean space of freedom would be contained within ideological constraints of race and gender.

Notes

- 1 The incident is recounted in an undated and unsigned note in the Delsarte Collection, LSU (Box 2, Folder 5). Curry's signature on other notes in this folder and his references to the incident in *Province of Expression* (351–52) confirms that he is the author. This would have occurred before 1890, the year Anderson retired.
- 2 Theater critic William Winter notes that Anderson's debut as Galatea was on September 28, 1881, in Troy, New York. Her first performance of this role in New York City was on January 7, 1882, at Booth's Theater. She toured major U.S. cities, including Louisville, Kentucky, and Cincinnati, Ohio, with the play until May 1883 when she took it to the United Kingdom. There, she played in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, Liverpool, Dublin, and Birmingham. She returned to the United States in 1888 (Winter 43, 50, 57, 68. Also see "Dramatic," *Music and Drama*, November 1882, Mary Anderson Scrapbook.
- 3 This article is an abbreviated version of a chapter on Anderson in Lake 132–69.
- 4 Downer 1943 and 1946; Mullin 1975.

- 5 For a more detailed history of the theatrical attitude's significations, see Lake 27–64. Also, Michael S. Wilson 203–205; and Roach 70–74. An extensive history of the attitude is available in Holmström.
- 6 Since the 1966 publication of Barbara Welter's "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860," studies of nineteenth-century American and Western European culture have documented and debated the influence of the "domestic ideal" on female identity, a normative construct that was disseminated through numerous cultural outlets (such as etiquette literature and evangelical Protestantism) and complemented by the rise of marketplace capitalism and commodity consumption. See Kerber; Dubois, et al.; and Roberts, et al. for useful insights.
- 7 I discuss critical comparisons of Anderson's classical acting style, appropriate for pictorial drama, contrasting with Clare Morris's emotional acting style, appropriate for the domestic drama (Lake 63–64).
- 8 For a detailed analysis of Mackaye's *Harmonic Gymnastics*, see Hebert 100–123. Mackaye's "Harmonic Gymnastics: Simple and Complex Expressions and Stage Business—35 Lessons" is included in this work.
- 9 See, for example, "Sketches and Portraits of Artists and Teachers: Genevieve Stebbins," *WM* 15 (December 1893):445.
- 10 For a more detailed discussion of the rise of Delsartean amateur statue posing, see Lake 175–204. For more about the partnership of Stebbins and Southwick, see Ruyter 1999, 52.
- 11 By ideological containment of women as spectacle for the male gaze, I mean the cultural construction of the female body as an object to be looked at (by men). This is not to say that Delsarteans functioned only in this single sense of a containing male gaze. Literature on statue posing in the *Werner's* magazines reveals that Delsartean statue posing was a popular item on graduation for all-girls and women's schools, suggesting that a female gaze was also a significant factor. An excellent review of literature on women as spectacle and the male and female gaze is van Zoonen, especially, Chapter 6.
- 12 Attendance records do not indicate that Anderson attended any acting school where Mackaye taught or lectured. Anderson's lack of formal training was a continual source of embarrassment for her, so, if she had attended Mackaye's classes, she probably would have told the press or mentioned it in her memoirs. While Stebbins had yet to publish in 1880–81, she had given Delsarte performances as early as 1879 (Percy Mackaye 437) and was teaching by this time. I am grateful to Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter for the suggestion that Anderson might have studied with Stebbins. See also, McTeague 41; Wilbor 1892, 60; and Thompson 61.

- 13 Review of *Lady of Lyons*, New York, *New York Times*, November 13, 1877; and *Romeo and Juliet* (and) *Fazio*, New York, *New York Times*, September 28, 1878. Both repr. *New York Times Theater Reviews, 1870–1885*.
- 14 According to Marshall, “Ovid’s narrative ends with Venus blessing the union of Pygmalion and Galatea, and enabling the erstwhile statue to bear a child” (24). Gilbert’s play, in contrast, sharply distinguishes between the ideal statue/Galatea and the real/human Cynisca. When Pygmalion chooses Cynisca, the heartbroken Galatea returns to stone.
- 15 “Mary Anderson’s Unusual Costume,” *Music and Drama* (March 10, 1883). In Mary Anderson Scrapbook, 17.
- 16 “From Our Correspondents and Exchanges,” (February 2, 1884). In Mary Anderson Scrapbook, 24.
- 17 Anderson makes no mention of criticism that her costumes were too daring. She only notes that they were “decried at first, as new things generally are, but in a short time even ‘old stagers’ voted them both beautiful and effective” (DeNavarro 117, 120).
- 18 “Mary Anderson at the Gaiety,” *Dublin Evening Mail* (March 22, 1884). repr. in Farrar 77.
- 19 Review of *Pygmalion and Galatea* (and) *Comedy and Tragedy*, in *New York Times* (October 23, 1885). Repr. in *New York Times Theater Reviews, 1870–1885*.
- 20 “Mary Anderson’s Unusual Costume,” Mary Anderson Scrapbook 17; and DeNavarro 119.
- 21 “When the Lights Are Out,” *New York Criterion* (October 28, 1899). Mary Anderson Scrapbook 66. Note that Wheeler assumes that Anderson’s American admirer is male.
- 22 “Question-Box,” *WM* 15 (January 1893):32. An explicit comparison of the ideal woman’s measurements and classical statuary is in “Women’s Waists,” *WVM* 14 (January 1892): 24.
- 23 Photographs of statue posing in *Werner’s* and other Delsarte literature suggestion an accentuation of the performer’s white skin and light hair with such elements. See, for example, Wilbor 1905, 462–63; and F.A.F. Adams 416.
- 24 Genevieve Stebbins emphasized the movement of transitions into and out of poses. See Ruyter 1999, 116–18.

- 25 "Miss Anderson at the Royalty Theater," *Glasgow Herald* (May 6, 1884). repr. in Farrar 75.
- 26 "The English Stage," *New York Spirit of the Times* (October 13, 1883). Mary Anderson Scrapbook 22.
- 27 The availability of relatively cheap plaster cast copies of antique statuary during the eighteenth century, the vogue of neoclassical art in nineteenth-century United States and the ease with which the latter lent itself to national allegories of pride and power, and the propensity of middle-class Americans to stuff their homes with cheap reproductions of classical statues and paintings make it likely that many in Anderson's audiences were familiar with representations of classical statuary such as Melpomene. See Haskell and Penny 79–80; Banta 414–25, 465–67, 487–98; and Orvell 43–52.
- 28 Edgerly 1890. For a discussion of the Delsartean's imitation of the "Niobe Group" and other Greek models, see Burns 210–211. For a short synthesis of *Werner's* coverage of performances of "The Niobe Group," see Lake 187–88.
- 29 "Genevieve Stebbins' Matinee," *WM* 16 (February 1894):69; and "Readers and Singers," *WM* 20 (February 1898):698. Also, see illustrations in Stebbins 1902.
- 30 "Lyceum Theater," *Standard* (December 19, 1883). Repr. in Farrar 61.
- 31 "The English Stage," Mary Anderson Scrapbook 22.
- 32 "Miss Anderson's Return," Mary Anderson Scrapbook 20.
- 33 C.S. "Untitled," Mary Anderson Scrapbook 20.
- 34 *Daily News* (December 14, 1883), Mary Anderson Scrapbook 23.
- 35 Bruce McConachie discusses the emergence of a "star discourse," the cultural construction of the actor as star through reviews, publicity, and other forms of knowledge. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, American stage actors' star discourse increasingly conflated the characters the actors portrayed with their (constructed) personalities (54–55)

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